

Public Excluded

Report PE-00.496

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Report to the Landcare Committee
from John Bissell, Ranger, Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

Educational Woodlot Plantings on Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

1. Purpose

To seek approval to enter into a partnership with Saint Bernard's College to plant an educational woodlot on Battle Hill Farm Forest Park. The "partnership" is a formal agreement to undertake a joint venture on Wellington Regional Council land where the costs and profits are shared and the College provides the labour for much of the work (refer section 5 and the draft agreement for details).

2. Exclusion of Public

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

To enable the Council to carry out, without prejudice or disadvantage, negotiations (including commercial and industrial negotiations).

Once the agreement is signed, appropriate information on the project will be made public. However, this is unlikely to include details about the specific clauses in the agreement.

3. Saint Bernard's College Proposal

Last year the Council received a request from Saint Bernard's College, Lower Hutt, to undertake a joint venture with WRC to plant and manage a small exotic woodlot area on Battle Hill for their Sixth Form horticulture curriculum. This was reported to the Landcare Committee and approval granted to investigate the idea further with a view to presenting Councillors with a draft agreement (refer Report 99.562). In particular, at the October 1999 Landcare Committee meeting, it was resolved:

(1) That the Committee approve the principle of entering into partnerships with educational institutions for woodlot plantings on Battle Hill Farm Forest Park.

- (2) *That the Committee ask officers to work through details of the Saint Bernard's College proposal to finalise an agreement to be submitted to the Committee for approval.*

As part of the ongoing development of educational programmes on Battle Hill Farm Forest Park, participating school groups have been encouraged to take a more active "hands on" approach and carry out practical work. This results in a greater feeling of ownership by the students and a desire by some to stay in touch and see projects through to completion. To date this has focussed on conservation related work, however, an opportunity exists for student involvement with exotic woodlot plantings. Therefore, officers support the intent of this proposal.

4. **Why Do This?**

This initiative offers an opportunity to contribute to the Council's objectives of environmental education (*Learnwell* - a classroom in the field) and Community Connection. An additional benefit is that the Council is not required to fully fund the establishment and maintenance of woodlots for educational purposes on the Park.

This initiative could be extended to other schools. The schools taking part would not be the only ones to benefit as interpretation panels next to the woodlots communicate a tangible example to the wider public of how the Regional Council is "getting involved" and could educate other school groups and Park users.

An initiative such as this is breaking new ground for the Regional Council in the area of education, however, officers consider the benefits to all involved make it something well worth taking part in.

We want to emphasise that this is an educational exercise, not a commercial profit-making project. The benefits are broader than just monetary.

5. **How Will It Work in Reality?**

A small area of land, (i.e., 0.5 hectares) on Battle Hill suitable for a woodlot has been identified and a formal agreement drawn up with the school outlining that:

- the Regional Council will provide the land under a licence agreement with the school;
- the school will carry out all maintenance and silviculture on the trees from planting up until just prior to harvesting;
- all other costs such as plants, fencing, drawing up of the contract and harvesting will be shared 50/50 between the two parties;
- the school will use the woodlot for successive years' classes as part of its curriculum;
- the school will keep a full record of each year's site preparation, planting, maintenance, silviculture, and tree growth for the Council and later students;
- the net profit after harvesting will be shared 50/50 between the two parties.

Indicative costs identified at this stage for the Saint Bernard's College proposal are:

- \$800 - fencing
- \$1000 - drawing up agreement
- \$500 - cost of trees
- \$200 - fertiliser and spray

\$2,500 Total

The Regional Council's share of the return could be put into further environmental education and community initiatives on Battle Hill.

Officers from Parks and Forests, and the Council Secretariat have reviewed the relevant provisions of, and are confident that there is ample authority under, the Local Government Act 1974 for such an initiative.

6. **Communication**

Opportunities will exist once the agreement is finalised to promote the Council's involvement in partnerships with educational institutions to enhance environmental education.

7. **Recommendations**

- (1) *That the Committee approve the attached draft licence agreement as a basis for a partnership woodlot planting on Battle Hill Farm Forest Park with Saint Bernard's College, with details to be finalised to the satisfaction of the Divisional Manager, Landcare.*
- (2) *That the Committee authorise the Divisional Manager, Landcare to enter into the agreement on behalf of the Wellington Regional Council.*
- (3) *That the Committee note that appropriate information will be made public once the agreement has been signed on behalf of Saint Bernard's College.*

Report prepared by:

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Attachment 1 : Woodlot Partnership Agreement