

31 January 2012

REPORT 1213862

Landscape Conservation Plan for Queen's Gardens – Public Consultation

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To approve the Landscape Conservation Plan for Queen's Gardens for public consultation.
- 1.2 To make Council aware that recommendations contained within the Landscape Conservation Plan for Queen's Gardens may impact on the planned Suter Art Gallery development.

2. Recommendation

THAT The Landscape Conservation Plan for Queen's Gardens be approved for public consultation;

AND THAT the public is consulted on the recommendations contained within the Landscape Conservation Plan for Queen's Gardens including implications for the Suter Art Gallery development.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 23 June 2011, Council resolved

THAT the Queens Gardens Conservation Plan become a priority project;

AND THAT staff ensure that adequate provision is made to recognise the heritage value of Queens Gardens in relation to any Suter Art Gallery development.

- 3.2 \$622,000 is included in the 2011/2012 Annual Plan to complete the design stage for the Suter Art Gallery development. An architect has been selected and design planning began in December 2011.
- 3.3 The Landscape Conservation Plan was commissioned in July 2011 and is now complete (see attachment 1). The plan has been written by Heritage Landscape Architect, Louise Beaumont, and comprehensively covers the

history, people, physical environment and development of the Gardens. The plan also details conservation principles and recommends conservation and management policies for the Gardens.

- 3.4 The Conservation Plan describes the relationship between the Gardens and the Suter Art Gallery (section 2.2.7, page 30-31 and section 3.3.1, p67), with further references to the significance of the Gallery grounds and its vegetation described in sections 2.2.7 (p20-21), section 3.6 (p87-88) and in sections 4 (page 95, 98) and 6 (page 102-108). An assessment of the significance of the vegetation is included in these sections and policies recommended to ensure appropriate conservation and management.
- 3.5 The Conservation Plan is of a very high standard and contains information that will be a valuable resource for Council. Current management of the Gardens is broadly consistent with the recommendations contained within the Conservation Plan. A key aspect for future work is to ensure that development and plantings maintain the historical integrity of the Gardens. The Conservation Plan provides useful information and guidance on this.

4. Discussion

Public Consultation on the Landscape Conservation Plan

- 4.1 There is a high degree of interest in the content of the plan from key stakeholders, including the Queen's Gardens Preservation Society, Nelson Heritage Advisory Group and the Bishop Suter Trust, particularly in relation to how the plan might impact on any Suter Art Gallery development (and how any Gallery development might impact on Queen's Gardens).
- 4.2 It is not intended that the Conservation Plan be adopted by Council as a Council plan for implementation and it is important this be explained to the community through the consultation. The plan is a technical report which provides valuable information to inform Council's management of Queen's Gardens. As a technical report the document does not take into account all the issues Council would normally consider in setting a management regime e.g. cost, resource availability, Levels of Service for horticultural parks. The Horticultural Parks Reserves Management Plan (tentatively scheduled for development in 2013/14) will be the document that sets out Council's management goals in this wider context and would be adopted by Council for implementation.
- 4.3 Community feedback on the Conservation Plan would be sought in the context of the plan being a guiding reference document and comment invited on the accuracy of the analysis and the appropriateness of the recommendations for Queen's Gardens. In particular it is expected that the community will have views on the recommendations to protect the significant vegetation within the grounds of the Suter and the impact this would have on the Suter Art Gallery development.

