

Summary and Analysis of Submissions Received

As part of the Review of the Castle Hill Reserves Management Plan

November 2016

Background:

In June 2011, the Castle Hill Reserves Management Plan (RMP) was adopted by the Castle Hill Community Association (CHCA) and the Selwyn District Council. Since 1996 the CHCA has had a separate subcommittee called the 'Reserves Committee'. The Reserves Committee was instrumental in applying to the Council to have the RMP prepared.

The RMP is a statutory document under the Reserves Act 1977. It is intended as a guiding document, for the long term management, development and expenditure planning for reserves in the Village. It is a mechanism to assist the Committee and Council in making robust decisions, to establish the desired mix of uses and values, and withstand scrutiny if decisions are challenged.

As per the Reserves Act, the Committee / Council are required to recognise the RMP as a 'living document' that will reflect the changing needs and requirements of the local community. To this end, the Committee are wanting to undertake a Desktop review of the RMP to ensure that it remains current (as per Policy 1.3).

The Committee called for submissions on the review of the RMP during October 2016. Ten submissions were returned, including a number with multiple signatories. Seven (7) of the submissions followed the standardised questionnaire provided. Three (3) submissions were received that did not follow the format of the questionnaire provided or answer the questions asked. These responses have still been incorporated into the various discussions under each question where considered relevant.

The analysis of submissions is presented below and represents in summary what was received. It is not intended as a complete list of the responses received.

Summary Statement:

There were a number of 'themes' that emerged in the reading of the responses. Generally these relate to 'tree matters'. A number of these themes include several polarising views, where it is argued that certain amenity values should be given precedence over others. Main themes include:

- Village character - a treed environment versus open unrestricted alpine vistas.
- The need for climatic amelioration and shelter from winds, versus issues with shading.
- Native tree species versus a varied tree environment.
- Wilding pines - immediate removal versus progressive.

A number of the submissions seem to indicate that current issues are more associated with the process or how the plan is being implemented, pointing to changes to the RMP that are needed to effect process or make it more efficient, such as changes to assessment criteria or those charged with making decisions.

It should also be noted that there is a possibility that the RMP is not well understood by some village residents. Particularly with regard to the broader vision and stated purposes of the reserves. Equally, the question should be asked – Do the objectives and policies in the RMP still align with the changing needs of the Castle Hill community?

The RMP review will need to consider carefully as to whether the plan sufficiently provides the best possible assistance to those charged with its implementation. Especially with regard to the challenges of balancing values of wind shelter, shade, sunlight and views. The review should also consider what other means might be necessary, external to the RMP e.g. could Council have an increased role, as an independent party, in resolving difficult technical / tree matters.

A summary on responses received to each question is given as follows:

Q.1a) Do you endorse the existing stated purposes of the Village reserves?

There was a general view that the stated purposes of the village reserves are still relevant. The majority of submissions endorsed the existing stated purposes. Of the two submissions that indicated they did not endorse the stated purposes, one endorsed some but not all of the stated purposes, the other endorsed the stated purposes but with some changes.

It was commented that the reserves serve a variety of purposes, both functional and aesthetic, and that the purpose of reserves are likely to differ between older areas of the Village that have a slightly different character and a larger percentage of reserve space, to more recently subdivided areas.

Q.1b) If No, what changes do you think are appropriate?

Generally, it is considered that the stated purposes for the reserves were at a very broad level, and as such, little change was necessary. Rather, there are issue with the objectives, policies and implementation of the RMP. This is commented on later in this report under Q.2).

Those submissions that endorsed some but not all of the stated purposes identified the following as needing to be changed:

- “create and maintain a rural alpine setting”.

Reasoning: The current alpine setting is inappropriate for the alpine area of NZ, being introduced trees more appropriate for North America where they are indigenous. It is requested that reference to replicating a European and North American presentation of the reserves be deleted from the RMP.

There were differing opinions on the nature of the Village setting / landscape. One commented that it is more ‘sub-alpine’, in keeping with the existing vegetation mix.

Officer Comment: It is likely that this submission is not questioning the importance of ‘creating / maintaining a rural alpine setting’, but rather, what constitutes a ‘rural alpine setting’. The RMP defines this by drawing heavily upon the original design vision for Castle Hill Village, being in part the “US / Canadian western mountain regions”. It should be noted that this ‘alpine’ or ‘chalet’ theme’ also forms part of the ‘strict’ building code (and District Plan) for the Village.

