

## 5.2 FORRESTER HEIGHTS

The report, as circulated, sought Council's consideration of the potential options in relation to 2.5390 hectares of land at Cape Wanbrow, known as Forrester Heights, and the level of engagement to be undertaken with the community should Council wish to proceed further.

Group Manager Paul Hope advised that this report was in response to comments from the wider public seeking to know what Council's intentions are in relation to Forrester Heights. Prior to doing a significant amount of work on it, officers are seeking direction from Council. There were three options included in the report and a recommendation to start the engagement process to see how it could be better utilised to help facilitate the discussion.

It was suggested that the land could be left as it is or turned into a reserve instead, but the value of the land would need to be known first. Property Manager Renee Julius advised that it was difficult to quantify, and there was no other similar land for any valuer to compare it to.

There was brief discussion about what Council would expect from a sale. It was suggested that it should not be about just selling the land for any price; Council would want to achieve a return that would be able to assist an initiative/project in some other area. There was a lot of pressure in the Long Term Plan related to rate increases. It was an aspirational LTP and there was a considerable amount of infrastructure work included. However, there was also a lot of other work to do, including doing more to improve recreation reserves that Council owned and is managing, including walkways; that work could benefit from any land sale funds.

The Chair suggested that it was time for Council to make a decision on this matter, given that there were recommendations and options in front of them. He asked Councillors if they wished to exclude any of the options put forward. His view was that the option for Council to develop the land on its own should be removed, because it would become a distraction when there was so much else requiring Council's priority attention at the moment.

Mr Hope clarified the need to be clear about the intent of the report's recommendations as they were written. Retaining the land in its current state was the lowest cost option. However, turning it into a reserve that is usable and attractive, with tracks and organised plantings that would need to be well maintained, would be a significant investment/cost and there would be no returns. The cost could probably be estimated, and that information would need to be made available to the public as part of any consultation process. That would lead to the key choice – how much do you want to invest in this alternate use, or the potential range of options to do something else with the land? Only part of the piece of land that is involved can be seen from the township, and that would need to be clarified, too. It is freehold so it is a Council decision that can be made because there are no encumbrances. Determining the best use of the land will be a useful conversation to have with the community.

### NOTICE OF MOTION

Cr Colin Wollstein advised that he liked the Chair's earlier suggestion (to remove the option for Council to develop the land on its own) and was prepared to move the report's recommendations without that and also by removing 2(a)(vii) but retaining 2(a)(vi). The Chair accepted this as a Notice of Motion whilst questions were still being asked.

When asked about how ongoing costs were being met, Mr Hope noted that initially the cost had been a loan as this was originally a commercial development. If Council took another route, then that cost would have to be funded to reflect whatever Council chose to do with the land. If it was turned into a reserve, then it would have to be funded by the RMA reserves or rates.

The reference to "given current environment" in point 2(a)(i) was queried, given that it was considered to be quite bullish. Mr Hope explained that the intended reference was to the total

environment, with staff workloads included in that. 'Do nothing' was always an option and it would always be expected to be seen in an engagement.

The Chair suggested that there should be a simple 'do nothing' option.

### **MOTION**

Cr Colin Wollstein moved the report's recommendations with the exclusion of point 2(a)(vii) and Cr Ross McRobie seconded the motion.

### **AMENDMENT**

Cr McRobie suggested that, for 2(a)(i), the words "given the current environment" be deleted. Cr Wollstein, as mover of the motion, agreed with this amendment.

### **Discussion on the motion:**

Two elected members spoke in support of the motion, one noting that Council could expect some discussion and debate in the community but there was a need to start the process. The other expressed concern about staff workloads and suggested that the conversation with the community did not need to be a rushed process; it was more important to get the process right to ensure the community has a good opportunity for debate and feedback. Another Councillor noted that that approach was covered by recommendation 3, and they supported it.

Another Councillor expressed concern about not knowing what the final figure could be so that people could make an informed choice about whether they felt a sale would be worth it. As it was a complicated piece of land, there may not be as much value as some might hope.

An opposing view was put forward – supporting option 3 (opposition to the sale) – for the reason that, in order for staff to put in time and resources needed for the community engagement process, it would take them away from business as usual and there was too much going on at the moment to do that.

Another elected member said they were not quite as set in their view as the previous Councillor, but believed that there should be options saying (i) that Council could generate "X" amount of money from the sale, or (ii) would you prefer to leave it as it is? Their concern was centred on a belief that going out to the community without tabling all of the information would be "fraught".

The Chair acknowledged that it may be possible to decide on a potential figure as the information for the community was developed and collated.

When asked for comment, Group Manager Paul Hope advised that it was unlikely that a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) would generate much response, given that any likely responder would not want to put in too much effort if there was not an outcome at the end or any indication of the level of community support. Officers had considered the best way to approach this matter and believed that there was a need to know what the community wants first. The options would be fleshed out so that the community knows what the questions are, but the key one would be "what do you think is the best use of that land?".

Using his Right of Reply, Cr Wollstein noted that the meeting discussion so far demonstrated that the matter is likely to promote a great deal of discussion. He took on board that the value of the property would be important but believed that that was the 'cart before the horse'. Council could not determine the value of the land to the community before it had community consent to do something, and therefore the first option should be to go to the community, get their views which he expected would be varied, and then Council could decide whether to proceed or not, and on what basis (eg which option from 1 – 6 is best). He noted that, if the public approved the sale in principle, then Council could still say no.

**RESOLVED WDC 2021/001**

Moved: Cr Colin Wollstein

Seconded: Cr Ross McRobie

That Council:

1. Instructs Officers to carry out a public engagement process to discern the community's views on the future of Forrester Heights;
2. Instructs Officers to compile feedback from a public engagement process on a range of options and present it to a future Council Meeting to enable a decision to be made on the future of the site;
  - a) Options to provide for feedback to include:
    - i) Do nothing
    - ii) Set aside the land as a greenspace reserve
    - iii) Develop the land as a reserve similar to Cape Wanbrow
    - iv) Set aside part of the land as greenspace reserve, and develop the remainder
    - v) Sell the land "as is" through a tender or similar open market process;
    - vi) Seek partners for a joint venture in developing the land; and
3. Instructs Officers to carry out parallel works to determine which approach will provide the best return for the ratepayer on a risk / return basis.

**CARRIED**

**AGAINST: CR PERCIVAL**