



PUBLIC EXCLUDED

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Committee Landcare
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Offer of land for addition to East Harbour Regional Park

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of an opportunity to purchase land in the East Harbour Regional Park area and seek Council's approval to decline the offer from the landowner.

2. Exclusion of the public

Grounds for the exclusion of the public under Section 48(1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act, 1987 are:

That the public conduct of the whole or relevant part of the proceedings of the meeting would be likely to result in the disclosure of information for which good reason for withholding exists, i.e. to preserve commercial confidentiality and to enable the Council to carry on negotiations (including commercial negotiations), without prejudice or disadvantage.

Interests protected:

Greater Wellington – The Regional Council

Chatham Islands Seafood Ltd (Orongorongo Station).

3. Background

East Harbour Regional Park, on the eastern side of Wellington Harbour, comprises public land between Wainuiomata, Eastbourne and the coast to Baring Head. The park includes nationally important lakes and wetlands, regenerating bush, indigenous forest, numerous archaeological features, an historic lighthouse and moderately high recreation values (estimated 100,000 visits per year). Recreational uses include walking, tramping, cycling, rock climbing, fishing, picnicking and duck shooting.

Greater Wellington (GWRC) owns 30% of the Park. Current discussions with Department of Conservation who own 22% of the Park, and Hutt City Council who own 48% of the Park, have resulted in agreement for GWRC to take control and management of the areas of land under their ownership.

Until this current financial year, East Harbour Regional Park was undeveloped with no budget provision for improvements. A Ranger is to be appointed for the park in November 2003 and the Management Plan Review is starting in March 2004.

At a workshop in May 1999, looking at future directions for East Harbour Regional Park (report 99.352), Council noted that the public expected further development of the park. Councillors were also keen to improve public access to two areas of the Park managed by GWRC – Baring Head lighthouse and the Lakes Block.

4. Area offered for purchase

The owner of Orongorongo Station, Kevin Clark, convened a meeting with GWRC representatives and Mr Clark's subdivision agents, Spencer Holmes, present.

Mr Clark advised that he had changed his stocking regime for the station, which involved moving from one breed of sheep to another. The sale of a complete mob of stock drew the attention of Bayleys Real Estate, which assumed that the land was to be sold. Bayleys advised Mr Clark of the realisable value of the land for residential development, a value far beyond that of farming. As a result, Mr Clark has moved from "I will never sell" to now being a keen vendor.

This activity is only in respect of the Baring Head block, which extends to 284.6000 hectares and has a current rating value (RV) of \$1.33M.

Bayleys has already presented an unconditional offer of \$3.2M for the whole block. GWRC has not sought to obtain an independent value assessment.

The Baring Head peninsula runs generally north/south with a central but gentle ridge dividing the land into west and east portions. To the east the land is in poor pasture and scrub and falls from the ridge down to the Wainuiomata River and on to the Coast Road. To the west the land is gentle and rolling in moderate to good pasture with an escarpment to the west and south where the land falls dramatically down to the beach and coastline (see map, **Attachment 1**).

Spencer Holmes has developed a number of possible scheme plans of subdivision. The currently preferred scheme, tabled at the meeting, provided for residential subdivision and development of the land to the east of the ridge. This would require building a new bridge across the Wainuiomata River close to the south end of the block. The sites developed would possess generally north, south and east aspects and in the main would be hidden from the landscape view obtained from Wellington to the west.

The balance of the land, some 168 hectares, is being offered for sale to GWRC, as reserve, for inclusion in the East Harbour Regional Park. The asking price for the land is \$3.5M. Access to the land would remain – via the current bridge close to the north end of the block. The bridge would continue to be shared in its use with the other Baring Head Crown agencies of Police, NIWA and MSA and also with Alan and Sue Loan.

The land is zoned *General Rural* in the Hutt City District Plan with *Significant Natural Resource* site classifications over the coastal land and the Wainuiomata River Mouth (SNR9 and SNR56). There are several *Significant Archaeological Resource* sites listed in the area (SAR 4,6,8,9,12,15,19,35 and 37).

