

## 26. MERIVALE CYCLE ROUTE

<b>Officer responsible</b> City Streets Manager	<b>Author</b> Brent Ferigo Cycle Planner , DDI 371-1925
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The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of an opportunity that has arisen which could provide the last link required to complete the Merivale Cycle route.

### MERIVALE CYCLE ROUTE – LOCATION AND HISTORY

As far back as 1976 a potential cycleway was identified “generally paralleling Harewood/Papanui Roads and Rossall Street, which could re-route a portion of cycle traffic away from the busy Bealey/Papanui intersection”. This cycleway is referred to as the Merivale cycle route.

Interest in the proposed Merivale cycle route was rekindled in 1998 and 1999 when the Parks and City Streets Units purchased and developed back-to-back properties on Office Road and Rugby Street. The connection of the park-link from Office to Rugby brought the route one step away from achieving an almost continuous series of road, park and path connections from the Waimairi School overbridge to the Carlton Mill crossing signals, as shown in the attached diagram.

This route has only one “missing link” left - a block - between Leinster Road and Aikmans Road. A public cycleway through Elmwood School is considered the most practical option to complete the route. The school was cautiously positive to such a path when contacted prior to the 1999 property purchases in Rugby and Office Roads.

The proposed route, when completed, will offer non-arterial connections for all properties bounded by Rossall Street, Railway Cycleway, Blighs and Papanui Roads, to Carlton Mill crossing signals. It will also allow direct access to St Andrews College, Heaton Intermediate, Elmwood School, Rangi Ruru School and St Margaret’s College, with access broken only by the crossing of Heaton Street. The cycle route is predicted to pick up the “catchment” between Rossall Street and Papanui Road.

At this stage it is impossible to predict the potential usage, but based on Railway Cycleway data, it would seem most likely that there will be collision reductions on Papanui Road, and a slight modal shift as some parents would allow their children to cycle (and possibly walk) on this non-arterial route.

### CURRENT PROGRESS

In the first half of this year, staff of the City Streets Unit (the driver of this project) held meetings with Elmwood School, Ministry of Education, and Parks and Waterways Unit to start the process of identifying options towards completing the cycleway link. It soon became obvious that there were limited options available, primarily due to the layout of the school buildings and the need for the school to retain all its open space – a consequence of its high roll per hectare ratio.

After identifying several preferred concepts to achieve the link through the school –all involving land purchases of surrounding properties – the parties concerned were waiting until the school was able to develop its plans on the future layout of the school’s buildings. Subsequently the City Streets and the Parks Units would develop a landscape plan of the preferred option/s with the school and present this to all parties to progress collectively. To date the school building and landscape plans have not yet been developed.

The preferred option at this conceptual stage is for a shared purchase with the MOE of the property on the northwest boundary of the school, at 46 Leinster Road. The whole of the purchased property would then be given to the MOE in return for a land swap to the Parks and Waterways Unit for a smaller ‘pocket park’ at one of the entrances to the proposed cycleway. The agreement would also include the MOE and school allowing a right of way for a public cycle path near the school’s eastern boundary.

The alignment of the cycle path would require a number of changes to the existing layout of the school including the removal of a building. The details were to be developed following firming of options identified and future negotiations with all parties concerned. These details would include determining and allocating the ensuing additional costs to parties eg clearing the property, and the legal costs of land swapping etc.

## **OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE PROJECT**

The property at 46 Leinster Road has come onto the market for sale. It is expected to go up for auction on 27 September. The property's rateable value is \$255,000, made up of land value (478m<sup>2</sup>) \$144,000 and improvements of \$111,000. A formal valuation of the property has not been undertaken but a sale above the rateable value could be expected in this locality.

This opportunity is currently in advance of our planning. However given that it is currently identified as the best concept option to create a cycle link and that other options appear limited it is brought to the Council for direction. It may be considered prudent for the Council to delegate specific authority for staff to purchase the property and then progress negotiations with other parties, taking into account the discontinuity politically over the next few months during which this opportunity may otherwise be lost. If at the end no solution is reached between the parties the Council could place the property back on the market.