- “to create and maintain wind shelter, shade and climatic amelioration throughout the Village”.

Reasoning: The need for wind shelter is considered subjective and emotive, and not based on actual data. Issues with shading in winter (evergreen trees) outweighs any benefit of shade during summer.

In complete contrast to this, another submission has highlighted both of these stated purposes as being of most importance (as currently worded) to the management of the village reserves.

Officer Comment: The review of the RMP will need to carefully consider any precedence given to some amenity values over others. These aspects are discussed further in this report under Q.2 – RMP Objectives.

With reference to ‘village character’, it was also noted that reference in the background of the RMP is made to evidence presented to SDC in 1979 that included a vision that the reserve and accommodation areas would feature ‘dense forest-like’ base plantings. It is felt that this evidence does not comprise any part of the consent given for the development at that time and is not a desirable situation. It is argued that reference to these passages be removed from the RMP.

Officer Comment: The review of the RMP will need to consider the original consent and context in which this statement is given.

The second submission that endorsed the stated purposes but with some changes, identified a need to give greater weight to resident’s needs to have trees removed as a result of shading in winter.

Other comments around change to the stated purposes included;

- Greater emphasis should be given to maintaining the character of the Village, with reference given to the original consents.
- A need to retain a mix of native and exotic treescape and

- A need to retain a high percentage of reserve space in comparison to developed land.

Emphasis on maintaining the character of the Village and the need to retain a high percentage of reserve space are two reoccurring themes throughout responses given to different questions.

Q.2a) Do you endorse the existing Objectives in the RMP?

The majority of submissions endorsed the existing objectives stated in the RMP. While it was felt that the RMP still retains the requisite wording needed to guide management of the reserves, there was also some suggestion that the content of the RMP requires updating given the development of new challenges within the village, particularly in relation to the growing height of trees.

The following objectives were specifically identified as being of most importance to the management of the village reserves;

Objective 7 - "Maintain the alpine rural character and visual structure of the Village in all reserves". While considered important, as per Q.1) above, it is noted that there are varying views on what constitutes an 'alpine' setting. It was also observed that different areas of the village (subdivision stages) have a slightly different character, and that each should be able to maintain this character type.

Objective 8 - "Manage, protect and enhance the natural and cultural values of the reserves for all users, neighbours and village residents". Gives valuable reference for the need to balance competing interests in some situations, i.e. during the assessment of tree removals.

Objective 9 - "Implement a long term strategy for tree and shrub maintenance, replacement and expansion in the reserves". This objective is considered important as it highlights the need to have an 'up to date' tree management plan / detailed development plans for individual reserves in place, before considering any mass removal of trees.

Q.2b) If No, what changes do you think are appropriate?

Three submissions indicated that they do not out rightly endorse the objectives. Each of these reasons are explained further below:

- Endorsed the objectives apart from references made to (the removal of) Lodgepine.
- Endorsed the objectives, but with some considerable modification in their implementation. Namely being the value that is given to Objective 1 – "For the health and wellbeing of all users" particularly in relation to issues with trees and winter shading.
- Stated that most of the objectives were reasonable, but believe these need to be reframed, along with supporting information changed.

The following recommendations for change to the existing Objectives were made:

- Objective 1 - Two of the three submissions that do not out rightly endorse the objectives identified a need to place a greater priority on the needs of people and “the health and wellbeing of all users”. It was identified that Objective 1 should be reworded to better achieve this; *“To provide efficient and appropriate management and administration of Castle Hill Village reserves, for the health and wellbeing of all residents of the Village and other users of the Reserves, as a primary consideration”*.
- Objective 6 - It was questioned as to the relevance of CPTED, being an urban design standard, within the context of Castle Hill Village.
- Objective 8 - Greater emphasis needed in protecting the important amenity values, especially of those residing in the Village. In terms of amenity values, these are listed in the executive summary as; wind shelter, shade and climatic amelioration. But there is no reference to other amenity values, such as access to light, sun and alpine vistas. Recognition of all amenity values needs to be given.

