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Committee Social and Cultural Wellbeing Committee
Authors Amanda Cox, Manager Parks
Sharon Lee, Parks Planner

Queen Elizabeth Park, Heritage Framework and land management review

1. Purpose

To provide an update to the Committee on work regarding farming and heritage within Queen Elizabeth Park and to provide the final reports entitled *Queen Elizabeth Park: Heritage Framework* and *Queen Elizabeth Park Farming Review*.

2. Significance of the decision

No decision is being sought in this report. This work is consistent with the objectives, policies and management focus for Queen Elizabeth Park identified in the Parks Network Plan.

3. Background

On 31 May 2012 officers presented the draft reports: *Queen Elizabeth Park: Heritage Framework* and *Queen Elizabeth Park Farming Review* to the Social and Cultural Wellbeing Committee. The discussions in these workshops assisted in the finalisation of these reports.

4. A heritage framework for Queen Elizabeth Park

In October 2011 the Committee endorsed the preferred option of a decentralised suite of heritage attractions/features and an improved entrance to the park. Further, they instructed officers to begin engaging with Printing Museum representatives and the Department of Conservation on the issue of a proposed printing museum at Queen Elizabeth Park.

The Committee also noted that amendments to the Parks Network Plan and draft Parks Operational Plan might be required to reflect the preferred option.

To develop the concept plans for a decentralised suite of heritage attractions/features and an improved entrance, Greater Wellington employed

Boffa Miskell. The work commenced in December 2011 and concluded with the final report produced in June 2012.

4.1 Summary of the work

The report *Queen Elizabeth Park: Heritage Framework* (hard copy available in Councillors' lounge) gives further guidance to the Parks Department on how to implement the Committee's preferred option of a decentralised suite of heritage attractions/features. The objectives of this Heritage Framework are to:

- Enhance, interpret and develop existing components throughout the park's natural and heritage landscape
- Identify points of interest for visitors to Queen Elizabeth Park
- Develop key gateways into the park, including the integration of an interpretation centre at MacKay's Crossing entrance
- Integrate heritage projects with existing infrastructure and future development opportunities identified within the Parks Network Plan

The framework identifies five elements or themes that contribute to the heritage of the area, namely: natural, Maori, farming, military and park. Through thematic mapping, opportunities were identified where heritage could be appropriately celebrated or interpreted in some way.

The framework includes an action plan for the implementation of the Heritage Framework. The ethos behind the action plan is that rather than creating a lot of new structures, interpretation should be integrated with the current landscape and infrastructure. Signage or other types of interpretation would be located either at places where a number of heritage themes interlink (at hubs or nodes) or along trails connecting the hubs and nodes. Interpretation of heritage would predominately be integrated into the design of park infrastructure and could be incorporated when replacing or upgrading infrastructure within the park or when new opportunities such as the north-south cycleway link are developed.

4.2 MacKay's Crossing entrance

The report recognises that MacKay's Crossing entrance area is one of the key gateways (or hubs) where the various elements of heritage overlap and thus provides an opportunity for a more obvious celebration of heritage. MacKay's Crossing is also significant in that it is adjacent to Whareroa Farm (DOC managed park) and accessible off the state highway.

To further consider how the entrance could be improved, a design folio (concept plan) was prepared (refer to the appendices in the Heritage Framework). The folio addresses the following issues:

- The entrance, whilst historic, is narrow and is inadequate especially during large events. It also does not provide for visitors walking/cycling to/from Whareroa Farm

- Park users are often confused by current signage; it is not clear about where to go in the park or how to access the tracks and facilities
- The landscape does not signal clearly what lies beyond the MacKay's Crossing entrance in terms of visitor opportunities and heritage
- There is a need to identify an appropriate location for the Printing Museum

As a result of the landscape analysis and taking into account future needs a number of changes to the MacKay's Crossing area are proposed which overcome these issues and will improve the overall visitor experience. These are outlined in the folio using maps, drawing and discussion. Essentially the following changes are proposed:

- The historic formal entrance would remain, but altered to provide for pedestrian/cycle connections to Whareroa Farm and a new separate exit to improve traffic flows
- A wetland is extended around the entrance which reminds visitors both of the past and celebrate the restoration efforts which are a key element in the Park
- Raised road and traffic calmers remind visitors that they are entering a Park, rather than a vehicle dominated space and indicate areas for parking
- A visitors/interpretation centre is proposed as a multi-functional space: and a focal point for celebrating the heritage of the park. It would cater for community group meetings and become a starting point from which visitors go out to explore

The folio outlines how these developments may be staged over time as funding allows. The first and most important of the improvements are the changes to the entrance/exit and wetland improvements and officers recommend that these improvements are prioritised.

4.3 Locating a possible Printing Museum

During the period from February to June 2012 officers from Greater Wellington met with members of the Printing Museum on three occasions in order to determine a suitable location for the museum within the MacKay's Crossing area. The aim was to determine a location that could not just contain a large building but also be sited close to existing infrastructure, minimise its impact on the existing landscape and complement the general visitor experience at MacKay's Crossing.

It was agreed at these meetings that the location outlined in the Heritage Framework report was the most suitable, would meet the needs of the Printing Museum and could be sensitively located within the landscape without compromising the overall amenity and functionality of the area. This location is on the land immediately to the east of the Tramways Museum and at the rear of a small carpark.

