



Submission to the Long Term Plan

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Purpose

This submission seeks to outline to the Marlborough District Council a case for reviewing the current aquatic weed control practised at the Grovetown Lagoon.

Executive Summary

Te Whanau Hou Grovetown Lagoon are restoring the Grovetown Lagoon and its tributaries. The current management practice of Council Rivers and Drainage Engineering of excavating the aquatic weed from upstream of the pumpstations has ongoing conflicts with maintaining the existing walking track. This submission to the Long Term Plan (LTP) requests that Council spend \$20,000 on an independent review of how the area upstream of the pumpstations can be managed to meet all of the needs of the area including enhanced flood flows, maintaining the ecological and aesthetic values of the area in a sustainable way.

Strategic Case

Background – Te Whanau Hou Grovetown Lagoon

Te Whanau Hou Grovetown Lagoon Incorporated (Society) is restoring Grovetown Lagoon and its tributaries. The Society aims to reverse the degradation that has occurred, by working to improve the natural environment, with an emphasis on water quality, pest control and landscape management. Restoration of the Lagoon began in 2002 when local iwi brought to the attention of MDC the degraded state of the area and the water quality. Since that time local iwi, MDC, the Grovetown community and Department of Conservation (DOC) have been working together to enhance the Lagoon.

Over the last nineteen years the Society has coordinated the transformation of the Lagoon from an almost forgotten waterway surrounded by willows and other exotic plants. Tens of thousands of native plants have been planted and the margins of the Lagoon are now home to a thriving native ecosystem. The Society has increased public access around the Lagoon for the whole community to experience and interact with this special area. The circuit track around the outside of the Lagoon has been completed. The toilet and car park have been installed as a result of the 2018 LTP process. The number of track users in the weekends is 150 people per day.

The management structure of the Society is; the Executive which is made up of representatives of its founding members of MDC, DOC, iwi and four Community representatives; and the Working Group which comprises of volunteers. The Working Group coordinates the daily operations at the Lagoon. The Society has a set of rules under which it operates, is an Incorporated Society, has an Annual General Meeting, a Treasurer and use Xero accounting software to manage the finances.

Aquatic Weed Management

The subject of this application to the LTP is to focus attention on the management of the Lagoon directly upstream of the pump stations at the northern and southern outlets of the Lagoon. Council Rivers and Drainage Engineering currently mechanically weed rake the Lagoon channel upstream of the pump stations with an excavator to keep the pump grates clear in flood flow events. This management practice is proving problematic, especially upstream of the Southern pump station beside Steam Wharf Road. The original work bench was in place for a few years before it had to be widened in 2012 due to bank erosion. The work bench was then again widened in 2020 by removing the existing native plantings and soil to create a safe operational width for the excavator. Figure 1 below is a photograph taken in December 2020 after the works were completed. The work bench is between Steam Wharf Road and the bank of the Lagoon and is also the main track used for public access around the Lagoon. There is limited width at the site for further widening due to the proximity to Steam Wharf Road. To widen the bench, the batter face beside Steam Wharf Road needs to be recontoured. The currently methodology of the weed removal through excavation is destabilizing areas of the Lagoon bank causing it to slump, further narrowing the work bench. Figure 2 below is a photograph taken in May 2021 of the lagoon bank slumping. The dredged material from the Lagoon is dumped on the side of the bench or the cut batter below Steam Wharf Road, further narrowing the work bench.



Figure 1: Lagoon Track West of Southern Pump Station



Figure 2 - Slumping of the Lagoon bank

The dredged material is made up of vegetation, silt and aquatic life. The dredgings are left on the bank of the Lagoon, to enable the eels that are caught up in the excavated material to return to the waterway. As the dredging desiccates it is smelly and unsightly for track users. The deposit of the material means that the area cannot be planted with native plants as it is elsewhere around the lagoon. Leaving the site weedy and difficult to maintain. It was suggested that the weed be trucked away, as is the management practice along the Taylor River in Blenheim township.

Council estimated the cost per annum for the removal of weed to be \$20,000. It was suggested that the society apply to the LTP to fund the weed removal. As outlined above there are many issues with the current practices. Rather than apply to the LTP for \$20,000 to truck the dredgings off site, it is requested that \$20,000 be spent to investigate management options which would be more practical for all partners.

Economic Case

Details of Costs

Initial costs of \$20,000 are sought to commission a report on the management options for the aquatic weed control upstream of the Lagoon pump stations. One of the considerations of the commissioned report will be to compare costs and benefits for the future management of the area. Options for how the area could be managed have been proposed by both Council Rivers Drainage and Engineering and the Society as follows: rock armouring the stream bank so that it does not slump, managing the aquatic weed with spray instead of mechanical means, putting a walkway bridge in upstream of the southern outlet to make the work bench solely a maintenance area.

Grovetown Lagoon financial background

Volunteers manage the operation of the Lagoon, approximately 40 hectares of land. There is support for the project from MDC of a contracted coordinator \$15,000 per annum. MDC Reserves and Amenities Section currently funds the Society \$12,000 per annum. Currently the \$12,000 is spent land-based weed control, pest control, track maintenance, operating costs (for example mulch, stakes, spray guards, planter bags etc). The Society plants between three and five thousand plants a year. Most of the plants for the project are propagated by volunteers from seed collected in the region and grown in the shade house at the Grovetown School.

Identify Short-listed Options

Within the potential scope of this proposal, the following options were identified

- Option one: status quo or do nothing
- Option two (\$20,000 pa): To remove the aquatic weed from the lagoon bank by truck
- Option three (\$20,000): Spend \$20,000 on an independent review on how the aquatic weed can be controlled upstream of the Grovetown Lagoon pump stations to enhance flood flows, maintain the ecological and aesthetic values of the area in a sustainable way.

The Preferred Option

The preferred option is option three as it enables the management of the aquatic weed to be reviewed so that the best practical approach can be found for the future management of the Lagoon.

If proposal receives formal approval, internal MDC staff can commission an independent report to investigate the management of the aquatic weed above the pump stations at the Grovetown Lagoon.

This business case seeks formal approval from the Marlborough District Council to progress the implementation of the preferred business case option three.