There are many references in the RMP as to the importance of views and sun, but which are not given prominence in the objectives. The following examples are given to support this;

- P.17 – “Castle Hill Village has a near unique alpine setting with 360 degree mountain views”
- P. 21 – Reference to the “distinctive unique and memorable natural high country landscape” and the conflict between the importance of maintaining views and the benefits of shelter and character added by the Village Reserves.
- P.51 – Reference to a need to achieve a balance between open land and tree areas, “tree areas are to be located and maintained in a manner that retains reasonable open views within and beyond the Village”, and the need to “provide reasonable wind shelter and summer shade within the Village while not unduly shading houses in winter”.
- P.52 – The need to maintain view corridors to the ranges because “these views are a part of the essential alpine character of the Village”.
- P.53 – Reference to the need for “reasonable view and outlook in at least one direction, and reasonable winter sun”.
- P.53 – Reference is made to “shading margin and tree gradient tree areas where smaller trees are called for adjacent to residential lots... to avoid shading or danger of wind throw to houses or recreation areas”.
- P.59 – Definition of various types of trees (landmark, general and small trees). Importantly, landmark trees are allocated position in the Village “to avoid issues of scale, shading or danger near houses”.
- “View corridors” are defined throughout the document, with the aim of “maintaining views”.

Officer Comment: The RMP review will need to consider as to whether the objectives and policies should reference all amenity values and as to what weighting is given, in-keeping with the wider vision for the village reserves.

Officer Comment: The review should also consider whether there is a need to reword objectives, or whether the issue lies in the implementation of these, and whether greater assistance can be given via changes to policies and or other documents to be developed (e.g. updated tree management plan, individual reserve development plans).

Q.3a) Are there any issues you would like to raise about the current implementation of the RMP?

The majority of submissions indicated that they did have issues to raise with regards to the current implementation of the RMP. Although it is being implemented in the spirit intended, there are issues, generally relating to the process and implementation of tree removals. Submissions did also raise concern over the fact that the RMP is not well understood by the Village, as well as the scale of work in relation to managing the Village reserves, the growth of the Village and the lack of resourcing available.

Q.3b) If Yes, how do you suggest the issue might be addressed and resolved?

Several submissions felt that the scale of tree removal / thinning has meant the reserve committee has become more reactive, as opposed to proactive, and primarily deals with requests for tree removal and replanting areas of *P. contorta*.

It is highly evident that the Reserve Committee has a 'difficult and unpopular role', in implementing the RMP, particularly on maintaining alpine character and tree removal decisions, in accordance with the 'Tree Management Plan' (p.51). This was evident in the nature of some submissions received, with one calling for the abolishment of the Reserve Committee, with responsibilities being handed back to the main Committee and the RMP amended to reflect this. It was felt that this would restore democratic process and reduce the "potential for bias or narrow focus in the application of the RMP". On the other hand, other submissions supported the existence of the reserve committee and the necessity for consultation with the Committee, prior to any felling of existing or new plantings.

It is felt by some, that existing plantings of tall trees breach the provisions of the RMP in many places within reserves. To assist in decision making, a number of submissions identified a need for clearer guidelines on complying with the RMP. In particular, in terms of 4.5.1.4 (p.51) - "*Tree areas are to be located and maintained so they provide reasonable wind shelter and summer shade within the village while not unduly shading houses in winter*". The following ideas were put forward:

- Clearer guidelines are needed on:
 - The meaning of 'undue shading' (e.g. length of time a house is shaded during the day).
 - Maintaining the tree and the wind protection functions of trees
 - 5 year micro-plans to provide greater certainty for the most sensitive tree areas
 - Immediate designation of notable trees
- Establish firm criteria, for example:

- Do the requirements of permanent residents take priority over residents who visit occasionally?
- How much influence should a neighbour have in objecting to a request to having a tree/s removed?
- The suitability of tree species in certain locations and conditions (e.g. it is stated that Douglas fir are unsuitable in places where their size affects residential or shade sensitive areas).
- Give more weight to section 2.9 in terms of how particular tree species are managed.
- The Plan gives good guidance on the location and provision of 'landmark trees' and 'general' trees. This should be followed in terms of the plan's implementation and what qualifies for removal and what should remain (as 'landmark trees', planted in the right location, as per the plan).
- A timeframe needs to be drawn as to when trees that do not comply with the plan (because of their location) are to be removed.
- More attention / priority given to the development of "drifts of shrubs and tussocks", as provided for in the RMP (4.5.4, P.52).
- Allocate sufficient resources to allow proper implementation of the summary action plan.
- Management needs to reflect particularities of each area as opposed to imposing a 'village-wide' rule.