It is now the responsibility of the Printing Museum to prepare their application for a lease on the basis of the site indicated (an initial application was made in 2008 and this requires substantial work before it could be considered). The application would initially be received by Greater Wellington but then sent to the Department of Conservation for their consideration.

This process is required because Greater Wellington only holds management and control responsibilities for Queen Elizabeth Park and the nature of the lease requires the owner of the park, the Department of Conservation, to be the decision maker. The Printing Museum would also require resource and building consents from Kapiti Coast District Council.

5. Land management review

During development of the Parks Network Plan, and more recently the Long Term Plan 2012-2022, the question of how to best sustainably manage the large areas of what is now currently farmland in Queen Elizabeth Park was frequently discussed.

To answer that question Greater Wellington initially commissioned P A Handford and Associates in late 2010 to develop a Sustainable Land Use Plan for the park. However, while these types of plans provide a blueprint for how sustainable farming should occur, they do not answer the wider question of the contribution of farming in the park. This is particularly important given the costs associated with providing farming infrastructure and the restricted public access to this land.

To resolve this issue, Greater Wellington commissioned Rob Greenaway and Associates to undertake a higher level review of land management options in the Park. This review commenced in November 2011, with the final report received in June 2012.

5.1 Summary of the work

The report *Queen Elizabeth Park Farming Review* (hard copy available in Councillors' lounge) considers options for managing the farmed areas of the park, recommends an approach and suggests how this could be implemented over time.

Several key issues and themes arose through the review:

- As the park is coastal in nature and near two urban areas, Greater Wellington has an important responsibility to manage local fire hazards. Fires are permanently banned in Queen Elizabeth Park (QEP), but the risk of fire would be considerably heightened should grazing be removed
- There is a community expectation for continued restoration of vegetation to native species in QEP. However, due to the high cost of this type of re-vegetation, there would be a considerable lag between the removal of grazing and restoration in native trees. In the interim, there would be a considerable resurgence in exotic weeds and a perceived loss of open space. This latter scenario is not supported by stakeholders

- There is significant stakeholder support for the land management approach developed in the draft Sustainable Land Use Plan. This essentially retains farming at the park as a way to manage its open space values and maintains an accessible rural activity in an increasingly urban area
- Through reorganising the management regime and farm lease arrangements, Greater Wellington could substantially improve the financial return and deliver other benefits from the investment in QEP, such as a demonstration site for implementation of sustainable land use practices in the region

5.2 Approach recommended for land management

Implementing the recommended approach means working to the following general principles, all of which are consistent with the Parks Network Plan:

- Agree to broaden the agricultural activities possible on QEP (e.g., cropping, use of sheep as well as cattle). Creation of a formal “farm park” at QEP is not considered appropriate, these experiences are already available elsewhere
- Review the farming lease to better reflect outcomes being sought by Greater Wellington rather than specifying the methods to be used by the leaseholder. This would give an appropriate degree of flexibility and stronger requirements to liaise
- Review the asset management plan for farm infrastructure to better identify lifecycle costing, maintenance and renewal responsibilities. This would be carried out in tandem with the review of the farm lease
- Prioritise spend on management of weeds and fences where long term costs may be reduced, production improved and management of restoration areas achieved
- Improve recreational access through the northern part of QEP, based around the waterway/wetland network. This gives separation from farm operations and provides an interesting route. This concept supports an enhanced northern entrance off Poplar Ave and the north-south cycle/walkway (being considered as part of the MacKay’s to Peka Peka Expressway development)
- Review the leases for equestrian activities to better reflect expectations of users
- Develop a single lease for QEP and Whareroa Farm, in association with DOC and have a single lease administrator. This provides a more versatile lease area, utilizing the hill country and lowlands

6. Comment

At this stage it is considered that no further amendments are needed to the Parks Network Plan to provide implementation of the reports' recommendations as detailed above.

The *Queen Elizabeth Park: Heritage Framework* report provides detailed plans which may be used in annual budgeting and operational planning but do not alter the management focus and policies for Queen Elizabeth Park as outlined in the Parks Network Plan.

The Printing Press Museum is now in the process of preparing their application on the basis of the location and other specifications provided in the report. An application once received would be forwarded to the Department of Conservation (DOC). DOC would invite the views of Greater Wellington in making a decision to approve or decline the lease. At this point a further report to the Committee with a recommendation would be made.

The *Queen Elizabeth Park Farming Review* involved significant interaction with Peter Handford which enabled the implications of the draft Sustainable Land Use Plan (SLUP) and associated options and costs to be explored. In addition community consultation undertaken through this process provided constructive feedback on the draft SLUP. As a result the *Queen Elizabeth Park Farming Review* provides detailed priorities and associated costs, which will assist considerably in planning implementation of the Sustainable Land Use Plan (final report due early August).

Officers are undertaking the first stages of this implementation, working on the first stages of fencing the Whareroa Stream. Officers are also basing discussions regarding the Expressway project on the recommendations contained within these reports.

7. Communication

A number of interested community groups and stakeholders were involved in the development of these reports. Copies of the final reports will be made available to the groups.

Officers will present an overview of the park and the findings from these reports to the Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park Annual General Meeting on Monday 13 August.

8. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report*

Report prepared by:

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Amanda Cox
Manager - Parks

Sharon Lee
Parks Planner

Jane Davis
General Manager, Strategy
and Community Engagement

Report approved by:

Nigel Corry
General Manager,
Environment Management
Group