Relationship between Queen's Gardens, Albion Square and the Suter Art Gallery

- 4.4 Queen's Gardens, the Suter Gallery and Albion Square (a Department of Conservation Historic Reserve) make up a significant heritage precinct in Nelson. They have a long associated history and the built and natural landscapes have been developed together since their inception. The built and the natural aspects of the area complement each other and are considered to contribute equally to the overall historic and cultural significance of the area. The Conservation Plan provides valuable information regarding the history of the three sites and provides guidance for future management.
- 4.5 Stakeholders have been keen for some time now to see a Conservation Plan prepared for Albion Square so that its heritage values could be more appropriately recognised and managed. Given competing priorities for the Department of Conservation (DOC) this is unlikely to be resourced in the near future, so staff have had initial discussions about ways Council and DOC could collaborate in the management of Albion Square.
- 4.6 If some agreement can be reached the advantage would be an integrated management approach for Albion Square and Queen's Gardens and the opportunity to further enhance the visual and spatial connections between the Gardens, the Suter Art Gallery and Albion Square. In particular Council's plan to develop an access path into the Gardens from Albion Square (a Heart of Nelson project) could proceed. It has been suggested that Council consider taking over administration of Albion Square Historic Reserve but while this would allow work on the area to move ahead the resourcing implications would need careful consideration. Further discussions on this are expected to be scheduled later in the year.

Linkages between Queen's Gardens and the Suter Art Gallery Development

- 4.7 Key parts of the Conservation Plan as they relate to the Suter Art Gallery and its grounds include:
- 4.7.1 The Suter Art Gallery grounds are considered a significant part of the Gardens' setting. This setting is given a high level of significance (see section 4.3, page 98). This is considered significant not only as a visual and spatial relationship between the Gallery and the Gardens but also due to the historical and cultural associations.
- 4.7.2 The plan comments on a number of mature trees, that while not within the boundaries of Queen's Gardens (sited within the grounds of the Suter Art Gallery and Albion Square), contribute to the setting of Queen's Gardens. Evidence is presented that one of the two large oak trees that are within the grounds of the Suter Art Gallery on the eastern side is a 'Jubilee' oak, planted by Mayor Francis Trask, to commemorate the opening of Queen's Gardens as part of Nelson's Jubilee celebrations in

1892 (section 2.2.7, page 20-21). The other oak is thought to have been damaged and possibly replaced at a later date.

- 4.7.3 'Mature' (greater than 50 years) and 'commemorative' vegetation within the Gardens is given a high to exceptional degree of cultural significance (section 4.3, page 98), with policies stating that "all fabric assessed as having an exceptional or high degree of heritage significance is to be regarded as an important cultural object, the retention of which is extremely important" (policy C.5, section 6.3, page 104).
- 4.7.4 At present both oak trees on the Suter grounds are classified as 'Local' trees in the Nelson Resource Management Plan (NRMP). The NRMP states that Local trees are of noteworthy interest but are not as significant as either Heritage or Landscape Trees. Their retention and protection is encouraged, but their removal is a permitted activity.
- 4.7.5 The plan provides evidence that the grounds of the Suter Art Gallery have been historically incorporated into the Queens' Gardens landscape, with the site being managed by the City Council as part of the Gardens since 1898. Of particular note is that the Gallery was originally designed to face east towards Queen's Gardens, so that its most "pleasing aspect may be visible from the Queen's Gardens" (section 2.2.7, page 31). The presence of the Gallery, as viewed from various locations within the Gardens, was 'seen as a marker of the city's cultural development'. Direct visual connections between the Gallery and the gardens have been significantly diminished over time due to unsympathetic alterations to the eastern facade of the Gallery. The view of the Gallery from the Gardens has also been impacted by vegetation growth (section 2.2.11, page 48).
- 4.8 The plan also comments on the need for archaeological monitoring when any building/construction takes place. There is no evidence that any monitoring has been carried out in the past, or any finds recorded, during earlier construction on the site of the Gallery. The whole area has significance for iwi, as it was a significant food gathering site in pre-european times. The area has been used for a variety of purposes including the Campbell's school house of 1844. Given the long history of use of the area it is possible that there may be some archaeological finds during construction and this would need to be managed as part of the building process.

Impact on Suter Art Gallery Development

- 4.9 The objectives for the Suter Art Gallery Development are contained in the design brief (see attachment 2) and include establishing a building that functions for the long-term to allow for growth, that honours its history and setting and that provides facilities that meet internationally accepted standard for museums and visitor attractions.
- 4.10 Restoring the visual and spatial connection between the Gardens and the Gallery is an important principle for the development and this is confirmed by the Conservation Plan highlighting the importance of the historical connection between the two (section 2.2.7, page 30-31).