With regard to the current implementation of the RMP, there were also a number of comments made on tree species selection and what is considered 'in keeping with the village theme'. It is evident that there are opposing views on this, being native versus an exotic / native mix. Some felt the prevailing intention in implementing the plan is to plant native beech as the primary species and that therefore, the RMP should be amended to reflect this, removing reference to goals of creating a European and North American replica.

Others oppose the 'extreme view' that all exotic tree species be removed from the village reserves, supporting the RMP's existing stance on 'tree character' (P. 52, 4.5.6), as being fundamental to the village character. Other arguments in support of retaining exotics include:

- Douglas fir, pine and larch are an integral element of the alpine rural character of this Village.
- The variety of tree species gives the village its own character and is why people are attracted to the area, not to be equated with other alpine villages (e.g. Arthurs Pass or Mt Cook), which have their own native vegetation established.
- Beech trees are insufficiently robust against strong winds to provide similar degrees of shelter, are slower to establish to a large tree and are susceptible to snowfall damage.
- Larger trees maintain a sense of scale within the built village environment.

Therefore, some support was shown for the principles of tree species selection in Sections 4.5.6 and 4.5.11, as well as the Committee's current direction of mixed beech

and larch tree replacement planting. Support was also shown for the increased planting of native shrub and tussocks, as well as trees.

Other comments related to the current implementation of the RMP included;

- That the current issues surrounding implementation of the management plan would best be addressed by not removing any further trees (including lodgepine).
- Scope of the RMP is limited to the Village reserves and does not encompass the Craigeburn Trails, which do have an influence on how the Village reserves are used.

Officer Comment: Although the RMP is a statutory document for the Castle Hill reserves, sections of the Plan may be updated to include these wider reserves / activities in terms of how they might affect use or future development of the village reserves.

Q.4) What actions governed by the RMP would you like to see given priority over the next 5 years?

The key actions identified by submissions generally involved trees and taking a proactive approach (as opposed to reactive) in resolving the associated issues of wilding pine spread (and natives versus exotics), tree shading versus wind shelter, and large trees growing in close proximity to dwellings.

Wilding Pine Removal:

Submissions on the issue of wilding pine removal highlight a complete spectrum of opposing views on the subject. Ranging from the immediate removal of all wilding species (including Larch and Oregon pine), to phased removal (allowing replacement plantings time to establish), to a moratorium on any further tree felling (for at least 5-10 years).

There are valid arguments for the removal of wilding species, in particular *P. contorta* (declared as a “pest” species under the Regional Pest Management Strategy 2011), which has a propensity for vigorous and long distance seeding. It is thought all *P. contorta* growing in the reserves are self-seeded. Recent documents produced by MPI – NZ Wilding Conifer Management Strategy 2015-2020 highlight that this is a national concern.

Those in support of an immediate removal of all *P. contorta* believe it is not practical to wait for the growth of replacement beech trees. It is asked that the RMP be revised so as to accelerate and direct a programme for the removal of wilding trees as soon as practical. It is suggested that aspirations in the current Plan relating to the removal of *P. contorta* are ‘vague’. The RMP needs to define a timeframe within which this goal is to be achieved.

Other submissions that express an opinion on wilding pine removal vary in terms of the timeframe for complete removal, but generally agree that removal should be progressive, allowing time for replacement plantings to establish sufficiently first.

One aspect that is agreed by all, is the view that the elimination of known wilding species within the village should also include the establishment of substitute non-wilding species, just that timeframes for doing so vary.

One submission identifies a need to seek clarification (an unbiased professional opinion) on the actual risk of wider spread of village reserve wilding pine species (Contorta, Douglas Fir and Larch) and to further explore opportunities for remedial measures to reduce risk. It is claimed in two submissions, that spread (of these three species) outside of the village is currently occurring, with considerable time and \$\$ being spent on their ongoing removal.

