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Committee Social and Cultural Wellbeing Committee
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Queen Elizabeth Park: Heritage Precinct

1. Purpose

To present a study which examines the feasibility of a heritage precinct concept for Queen Elizabeth Park and to identify a way forward.

2. The decision-making process and significance

The matter requiring decision in this report has been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act).

2.1 Significance of the decision

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking into account the Council's significance policy and decision-making guidelines. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance.

3. Background: Parks Network Plan

The Parks Network Plan sets out the overall approach for managing Greater Wellington's Parks and the specific direction for each park. In the preparation of the Parks Network Plan the Council heard from various submitters who advocated for a heritage precinct at the MacKay's crossing entrance of Queen Elizabeth Park (QE Park). There are a number of groups interested in arts and heritage in the region and some of whom presented submissions, such as: The Tramways Museum (located in QEP); the Kapiti U.S. Marines Trust, Whareroa Guardians Community Trust, Whale Song, and the Printing Museum (currently located in Upper Hutt).

The concept of a heritage precinct was incorporated into the Parks Network Plan as part of the management focus for QE Park and indicated as a projected future change:

6.7.6 "Make provision for a heritage precinct which contains facilities and activities that are family friendly and focused on heritage".

The Parks Network Plan does not provide further detail on how the precinct would function or what elements are anticipated to be incorporated within it.

Following Council approval of the Parks Network Plan, a consultant with experience in tourism and recreation projects was contracted to further investigate the feasibility of a heritage precinct for the area and to recommend an appropriate way forward.

4. Heritage Precinct Feasibility Study

The purpose of the feasibility study was to identify and assess a range of options for a heritage precinct at QE Park. This included an examination of indicative costs, identification of any risks, and potential management structures.

The consultant, Rob Greenaway and Associates, embarked on the study in late May 2011 and the final report, *Queen Elizabeth Park – Heritage Precinct Concept Review* is attached (**Attachment 1**). In developing and assessing the different options, the consultant talked with various community groups, did a survey of selected heritage attractions throughout the country and meet with DOC and Kapiti Coast District Council.

4.1 National and regional context

Drawing on the experience of other heritage attractions around the country it is clear to see that their success relies heavily on community participation and a combination of revenue from ticket sales and long-term council funding. A number of heritage attractions have had to ‘reinvent’ themselves, becoming more commercialised through cafes and convention centres to survive. While some heritage attractions have started out without council assistance, low visitor numbers and increasing costs for preservation, and a lack of volunteer labour has often meant that local authorities have had to step in with funding grants or an annual contribution.

The report also gives consideration to current visitor numbers to heritage attractions within New Zealand as well as overall visitors to the Kapiti region. Generally it finds that heritage attractions have much lower visitor numbers than their museum or art gallery counterparts. A further finding is that a heritage attraction in itself may not attract the numbers needed to sustain itself – so incorporating other elements that are shown by market research to draw people may also be necessary. Surveys estimate that in 2010, domestic and international tourists made just over 2000 visits to heritage attractions in the Kapiti-Horowhenua area. Whilst this may only highlight the lack of critical mass in this area, it does caution against over-optimistic expectations for visitor numbers to a heritage attraction in QE Park.

4.2 Options for a precinct

A range of options for a heritage precinct were developed through the study:

1. A decentralised suite of heritage attractions/facilities: This is effectively an enhancement programme for QE Park which focuses on development and interpretation of heritage, cultural and natural values.
2. An interest-specific heritage precinct for groups of enthusiasts to showcase displays. This would create a moderate visitor attraction, in the same vein as that which currently exists with the Kapiti Tramways Museum. New heritage assets would relate to what heritage groups can offer rather than being developed on the preferences of the regional visitor market.
3. A semi-commercial heritage precinct driven by market demand within the region or nationally for heritage attractions.

As an integral part of all of these options, the concept of an improved 'gateway' at the MacKay's Crossing entrance to the park was recommended. This gateway would build on the theme of the wetlands and memorial gate; provide centralised visitor facilities (ie toilets, car parking, and refreshments) as well incorporating a visitor centre at some future date.

These options are shown diagrammatically in a series of concept plans, which illustrate how the options might be laid out within the park (Appendix 4 of the attached report).

In terms of the potential content of any heritage precinct, the following broad proposals have been identified:

- Heritage directly connected to QE Park (ie US Marines, pre-European Maori settlement);
- Industrial and technological heritage;
- Working heritage (ie printing museum, Omnibus Society trolley buses)
- Regionally/nationally significant collections with educational benefits;
- Visitor facilities (ie café, bike hire);
- Art and sculpture (ie Whale Song).

