

11. PROPOSED LAND PURCHASE IN THE RURAL 6 ZONE

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| Corporate Plan Output: Strategic Reserve Purchases | |

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) Recommend the purchase of approximately of 159 hectares of land near McLeans Island for Scenic Reserve purposes in order to protect a Canterbury Plains grassland of national significance; and
- (ii) Help resolve references to the Environment Court on the Rural 6 zone in the proposed City Plan.

BACKGROUND

In 1993 an ecological survey of Christchurch district was carried out to find and evaluate the key areas of high nature conservation value.

Parts of the McLeans Island area were found to have amongst the highest nature conservation qualities in the city on a par with Riccarton Bush and parts of the Port Hills.

Further detailed survey work confirmed the area's importance as a biological remnant of national significance.

Measures were then undertaken to protect this biological asset and evaluate means by which this relic of pre-European Christchurch and Canterbury could be experienced by the public.

The principal values and issues to this area are:

- The pre-European vegetation of much of the Canterbury Plains was a mosaic of woodlands of kanuka, kowhai & cabbage tree:
- These lowland, outwash plains vegetation types now occur nowhere else in New Zealand; they are therefore unique and characteristic or representative of Canterbury.
- After farming settlement, some areas survived in a semi-natural state, because they were on such poor, stony or dry land that they were not worth developing. A few tiny reserves, such as Eyrewell and Bankside, were established in the 1970s. However, these have become degraded.
- Christchurch City supports one of the largest contiguous areas of these dry plains grasslands at McLeans Island.
- The nearly 400 indigenous vascular plants growing wild in Christchurch City represent about 15% of the total New Zealand flora, and the dryland ecosystems support about 18% of our City's total plant biodiversity. In addition, McFarlane (1999) has recorded over 250 invertebrate species in these communities, including characteristic birds and reptiles.
- In the past 5-10 years there has been a renewed and increased rate of attrition of these threatened ecosystems across the plains. New technologies and market opportunities have placed new pressures on this land. Some management practices are resulting in weed spread, excessive exotic grass growth, loss of species and loss of the broad open landscape experience.

The proposed purchase is the last opportunity to preserve the freehold land part of this ecosystem and landscape in the Rural 6 zone.

RURAL 6 ZONE

The Rural 6 zone as depicted on the attached plan (see Appendix 1 – "Rural 6 zone including proposed purchase") comprises areas of indigenous grassland and shrub vegetation of unique ecological significance to Canterbury and Christchurch. The open and expansive landscape is also unique because it represents a relatively unmodified part of the plains close to the centre of Christchurch. The purpose of the zone is to enable management of activities so they are compatible with the natural, particularly ecological, values of the area and the maintenance of a predominantly open landscape. Accordingly, the zone is suitable for the current use of extensive pastoral farming, and suitable recreational activities associated with the adjoining McLeans Island area. Measures to protect vegetation in particularly important areas within the zone are incorporated in the rules.

REFERENCES

During the City Plan process, five parties lodged references opposed to the zone. Two are freehold landowners, and one is a lessee. Most of the land in the zone is vested with Ecan and leased for grazing.

It is hoped to assist the resolution of the references by purchasing part of the freehold land owned by two of the referrers, which also contains a large ecological heritage area of high botanic value. The current rules and policies of the Rural 6 Zone provide a minimum level of protection for both the Ecological Heritage Areas it contains and the landscape of the area. Purchase of the site would be a major step toward retaining the integrity of the whole of the Rural 6 Zone, while providing added protection for an area with significant natural heritage values.

Given the expense of preparing evidence (time and resources) for a series of Court cases, particularly in terms of farming viability in the area, planning, landscape and botanical evidence and the uncertainty of the outcome of a Court hearing, it is critical the current negotiations are resolved. All of the referrers have indicated their preference to reach a negotiated settlement to avoid the expense and uncertainty of a court hearing. Also, the freehold land in question is on the open market, and could be purchased by another party at any time.

The issues and process to resolve the references were considered by the Resource Management Subcommittee on 24 November 2000. The following recommendations of relevance to this Committee were adopted:

1. That the current land purchase/protection negotiations with private land owners/lessees in the Rural 6 zone continue with a view to settling references to the Proposed City Plan.
2. That the Subcommittee support the approach to settling the references outlined in the report.
3. That the Subcommittee, recognising that approach requires land purchase, refer the matter to the Parks and Recreation Committee for consideration of funding priority.
4. That, in referring this matter, the Subcommittee note that this matter is still before the Court and must remain strictly confidential.

PROPOSALS

With respect to the freehold land, discussions have been held with the respective owners in order to secure the areas of high conservation value. These areas form part of larger land holdings which both owners are currently in the process of selling. If the land is to be secured and protected from more intensive development which would destroy the heritage values there is a need to purchase the land now.

Following negotiations with the respective parties, agreement has been reached to acquire the relative areas on the terms and conditions contained in the public excluded section of this report.

SOURCE OF FUNDS

Given that there will be a need to subdivide the respective properties, only part of the purchase price will come to charge this financial year. Provision has been included in both the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 Parks acquisition programme for the purchase of the properties.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the respective properties as outlined in the public excluded section of the report be purchased for reserve purposes on the terms and conditions contained in the report.
 2. That, subject to 1 above, the Council resolve pursuant to the Reserves Act Section 16(2A)(a) to classify the land contained in the following schedules as scenic reserve under Section 19(1)(a) of the Reserves Act 1977:

Schedule

- (i) All those parcels of land comprising 68.3473 hectares (subject to survey) being Sections 2,3 and 5 as depicted on scheme plan S23193/4.
- (ii) All those parcels of land comprising 90.6 hectares (subject to survey) being Sections 1 and 4 on the attached scheme plan S23193/3.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the above recommendation be adopted.