Turitea Reserve Consultation

Statement of proposal and statutory notification of proposed change to the purpose of the Turitea Reserve and to amend the Turitea Reserve Management Plan.

Introduction from the Mayor

One of the many characteristics of the ranges near Palmerston North is the consistency of the wind. It has been identified as one of the best locations in the world for renewable energy generation.

The proposed wind farm which the City Council is considering developing with Mighty River Power is reaching another milestone.

The Infrastructural Well Being Committee received a report which proposes changes to the Turitea Reserves Purpose and Management Plan.

What this means is that a wind farm could be developed on the reserve but, before any further significant progress can be made, a public consultation process must take place.

The process allows people to comment on the pros and cons of altering the purpose of the reserve to permit the siting of a wind farm within the water supply catchment area. No changes are proposed for the 900 hectare Hardings Park reserve.

I would encourage you all to participate in the consultation process.

I am really excited that permitting a wind farm would provide the resources to establish an eco park in the Turitea Reserve.

The key elements of the eco park will be ecological enhancements to the water supply catchment reserve and Hardings Park, in particular the restoration of the original vegetation. This could lead to the possible reintroduction of endangered bird species such as kiwis and the North Island robin.

Native fish and the giant land snail found in the Kahuterawa Valley could also be returned to and protected in this area and, with the removal of the existing pine forest, we’ll be able to replant the area with native plants.

Certainly the eco park will leave the reserve in better condition for future generations than it is now.

However it’s important to point out that the restoration is only possible from income derived from the wind farm development. If it goes ahead I would be looking for ongoing community involvement and participation regarding enhancements to the area.

The proposed eco park could provide a range of environmental, recreational and tourism opportunities to the region and it certainly has my support.

Heather Tanguay
Mayor of Palmerston North.
Background to Consultation

New wind farm and eco park proposed near Palmerston North

Palmerston North City Council begins community consultation this month on a project to develop a new wind farm on parts of the Turitea water reserve, and a major eco park in the Tararua Ranges, just behind the city.

The first step is to seek public views on a proposal to add an additional purpose to the reserve to permit renewable electricity generation.

Currently, there is a small amount of hydro-electricity generated in the reserve, however amending the purpose would allow for the establishment of a wind farm within the area and on adjacent privately-owned land.

If the community approves the additional purpose, and if resource consents are then granted, wind turbines could be constructed in the reserve. There could also be a small extension to the existing small hydro generation plant on the dam.

The wind farm

The proposed wind farm would lie in the Tararua Ranges, around 10 km south-east of Palmerston North. It would be built and managed by Mighty River Power, a publicly-owned power generator and retailer.

Harnessing the area’s exceptional wind resource would generate between 1-2% of the nation’s electricity needs or sufficient power for up to 100,000 households. Not only would this add to the region’s energy self-sufficiency, the sale of the electricity would create a valuable annual revenue stream for the Council.

Council proposes to use this income for the development and maintenance of a major eco park that runs from the top of the Tararua Ranges down to the city.

The eco park

This park would provide enhanced recreational facilities for the long-term benefit of the region’s ratepayers.

It could be an integrated playground, ecological park and venue for a wide range of recreational activities and tourism opportunities.

It could also provide city dwellers with well formed walking tracks, mountain biking and other outdoor pursuits, while the new and beautiful environment will encourage tourist operators to begin new businesses and thus attract visitors to our region.

Impacts on water supply and ‘green land’

The Council is confident this proposal will not affect the main role of the reserve, which is to function as a fresh water catchment for Palmerston North residents.

Mighty River Power is required to ensure there is no adverse change to the quality of the water supply during the construction and operation of the wind farm.

While some vegetation will be removed to allow for the wind farm’s construction, much would be reinstated. Under a formal re-vegetation plan, a considerable area of plantation forest and grassland would be restored to indigenous vegetation. This is likely to increase the area of ‘green land’ significantly, although the exact amount of land affected will not be known until the RMA consenting process is finalised.

Environmental advantages

The project will provide the opportunity for considerable environmental advantages and improvements.