4.3 Fit with Queen Elizabeth Park

As part of the research the consultants talked with various community groups, (including the Friends of QE Park) about the types of options that could be considered within a precinct. Most groups supported entrance improvements, with the sentiment that currently visitors on arrival were not provided with a good understanding of what the park offers.

Option 1 (a decentralised suite of heritage attractions/facilities) was universally supported, and the benefit of this option noted as being that all the values of QE Park have the potential to benefit from greater prominence and interpretation.

There are however divergent views on the appropriate focus of any more intense heritage precinct options. Some groups believe that the park should

accommodate a wide range of historic heritage of regional interest to enhance the overall visitor experience. Others believe that the park should only showcase the values ‘indigenous’ to that area –the natural environment, pre-European Maori settlement, US Marines and farming. This latter group highlight the important natural values of the park and the need to avoid cluttering the only significant remaining area of intact duneland in this part of the region.

In terms of the Parks Network Plan, the Reserves Act and the Kapiti Coast District Plan, there are no show stoppers to any of the options. However the options that involve less intensive development fit best with the principles and objectives of the Parks Network Plan, and a more intensive heritage precinct based around Mackay’s Crossing may well require a change to the reserve classification. Any such change would require the consent of the Minister of Conservation.

5. Viability and risks of each option

One of the objectives of the feasibility study was to give some indication of costs, risks and ongoing management. Key considerations include:

- The extent of capital costs for any option, and whether any funding from external parties is likely to be available;
- The extent of ongoing operational costs and any likely revenue, including from ticket sales;
- The level of risk for Council, including consideration of potential management structures, ongoing asset maintenance, and the risk of failure.

The sections below summarise the findings of the feasibility study for each of the options. To enable comparisons between the options the total estimated cost of the project has been provided. Funding is likely to come from various sources, including partly from Greater Wellington. It is difficult to estimate the proportion of funding likely to be required from each funding contributor, however comments on each option are made below to indicate likely funding sources where known.

5.1 Improved entrance to park

The proposed improvements incorporate enhancements to the entrance to QE Park at Mackay’s Crossing, the provision of enhanced visitor facilities (carparking, toilets) and the development of a visitor centre.

The visitors centre would provide a central focus to the main entrance to the park and a point of orientation to other areas of the park. QE Park is the most visited of the regional parks and has the potential to grow visits as the Kapiti area grows and with a greater awareness of both QEP and Whareroa Farm (recently opened by the Department of Conservation). There is potential for the visitor centre to be developed as a joint project with both DOC and KCDC.

The construction of any visitor centre could be timed to fit the development of other complementary facilities within the park and available funding.

The estimated capital costs are shown in a range to reflect the choice between a basic design and a top quality design specification:

Entrance improvements	\$0.5 - \$1.0m
Visitor centre	\$0.8 - \$2.3m (potential cost share with DOC)
Total capital:	\$1.3 - \$3.3m

Capital costs would be funded through borrowing over an indicative 20 year period. Most of the cost is likely to be funded from Greater Wellington, although some of these costs could be shared with DOC if a joint visitor centre is agreed, and the cost of interpretative displays may be shared with other developers of heritage features elsewhere in the park. The visitor centre would also have ongoing operational costs, which are estimated at around \$0.1 - \$0.18m per annum. One-off planning costs are estimated to be \$0.025m.

The improved entrance would work in combination with the other options identified below, and is particularly important to bring together the decentralised facilities of the option identified in 5.2 below.

5.2 A decentralised suite of heritage attractions/facilities

This concept provides for a suite of heritage attractions and interpretative facilities centred along the Whareroa Road to the beach. They would build on the heritage and values of the park, and might include such projects as the Whale Song installation, interpretation of the US Marines occupation of the site, interpretation of pre-European Maori settlement, and interpretation of the natural values of the park. It would also be possible to include some of the working museums envisaged in section 5.3 however these would be subject to the same risks as outlined in that section. To integrate these decentralised facilities into a cohesive package and to maximise visitor appreciation, the complementary development of a visitor centre at Mackay's Crossing (as outlined in 5.1 above) would be necessary.