There are two alternatives put forward for the Council to consider:

1. The Council purchases the property at 46 Leinster Road now and then continues to progress negotiations with both the school and the MOE. If no agreement is reached the Council can place the property on the market.
2. The Council does not purchase the property at present and Council staff continue to steadily progress future options with both the school and MOE towards all parties' agreement. This would be at the risk that 46 Leinster Road may sell before the Council is ready to buy it.

## **CITY STREETS SUPPORT**

The City Streets Unit believes the route has a lot of merit. However it does not appear in the Unit's five-year financial programme.

If the Council decides to purchase the property now the full cost would initially need to be found from the City Streets 2001/02 cycleways capital budget. The Parks and Waterways Unit and the Ministry of Education may later contribute to this cost.

The effect of using a third of the City Streets cycleways budget on an unscheduled purchase would be considerable, as the budget is already fully committed. It would cause many scheduled projects to be deferred to later years when there are expectations from the communities that 'their' projects implementation schedule will be maintained.

## **PARKS AND WATERWAYS SUPPORT**

The Parks and Waterways Unit recognises the benefits to be gained in a concept such as this land purchase for a public 'pocket park' in this locality but it is unable to contribute from its already fully committed 2001/02 budget.

## **ELMWOOD SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Both the Principal and Board of Trustees Representative are positive towards gaining additional open space for the school. They support the concept of a public 'pocket park' and the allowance of a 'right of way' for the public cycleway development. However until the school has completed its five-year building plan it isn't in a position to develop a landscape plan or confirm any proposals in detail. It is currently pursuing the development of its building plan with the Ministry of Education and it is expected that this will be completed in the near future.

## **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

Ministry of Education staff advises that the Ministry is open to considering the general proposition as outlined. It recognises that there are potential benefits for Elmwood School from gaining more land as it is on a relatively small site for the size of its roll.

The Ministry requires that a formal proposition be put to it, one that has the backing of the Council and it will then consider whether it contributes to the project and to what level.

Its decision may take between one to three months upon receiving the Council's formal proposition.

## CONCLUSION

The completion of the Merivale cycleway route will provide a valuable non-arterial pathway for cyclists and pedestrians, from the Waimairi School over-bridge to the Carlton Mill crossing signals. It has the potential to service a large local catchment that includes a large number of local schools and it may encourage a transport modal shift by parents allowing their children to cycle and walk on this non-arterial route.

The planning for identifying options and the negotiating of opening up the last section of the route is in its very early stages and gives cause for hesitation in taking up the opportunity of purchasing the property at 46 Leinster Road. However at this stage as informal discussions continue amongst all parties this property continues to emerge as the 'best' option identifiable.

If the Council resolves to purchase the property now and it transpires that no agreement can be reached with the other parties the property could be placed on the market again for sale.

The owners want to sell the property in the immediate future and have placed it up for auction on 27 September. The owners were requested to delay the auction date by several days but to no effect.

If the Council decides not to purchase the property at this meeting Council staff will continue discussions with all the parties towards firming options and reporting again to Council. However it is possible that the property will be sold in the interim period.

The City Streets Unit's cycleways budget would need to provide funds for the property purchase should the Council resolve to take up this opportunity. This would cause major disruption to the current cycleway projects scheduled (the purchase price equates to one third of the whole Christchurch cycleways budget) and will have a roll-on effect into future years with deferred projects.

The Council will also need to consider giving specific delegated authority to both the City Manager and Property Manager to complete purchase of the property to a specified financial limit. This delegation would need to be made up to the estimated market value provided by a registered valuer appointed on behalf of the Council and to a specified upper limit.

Planning for linking the last block of the Merivale cycle route is still in its early stages, with a high degree of uncertainty amongst the parties concerned for this option. This coupled with the large impact that the property purchase would have on other cycleway projects makes it prudent to recommend that Council staff continue to explore and develop options rather than trying to purchase the property immediately.

**Recommendation:** That staff continue to steadily progress developing options to achieve a public cycleway linkage from Leinster Road to Aikmans Road for completion of the Merivale cycleway route and report back to the Council in due course.

### Chairman's

**Recommendation:** That the above recommendation be adopted.