

## 24. REMOVAL OF EUCALYPTUS TREES IN McHAFFIES PLACE RESERVE

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The purpose of this report is to obtain a Board decision in response to McHaffies Place residents' requests for certain Eucalyptus (gum) trees in McHaffies Place Reserve to be removed for reasons of safety, shading effects and tree litter problems.

### BACKGROUND

A resident from McHaffies Place, Shirley Craig, made a deputation to the Board on 2 July 2001 to raise the problem of trees in McHaffies Reserve shading her property. A site visit to the reserve was then made by members of the Board on 27 August 2001 to discuss the problem with Shirley Craig and her neighbours. Fifteen residents attended and views were divided on whether some of the trees should be thinned or removed.

A copy of this report has been distributed to all residents in McHaffies Place.

### CONTEXT

McHaffies Reserve was acquired by the Council as reserve contribution following the subdivision of the old Aranui camping ground in 1976. Additional land was also purchased by the Council in order to incorporate the main group of gums and other significant trees within the parks boundary. The gums in particular were considered to be such an important landscape feature in an area largely devoid of significant trees, that the expense of acquiring the additional land for reserve was considered justifiable.

Since then, the adjacent sections have been developed with residential housing with the exception of the Aranui School grounds along the north west boundary. From the time the sections were first developed, the Council has received numerous complaints about the trees mainly relating to shading effects, tree litter and safety. Over the years, in response to these requests, the Council has removed quite a number of trees from the reserve, these being mainly the poorer specimens or those which exhibited structural defects of some kind. Of the original number of trees in the reserve, probably only half of these now remain. In addition, the trees have been pruned periodically to reduce the shading effects on the adjacent properties, also removing dead branches and reducing end-weight on large limbs. Trees on the school grounds along the boundary with the reserve have also been removed by the school authorities further improving the amount of sunlight reaching the properties.

While significant tree removal has resulted from complaints from residents, there are other residents in the area who place a high value on the trees in the reserve and have voiced their concerns at intentions to remove more trees.

The dominant tree in the reserve is the manna gum (*Eucalyptus vimnalis*). There are 17 manna gums ranging from 40 to 100 years of age, and in height from approximately 20 metres to 39 metres. The largest of the manna gums, is at 39 metres thought to be well over 100 years old, and is protected by the Council as a notable tree, being the best example of this species in Christchurch.

### RELEVANT POLICY

The following powers have now been delegated to the Community Board:

- The planting and removal of trees on parks.
- To adjudicate on the removal or retention of significant healthy trees in consultation with any Units affected, and contentious matters relating to the planting of trees on any reserve or land administered by the Parks and Waterways Unit except for the following:
  - Any trees protected by the City Plan (resource consent procedure required).
  - Trees immediately dangerous to persons or property, subject to the Chairperson of the relevant Community Board being advised of any removals.
  - Trees currently causing or likely to cause immediate significant damage to buildings, services or property whether public or privately owned.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

### Trees Which Should be Considered for Removal

There are 4 gums of particular concern, showing signs of a decline in condition referred to below, which should be considered for removal on the grounds of public health and safety, as well as reducing shade. Details of each tree are supplied in the sheet appended to the report and shown on the attached plan.

#### Condition

The following description of the condition relates to the form, foliage, leaning, anchoring and structural defects of the manna gums to a greater or lesser extent:

**Form** - The form of most of the gums is that of tall clear trunks with lateral branching and foliage mainly on the upper one third (1/3) of the total height of the trees. This is partly due to the natural branch growth inhibiting characteristics of gums growing in close proximity to each other and also that pruning in the past has been aimed at thinning and lifting the height of the crowns to allow more winter sunlight to reach the adjacent properties. Keeping the bottom parts of the trees clear of growth during the winter months has proved to be more effective at reducing shading than work in the uppermost parts of the trees, because the angle of the sun reaches only 24 degrees above the horizon at mid day, in mid winter.

**Foliage** - A recent inspection of the gums found most to have fairly sparse foliage, some showing obvious signs of reduced vigour. This may be due in part to the increasing maturity of the older trees, but the severe droughts of the past few years are also likely to have acted as a stressor, particularly in the dry soil conditions of the site in question. This situation could change with a return to normal rainfall levels.

**Leaning** - Some trees have leans away from the group. Most of the gums have other trees growing within about 2-3 metres proximity which has contributed to their leaning. It is an entirely a natural tendency for trees in groups to grow away from the shade towards stronger light and it should not be taken in such cases that the trees are necessarily unstable.

**Structural defects** - There is decay of varying degrees in all of the four gums proposed to be removed, resulting from damage to bark, removal of branches, and wounds.

**Anchoring** - In the four trees to be removed stump/trunk decay has had an effect on the lateral root health and therefore affects the provision of good anchorage from winds.

Note: Trees growing within 2-3 metres proximity to the trees proposed for removal, will lessen the impact of removals.

#### OTHER WORK PROPOSED

**Removal** - It is proposed to remove all three small willow trees on the reserve, all are in a poor condition, one suffering from Armillaria root rot disease.

**Pruning** - All trees will be pruned to remove dead and dying branches, while the large gum and cedar below are due for more specific pruning. The large gum in the south-east corner of the reserve will be pruned to thin the crown which will allow more sunlight to permeate through to the adjacent properties. The large cedar tree adjacent to the children's play area will be pruned to remove the low overhanging branches and to reduce end-weight on any excessively loaded limbs.

**Replacement Planting** - Plans for appropriate replacement tree planting in suitable locations in the reserve, in consultation with the local residents are to be prepared.

#### REQUEST FOR REMOVAL

There has been a request to remove two smaller gums which are growing into the lower edge of the crown of the large, protected gum, for the purpose of preventing further intrusion into its crown and to further reduce the shade problem. It is proposed to retain them at this stage however for the reasons that they are sound and healthy, causing no significant problem to the protected gum, and would removal not greatly improve the shading situation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Council receives a great many complaints from residents requesting that trees in parks and streets be removed for the same sorts of reasons expressed by the McHaffies Place residents. As with the case in question, it has always been the Council's policy to take all reasonable steps to alleviate the problems being experienced by residents. However, it is imperative that the Council also take into account the landscape and general amenity values provided by large trees in reserves and other public places, and the Council's policies of maintaining the "Garden City" character of Christchurch.

For those that have chosen to purchase properties next to reserves or in streets containing large trees, the sort of problems being experienced by some of the McHaffies Place residents are a fact of nature common to many properties all over the city. For the Council to try to resolve these sorts of problems by felling or carrying out injudicious pruning on the trees concerned would result in the destruction of many fine trees and much of the City's landscape and general environmental values.

The proposed works will improve the tree related safety of McHaffies Reserve and the adjacent properties, also reducing the degree of shading and litter deposits affecting residents without spoiling the form of the trees or the attractive qualities of the reserve. Proposed replacement plantings will provide for the future should the older trees need to be removed for any reason, ensuring that the well treed character of the reserve is preserved.

**Recommendation:** That the Board approve the removal of the four gum trees numbered 1-4 on the attached plan, and the three willows.

**Chairperson's Recommendation:** That the abovementioned recommendation be adopted.