These would involve the re-vegetation of existing pine plantations into native plantings, the protection of endangered plants, and the establishment of a major and ongoing possum eradication programme. This in itself would help to alleviate flora damage.

In addition, native birds would be encouraged to return and native fish species could be reintroduced.

In the longer term, ecological corridors could be developed allowing birds to move between the city and the ranges.

Possible impacts

There would be impacts both in terms of visual (turbines will be visible from the city) and removal of some vegetation. However it is intended that these will be offset through mitigation measures such as the re-vegetation programme and the development of an eco park. All impacts and mitigation measures will be considered through a separate resource consent process.

Turitea Reserve Management Plan Amendments

The Turitea Reserve Management Plan describes how the Turitea Reserve will be managed and developed.

The goals and objectives of the plan remain unchanged. However the plan is being amended to allow for renewable electricity generation and eco-tourism activities within the Turitea Reserve.

The proposed amendments which can be viewed at any of the City’s public libraries or the Civic Administration Building, include dividing the Reserve into two areas as shown on the maps on pages 3 and 4.

Turbines will not be permitted within the green areas while they will be allowed within the yellow areas.
Eco Park Concept...

Background

Palmerston North City Council has on its doorstep a reserve that is at present managed for the water catchment of the city.

The Council envisages that this reserve could be developed into a facility known as an Eco Park to be used by citizens and visitors to the region.

This facility would stretch from the top of the Pahiatua track to the southern end of Gordon Kear Forest. At this stage it is purely a concept which Council would like to develop with the community and the large number of interest groups around environmental, recreational and tourism opportunities. A vision of what it could look like is outlined below. This is still in a conceptual stage and once the outcome of the proposed wind farm is determined more detailed work will be carried out. This magnificent self funding facility would otherwise have taken generations to develop and could become a reality for today’s citizens and their legacy for future generations.

Imagine...

Introduction

Imagine from the mountains to the city, an integrated adventure playground, ecological park and recreational paradise that could provide a unique experience in New Zealand for all visitors to the Turitea Eco Park.

Environmental, recreational and tourism opportunities abound.

Environmental

Possums would have been eradicated and native birds would have returned. The canopy of the forest would have rejuvenated, and native fish could swim in the upper streams of the reserve. The rare snail now found further South could thrive in the Eco Park where reintroduced species including the North Island robin, spotted kiwi and kokako could live in a protected section of the park. Massey University could monitor and provide research programs in partnership with the city. The call of the tui, bellbird and native pigeon could ring out over the city as the green corridors from ‘the mountains to the city’ would have been formed.

Recreational

Visitors from the city and region could be spoilt for choice - well formed walking tracks could beckon all fitness levels and mountain bikes traverse the terrain. Abseiling could occur off the dam wall, 4WD facilities could provide an adventure playground as well as orienteering, cross country running, triathlons and tramping.

Tourism

Mini buses could pick up excited visitors from the Information Centre in the Square. Some could choose the steam train or the restored railcar service that may travel daily to Woodville and Pahiatua. Passengers could then be picked up and whisked away into the Turitea Eco Park.

The options packaged could be unique and may include quad biking, horse trekking, kayaking, abseiling, 4WD adventures and guided walks.

Flashpackers could be provided a high value experience which may include a stay in the Turitea Eco Lodge, soothing hot showers, hot meals together with a comfy bed for the night. Next morning an exploration of historic trails and the unique Platinum Mines could be provided by experienced guides.

The picturesque walk to the waters edge where an eco battery powered boat could carry tourists across the reservoir, unfolding the awe of the hidden valleys.

The Te Araroa Trail which passes nearby the Eco Park, could provide visitors with linkages to the lodge, mines and historic sites steeped in the history of the region - from the story of Rangitaane to the toils of early settlers. Turbine treks would provide unparalleled views of the Manawatu and Tararua regions.
The Turitea Reserve...
Formal Notice of Proposed Changes to the Purpose of the Turitea Reserve

The Palmerston North City Council by gazette notice declared certain land it owned (forming part of what is known as Turitea Reserve) to be Local Purpose Reserve under the Reserves Act, to be held for water supply and protection of indigenous flora and fauna and comprising approximately 2,600 hectares. This is known as the water supply catchment area of the Turitea Reserve. Adjacent to the water supply catchment area is Hardings Park that is classified as Scenic Reserve. The water supply catchment area of the Turitea Reserve has the important function of providing a catchment for the collection of fresh water to meet the needs of the residents of Palmerston North.