5. Assessment

Key values lie along the coast – the main recreational, environmental and heritage values of the Baring Head peninsula lie on the river margins, coastal strip and cliff escarpments. The natural features, landscape significance and heritage sites are all recognised and have some protection in the District Plan. As the river margins, coastal strip and cliff escarpments are of low value for farming, development or subdivision, there is little threat to the environmental and heritage values.

Nevertheless, GWRC ownership of the Orongorongo Station block would provide a wider range of recreation opportunities (particularly public access between Wainuiomata Coast Rd and Fitzroy Bay), greater management control over heritage features (e.g. protecting archaeological sites) and environmental values (e.g. protecting the coastal escarpment, retiring areas of pasture, linking remnant vegetation).

Improved access between Coast Road and Fitzroy Bay – the main potential benefit of GWRC ownership of Orongorongo Station block would occur if we could develop public access between Wainuiomata Coast Rd and Fitzroy Bay. Currently practical access for the public is illegal via tracks on private land from the Coast Road along the coastline, across the Wainuiomata River and around Baring Head to Fitzroy Bay. Legal access along the coast is on a paper road just above the mean high water mark between Lake Kohangatera and Wainuiomata River, with four property owners currently owning land down to this mark. Public access across the Orongorongo Station block (by way of the farm track and bridge over the Wainuiomata River) is prohibited by Orongorongo Station. In practice however there is a level of unauthorised access already happening across this land.

Purchase of the land would enable Council to have the public cross the bridge from Wainuiomata Coast Road, over the land it would own and down to Fitzroy Bay. However, between Fitzroy Bay and the Lakes Block there are still two private properties (Curtis and Takarangi blocks) over which the formed access track passes. GWRC would hold no legal right to promote the public crossing over the private land via the formed track. Negotiations with two further owners would therefore be required. The paper road effectively runs along the beach and in some areas may be beneath the high water mark.

One of the owners sitting between Baring Head and the Lakes Block is Mike Curtis. Mr Curtis has a very clear agenda of opening up access to his tourism facility. Any negotiation with Mr Curtis to legitimise public access over his land would trigger a requirement for reciprocal rights for Mr Curtis to bring tourist buses over Orongorongo Station block and on to his facility. Council may see this as a positive proposition as it could lead to shared costs and bring advantages of local relationships into the negotiations with other owners.

The Council could also allow the public up to the boundary of the Loan property. This will be possible as the access will be over Council owned land, rather than as currently under a right of way which specifically excludes the public. Unfortunately the right of way over the Loan property, which sits between Orongorongo Station and the Baring Head lighthouse reserve is subject to the same restriction and excludes the public.

There is an ability to physically reach the Baring Head lighthouse reserve from the Orongorongo Station block but this runs very close to the edge of the south escarpment and would need safety issues to be carefully addressed before being created and opened to the public

Wider range of recreation opportunities – GWRC ownership of the Orongorongo Station block would allow a slightly wider range of recreation opportunities. Orongorongo Station prohibits public access to the block except for a few organised events such as the Big Coast mountain bike ride and the Pencarrow Fun Run. There is potential for horse riding and possibly eco-tourism on the land.

Improved heritage protection – regionally important archaeological sites on the land are not actively managed by Orongorongo Station – but have some protection by Historic Places Act 1993 and in the District Plan. GWRC ownership would provide greater protection and possible future interpretation.

Protection of landscape values – negative effect of the subdivision proposal (if it is approved through the resource management act and district plan) is that there could be an incremental loss of landscape, natural and wilderness values at Baring Head. While the Resource Management Act 1991 provides for mitigation of effects of development there is no guaranteed protection of landscape or other intangible values.

The land abutting Baring Head is an outstanding rural semi-wilderness landscape that forms the backdrop to Wellington harbour. Past development of the site has been rejected because of the impact on these landscape values. If smaller land titles are created and developments carried out, then this cumulative domestication of the environment is impossible or difficult to undo in the future.

Community support – when the Pencarrow Lakes block was purchased in 1992, Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust and Forest & Bird assisted with financial contributions. The East Harbour Environmental Association and Eastbourne Rangers are active volunteer groups involved in the park. GWRC ownership of the Orongorongo Station block could provide further opportunities for working with the community and iwi.