- 4.11 The architect has begun looking at options for the development of the Suter Art Gallery based on the design brief and indications from this initial work is that it would be very difficult to develop the Gallery to meet the desired development objectives if the two large oak trees on the eastern side of the Suter land remain. This is due to the site constraints, as the limited land available and triangular shape of the site limits where expansion/redevelopment can occur. See attachment three for an aerial view of the grounds and site boundaries of the Suter Art Gallery.
- 4.12 If the oak trees were to remain this would significantly compromise the objectives of the development or significantly add to the cost for the following reasons:
- The architect has advised that no construction should occur in the area around the trees as it is not advisable to undertake any construction within the canopy spread of a tree. This is to protect the root structure and maintain the tree's access to rainfall, nutrients and sunlight. If construction were to work around the trees this would add a level of complexity and therefore cost, to ensure damage to the trees was avoided, and could create ongoing issues for the maintenance of the buildings as the trees continue to grow.
 - Initial thoughts are to retain a café on the eastern side to enhance the views and connections with the Gardens. If the trees remain this means the café would need to be sited elsewhere. This could be on Bridge Street (filling in the set back at the current front entrance) or moved from ground level to a first floor on the eastern side. The architect has advised that neither of these options are desirable as the real point of difference for the development is in improving the café's relationship, views and connections with the Gardens. The café is a key source of operating revenue for the Gallery and is an expected feature of a visitor destination.
 - A larger two storey building is a possibility but the scale of such a development would have a significant visual impact on the Gardens on the eastern boundary and is not in keeping with the historic relationship between the Gardens and the Gallery. Initial thoughts for the development are to maintain a low (single storey) profile on the Gardens side of the Gallery in order to open up vistas from the Gardens to the original Suter building. A larger two storey building would also increase costs and could contribute to access difficulties.
- 4.13 Several other mature trees on the Suter site are identified as significant in the Conservation Plan, including four large beech trees planted in the 1890's. These are located at the southern end of the site where development is also expected to occur, but initial thoughts are that this significant vegetation can be retained.

- 4.14 This southern end of the site is also where the main spatial and visual links from the Gardens to Albion Square occurs. The development provides an opportunity to enhance the connections between these two public spaces and the Suter Art Gallery.
- 4.15 It may be possible to retain the oaks and complete a limited development, however this would compromise the objectives of the redevelopment and likely add to the cost to such an extent that Council may consider the project no longer viable.

Options for Public Consultation

- 4.16 The aim of the public consultation on the Conservation Plan is twofold:
- To seek general feedback on the Conservation Plan, its policies and recommendations. This feedback would inform the development of policies within the Horticultural Parks Reserve Management Plan for the management of Queen's Gardens.
 - To outline and seek feedback on options for developing the Suter Art Gallery in light of the recommendations within the Conservation Plan. At this point staff recommend that three options be presented to the community:
 - o Retain the oak trees as recommended in the Conservation Plan and do not develop the Suter until such time as the trees can be removed (e.g. due to senescence). There are differing views on the likely remaining lifetime of the trees which range from decades through to hundreds of years. It is very difficult at this stage to anticipate their remaining lifespan. Given the limitations of the site for development, if the trees were to remain this would significantly compromise achieving the objectives of the development or significantly add to the development costs.
 - o Remove the oak trees and develop the Suter Art Gallery. Other policies within the Conservation Plan could be carried out to maintain integrity such as retaining and propagating genetic material from the trees for replanting and using the felled timber within the Suter development or the Gardens (e.g. for seating or ornamental purposes) so that the association between the trees, the Suter Art Gallery and the Gardens is continued.
 - o A third option is to consider whether the current site of the Gallery, given its limitations, provides the best option for redevelopment in the long-term. This option would involve considering whether an alternative site and a purpose-built facility would better serve the long-term needs of the Gallery and the community. The Suter Art Gallery would remain as an important heritage site within the city. This idea has been

raised previously through public consultation while developing the Nelson Tasman Regional Arts Strategy.