In accordance with the Reserves Act the Council prepared a management plan that outlined the objectives and policies to be achieved in respect of the management of the reserve. At the time the Local Purpose Reserve was classified it was not within the contemplation of the Council that the land could be utilised to operate a wind farm. As a result of an investigative process into the viability of use of the land for a wind farm, the Council is satisfied that there is a significant economic opportunity associated with use of the land as a wind farm. The revenue stream in particular provides a real possibility of improving the biological diversity within the reserve. This is consistent with one of the existing purposes of the reserve which is the protection of indigenous flora and fauna. In addition, there are other recreational opportunities that can be provided if income is generated from the reserve.

As the primary and probably sole reservoir of biological diversity within Palmerston North City the enhancement of the reserve’s indigenous biological values is important.

Under the Reserves Act permissible use is governed by the purpose for which the reserve is held within the classification of Local Purpose Reserve. In addition, the management plan is a subsidiary document that guides and informs management decisions in respect of the reserve.

It is necessary to amend both the purpose and management plan to accommodate the new concept of a wind farm. As the reserve is Local Purpose Reserve, the Council is entitled to amend the purpose of the reserve pursuant to section 24A of the Reserves Act 1977. This requires public notification of the proposed change of purpose together with reasons.

Submitters should clearly state whether they wish to appear before the Council to speak to their submission.

SCHEDULE

- Submissions may be lodged: 
  - By Mail, addressed to the Governance & Civic Team Leader, Palmerston North City Council, Private Bag 11034, Palmerston North.
  - In Person, by delivery to the Customer Service Centre of the Palmerston North City Council, Marked “Attention Governance & Civic Team Leader, Palmerston North City Council”.
  - By E-mail to submission@pncc.govt.nz with a subject heading entitled “Turitea Reserve Changes”.
  - By Fax 06 355 4115 – entitled “Turitea Reserve Changes”.

Any objections under the Reserves Act will be considered by the Council at a hearing, the dates for which will be advised.

The Closing date for submissions is 5pm Monday 4th September 2006.

Paul Wylie
Chief Executive
Palmerston North City Council

Formal Notice of Proposed Changes to the Turitea Reserve Management Plan

The changes to the management plan will provide for renewable electricity generation in part of the reserve currently identified as the water catchment area. The amended management plan also provides for eco-tourism in a way that celebrates the existing and future characteristics of the reserve without generating undue adverse effects.

The proposed amended management plan is available for inspection between the hours of 9am and 5pm at the Council offices, the Square, Palmerston North, and 10am to 5pm at Council’s public libraries.

Any person may make a submission concerning the amendments to the management plan. However, the submission must be in writing and made no later than Monday, 4 September 2006 to the Chief Executive of the Palmerston North City Council.

Any objections will be considered together with objections in respect of the proposed change to the purpose of the Turitea Reserve at a hearing, the dates for which will be advised.

Submissions may be lodged:
- By Mail, addressed to the Governance & Civic Team Leader, Palmerston North City Council, Private Bag 11034, Palmerston North.
- In Person, by delivery to the Customer Service Centre of the Palmerston North City Council, Marked “Attention Governance & Civic Team Leader, Palmerston North City Council”.
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Submitters should clearly state whether they wish to appear before the Council to speak to their submission. The closing date for submissions is 5pm Monday, 4 September 2006.

Paul Wylie
Chief Executive
Palmerston North City Council
What exactly does the Council want to do in the Turitea Reserve?
The main ‘purpose’ for the reserve is, and will remain, water catchment. However, flora and fauna protection is also a purpose. The Council doesn’t want to change those purposes but also to add another – renewable electricity generation. This won’t change the status of the reserve.

