

## **Report 00.160**

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Report to the Landcare Committee  
from Anne Manley, Parks Planner - Policy, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)

### **Update on Belmont Regional Park**

#### **1. Purpose**

To update Councillors on progress by officers:

- Identifying potential threats to the future of Belmont Regional Park;
- Noting key elements within the Park for future protection; and
- Preparing to deal with new issues in Belmont Regional Park as they arise.

#### **2. Issues/Threats**

Following Hutt City Council's review of the Kilmister Block, officers considered it timely to identify issues and potential threats to the Park, and to prepare for dealing with those issues in the future. Key issues potentially affecting Belmont Regional Park, are discussed below.

##### **2.1 Changing Concept of the Park**

Belmont Regional Park is evidence that day-to-day management by one agency over park land owned by multiple parties can work. (The Council has been successfully managing recreation in the Park for over ten years.) However, management of Belmont Regional Park does rely on the goodwill of the parties involved and if this changes, so too can the concept of the Park.

Since the Park was formed, the pressure on some Park landowners to make a commercial return has increased. It is possible that those landowners may sell their land in future.

Purchase or reservation of the land are the most obvious ways to ensure key environmental and heritage features are protected and public access maintained, in the event of a sale. However, gazetting walkways under the Walkways Act 1990 (requires landowner agreement) and negotiating easements across privately owned land can achieve desired recreational outcomes. The Council will need to assess any potential sale on its merits, bearing in mind the aims of the Park and the degree of fragmentation that would occur as a result. Two areas, with the potential to be sold in future, are discussed below.

## 2.2 **Takapu Block**

The Takapu Block is currently administered by Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) on behalf of Treasury and is leased and managed as part of Landcorp's Waitangirua Farm.

The Department of Conservation (DoC), in conjunction with the WRC, asked that the Takapu Block be transferred to DoC for nil consideration. DoC could then declare the land recreation reserve and appoint the WRC to control and manage it (as at the Dry Creek Recreation Reserve). The Block could then remain within Belmont Regional Park in perpetuity. To date there has been little progress by LINZ on this matter.

However, DoC has advised that in the event that the Block is sold to a third party, legal provision has been made for existing public walkways across the Block to be gazetted, ensuring protection of the walkways, if not the whole Block, for future generations. At this stage, DoC and WRC officers are continuing to seek a resolution from LINZ on ownership of the Block, before pursuing this matter further.

## 2.3 **Landcorp Land**

Landcorp owns some 35 percent of the Park, which forms almost all of the western (Porirua) side of the Park and some important links between Dry Creek and the Kilmister Block through to Korokoro Valley. The land is effectively private land so could potentially be sold to a third party. The existing walkways across the land are protected as they were gazetted in 1999. However, if the land is sold in future, the impact on the Park, particularly on environmental and heritage values, would still be significant.

## 2.4 **Roading Proposals**

There are a number of roading proposals that will pass through parts of the Park:

- Transmission Gully;
- The Hill Road extension; and
- The SH58 upgrade.

All these roading proposals will have impacts on recreation links and environmental values. Regional Parks officers will be endeavouring to mitigate the impacts of roading proposals on Belmont Regional Park, through the resource consent process and via input into the road designs.

## 2.5 **Entry Points to the Park**

Porirua City Council continues to make submissions via the WRC Annual Plan process, requesting more access points into Belmont Regional Park from Porirua City. Currently there are only two access points within Porirua City - the primary entrance at Cannons Creek, and a secondary entrance at Belmont Road (Pauatahanui) - compared with four primary and three secondary access points on the Hutt City side of the Park. There is one other secondary entrance on the western side of the Park, at Takapu Road (Tawa) - this falls within Wellington City Council boundaries.

There may be opportunities to create additional entrance points from Porirua and walking track links, through negotiation with Landcorp.

## 3. **What are the Key Elements in Belmont Regional Park?**

In an ideal world it would be possible to retain the Park in its entirety. However, the above threats mean that this may not always be possible. Officers have, therefore, focused on identifying *key elements* in the Park for protection and ways that we can be proactive in pursuing that protection (refer section 4).

The *key elements* are the unique features, particularly popular with Park users which help define a Park, (i.e., distinguish it from other parks in the Network).

By clearly identifying the *key elements* to be protected in a park (based on the *Signature Values*, the Park Management Plan and Council objectives), officers can assess opportunities and respond to changing situations, (e.g., potential land sales), quickly and consistently, rather than on an ad hoc basis. Hopefully this approach will reduce the likelihood of surprises for Councillors.

Officers have identified the *key elements* of Belmont Regional Park as the:

- **“Park Connections”**

Belmont Regional Park is close to four urban centres and provides a unique rural experience for Park visitors, close to those centres. The Park’s location (traversing a number of geographical and local authority areas) means it physically and visually connects several parts of the Region.

The Park provides an opportunity for people to recreate and enjoy the environment outside their immediate locality, moving through and/or viewing different parts of the Region.

