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Committee Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee
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Landcare Proposed Business Plan 2003-2013

1. Purpose

To seek approval of the proposed Business Plan for the Landcare Division, including any amendments approved by the Committee.

2. Overview

The Landcare Division comprises two departments *Parks and Forests* and *Flood Protection*.

The *Parks and Forests* Department is Greater Wellington – The Regional Council's (GWRC) primary land manager in the western part of the region. The department is responsible for managing five regional parks and four forest areas totalling over 47,000 hectares.

As well as providing recreation opportunities, the parks and forests also allow valuable natural, landscape and heritage features of the region to be protected. Every year there are about 800,000 visits by people who enjoy the opportunities offered by the parks and forests as well as an estimated 1 million visits to the Hutt River Trail.

The Department manages the parks and forest lands by:

- maintaining and enhancing visitor facilities
- providing park ranger services
- maintaining and enhancing the natural values
- encouraging community involvement in the parks and forests
- facilitating access to Council lands and trails.

The *Flood Protection* Department is responsible for assisting the community to protect itself from the consequences of floods and to provide access to river environments in the western part of the region. The western part of the region includes the Hutt, Otaki, Waikanae and Wainuiomata Rivers as well as a number of smaller streams (e.g. Porirua, Waitohu and Mangaone).

The Department carries out its role by:

- planning (and assisting others to plan) for flood protection
- delivering flood protection (through capital works and river management).

Increasingly the Flood Protection Department has had a role in making river environments attractive and ecologically sound. This is reflected in the large amount of amenity planting carried out in association with capital works and maintenance projects as well as our close working relationships with the Hutt River Ranger and the Friends of the Otaki and Waikanae Rivers.

The proposed Business Plan comprises the *Proposed Parks and Forests Operating Plan* and the *Proposed Flood Protection Operating Plan*. These Proposed Plans have been previously distributed to Councillors and will be tabled at the meeting on 4 March 2003.

3. Playing our part – contributing to a sustainable region

The Landcare Division has readily adopted the GWRC's challenge to enhance quality for life by contributing towards creating a sustainable region. GWRC has adopted ten key areas where it wishes to focus the work of the next ten years (Take 10 Quality for Life). The Landcare Division is a key contributor towards achieving the Council's Take Ten Goals. The Division's main contributions are through;

- Biodiversity (e.g. maintaining enhancing biodiversity on GWRC land)
- Water (e.g. protection and monitoring of the Council's key water collection areas)
- Land (e.g. river erosion protection and mitigation)
- Recreation and Parks (e.g. regional park visitor programmes and providing visitor facilities such as toilets and tracks)
- Safety / Hazards (e.g. flood protection structures and works, flood warning).

4. Key themes

Flood Protection

The Flood Protection Department is now squarely focussed on the twin themes of Asset Management and implementing Floodplain Management Plans (FMP).

Prudent asset management has been a part of our business for some years now and represents an ongoing maintenance commitment. Constructing stopbanks is of little value if they are not maintained properly and consequently fail in a significant flood.

The implementation of FMPs has become an increasing part of our work programme over the last six years. In 1997 the Waikanae FMP was completed, followed by the Otaki FMP in 1998 and the Hutt River FMP in 2001.

FMPs are based around two key principles – keeping floodwaters away from people (and property) and keeping people (and property) away from floodwaters. They comprise capital works programmes (with linked environmental strategies) and district planning/emergency management provisions.

Thanks to the co-operative working relationship with the affected City and District Councils excellent progress has been made on the district planning provisions. Consequently we expect our role to diminish in this area over the next three years. The capital works programme is large and will continue to “ramp up” over the next two or three years.

Parks and Forests

The major focus of Parks and Forests are asset management (albeit with a different emphasis) and managing the increase in the Parks and Forests Network.

The previous Long Term Financial Strategy placed a lot of emphasis on upgrading the critical structures in Parks (e.g. bridges). These efforts have resulted in improved structural safety margins, longer life expectancies, and lower ongoing maintenance costs. The next three years will see more effort being put into signs and high use tracks.

