Normandale Residents Association

c/o 301 Normandale Road
Lower Hutt

SUBMISSION

TO HUTT CITY COUNCIL
on

Draft Urban Forest Plan 2009

Summary of submission

In summary, the NRA submit as follows:

- *We congratulate the Council and Council Officers on the development of a strategy for the protection and enhancement of existing natural environment within the city.*
- *We endorse the approach that vegetation within the City should be managed as a functional network.*
- *We applaud the intent that natural assets are recognised, but feel that until these assets are accorded an appropriate proxy value within the Councils balance sheet that reflects their true worth to the community they remain at risk from actions driven by 'economic expediency'.*

Key aspects of Normandale

The Western Hill suburbs, particularly Normandale and KoroKoro, where development has been gradual over an extended period of years, retain an environment that is dominated visually by vegetation. Much of this vegetated area also provides the basis for a network of walking tracks, some officially maintained by HCC, many developed and maintained by local residents. Whilst some of this land is owned by HCC, much of the vegetation is retained on private land. In addition much of the vegetation on both HCC and private land contains mature trees, a circumstance that does not prevail in many if any other wards of the City. As a community we have both a close emotional attachment to the existing vegetation, and a well researched understanding of the importance of vegetation and tress in particular to the well being of a community.

Detailed comments.

Vision 1.

We have qualified support for this 'vision' and some concerns over the articulation as objectives.

Although we would wholeheartedly support the development of a 'connected web of natural areas', and clearly these need to have an 'ecological motive' we feel that the

way in which this is interpreted fails to address the importance, alluded to in the Summary, of meeting multiple objectives. We are concerned at the implications that the public may be excluded from access to some HCC managed natural areas, and believe that a management plan that excludes public utilisation of urban forest areas a a prime objective will not receive sufficient public support in terms of rate contribution to be sustainable.

We would also question the reasoning behind Objective 1.2. It is unclear on what basis 'replicating a pre-European habitat and ecology' is offered as a desirable objective over any other. We feel that the laudable sub objectives would be compromised rather than supported by an intention to create a state based on a point in time rather than a self sustaining ecology.

Visions 2 and 3.
We strongly support the intent of both of these 'visions'. We believe that the creation and maintenance of the visual dominance of the urban landscape by mature trees is the most important contribution Council can make through any 'Urban Forest' strategy. Although the majority of mature trees within Normandale exist on reserve and private land, we believe that this visual dominance benefits not just local residents but the entire City by providing a green visual backdrop.

We recognise that trees within an urban environment require active management, and that this may entail removal and replacement. We are however concerned that the wording of objective 1.7.2 is too open to interpretation regarding 'unreasonable interference'. We suggest that treescapes should be planned with regard to their effect in 150 years and should not be compromised by short term expediency based on ephemeral opinions of what is 'reasonable'.

We are also very concerned that it appears to be the intention to reduce the street tree population by over 50% . This appears to be a sacrifice to reduce maintenance costs where electricity services are delivered by overhead lines. We are aware of the historical reasons for this situation, the legal requirements and the potential cost of placing services underground. However we feel that this is an area where a different outcome could be expected if the true monetary benefits of an urban treescape was quantified and included.

We also consider that the Council should also take a greater initiative than suggested in working with private property owners to encourage and protect vegetation that contributes to the urban treescape. In particular in providing legal protection through the District plan to prevent new owners from removing trees from a property.

For and on behalf of the Normandale Residents Association

P. Matcham
President