

21. WITHELLS ISLAND DEVELOPMENT

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The purpose of this report is to report on the Board request to remove the fence and tidy the area and to advise on past consultation with community groups regarding their visions for this site.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

The Property Manager reported to the Board on 4 September 2000 on the situation at that date, specifically soil testing. At that meeting the Board resolved to request the retention of the Council buildings for use by Coast Care, PEEEPS and as a base for aquatic activities.

The Property Services Manager has since advised Board members:

“Coast Care have engaged a contractor to remove their own materials from the area. The Property Unit has consulted a contractor regarding the remaining stockpiles with the view to spreading the material and generally levelling and tidying the area. Because of the nature of some of the material (old building masonry/concrete etc) it is not possible to spread the material and removal is the only option. The estimated cost of completely removing, trucking and disposing of this material cannot be justified right now as a separate exercise to that which will probably be required later in the subdivision process to remove the top ground layer. The area will however be tidied to the best possible state in the meantime.

It is also not proposed to remove the external security fence from the area for the following reasons:

- With the stockpiles remaining in the meantime there is a risk of injury underfoot. The area is not suitable for public access, particularly children, playing around the stockpiles.*
- Gas monitoring tests are still being undertaken on the site with technical equipment.*
- The Coast Care area has been target for several burglaries and one arson attempt recently, and retention of the fence at least gives some additional protection”.*

The Property Projects Officer has also reported to the Board’s 19 September 2000 Seminar on the preliminary soil testing results.

RECREATION AND COMMUNITY USE

Background

Following the 1998 decision by the City Plan Hearings Committee, which defined this area located between the Avon River, Owles Terrace and Admirals Way, into Living One and Open Space Two zones, the Council, through its Property and Projects Committee now wishes to seek to identify the best use of the area. The areas to the south-west and north-west corners respectively are used for 28 Elderly Persons Housing Units (Shoreham Courts) and an area leased to the New Brighton Power Boat Club. The occupiers of the balance of the land are on informal or temporary leases.

Present Use

The following organisations are identified as presently making use of the site:

- Parks Unit - having their Coast Care headquarters there.
- PEEEPS (Project Employment and Environmental Enhancement Project) - their headquarters as well.
- Environment Canterbury - a well monitoring station.
- Water Services Unit - a telemetry room.
- Canterbury Surf Lifesaving Assoc Inc - storage of boats and equipment.
- Canterbury Dragon Boat Club - storage of boats and equipment.
- Te Runanga O Nga Maata Waka - storage of boats and equipment.
- Te Awa Haku Outrigger Canoe Club - storage of boats and equipment.
- New Brighton Power Boat Club - clubrooms and equipment storage.

A number of other organisations have indicated an interest in the site or have used it in the past:

- New Brighton Residents' Association.
- New Brighton Pier and Foreshore Society.
- Leisure Unit.
- Community Gardens Project represented by Jane Quigley.
- New Brighton Netball Club.

The neighbouring residents' associations of South New Brighton and Bexley have been informed of recent discussions on this site, as have the other Council Units of Property, Environmental Policy and Planning, City Housing and the Committee Secretariat.

The Shirley Service Centre Advocacy Team and the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board are also heavily involved in the planning and consultation, with the Board investigating the proposal for an eco-village on the site.

This report should be read in conjunction with the reports currently in progress from the Community Board (eco-village) and the Property Unit ('options' report on highest and best use).

Consultation with Current Tenants

The Parks Unit and Burwood/Pegasus Community Board hosted a workshop (Saturday 22 July 2000) on the site, inviting all the groups above to comment and/or attend. Twelve groups were represented. The purpose of the meeting was to outline their current use, future requirements and to put forward ideas for the future.

Information was presented by the following organisations:

Environment Canterbury and the Water Services Unit: To retain their existing well monitoring and telemetry sites.

The well monitoring site has been developed over the last few years at considerable expense, approximately \$100,000, and was due for full commissioning in September 2000. The equipment monitors the coastal aquifers and tests salt-water intrusion, water quality, etc. The well will have an expected life span of 50 years. If it had to be resited, it would take over six months to set up again, if a suitable alternative site was available.

The telemetry site has a dual function, that being a radio repeater site from Cashmere to the Sumner Heads, and has equipment to measure and monitor the New Brighton mains pressure. Resiting this facility would also be expensive, some \$60,000, if a new site for their radio mast was available.