The emphasis will also shift in our environmental asset management programme. Previously the programme has only been on possum control except in the water catchments where additional pest control has taken place. Over the next three to five years we will be phasing in “site led” weed control programmes and expanding the animal pest programmes to better control pests other than possums.

The Council, through it’s Regional Policy Statement and other strategies, has placed considerable emphasis on halting the decline in biodiversity. The environmental asset management programme is the key component in “practising what we preach”.

5. Stage 1 – the next three years

Flood Protection

Much of Flood Protection’s efforts in the next three years will be in completing the major capital works in the Hutt (e.g. Ava to Ewen, Belmont) and Kapiti Coast (e.g. Jim Cooke Park). Towards the end of the three-year period we will be starting projects in Otaki (e.g. the South Waitohu Stopbank) and Upper Hutt (e.g. Whirinaki Crescent stopbank). A number of environmental programmes will be associated with these works.

Stage 1 will also see major progress in the non-structural flood protection measures. These measures (emergency management programmes, District Plan provisions, flood warning and education) are ongoing, but by the end of the three years considerable progress will have been made in updating the “flood safe” provisions in District Plans.

The other major work area is ongoing maintenance and advice. Every year Greater Wellington receives around 150 formal requests for advice on flood-ability of land, mostly from resource consent authorities (about one every two days). In addition, there are a much larger number of telephone calls and informal requests from the public. All of these need to be researched and responded to. Well-maintained flood defences are also vitally important, and this work will always remain a major function of the department.

Parks and Forests

As noted above, the next three years will see a slight shift in focus in both the infrastructural and environmental asset management programmes.

A major focus for the next three years will be managing the “new” land that the Council is taking on. In 2003/04, we will become responsible for managing the area between Eastbourne and Wainuiomata or the “Northern Block” of East Harbour Regional Park. 2003/04 also sees Parks and Forests formally take control of areas of Belmont Regional Park which were previously controlled by the Hutt City Council. Later in 2005/2006 we will begin managing Whitireia Park. Bringing the new land into the parks and forests network will be a challenge, but it is one the Department is looking forward to.

The next three years will also see all the park management plans reviewed and updated, as well as new toilets at Queen Elizabeth Park and a major development of the Wainuiomata Recreation area.

As with Flood Protection the ongoing work areas will remain a priority. Maintenance of the park infrastructure, working with volunteers and recreational programmes are a constant and important part of our work.

6. Changes between 2002/03 and 2003/04

As part of our normal three-year cycle the development of the Draft Operating Plans has included a detailed re-assessment of projects and costs. The better information gained from this reassessment has resulted in a number of adjustments and programme changes when compared back to the Long Term Financial Strategy “soft” budgets developed in 2000.

The Proposed Operating Plans show an increase in funding over the previous “soft” budgets. There are three main reasons for this increase:

- the soft numbers were developed in 1999 and 2000 and there have been cost increases since then (particularly in construction costs which affect our flood protection capital works programme) – some of those have increases have been absorbed but others need to be funded
- the Council has undertaken to manage a considerable amount of extra land as part of the Regional Parks and Forests network, which has resulted in significant cost increases
- the environmental programme has been upgraded, partly in response to threats from pests and weeds and partly due to the proactive steps to enhance biodiversity such as the Super Key Native Ecosystem (Super KNE).

7. Financial implications across the ten years

Funding required by the Division increases over the ten years. This increase is due to the major capital works programme in flood protection and the additions to the regional park network in 2003/04 (East Harbour Regional Park Northern Block and other land formally managed by Hutt City), 2005/06 (Whitiriria Park), and 2007/08 (Wairarapa Wetlands Park).

8. Changes to the proposed business plans recommended by officers

Nil.

9. Recommendations

That the Committee recommend to Council that it:

1. **receive** the report.
2. **note** the contents of the report.
3. **note** that the Proposed Business Plan for the Landcare Division includes proposed operating plans for the following departments:
 - Parks and Forests
 - Flood Protection
4. **note** that officers are recommending no changes to the proposed business plan for the Landcare Division.
5. **approve** the Proposed Business Plan for the Landcare Division (including any amendments approved by the Committee) for inclusion in the Council's Long Term Council Community Plan 2003–2013 (incorporating the Council's 2003/04 Annual Plan).

Report prepared by:

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