

3. THOMSON PARK - TREE REPLACEMENT

Officer responsible Parks Manager	Author Walter Fielding-Cotterell, Arboriculturist
Corporate Plan Output: Parkwood lot replacement, Parks, Plans and Policy Statements, Community Relations	

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to remove certain trees from the shelter belt in Thomson Park and to undertake replacement plantings and associated landscape works in accordance with the landscape concept plan prepared for the playground area.

BACKGROUND

In July 1998 the Parks Unit received a request from the North New Brighton Residents' Association for the pines in the vicinity of the Thomson Park playground to be removed. The main reason for this request was that the conifers cast a dense shade over the playground, particularly during the winter months making it cold, dark and generally uninviting. The Parks Unit was not opposed to the request as the management policies of the Rawhiti Park Management Plan adopted in 1988 stated that: "Priority shall be put on planting to replace the existing mature pines and macrocarpas". Some felling and replacement work had already been carried out along the Marine Parade boundary with the football fields. However, these new plantings have not thrived due to suppressing effect of the remaining large conifers nearby. For these reasons it was decided to include the felling of these trees also in the proposals to replace the old shelter belt trees.

In recognition of the problems that exist with old park shelterbelts throughout the city special budgetary provision has been made for the ongoing replacement of these trees. Funds are available in the current financial year for the replacement of trees on Thomson Park.

The Council's initial proposals for the removal and replacement of the Thomson Park trees and landscape plans were extensively publicised in local newspapers, and directly by letter drop to approximately 1,400 households and community groups in the area. Signs to advise the public of the Council's proposals were also erected in Thomson Park and a public meeting was held.

The public response to all this was quite poor however, the Council only receiving a few returns and little feedback. Following this, however, a petition was organised by a group of people headed by Ms Sarah Beaven, wishing to save the trees. The petition gained 1,649 signatures. However, the petition only stated that trees were to be removed. The Council's reasons for wishing to remove the trees were not explained nor was the landscape plan mentioned. For this reason when the "Save the Trees" group presented the petition to the Community Board and the Parks and Recreation Committee, it was not accepted. The matter was referred back to the Parks Unit with the direction that there be further consultation with the community groups involved.

At an onsite meeting on 8 May 1999 Council staff, including the writer, met with residents to discuss the issue and inspect the trees concerned. Mr Hendrik Berkout, an arborist engaged by the "Save the Trees" group gave his views on the quality and safety of the trees. He stated that in his view there was no reason to remove most of the trees proposed by the Council, with the exception of the leaning trees near the playground.

Residents also expressed concerns at what they considered to be the unwarranted removal of trees, the loss of shelter and the lack of replacement shelter tree plantings in the proposed landscape plan.

Since then, Area Parks Officer Gary Harrow has consulted with the residents of Bowhill Road properties adjacent to the boundary trees and obtained their views. All but one are in favour of the pines nearest their properties being removed.

As Mr Berkout, the arborist engaged by the "Save the Trees" group declined to put his opinion of the safety and condition of the trees formally in writing, and because his verbal opinion differed greatly to the Council's, the Parks Unit then decided to engage an independent arborist for a second opinion. The arborist engaged was Mr Nick Derrick of Beaver Tree Services. Mr Derrick's brief from the Council was to report on the following:

- The safety of the trees, particularly in relation to the play area and Bowhill Road properties
- Their overall health and condition
- Useful life expectancy
- Usefulness as a windbreak
- Recommended tree work
- Individual trees or groups of trees to be identified

Mr Derrick's report was presented to an open meeting with residents on 9 March 2000. Mr Derrick's full report is attached. His general comments and conclusions are that:

"Nearly all trees in the area surveyed are conifers of average to poor quality and with a low useful life expectancy. Some present safety issues. There are very few young or semi-mature trees of any quality. The overall effect of these senescent plantings are:

1. Visually unattractive, scruffy and uninteresting.
2. Draughty (wind is channelled beneath crowns especially on eastern boundary).
3. Lack of deciduous trees create sombre atmosphere, dark in winter.
4. Impossible to plant properly for the future.
5. Less safe than desirable, sometimes even where already pruned for safety.

The Park badly needs upgrading by robust replanting; this cannot be done until substantial felling takes place. I have known this park for 15 years and have observed a steady deterioration which is the inevitable result of hanging on to old shelter belts".

This report was presented to an open residents' meeting at the North New Brighton Community Hall on 9 February 2000.

Also presented at the meeting was a revised landscape concept plan prepared by landscape architect Mr Tony Milne. This revised plan has addressed the residents previous concerns about the lack of large sized shelter trees in the plantings. Mixtures of macrocarpa, salt tolerant poplars and eucalyptus trees are proposed together with coastal native trees/shrubs.

The proposed planting will provide varied groupings, a good permeable windbreak and a variety of plant forms and textures, unlike the dark somewhat overbearing rows of conifers. To give the new plants the best chance of surviving the severe coastal conditions, the works will involve importing good soil, also constructing affective shelter and watering systems. Copies of the landscape plans are attached.