Coast Care (Parks Unit):

Their operation involves up to ten permanent staff members from Coast Care, coastal ranger service and the Travis Wetland restoration programme. They have seven vehicles and use of office space, toilets, tool store, workshop, fuel and chemical stores, timber store, storage space for recyclable materials and a tea/meeting room which is presently used by at least 14 groups as well as for holiday, school, youth, rangers and wardens programmes.

Coast Care currently supports the following groups from the site:

- Travis and Bexley Wetland Trusts.
- Task Force Green.
- ACE Programmes (Adult Community Employment).
- Wai Ora Trust.
- Periodic Detention.
- YMCA Conservation Corps.
- Native Habitats.
- Te Roopu Te Arahau Trust.

At the July meeting, Coast Care requested that they be able to continue to use their current buildings but could relinquish at least half the sealed area to the south. They could accommodate the PEEEPS trailer and vehicle on their site, but the site needed to be secured by fencing. The Owles Terrace frontage could be landscaped more effectively now that the Open Space 2 zoning has been confirmed. They suggested that maximum use be made of the existing seal outside their reduced area for community tennis and basketball courts and playgrounds. These and community gardens would be a suitable buffer between their site and the residential area.

Because of the current reorganisation of the Ranger Services, Coast Care are now discussing with the Parks and Waterways Unit and the Property Unit, a possible relocation to Bottle Lake Forest.

The New Brighton Fire Service advises that the Coast Care high pressure water point and tanker are an asset to the community for fire fighting. The tanker has been used often as a backup for fire fighting on public and private land.

PEEEPS: To retain their existing administration office, tearoom, toilet, tool stores and workshops.

This organisation is community based and supported by the Shirley Advocacy Team, Burwood/Pegasus Community Board, Community Trust and Canterbury Development Corporation. Their work is complementary to Coast Care in a number of ways, supporting many of the same or similar organisations. They have been on site since 1991 and the negotiated rental with the Council has been instrumental in no small way in the continuation of their activities. They support the community gardens in the area and have a plant propagation unit and nursery. These could be relocated to form a buffer between the residential area and their site. They have up to eight staff and two vehicles. Use is made of the open storage/vehicle sheds (that Coast Care uses) on wet days for maintenance and their horticultural operations. They are willing to assist any other community garden venture in the eco-village or elsewhere.

The Canterbury Surf Lifesaving Association Inc advise they do not necessarily have to be on that site and an opportunity has arisen here for Council staff to identify suitable storage facilities elsewhere near the coast for their use. They store six trailers, two boats and lifesaving equipment in the western building.

The New Brighton Power Boat Club advise they have been on site or nearby for approximately 110 years, having been in their current building for 48 years. The land is zoned Living 1 in the Proposed City Plan but gazetted as recreation reserve and was not subject to the 1998 City Plan Hearing on the balance of the land at Withells Island. They have approximately 120 members and are currently renegotiating a lease with the Property Unit. They advise they can relinquish their interest in the car park (and equipment shed next door) and are keen to work in with other watersports organisations such as Waka Ama, outrigger clubs and canoeists/kayakers.

Two of the other watersports clubs can be taken as one, as their submissions are similar. They are the **Canterbury Dragon Boat Club** and **Te Awa Haku Outrigger Canoe Club**. Their submission is that as this stretch of the Avon/Otakaro River is the safest for their type of craft, that this area become the focal point of outriggers and canoes in Christchurch.

They require the use of the existing western building, the sealed, secure area to the west of the main entrance with direct access to the river through the western fence, near the Power Boat Club. They also require adequate car parking and a slipway suitable for their long craft, similar to the slipway for rowing at Kerrs Reach. Further covered boat storage facilities are proposed by the clubs along the driveway, which would be screened by landscaping. There have already been discussions to form an umbrella group for these sports (the South Island Regional Waka Ama Association) and the groups have made a commitment to work in together on this site. Their operation would still allow public access along the river and public access to the slipway. They stress that there is no other suitable, safe, riverside area in Christchurch at which to undertake such developments.

Represented in these organisations is a total of approximately 130 members, and numbers are growing. A total of seven boats need storing at present with this number doubling within the next five years. The area at present available to them is 1,900 m², adequate for their needs in the near future. Their needs would be met by the use of the western building, the western sealed area and provision on that sealed area for a future boat storage building.

Te Runanga O Nga Maata Waka are a similar club to the above, and have two waka at present, rising to eight in the near future. They have 140 members at present and their sport is also actively growing. The waka take up more room than dragon boats, etc, and ideally need deeper water in which to launch. They have requested in the past that they be allowed to establish at Kerrs Reach and this is still being investigated, with discussions recently being facilitated by the secretary of the Canterbury Rowing Association Inc.

