

3. BOTTLE LAKE FOREST PARK JUNIOR GOLF PROPOSAL

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The purpose of this report is to seek a decision from the Community and Leisure Committee regarding an application to lease an area of land within the Bottle Lake Forest Park (the park) for a junior golf course and golf practice area, and from the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee altering the management plan and intended use of the Park and to release 5.2 hectares of land from the Selwyn Plantation Board's forestry licence.

CONTEXT

As Bottle Lake Forest Park is of metropolitan significance, the application by the Windsor Golf Club to develop a junior golf facility within the park is being referred to the Community and Leisure Committee. If the application is approved then the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee will be required to approve the release of the proposed site from the Selwyn Plantation Board licence. The Parks and Waterways Unit strongly opposes such a development occurring within the park and this view is supported by the Leisure Unit.

The application has been reported to the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board on two occasions.

At its meeting on 4 March 2002, the Board decided:

- (a) That the Board support the establishment of a junior golf course in Burwood/Pegasus in principle.
- (b) That the report lie on the table and officers be requested to provide a further report on other potential locations within Burwood/Pegasus for a junior golf course.

Following a report on other potential locations on 29 July 2002, the Board decided that a decision on the park as a site be deferred until:

- a further investigation is undertaken into the proposal;
- the park user group, local residents and the golf club are consulted; and
- the possibility of junior golf at the Ascot Links Golf Course is investigated.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The park caters for production forestry and multi use recreation activity including walking, biking, horse riding and orienteering. The Windsor Golf Club is located adjacent to the park and has applied to lease 5.2 hectares of land within the park on which to develop a junior golf course and practice golf area. The proposed area is north of the park ranger headquarters and opposite the entrance to the Windsor Golf Club.

The proposed golf course is being considered in the context of a wider planning exercise for the park headquarters development area, which includes this site. The site is currently leased to the Selwyn Plantation Board and is planted in young pine trees. It has been identified in the Park Management Plan as a future picnic area with labelled arboretum trails in a themed forest setting.

While a junior golf course is a desirable facility in Christchurch, it is not considered that the park is an appropriate site for such a facility as it would displace existing forestry, tracks and wide ranging recreation opportunities. The proposed golf course does not comply with the Park Management Plan.

1. Relevant Current Policy

- (a) The Recreation and Sport Policy ranks golf courses in the lowest priority for recreational services while parks are ranked in the highest priority. The allocation of resources to the higher priority recreational services is to be considered before resources are allocated to those of lower priority.
- (b) The Park Management Plan requires that recreational opportunities be compatible with forest management. A golf course differs significantly from the management plan's proposed visitor services of picnic areas and labelled arboretum trails in a forest setting and would therefore require public consultation before such use can be approved.

Relevant objectives and policies from the Park Management Plan are reproduced below.

- **MANAGEMENT GOAL** (p. 9)
To provide for the harmonious management of timber production, special purpose activities, the development of diverse recreation and education experiences and the protection of scenic, ecological and scientific values.
 - **PART IV: FOREST PARK LAND USE**
6. FORESTRY (p. 22)
Objectives
 - (i) *To promote production forestry on a sustained yield basis.*
 - (ii) *To promote forestry (silvicultural) practices that are compatible with conservation of the soil and the recreational values of the forest area.*
8. RECREATION (p. 28)
Objectives
 - (i) *To provide a range of forest based recreational opportunities compatible with forest management and safety.*
 - (ii) *To develop recreational facilities in consultation with potential users.*
 - (iii) *To provide facilities for the needs of public recreation and to design and locate these so as to harmonise with the existing character and landscape values.*
 - (iv) *To consider recreation in a regional context while taking full cognisance of other facilities which have already been provided by other bodies or which are planned.*
 - **PART V: DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS** (p. 37)
Objectives
 - (i) *To proceed with recreational development in accordance with regional recreational needs.*
 - (ii) *To ensure the provision of facilities for the public to enhance opportunity for education, recreation and enjoyment.*
 - (iii) *To ensure that recreational development of all scales, within the park is restricted to areas where the development is compatible with the assigned recreational subzone(s) of the area(s).*
 - (iv) *To specify in detail, the recreational development proposed for the forest park for the next 10 years.*
- (c) A compensation payment of \$10,069, as assessed by the Selwyn Plantation Board for the loss of the existing plantation, would be payable to the Board by the Windsor Golf Club as per the requirements of the forestry licence agreement between the Christchurch City Council and the Selwyn Plantation Board.

3. The Proposal

The Windsor Golf Club has applied to develop a 5 hole course for junior golfers and a practice area which could be used by all ages for learning and practising golf. The proposed site is adjacent to the Golf Club within the park (see attached map).

A junior golf course is desired because it would be better suited to children's strength and ability and safer than using the existing golf course at the same time as other more experienced golfers.