Few immediate benefits – this purchase, if it were to be contemplated, however, would have to be viewed as a very long-term strategic acquisition. Very few immediate benefits would be achieved from a Park or public perspective. For the long-term it would enable planning and subsequent negotiations to be set in place in an endeavour to achieve:

- access for the public to the Baring Head lighthouse reserve which avoids continued passage through the Loan property
- creation of a public link running from Wainuiomata Coast Road, over the saddle, down to Fitzroy Bay and around the coastline to the Lakes Block.

6. Priorities for land purchase

In February 1999, the Landcare Committee considered the future direction for Regional Parks (Report 99.18). The report recognised there was pressure on existing lands, pressure to create additional parks and also for increased access to forests. Future priorities for expanding the Regional Parks have been identified through submissions to the Council's Annual Plan and LTCCP deliberations.

- First priority is to maintain existing regional parks and recreation areas;
- Second priority is for creating new regional parks, (e.g., Whitireia Park and Wairarapa Wetlands); and
- Third priority is for linear trails and facilitating access to the coast or rivers.

Policy 1.18 of the current East Harbour Regional Park Management Plan provides for land acquisition as follows:

The Wellington Regional Council will consider opportunities for land acquisition as additions to the Park area as these arise. Criteria to be applied in assessing land purchase opportunities are:

- *rationalisation of land holdings in the Park area*
- *facilitation of public access*
- *protection of natural features, heritage sites, or scenic values*
- *enhancement of landscape or conservation values.*

The Orongorongo Station offer meets Council's priorities for regional park land purchases – *to maintain existing regional parks and recreation areas and to assist in facilitating access to the coast and rivers.*

The offer also generally conforms to the East Harbour Management Plan land acquisition criteria – *to rationalise land holdings in the Park area; to facilitate public access; to protect natural features, heritage sites, or scenic values; and to enhance landscape or conservation values.*

7. Financial implications

The Rating Valuation for the entire 284.6 hectares in the block is \$1,330,000. The initial price indication supplied by the landowner for the purchase of 168 hectares (roughly 60% of the entire block) would be in the vicinity of \$3,500,000.

Based over a 20-year loan term for \$3,500,000, repayments would be \$369,000 per annum.

On top of this, there would be ongoing operational funding required for the development and maintenance of tracks, bridges and fencing and pest animal and weed control. The upgrade of the bridge crossing the Wainuiomata River will remain with the Council as a problem to resolve and a cost to meet. Obtaining financial assistance for the bridge upgrade cost from Alan and Sue Loan will remain a problem for the Council to resolve.

8. Alternatives to land purchase

As an alternative to purchase, it may be possible to use the subdivision consent process to work together with other agencies such as Department of Conservation and Hutt City Council to negotiate conservation covenants and public access to the coast by walkway easements and esplanade strips.

Conditions to subdivide which GWRC could seek to have imposed on any consent might include:

- Marginal strips created along the Wainuiomata River passing through the land (*11.2.4 Esplanade Reserves, Strips and Access Strips*, Hutt City District Plan).
- Vesting as reserve, in Hutt City Council, all the land comprising the escarpment to the west and south of the block including the beach out to the block's legal title boundary which extends to the paper road just above the mean high water mark.
- Provision of public accessway (may be limited to pedestrian) over the land from Wainuiomata Coast Road to the Fitzroy Bay coastline.

9. Conclusion

The potential acquisition of the Orongorongo Station block offers some benefits to the Parks and Forests network. The primary benefits are in terms of potential improvements in public access, and some recreational benefits.

However, in view of the high cost of the purchase and the few immediate benefits that would be achieved, officers consider the offer should be declined. Most of the recreational, environmental and heritage values of the Baring Head peninsula lie on the river margins, coastal strip and cliff escarpments. It is likely that many of these values can be protected through the subdivision consent process.

10. Communication

This land purchase offer is a confidential, commercially sensitive matter, which may require further investigation with Department of Conservation, Hutt City Council and the landowner. It is not appropriate to communicate the proposal to the public at this stage.

11. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *receive the report.*
2. *note the contents of the report.*
3. *decline the offer to purchase the Baring Head property.*
4. *as an alternative to purchase, when an application for subdivision is lodged, that discussions should be entered into with Hutt City Council to use the resource consent to subdivision process as a mechanism to achieve some desirable public good outcomes.*

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Attachment 1: Map of Baring Head, East Harbour