How far down the track are these proposals?
In 2005, following a tender process involving 17 tenderers, Palmerston North City Council signed a conditional contract with Mighty River Power to potentially develop a wind farm in the Turitea Reserve. This contract is conditional on the Council undertaking the statutory process under the Reserves Act and consultation before the development may proceed. The specific wind farm development will be assessed under the Resource Management Act by independent commissioner[s] appointed for that purpose.

Is the wind farm certain to go ahead?
No – it depends on the outcome of this consultation about adding to the allowable activities in the reserve. However, even if this consultation is positive, the project still has to go through the RMA process.

How big will the proposed wind farm be?
The number and type of turbines will be confirmed by the developer after extensive wind testing. It is anticipated that the reserve itself could support around 60 turbines, with further turbines being sited on privately owned adjacent land.

Will there be any noise from the turbines?
The project must comply with New Zealand Standards for wind turbine noise levels and local authority maximum noise limits. It should also be noted that noise issues associated with earlier wind farms have now been largely addressed by the industry and Council is determined that those problems will not impact on this development.

Why is Palmerston North City Council considering a wind farm in the reserve?
The reserve is located in one of the windiest places in New Zealand and it is therefore a premier wind generation site. The Council also believes there are considerable benefits to the City and region from wind farm revenue stream that will allow the development of the Reserve into an Eco Park for both present and future generations.

Where will the generated power go?
The power will be fed into the local electricity network as part of the national grid.

How will the wind farm benefit the community?
The Council has identified major economic and energy security benefits stemming from the wind farm. The estimated extra energy output from a wind farm in the reserve would service around 100,000 homes i.e. the entire Manawatu region. That creates significant energy security benefits that are made all the more valuable because they come from a renewable energy source.

How will the eco park benefit the community?
The eco park will bring three major opportunities together; environment, recreation and tourism. All three should provide a range of business and lifestyle opportunities.

What sort of recreational opportunities will arise?
Recreational activities will be centred largely on the Kahuterawa Valley. Council is currently in the process of acquiring the Woodpecker Forest, and with the adjacent proposed development of the Te Araoa Walkway, this will create opportunities including walking, tramping, orienteering, cycling, mountain biking and various forms of motorised recreation. The plans will also allow for improved access to Hardings Park, particularly to the Platinum Mines. These ideas link with Council’s Outdoor Recreation Strategy and development of a Kahuterawa Outdoor Recreation Plan.

What sort of tourism opportunities will be created?
This project could create a range of tourism opportunities. These include guided walking and cycling, water sports, adventure sports, camping and even the opportunity to walk historic trails. The Council believes these opportunities will be attractive to tourist operators and that they will create new jobs and economic activity in the region.

What sort of environmental opportunities will be created?
This project will create a range of environmental opportunities and may include pest eradication, native vegetation regeneration, re-introduction of species such as the North Island Robin, Spotted Kiwi and Kokaka, and eco tourism opportunities to experience the natural environment.

Where is the Turitea Reserve?
The reserve is within the Tararuas Ranges, around 10 km south-east of Palmerston North.

What will the project cost ratepayers?
This project won’t cost ratepayers anything at all. It will be fully self-funding and therefore it will not affect your rates. Mighty River Power will pay for the development of the wind farm and the royalties from the electricity generated from it will pay for the establishment and maintenance of the eco park which will include extensive pest (possum in particular) control. Legislation requires that such royalties must be spent on reserves and cannot be spent on any other activities. Mitigation costs will also be part of the development cost which Mighty River Power will pay.

Why wasn’t electricity generation from wind made an allowable activity in the first place?
Wind farms were not contemplated seriously when the Turitea Reserve management plan was developed in 2004. It is only recently that wind farming has become a viable and cost-effective option. Now that it has, Council believes it is important to make full use of this renewable resource, hence the proposal to include it as an allowable activity in the reserve.

Will there be public access to the Turitea Reserve?
Access is currently very restricted because the catchment provides water for Palmerston North City. Because of this, access will continue to be restricted, although there are plans to have managed access for guided visits to the Turitea Reserve for tourism, recreational and educational purposes.