The reason the landscape plans only cover the playground area at this stage is that this locality with its high public use is the primary area of concern in terms of safety landscape and recreation values and for these reasons should be given priority for the renewal of the plantings.

CURRENT SITUATION AND REASONS FOR PROPOSED WORKS

In their submissions on the matter of 12 March 2000, the “Save the Trees” group has stated that they are “passionately committed to the landscaping and replanting of Thomson Park”. However, the group still has grave concerns about any proposals that involve the massed felling of the conifers particularly as Mr Derrick in his report recommended the felling within one year of the whole of groups 1 and 2. While the Parks Unit generally agrees with Mr Derrick’s findings we do not have to rigidly adhere to the timeframes set down or the scale of the operation at any one time, provided any trees to be retained can be kept in a reasonably safe condition.

To define the difference between a tree that is defined as potentially dangerous, against one that is immediately dangerous, many of the Thomson Park trees could be considered to be **potentially dangerous** under certain conditions, (gale force winds etc) particularly where they are growing next to high use areas such as playgrounds. In normal circumstances they may give no cause for alarm. Trees which are defined as being **immediately dangerous** are those which display obvious sign of structural defects such as root lift, splits in branches or trunk, extensive decay etc. In these situations the Council has a responsibility to take immediate action to eliminate the danger.

The main reasons the Council wishes to fell and replant the old conifer shelter belts in Thomson Park (and other similar areas) are as follows:

- The trees are even aged, over-mature therefore the incidence of death, risk of breakage and wind-throw is higher than in younger, mixed aged stands and will naturally increase with age.
- There is a need to start replacing the old trees with new stock to provide for the future.
- The trees shade the playground badly, particularly during the winter months, making it cold, dark and generally discouraging use.
- The functional value of the conifers as a windbreak is decreasing, as the trunks of most of the trees are either clear or clad in dead branches up to three quarters of the height of the trees.

- Due to progressive die back of the lower branches and the need to prune back healthy branches for safety reasons, much of the natural attractive crown form of the trees has been lost and they no longer mark an attractive contribution to the landscape of the park.
- The Rawhiti Park Management Plan adopted by the Council in 1988 identifies the need for the replacement of the older coniferous trees.

PROPOSED WORKS

Having considered the views of the “Save the Trees” group, the Bowhill Road residents, the reasons stated above, and the management policies adopted for Rawhiti/Thomson Parks the following works are proposed for autumn and winter 2000.

- **Group 1**
Retain the trees in group one at this stage, except for the trees at the southern-most end, which will be felled to achieve a distance of 25 metres from the Marine Parade properties for safety reasons.
- **Group 2**
Fell all of the trees in this group and carry out replacement planting and landscape works in accordance with the landscape plans.
- **Group 3**
Fell all of the trees adjacent to the Bowhill Road properties except for those in the north east corner in the vicinity of the toilet block and carry out replacement planting.
- **Group 4**
Retain all trees and carry out pruning for branch end weight reduction over whole playground area in vicinity of trees.
- **Group 5**
Retain the whole group of trees except for two dead/dying macrocarpas. Prune to reduce end weight on lengthy branches and remove dead branches.
- **Group 6**
Retain the whole group of trees and carry out pruning to reduce end weight on lengthy branches and remove dead branches.
- **Group 7**
Retain whole group of trees and carry out any necessary pruning as above.

ONGOING WORKS

Dead, dangerous and diseased trees will be removed in the course of normal tree maintenance operations. The trees will receive at least one comprehensive inspection annually.

It is also recommended that the matter be reviewed in the year 2003 or earlier if large scale damage has been caused to the trees by some serious climatic event.

CONCLUSION

The progressive deterioration of the old shelter belt trees is an irreversible fact of nature that has to be faced and provided for with the establishment of new plantings. Some residents have indicated they are opposed to massed felling of trees and for this reason the number of trees originally proposed to be removed has been significantly reduced. At the same time, to give effect to the stated reasons for removing the trees in the playground area, the scale of the felling and replacement planting needs to be as proposed in this report.

Recommendation: That the Committee endorse the concept felling and landscape plan including the replacement planting operations for Thomson Park proposed in the Parks Manager's report.

The above report was before the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board at its meeting on 27 March 2000. At that meeting the Board heard representations from two local residents who sought the retention of as many trees as possible. The deputation emphasised the immense aesthetic value of the trees which the community view as an intrinsic feature of the landscape of the whole foreshore. The deputation also stressed the intensity of the community feelings for the retention of these trees.

After considering the staff report and the deputation's submissions, the Board decided to recommend to the Parks and Recreation Committee:

1. That the above proposed actions for groups 1 and 3 to 7 be endorsed, and that the group 3 trees be re-evaluated with a view to protecting all young macrocarpa trees.
2. That only the pine trees in group 2 be felled, with an appropriate maintenance regime being undertaken for the macrocarpa trees.
3. That replacement planting be undertaken without using poplars and eucalyptus trees, with attention being given to irrigation and maintenance.
4. That the management plan for Rawhiti Domain and Thomson Park be revised.
5. That the Board, Parks staff and residents identify trees that could be included in the City Plan as notable trees.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the Parks Manager's recommendation be adopted.