The estimated total capital costs are shown in a range to reflect uncertainty about the cost of particular facilities:

Projects (each)	\$0.5 - \$1.0m (potential cost share)
Total capital (3 projects):	\$1.5 - \$3.0m

Capital costs would be funded through borrowing over an indicative 20 year period, subject to any cost sharing with external parties. There would be ongoing operational costs which are estimated at around \$0.16 - \$0.38m per annum. One-off planning costs are estimated at \$0.04m.

This option has the ability to be developed incrementally, as funding is available and as proposals are put forward and developed. As such it is lower-risk to Council. It is likely that all of the facilities would only proceed with

some form of external funding from partnership with other parties. For instance the US Marines Trust have indicated that they are hopeful of securing funding to develop a heritage interpretation facility relating to the past use of the park during wartime. The promoters of Whale Song have also indicated that they would fund raise to enable the development of their installation. It is likely however that some costs for each project would be borne by Greater Wellington, particular in relation to shared public areas and facilities (ie car parking, visitor facilities, landscaping)

The dispersed nature of the concept would enable the facilities to be better integrated into the landscape and encourage visitors to travel to other parts of the park. The proposal for a family friendly cycleway through the park would also fit well with this concept, as it would provide another transport option for visitors to the various facilities.

5.3 Interest-specific heritage precinct

This concept provides for the establishment of a series of heritage themed attractions, centred around Mackay's Crossing. It is envisaged that these would build on the existing Tramways Museum, and would consist of various heritage collections, working museums, craft centres, and interpretation centres largely managed individually by enthusiast groups. These would be housed in a series of buildings centred around a communal space, incorporating car parking and visitor facilities.

The estimated capital costs below assume a total building envelope of 2500m² as well as related external works:

Heritage precinct buildings	\$2.5m (potential cost share)
Basic building fit out	\$0.25m (potential cost share)
External works	\$0.5m
Total capital:	\$3.25m

Capital costs would be funded through borrowing over an indicative 20 year period. It should be noted that the costs for building fit-out do not include the setup costs for the interpretation and display of collections. There would in addition be ongoing operational costs which are estimated at around \$0.2m per annum, assuming that the facilities are managed by volunteer labour. The costs could be much higher if volunteer labour was not available. One-off planning costs are estimated to be around \$0.1m.

This option could be developed incrementally, but up-front investment in planning and construction of the external works would be required to provide an integrated framework for the development. It is likely that individual heritage facilities and associated buildings would be at least partly funded by enthusiast groups. For instance the Printing Museum has indicated that it would aim to fund raise to cover the cost of building construction for a museum.

This option carries risks for Greater Wellington. There is considerable uncertainty, particularly in the current economic climate, about the ability of enthusiast groups to raise sufficient funds for the construction of individual buildings and facilities. Council would probably have to invest in the planning and external works in advance of certainty about commitments by partners to development of individual facilities. In addition, the feasibility study highlighted the ongoing risks of relying on enthusiast groups and volunteer labour to manage their facilities into the future and the uncertainty of whether the heritage precinct as a whole would draw large numbers of visitors. The report indicates that this is likely to mean ongoing Council support being required into the long term.

Such a development is also likely to require a change to the reserve status of the land and ministerial approval.

5.4 Semi-commercial visitor attraction

This concept provides for the establishment of an integrated heritage themed visitor attraction at Mackays Crossing. This would be planned to maximise the number of visitors, and is likely to require additional facilities to be included other than those already identified as potential components of a heritage precinct. Whilst it could incorporate individual heritage themed collections, these would be centrally managed and marketed. Various high level design scenarios have been identified for such a development, including buildings clustered around a central square, a ‘long house’ and a heritage street. Car parking and visitors facilities would also be required.

The estimated capital costs below assume a total building envelope of 2500m² as well as related external works and are shown in a range to reflect the choice between a basic design and a top quality design specification:

Heritage attraction buildings	\$2.5 - \$7.5m (potential cost share)
Building fit out	\$0.25 - \$0.75 (potential cost share)
External works	\$0.5 - \$1.12m
Total capital:	\$3.25 - \$9.37m

Capital costs would be funded through borrowing over an indicative 20 year period. There would be higher ongoing operational costs which are estimated at around \$0.2 - \$0.43m per annum. One-off planning costs are estimated to be around \$0.3m to reflect the additional market research and design costs expected.