If these plans do not materialise, they request they also be allowed to retain and develop the use of Withells Island, from where they now operate.

It should be noted that this group and Te Awa Haku also use the sport as part of their cultural heritage and it is a whanau occasion when these vessels are launched and used.

The Community Gardens Project requests that they be allowed access to a suitable area (approximately 100 m²) on the site and are keen to assist the eco-village proposal if it were to go ahead. There are a number of suitable areas including the southern end, which could be in conjunction with the Elderly Persons Housing Units. These would be developed on the principles of sustainability and organic gardening. They currently have a community garden operating at Bridge Street, South Brighton.

The New Brighton Netball Club have for a number of years indicated interest in the buildings for clubrooms and the outdoor area for courts. They currently have two courts at Rawhiti Domain and use the New Brighton Rugby Clubrooms for social activities. Discussions are presently being held regarding their current situation, and that of the Rawhiti Tennis Club, which has a very small membership and may relinquish the clubrooms and courts they presently use. The netball club have recently indicated that they only need two courts and do not need clubrooms. They have over 50 members. The provision of a public netball court at Withells Island may take the pressure off their facilities where people frequently cut through their wire fence to use the courts for various activities such as ball sports, skateboarding, etc. The newly revamped skate facilities at Thomson Park should also help in this direction.

The Leisure Unit have indicated there is a need for two junior winter sports fields in conjunction with one cricket field in the area and this is currently being confirmed, taking into account the large sports fields available in the area, namely Cuthberts Green, Rawhiti and Bexley.

Chrissie Williams, Chairperson of the **Burwood/Pegasus Community Board** outlined the investigations currently being made into the establishment of an eco-village on the site. This would be a first for Christchurch and would be modelled on successful villages overseas. These developments captivated the principles of conservation, co-operation, sustainability, permaculture, organic gardening, energy efficiency, recycling, renewable energy technology and economies of shared ownership.

The New Brighton Residents' Association wishes the Council to consult closely with them and the immediate neighbours on the current and proposed uses of the site so they can be well informed, enabling them to make appropriate comments and representation. They felt that the current uses of the site were not known or appreciated fully by the neighbours. At that stage they did not support the retention of the existing use and buildings but since hearing the visions of those at the meeting, have preferred to take a neutral stance and will support any community consultation on this topic. They preferred not to see organised sport played there and presented a number of ideas including those of retaining the existing entrance to the site as the main access to the housing area, children's playgrounds, boat hire, tearooms, community gardens, herb gardens, picnic and formal areas, a footbridge over the Avon, the public slipway, public ballgame courts, extensive native garden areas, a labyrinth, informal sportsfields, car parking and areas from where the alpine views could best be appreciated.

The Central New Brighton School have recently indicated their wish to be involved in the development of the site including community gardens and to the extent of entering into an adopt-a-park relationship in the future.

The Water Services Unit have indicated that there is potential on the site to enhance the watersports activities, river edge restoration, a demonstration site for stormwater soakage and general enhancement of the river edge.

The meeting also considered the timeframe needed to consider the proposals both within the local community and by Council. The Parks Unit's Five-year Capital Works Programme was discussed. This is:

	2000/01 \$	2001/02 \$	2002/03 \$	2003/04 \$
Site development and landscaping	10,000	111,600	85,000	10,000
Playground	15,000			
Toilet		40,000		

The consensus of the meeting was that the Council be requested to bring forward the provision of a toilet into the current financial year.

The meeting was also advised that the siting of a public toilet without an agreed overall landscape plan may not be prudent, but this may be achievable if the Council's decisions were timely.

Conclusion

The July meeting was successful in enabling those individuals and organisations currently involved in the Withells Island site to hear and understand more about the use, both current and future, that is made of the area and to hear other people's viewpoints. The outcome was not unanimous, with the residents' association at this point not fully supporting the retention of the existing buildings on the Living One zone. Otherwise, the current users requested to be able to continue use, occupying either smaller or larger areas. Many ideas were put forward for the balance of the land and these would be investigated further at the appropriate time.

- Recommendations:**
1. That the Parks and Waterways, and Property Units not be required at this stage to remove the outer fence at Withells Island but the Property Unit be requested to tidy the area to the best possible state.
 2. That the community and recreation groups be thanked for their involvement so far in the consultation and the local neighbours be given a copy of this report.

Chairperson's Recommendation: That the abovementioned recommendations be adopted.