Amongst submissions, there is also some variation in what is considered a 'wilding' species, with various submissions naming one or more of the following; P. contorta, D. fir, oregon pine and larch. Larch is specifically named in one submission as a preferred species for longer term retention (along with native NZ beech), and that this needs to be reinforced through the Plan.

Officer Comment: It is agreed that some form of action needs to be taken, but that there would be some value in seeking further clarification (professional opinion) on the risk factor associated with each 'wilding' species, specific to the situation at Castle Hill, to determine the most appropriate course of action.

Closely associated with the matter of wilding pine removal, is the varying opinions that exist amongst village residents on native vs mixed native / exotic tree species and what constitutes 'alpine' character. This is further explained in Q.3 above.

Issue of tree shading vs wind shelter:

This matter has also been discussed under Q.2) and opinions on amenity values that are considered important to those residing in the Village (e.g. access to light, sun and alpine vistas). Several submissions highlighted a need to resolve current issues of trees shading residential dwellings. But this is currently conflicted by values associated with maintaining wind shelter and the treed character of the village, i.e., there are 'two opposing camps'. Submissions with concerns over sun deprivation put forward the following arguments;

- That the need for wind shelter is considered subjective and emotive, and not based on actual data.
- Large wind events are considered rare / infrequent and invariably occur when the majority of residents are residing elsewhere.
- Existing trees are not actually offering a lot of protection prevailing wind directions, due to being lone standing and pruned up high (canopy lift).
- The RMP states Douglas fir is unsuitable in close proximity to residential and shade-sensitive areas (p.32).
- The RMP clearly states that wind shelter need only be 'reasonable' (P.51).
- Village is becoming more populated with permanent residences (as opposed to weekend residents) that suffer the effects of shading through more extensive periods.

Several submissions strongly felt that sun deprivation caused by tall trees on reserves is by far the more important factor to consider when deciding to fell a tree or not, and should be given precedence over retaining them for protection offered during infrequent wind events.

Other submissions suggested that there is a need for better prioritised planning of individual reserve areas, including the development of plans to manage each individual reserve, including 'suitable' trees lists to guide their further development.

Officer Comment: As per elsewhere in this report, the review of the RMP will need to carefully consider whether any precedence needs to be given to some amenity values over others.

Removal of large trees within close proximity to dwellings:

Concern was expressed regarding the situation of large exotic tree species growing in close proximity to buildings and posing a risk. All these trees are capable of reaching heights of 30-50m and are prone to shallow root release (falling over during windstorms). It is stated in the RMP (p.32) *"Due to its large size, Douglas fir is unsuitable in close proximity to residential and shade-sensitive areas..."* It is requested that the RMP action the removal of all exotic trees that have potential to grow to over 30m and are within a tree-length of any property and to replace these with native mountain beech or some other suitable low-growing species.

To maintain Village character through a high percentage of reserves provided:

Reference was given to the need to preserve the village character through maintaining the percentage of reserves provided for in new developments. As per the RMP, contributions should always be in land (sec. 4.2.4, p.47). Further to this, the RMP refers to "generous" space provision within large reserve areas, with open space defined by "trees, drifts of shrubs and grassland" (p.47).

It was conveyed that the original consent for the village provided for small sections, view lines and a much larger than normal portion of the land required for reserve contribution. It is believed that this additional reserve contribution was taken away when the Selwyn District Plan was adopted?

The pending development of commercial land was raised and the need to better liaise with SDC to ensure useable reserves, link strips and the original vision for the village form a part of the planning process.

Other key actions identified by submissions included;

- The need to be proactive in identifying landmark and established tree groupings, as well as the monitoring and maintenance of reserve trees.
- Need for further publicity of the 'adopt a reserve' approach (see Q.6).
- The development of 'drift' planting of alpine shrub and tussock species to replace wooded areas and increase area of reserves designated as 'small tree' and 'shrub areas'.
- To address the issue of vehicles being driven on the reserves (to access picnic facilities), despite this being prohibited in the Plan.

Q.5a) Do you support the Reserve Committee's approach to tree removals and replanting?

There was a mixed response in terms of supporting the Reserve Committees current approach to tree removals and replanting.

Comments in support of the Committee's approach included;

- Support the current encouragement for early/prior replanting by those wishing to have trees removed.
- Acknowledge that there are conflicting interests, yet the Committee has demonstrated consistency in its decision making.
- Comfortable with the general principles the committee is working under.