This option would require considerable up-front investment in planning and further market research, and to reach sufficient critical mass to attract paying visitors, would have to be developed in substantial phases rather than incrementally. It is likely that the majority of the funding would be from Greater Wellington however it may be possible to attract some external funding from KCDC or other sources. Revenue from tickets sales and commissions could also offset ongoing costs to some extent. The feasibility

study indicates that based on existing visitors numbers to Kapiti-Horowhenua (and assuming national trends) visits to such a facility might be in the order of 22,000 per annum. However other established facilities of a similar nature around NZ, have managed up to 100,000 visits.

There are high risks for Greater Wellington with this option. Without further market research it is uncertain what the market is for such a visitor attraction in the Kapiti area or what level of visitor numbers could be expected. Other similar attractions in NZ require considerable ongoing Council support. However this option could provide the greatest potential benefits (as an attraction of regional or national importance). Such a development would require Greater Wellington to go well beyond its current range of activities in regional parks, and would almost certainly require a change to the reserve status of the land and therefore ministerial approval.

The feasibility study strongly cautions against proceeding with this option without further research into market demand. Some doubts are also raised over the viability of the proposed site (given the current visitor numbers to this part of the region may not be high enough to sustain it), and that any such development needs to be well-planned so as to be cohesive and have critical mass.

6. Conclusions

The feasibility study concludes that none of the options is fatally flawed, however clearly each of the options has a different range of costs, benefits and risks.

The views of the community are split, with support for both an indigenous heritage focus and for more commercial facilities.

In the context of the Long Term Plan 2012-2022, there will be considerable pressure on the available budget to fund capital expenditure across a number of existing activities. New activities, such as investment in a heritage precinct in QE Park, will also have to be balanced against other competing priorities in the regional park network, particularly investment in new regional parks such as Baring Head and Whiteria.

The level of risk to Council is also a critical factor, as any development model needs to be sustainable in the longer term. Several of the options considered in Section 5 above have higher levels of risk, due to the uncertainty of the visitor market, and doubts about the long term viability of the management structures.

Overall it is considered that of the options assessed the best balance of costs, benefits and risks is achieved by a decentralised suite of heritage attractions/features (outlined in Section 5.2 above). This would ideally be coupled with the improved entrance to the park (outlined in Section 5.1 above).

This option requires a relatively low level of up-front investment, and can be developed incrementally as resources and commitments by partners allow. It is likely to have stronger support from the local community.

6.1 Indicative timeline

The indicative timeline for implementation of the option for a decentralised suite of heritage attractions/features could be as follows:

2012/13	<i>(a) Complete planning and design</i> <i>(b) Prepare implementation plan</i>
2013/14	<i>(c) Construct entrance improvements</i> <i>(d) Construct first selected project</i>
2014/15	<i>(e) Construct second selected project</i>
2015/16	<i>(f) Construct third selected project</i>
2016/17	<i>(g) Construct visitor centre</i>

6.2 Funding

The availability of funding to implement the preferred option should be considered as part of the Long Term Plan process for 2012-2022, which will enable the Council to prioritise funding across its various activities, and to consider this proposed development as part of the overall parks budget. The project could have a start date of August 2012 if funding was allocated.

As part of the planning phase of the project, in the first year, discussions will be held with potential partners to explore the opportunity for joint funding or assistance in kind. This would include potential public sector partners such as DoC and KCDC, as well as private organisations and community groups.

6.3 Amendments to Parks Network Plan and draft Parks Operational Plan

If the recommendations outlined in this report are adopted, then it would be appropriate to reflect these changes in both the Parks Network Plan and the draft Parks Operational Plan.

The Parks Network Plan already includes in the QE Park section a reference to the proposed heritage precinct, however on the Projected Future Changes map this is shown as being centred on Mackay's Crossing. This should be amended to reflect the decentralised suite of heritage attractions/facilities and the proposed entrance improvements. The management focus for QE Park includes reference to a heritage precinct; this should also be amended accordingly.

The draft Parks Operational Plan currently does not include reference to the proposed works to implement the preferred option. This should be amended accordingly.

6.4 Communications

A copy of the feasibility study and the recommendations of the Committee will be communicated back to all the stakeholder groups that participated in the preparation of the study.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*
3. *Endorses the preferred option of a decentralised suite of heritage attractions/features and an improved entrance to the park.*
4. *Notes that any decisions on funding will be considered in the context of the Long Term Plan 2012-2022.*
5. *Notes that amendments are recommended to the Parks Network Plan and draft Parks Operational Plan to reflect the preferred option.*

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Attachment 1: Queen Elizabeth Park - Heritage Precinct Concept Review, Rob Greenaway & Associates