Building on these “Park Connections”, there is the potential to promote links with other public land throughout the Region, thereby enhancing recreation opportunities and the future protection of ecological corridors (refer below).

- **Recreational Corridors**

The varied topography of Belmont Regional Park makes it an ideal area for recreation including walking, mountain biking and horse riding.

As well as an extensive track network (providing a variety of experiences for different fitness levels), Belmont's location means the Park also acts as a link or corridor to nearby recreational areas, e.g., Hutt River. There is, however, work to be done to increase people's awareness of and physically enhance, (e.g., through signage or track improvements) the links with other recreational areas.

While the "connection" between Belmont and nearby areas has been made by some visitors, it is not something that has been promoted widely. Promoting the links/corridors from Belmont will result in the availability and/or awareness of a wider range of recreational experiences (both in terms of environment and activities). For example, people could experience a riverside environment and the open hilltops in one day. Accessibility to both Belmont Regional Park and adjacent areas may be enhanced if people are aware that they can make a direct link (biking or walking) from a local park through to the Regional Park or alternatively, for variety, access areas adjacent to Belmont while visiting there.

- **Ecological Corridors**

As mentioned, the Park's location lends itself to promoting links with other public land, thereby enhancing future protection of regional ecological corridors, (e.g., linking Wellington Harbour and Pauatahanui Inlet).

Within the Park, some significant native remnants (some covenanted) and regenerating indigenous forest can be found. Korokoro Bush is the only large stand of regenerating and remnant rimu-rata/tawa-kohekohe forest in the south-west Wellington Region. Indigenous fish species are found in Korokoro Stream.

The Proposed Regional Landscape Plan identified Korokoro Bush (Wellington Harbour Landscape) and Belmont Saddle Bush (Pauatahanui Inlet Landscape) as sites of ecological significance. These and other areas form useful wildlife corridors across the Park. In particular, Korokoro Bush, Belmont Bush and Boulder Hill Bush (all within the Park) form part of the Hutt Valley bird "corridor". Belmont Hills Bush (north of Round Knob) maintains a bird habitat in an area lacking other forest cover.

By focusing on enhancing the environment and particularly the ecological corridors within the Park, the Council can contribute to improving the Region's ecological systems and biodiversity.

Work identifying Key Native Ecosystems (KNE's) for protection, and favourable anecdotal evidence from a recent pest control operation are emerging. There are, however, still large areas of native vegetation with scope for enhancement to improve the visual and ecological quality of the Park environment.

- **Landscape**

Belmont Regional Park contributes distinctive landscape features to the Parks Network. The Proposed Regional Landscape Plan identified the Belmont and Hill Road Blockfields and peneplain remnants as geological features in the Wellington Region of scientific and educational value.

In addition, the open hilltops provide a backdrop to the skyline behind Porirua and Hutt City, visible from many vantage points around the Region (such as Wellington Harbour and SH1). Landmarks such as Boulder Hill, Round Knob and Cannons Head are easily discernible from Porirua City and the Hutt Valley. Spectacular vistas can be experienced from within the Park itself - towards Wellington, Porirua and Kapiti Island, and out over the Hutt Valley.

- **Heritage Elements**

Belmont Regional Park contributes distinctive heritage features to the Parks Network relating to water supply, WWII and heritage trails, (e.g., Korokoro Dam and weir, WWII ammunition magazines, Old Coach Road, Maori trading route).

- **Education Opportunities**

Belmont Regional Park's environment and landscape (as noted above) provide the ideal "venue" for educational experiences. Education programmes tie in well with implementation of the Regional Council's wider objectives, (e.g., Biodiversity, Regional Policy Statement (RPS), environmental education). The Park Ranger already involves schools and volunteer groups in projects around the Park but this requires further expansion if education is to become an important, immediately recognisable aspect of the Park.

#### 4. **How Can the *Key Elements* be Applied?**

The key elements identified above provide a basis for officers to prioritise options as issues arise, (e.g., potential sale of land). Officers acknowledge that Council (via the Landcare Committee) will need to consider each case on its merits.

However, by using the *key elements* method, officers are able to provide Councillors with information/options promptly and take a "no surprises" approach. They are now better prepared to deal with new issues in Belmont Regional Park, should they arise.

As part of this exercise, officers have also identified areas where we can be proactive in addressing issues and promoting these *key elements*, (e.g., a meeting is planned with Porirua City Council to discuss entrances in the Park and that Council's vision for the Cannons Creek part of the Park).

Officers will continue to make submissions and try to engage the support of territorial authorities via their respective District Plans, (i.e., to ensure that the Park is zoned appropriately) and through reserve contributions (particularly to promote new access points from subdivisions) via the resource consent process.

## 5. **Communications**

There are no communications implications arising from this paper. Public consultation and communication will be undertaken through the review of the Belmont Regional Park Management Plan (scheduled to commence in 2001/02), and as and when new issues and initiatives arise.

## 6. **Recommendation**

*That the Landcare Committee receive the report and note the contents.*

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