- 4.17 Depending on Council's decision, current work on the design proposal by the architect can be halted while the public consultation is carried out.
- 4.18 Draft information for the public consultation is included in attachment four.

Timing of public consultation

- 4.19 This consultation has the potential to polarise the community so ensuring there is necessary time to consider all the issues will be extremely important. It is also important to carry out the consultation as soon as possible so that it can inform what is presented in the draft Long Term Plan.
- 4.20 A timeline with proposed consultation activities is detailed in the table below.

Date	Activity
Early Feb 2012	Release plan to key stakeholders and the public. Provide details of options with supporting information
Mid Feb	Hold one on one discussions with key stakeholders, discuss options and alternatives
Early Mar 2012	Submissions close. Staff develop recommendations based on feedback and amend LTP draft
mid Mar 2012	Report to Council on way forward

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Council requested that a Conservation Plan be developed for Queen's Gardens to ensure that adequate provision is made to recognise the heritage values of the Gardens in relation to any development of the Suter Art Gallery.
- 5.2 A Landscape Conservation Plan for Queen's Gardens has been completed. It contains information and recommendations that could impact on the Suter Art Gallery development. Given the high level of interest in the plan by key stakeholders it is recommended that public feedback on the plan be sought, in order to inform design plans for the Gallery development.

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Attachments

Attachment 1: [Landscape Conservation Plan, Queen's Gardens, Nelson](#)

Attachment 2: [Suter Art Gallery Design Brief](#)

Attachment 3: [Aerial Photograph of the Suter Art Gallery and Grounds](#)

Attachment 4: [Draft information for the public consultation](#)

Supporting information follows.

Supporting Information	
1. Fit with Community Outcomes and Council Priorities	This consultation supports receiving feedback on a plan that contributes to the following community outcomes: People Friendly Places; A Fun Creative Culture
2. Fit with Strategic Documents	Infrastructure objectives within the Nelson Tasman Arts Strategy 2009 include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of arts facilities exist to enable a wide variety of arts activities to be experienced across the region • Facilities are physically accessible, affordable, and activities are targeted for both local and visitor needs and expectations
3. Sustainability	N/A for this public consultation. Sustainability will be considered when management policies are developed for Queen's Gardens through the Horticultural Parks Reserve Management Plan. Sustainability will be considered in the detailed design of any Suter Art Gallery development.
4. Consistency with other Council policies	The Arts Policy 2010 notes that the Bishop Suter Trust is working on a proposal to restore and redevelop the Suter. The Trust's desire to redevelop the Suter is also detailed in the Arts Activity Management Plan 2012-2022.
5. LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and financial impact	\$500,000 is included in the 2011/2012 Annual Plan to complete design work for the Suter Art Gallery development. The outcome of this public consultation may result in this budget needing to be deferred or not spent at all. The outcome of the public consultation may result in changes to the draft LTP 2012-22 regarding the planned Suter Art Gallery development.
6. Decision-making significance	This is not a significant decision in terms of the Council's Significance Policy.
7. Consultation	Consultation with key stakeholders and the public on the Landscape Conservation Plan for Queen's Gardens, and recommendations in the plan as they impact on the Suter Art Gallery development, is being proposed by this report. Further consultation on policies for the management of Queen's Gardens will occur as part of the development of the Horticultural Parks Reserve Management Plan. Public consultation will also occur separately for any design proposals for the Suter Art Gallery development.
8. Inclusion of Māori in the decision making process	Iwi were not consulted during the development of the Landscape

Conservation Plan and it is recommended within the Conservation Plan (page 3) that this be undertaken as part of the consultation process.

9. Delegation register reference

N/A.