Will our water supply be protected during the project’s development?
Yes, provision of clean and potable water will continue to be the priority for the catchment. The Palmerston North City Council must be satisfied that the plans for development will not impact on water collection or water quality. There will be ongoing monitoring of water quality to ensure it continues to meet required standards.

What happens to the bush and plantations in and around the water reserve?
The Turitea Reserve, including Hardings Park (which will not be touched under these proposals), contains 86% of the indigenous vegetation found within the city boundary. There are a few large native trees on the ridges and these will generally be protected. However, the project will require some clearance of native scrub in the catchment. To address this issue, the plans contain extensive mitigation activities that will ensure the environment is markedly improved. Pest control within the reserve, which Horizons Regional Council has classified as a High Conservation Value Area for pest management purposes, will also be improved as a result of additional income for this purpose from the wind farm revenues.

What are the dangers to birds?
The risks of birds colliding with wind turbines are far lower than one may imagine. Research says only certain species in New Zealand are at risk from wind farms, and the majority of birds learn to co-exist or to avoid them. The wind farm consent application requires a detailed assessment of the species and habitats present, or any migratory paths. Where it is subsequently deemed necessary the wind farm would need to be modified accordingly. Further background on wind turbines and birds can be found at www.windenergy.org.nz
Are there any risks to the Palmerston North City Council?
The risks are negligible because the Council is not investing any money in the project. Also, Mighty River Power’s activities will be carefully controlled by its contract with the Council, and by the RMA consent conditions to which it will have to adhere, if consent is granted.

Will I be able to visit the wind turbines?
Not really, because the area will continue to have restricted access to protect its water reserve status. However, there are likely to be guided tours available to visit the Reserve and its surrounds.

Will I be able to see the turbines from the city?
Yes, however at this stage turbine locations have not been finalised by Mighty River Power as this is subject to wind investigation. The final locations will be considered under the Resource Management Act when consent is applied for.

Is this the only chance to have our say?
At this stage, the Council is only asking whether or not we should make the water reserve area available for renewable electricity generation. If following consultation the Council decides to amend the purpose of the Turitea Reserve and Management Plan, Mighty River Power will need to apply for a number of resource consents that will require public notification. This will provide a further opportunity for public input at formal hearings.

How can I have my say?
We do want to hear your view. You can:
- Fill in and post the submission form on the back of this paper
- The submission form is also available online at www.pncc.govt.nz
- E-mail queries or comments to info@pncc.govt.nz
- Phone the Council on 06 356 8199
- Your can speak to your submission at Council hearings.

When do submissions close?
Submissions close at 5pm on Monday 4th September 2006.

Where can I find more information?
There is considerable background information available at www.pncc.govt.nz This site also has links to other wind energy related web pages.

Phone the Council on 06 356 8199

What happens next?
Once this consultation round is complete including hearings Council will advise the outcome. If there is a favourable response then Mighty River Power will apply for a resource consent under the Resource Management Act.

Have your say
Should Palmerston North City Council change the purpose of the Turitea Reserve to allow for renewable electricity generation?  Yes  No
Should Palmerston North City Council amend the Turitea Reserve Management Plan to allow for renewable electricity generation?  Yes  No

Comments
If you would like to comment on your response, please do so below (use more pages if required).

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Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr __________________________
Address ____________________________________________________________
Telephone Number __________________________
I am writing this submission  [ ] as an individual  [ ] on behalf of an organisation
Please name the organisation [ ] Business  [ ] Community  [ ] Other
Type of organisation

Do you want to present your submission at a hearing?  [ ] Yes  [ ] No

If you answer yes, Palmerston North City Council will contact you prior to the hearing date.

Fold and tape as indicated on the reverse and post it to Palmerston North City Council, or fax it to 06 355 4115 or drop it into the Palmerston North City Council, Customer Service Centre, The Square, Palmerston North.
Timeframe

1st July 2006  
Consultation begins on Change of Purpose under the Reserves Act and Management Plan amendments

4th September 2006  
Submissions close on amendments to the Management Plan and change of purpose of the Reserve

11th September 2006  
Hearings on submissions for the amendments to the Management Plan and change of purpose of the Reserve