The Windsor Golf Club currently has a structured junior golf development programme to actively promote and encourage the involvement of Christchurch's youth and has 145 junior members registered with the club. The club aims to become the home of junior golf in Canterbury. The proposed golf facilities would be utilised as part of Windsor's development programme, as well as holding open junior tournaments. The course would be aimed at ages 13 years and under and for beginners up to 17 years. Work is currently being undertaken with schools in the area to promote the game of golf.

The Windsor Golf Club have proposed a five year implementation plan to develop the Bottle Lake site. The cost of development and maintenance of the proposed golf course would be met by the Windsor Golf Club at no cost to the Council. A green fee charge of approximately \$2 is expected to be set for use of the junior golf course. Currently the forest experience is publicly available free of charge.

The lease terms for the site would be negotiated by the Property Manager in consultation with the Parks and Waterways Policy and Leasing Administrator.

4. Issues For Consideration

The park is located approximately 10 km north east of central Christchurch, adjacent to the coast. The park provides a unique forest experience unavailable elsewhere in Christchurch. It consists of over 800 hectares of mostly *Pinus radiata* planted on coastal sand dunes. The close proximity of this forested area to the central city and surrounding districts has attracted increasing numbers of visitors so that recreation now constitutes a major use of the forest. Changes in availability of leisure time and types of recreational pursuits have also led to an increase in recreational demand on the park. Walking, running, mountain biking (night and day), horse riding, orienteering, picnicking, off road vehicles, dog exercising and holiday programmes are just some of the recreational activities catered for. Estimated annual visitor numbers are 350,000, an increase from 250,000 in 1999. Yet the recreation potential of the forest is still largely unrealised. Most of the more than 400 children who visited the park as part of the Leisure Unit's holiday programme in September had not visited the site before and did not even know it existed. The annual Family Orienteering Day held in February has been attracting increasing numbers of participants with more than 600 people in attendance this year. The park is being used more and more widely by schools, community groups, and sports clubs for recreation and education.

Listed below are reasons why the park is not considered an appropriate venue for a junior golf course:

- (a) Golf is not consistent with the management goals of promoting production forestry and providing a range of forest based recreation opportunities compatible with forest management.
- (b) A golf course would alter the character and nature of the existing forested site by changing the landscape and its use. The young trees would be removed and the area would become relatively open and manicured with highly visible intensive use compared to the relatively enclosed and unseen use that occurs within the forest.
- (c) The Park Management Plan was developed and agreed upon through public consultation. People who had input into the management plan process can reasonably expect the management plan to be adhered to.
- (d) The park headquarters area is the most intensive development scenario planned for the park. Development of visitor services in this area will affect use of the forest which in turn will influence further complementary developments in the park headquarters area. The golf proposal differs significantly to the management plan proposals in that it contravenes rather than enhances the visitor's forest experience.
- (e) Development of a golf facility would displace existing and potential forest based recreation activities. The site currently has a horse trail going through it and is also used by the orienteering club. There would be a development cost attached to rerouting the existing track.
- (f) Golf is a well organised and formalised sport and has a strong support base from which to lobby for their needs. Informal, casual users of the park have not had the same opportunity to express their needs. This is much more difficult to achieve as there is no formal organisation representing their views.
- (g) Unstructured activities such as walking have significantly higher participation rates than organised sport and it is predicted that the greatest demand for outdoor recreation activities in the near future will be for passive activities such as walking and relaxing. However, the Ministerial Taskforce review of Sport, Fitness and Leisure confirms that the planning and provision for sport outweighs that for unstructured recreation. The Council has the opportunity to redress this imbalance by providing better access to natural resources via walkways, tracks, and reserves such as those offered at Bottle Lake.
- (h) Visitor numbers have been steadily increasing in the park and this trend is expected to continue.