Q.5a) If No, how would you like to see the approach changed in future?

Submissions that did not support the Committees approach to assessing tree removals generally identified a need to review the decision making process, suggesting that this should be done as part of the wider RMP review. One submission expressed real concern that the current approach / process to tree removals is causing serious damage to 'harmonious relationships' in the village.

One submission detailed the current approach employed by the Committee - to partially allow trees to be removed, with the balance of removal dependent on the replanting beech or larch trees that need to reach a specified height / level of growth before further removals will be considered.

The following concerns / issues with the existing process were highlighted in various submissions;

- The RMP contains no specific guidelines for the practicalities of managing requests for tree removal.
- Without clear guidelines, decisions may be biased towards Committee members with 'agendas'.
- The individual reserve plans within the RMP are considered inflexible.
- The current system has been developed by the Committee and is a source of conflict within the village.
- This current approach has improved the commitment to replanting, but has led to increased criticism of the Committee.
- The expectation that all removed trees should be replaced with more / multiple trees. This may only repeat the process over time.
- The current process of assessing requests can be drawn out (up to 6 months) and has become unduly bureaucratic, with a loss of focus on the wellbeing of residents.

The following ideas were suggested as a means of improving the approach taken in future;

- The reserve plans in the RMP should be more open to accommodating changes.

- The assessment approach should be more 'positive' and 'people centred', putting human needs as the primary concern (e.g. sunlight, views), with the value of trees considered as secondary.
- 'Replanting' should include an option of replanting shrubs / tussocks, as well as trees.
- Decision making should be based on a majority, as opposed to a consensus as is currently (source of delay).
- The process expedited and made more efficient.

In addition, there were a couple of comments made relating to the current procedure for tree removals which includes felling and cleanup, as well as sharing the benefits of firewood produced (referenced in the RMP on P35). One submission believed the current process works well and should remain. While another submission felt that the benefit achieved by the effected resident is too modest and that the agreement needs to be reviewed.

Officer Comment: As to who undertakes felling / maintenance is likely to be reviewed in light of recent changes to Health and Safety and concerns over chainsaw use and spraying (use of chemicals).

Q.6) Do you support the Reserve Committee's initiative on 'adopting' areas of reserve?

All submissions that responded to this question indicated they supported this initiative and thought it was a good idea. Comments on how the initiative could be extended or improved included;

- The need for an agreed plan that the 'adopter' is working towards.
- To also extend this initiative to include taking a role in developing longer term plans for individual reserve areas.
- May need further encouragement, promotion in community newsletters etc.

Q.7) Do you want to raise any other issues related to the Reserve Management plan for consideration by the Reserve Committee? Please elaborate and explain.

Generally, responses given to this reiterated the key issues already covered, being; the timing and extent of wilding pine removal, the appropriateness of exotic species versus natives, issues of tree shading versus wind shelter and the need to maintain the character of the village as it was originally intended.

Other issues not previously raised included:

- The need for improved publicity and communication with property owners on the existence / purpose / policies and programmes under the RMP.
- RMP encompasses all reserves and facilities within them. A need to seek clarification over who is managing the playgrounds, which involves more than just the implementation of new developments. Recently the Reserve

Committee has handed back responsibility of the playground areas to the main Committee. It is believed things are being missed.

- The RMP includes responsibility for safety etc. The appointment of a Village Safety Officer and how this fits into the Plan. Management of the hall in the absence of a 'hall committee'.
- A need for further detailed planning of individual reserves, as per P.51, 4.5.2(ii). To address progressive removal of pest pine species, to maintain character and wind shelter.
- Concern over the proliferation of hedging and fencing, which is not considered to be in keeping with the 'open', accessible village character. The growth of the village is putting pressure on section owner's goodwill to allow this.
- Increased traffic flow with growth, yet footpaths have disappeared.
- The development of nearby mountain bike tracks has changed the reason people come to the Village. This has meant increased day visitor numbers, which is different to what was envisaged 20, or even 5 years ago.
- Pest control and the encouragement of birdlife is important.
- Current growth of the village and added pressure on tree removals for houses and resulting loss of amenity, particularly for children (natural play value).