



Report 10.10
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Committee Regional Sustainability
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Future of houses at Baring Head

1. Purpose

To consider disposal of two houses currently located at Baring Head, East Harbour Regional Park, and subsequently to agree the process to be followed for their disposal.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2002*.

3. Background

3.1 Baring Head Lighthouse Reserve acquisition

In 1992 Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) entered into an arrangement with the Department of Conservation (DoC), whereby DoC acquired Lighthouse Reserve land (“the land”) at Baring Head from the Marine Division of the Ministry of Transport, with the land’s management being vested in Wellington Regional Council (see Report No. PE-93.509).

The value of any improvements on the land at the time of its acquisition was purchased by GWRC on the understanding that, should the Council decide to dispose of them, DoC would be offered the opportunity to buy them back.

The arrangement was entered into, as it was seen that acquiring the land would be a very worthwhile acquisition in conservation terms and hence a worthy addition to the East Harbour Regional Park concept. At the time of acquisition GWRC intended to acquire either ownership or management of land in a contiguous stretch from the Northern Block of East Harbour Regional Park to Baring Head.

As part of that arrangement, the land at Baring Head was classified under the *Reserves Act 1977* as Recreation Reserve.

While the lighthouse complex has an easement for access over private

neighbouring land for management purposes only, it is effectively landlocked for public recreational purposes and potential development options. The bluffs and foreshore are accessible on foot from along the coast.

3.2 Baring Head houses

The houses have some heritage interest, as they are one of only a handful of intact lighthouse complexes on the New Zealand mainland. Having said that, they are not registered as historic sites by the Historic Places Trust.

At the time of the acquisition it was intended that the houses on the land would somehow enhance East Harbour Regional Park by either being made available for public use as accommodation, or as accommodation for park staff. As such, in 1997 GWRC spent \$100,000 on refurbishing the interior of one of the houses. This was only partially completed. Difficulties with gaining public access to the site to either conduct recreational activities or to rent the houses has meant that they have been boarded up to protect them from vandalism. The houses have been left idle pending a decision on their future.

In November 2007 and 2009 staff inspected the condition of the houses. The houses were found to be deteriorating and uninhabitable in their current state. Significant investment (more than \$100,000) would be required to bring these houses up to a suitable standard for either residential or public use.

At a workshop in 2008 Councillors indicated to officers that the options for house disposal be looked at.

4. Comments

4.1 Introduction

There are a number of issues associated with the site that has meant that the houses have never been used for any park purpose, nor does there appear to be any potential use for them in the foreseeable future.

4.2 Access

GWRC has vehicle access to the house sites for management purposes only. The access road firstly crosses “Baring Head Station” (currently in receivership) and then through a private property. While the previous owner of Baring Head Station has always appeared open to the idea of recreational access, the private property owner has been opposed, a view that has been confirmed in their submission to the Parks Management Plan review.

4.3 Usage

The Parks Department has determined that there is no requirement for staff accommodation in East Harbour Regional Park. Certainly the location of the houses away from the main recreational use in the rest of the park renders Baring Head unsuitable for this purpose.

GWRC to date has not entered into the booked accommodation market in its regional parks.

Even should the access issue be resolved, the location of the houses is problematic in terms of servicing and will require intensive management.

4.4 Value of houses

Discussions with Britton House Movers (WN) Ltd has established that they would be interested in removing the houses and estimate that, subject to inspection and condition, they may offer up to \$10,000 each for them. GWRC would be responsible for negotiating relevant access, any road improvements required, disconnection of services and site remedial works. We can expect that this work will use up most of the proceeds, making this a break-even proposition at best.

Delay in resolving the future of the houses will result in further deterioration and reduction in value.

5. Process for disposal

As the houses are at the point where they need a substantial amount of capital investment to stop them from deteriorating further, and there are no options on the horizon for their productive use, officers suggest that it would be prudent that the houses be disposed of to avoid major capital and ongoing maintenance costs for assets that have no ability to be used at that site in the foreseeable future.

With this being the case, officers have had initial discussions with DoC to ascertain if DoC had a desire to take over the upgrade and upkeep of the houses. DoC is in the process of developing a *Big Coast* walk that, in part, provides public walking and cycling access around the southern Wairarapa/Wellington coast from Wharekauhau to Eastbourne. DoC has indicated that it does have an interest in retaining the houses, as they could be used as accommodation for people that utilise that trail. However, at this point, DoC does not have the funding for the upgrade and ongoing maintenance of the houses, nor can they see that they will get it in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, even if they could secure ongoing funding, the issues surrounding public access to the site are difficult to resolve.

Given that there is some historical significance attached to the houses, officers suggest that they be offered to other organisations that may be able to maintain them in their existing location for heritage/historic purposes in first instance. There is a risk in doing so that these organisations, which may not be in a position to purchase the improvements, may attempt to stall any removal through an injunction based on the heritage values of the site.

Officers propose that the following steps be taken to complete disposal of the houses:

- (1) That the houses be offered to the Historic Places Trust.
- (2) Should the Historic Places Trust not be interested, that the houses be offered to adjacent landowners and Crown agencies with an interest in the Baring Head site for a fair amount.

- (3) Should they not be interested, that the houses be offered to Britton House Movers and any other interested company for removal.

Failing all those options, as a last resort, the buildings could be demolished.

6. Communication

Officers believe that, in following the proposed process to dispose of the houses, GWRC can demonstrate that it has followed good process in attempting to find another organisation that may be able to maintain the heritage values of the site.

No specific communications are planned for the disposal of the houses. In accordance with normal procedures, a spokesperson will be appointed and briefed to handle any enquiries.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. **Receives** the report.
2. **Notes** the content of the report.
3. **Approves** the process proposed in section 5 of this report to dispose of the houses.

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Attachment 1

Location of Baring Head houses