- (i) The size and availability of space within the forest park will affect its future carrying capacity. Nibbling away at the edges will reduce the amount of space available for public use.
- (j) There is a recognised need for diversity in the size and type of open space and facilities provided by the Council to cater for personal recreation preferences and different levels of ability, to meet the needs of the community, and to recognise and promote the distinct character of each park. The park provides the opportunity for people to participate in activities and experiences not available in a conventional park, thereby increasing the diversity and functions of parks in Christchurch.
- (k) Forest parks and recreation are in very limited supply. The park provides a unique forest experience unavailable elsewhere in Christchurch. In comparison, there are currently 17 golf courses in Christchurch, three of which are on Council owned land, one being managed by the Council. A further golf course is proposed in Heathcote Valley. There are also five golf driving ranges in Christchurch. Specific golf facilities for junior players are available at Coringa golf course at McLeans Island. There are two sizeable existing golf courses immediately adjacent to the proposed junior golf site, Waitikiri Golf Course is approximately 43 hectares in size and Windsor Golf Course is approximately 44 hectares.
- (l) Leasing part of the park to the golf club would set a precedent for other clubs and organisations interested in becoming established in the area.
- (m) Current use of the forest resource is free and publicly available. The golf facility would be managed by a club and a fee would be charged for its use.
- (n) Golf courses can not cater for other public recreation due to the hazard of flying golf balls. The social impact and potential conflict between golf and forest recreation activities needs to be considered. As at Rawhiti Domain, a high barrier fence would be required around the golf course or a large buffer zone set aside for safety.
- (o) The park is a natural resource which plays an important role in the well-being of the community and the provision of recreation opportunities. The wilderness nature of the park is expected to become ever more precious as urban growth continues to increase around it.
- (p) Recent contact with the community has shown increasing demand for the Council to protect and enhance environmentally valuable sites within the forest.
- (q) Golf is not considered a sustainable use of the site and would require continued irrigation due to the sandy nature of the soils. The proposed junior golf site is zoned Rural 1 (Coastal) in the City Plan. Soils within this zone are prone to erosion and are generally unsuitable for sustaining intensive cultivation. In order to maintain and enhance soil resources, forestry activities are encouraged.
- (r) Loss of revenue to the Council is also to be considered. The proposed site for the junior golf course is currently leased to the Selwyn Plantation Board. It is anticipated that they will fell the trees on this site in approximately 25 years time. The Council is a minority shareholder (39%) in the Selwyn Plantation Board. Reducing the area of land available to the Selwyn Plantation Board on which they are able to grow trees will, in effect, reduce the financial return to the Council.

Alternative options for the junior golf course were investigated and are discussed below.

(a) **Bexley Reserve**

A golf practice area has been incorporated into the development proposals for Bexley Reserve and there is plenty of scope to accommodate a junior golf course. However, the Windsor Golf Club do not consider the site to be suitable for their purposes because it is too far from the club's main facilities, it is exposed to the wind, and they are concerned about the potential health risk in playing on a former landfill.

(b) **Ascot Golf Club**

The possibility of developing a partnership with the Ascot Golf Club was raised. However, Windsor Golf Club have previously found Ascot's fees to be too high which is not conducive to developing juniors and they do not have confidence in a successful partnership with this club. The Community Board has requested that further investigations be undertaken with Ascot Golf Club.

(c) **Private Land**

A block of privately owned land immediately to the north of the Windsor Golf Club would be suitable for development as a junior golf course but the landowner is unwilling to sell at present.

No further possible options have yet been identified. Junior player numbers continue to grow despite not having a purpose built facility.

5. Results of Consultation

(a) **Internal**

The junior golf proposal has been well debated by staff from both the Leisure Unit and Parks and Waterways Unit. The recommendations below to keep the land for the use of existing and future recreation activities are supported by both units.

(b) **External**

A brief survey of 95 park users was undertaken in September 2001 to gauge response to a range of planned developments in the park headquarters area.

There was strong support to retain a wilderness forest theme for Bottle Lake Forest Park

- 93 respondents in support
- 1 respondent neutral
- 1 respondent opposed

There was a mixed response to the proposed junior golf facilities.

- 38 respondents supported the junior golf course proposal
- 51 respondents were neutral or opposed to the proposal
- 6 respondents provided no answer

There was strong support for picnic facilities

- 74 respondents in support
- 13 respondents neutral
- 6 respondents opposed

An arboretum was also popular

- 56 respondents in support
- 27 respondents neutral
- 2 respondents opposed

A separate survey undertaken at the same time found that of 143 respondents 82% were regular visitors, 6% were occasional visitors, and 12% were first time visitors.

The additional consultation that was requested by the Community Board has not yet been undertaken. There would be a considerable time cost involved in doing this exercise which has not been planned for. There has been some debate occurring in the Letters to the Editor and four letters strongly opposing the golf proposal have been received from forest user groups.

CONCLUSION

The Windsor Golf Club has been successful to date in developing a junior golf programme which is continuing to grow. Junior golf facilities located nearby would further enhance their programme. However, the Bottle Lake Forest Park is not considered a suitable location for a junior golf facility because golf is not aligned with the values and management goals of the park. Demands on the park are increasing and it is not appropriate to displace public recreation opportunities with an exclusive junior golf facility.

Alternative options for developing the junior golf facilities have been investigated. The Council is currently unable to provide a venue for a junior golf course close to the Windsor Golf Club.

Staff

Recommendation:

1. That the Community and Leisure Committee reject the Bottle Lake Forest Park as a site for the Windsor Golf Club's proposed junior golf course and golf practice area.
2. That the Parks, Gardens and Waterways Committee not approve the release of 5.2 hectares of land from the Selwyn Plantation Board's licence area.
3. That the Parks and Waterways Unit continue to assist the club with the possible acquisition of additional land in the area, subject to suitable price and funding and joint use such as access to other recreation areas for walkers and bikers.

Chairman's

Recommendation:

That the above recommendation be adopted on the grounds that the Management Plan must be strictly adhered to.