

## **Report 99.482**

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Report to the Landcare Committee  
from Susan Edwards, Manager Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)

### **Control and Management of Whitireia Park**

#### **1. Purpose**

To report on the request by the Whitireia Park Board (Board) that the Wellington Regional Council take over the control and management of Whitireia Park.

#### **2. The Whitireia Park Board's Request**

On 1 December 1998, Allan Ross, Chairperson of the Whitireia Park Board, wrote to the Wellington Regional Council Chairman asking that the Council consider taking over control and management of the Park (**Attachment 1**). The letter states that since its establishment in 1978, the Board has struggled with limited funding to maintain the Park to the standard that it deserves. The Park Board considered that, as the Park's attributes are similar to those in the Regional Park network and because Park users come from around the Region, the Regional Council would be an appropriate Park Manager.

The Council Chairman, Chairperson of the Landcare Committee and Porirua Regional Councillors met with members of the Whitireia Park Board to discuss the proposal. It was agreed that Regional Council officers report on the matter for consideration by the Council, having consulted with the Department of Conservation. It was noted that taking over control and management of the Park could not be fully considered until the review of the Long-term Financial Strategy later this year; this formed the basis of the Council Chairman's response to the Board's request.

#### **3. The Current Policy in *Facing the Future***

The Council has considered making grants to fund Whitireia Park on a number of occasions, most recently in 1996 at the last full review of the Long-term Financial Strategy. Each request was declined.

The Council's Annual Plan *Facing the Future 1997 – 2007* listed Whitireia Park as a service the Regional Council has not been able to include.

However, when commenting on the Regional Council's Annual Plan, Porirua City Council has on two occasions submitted that this Council take over management of Whitireia Park. (Until the letter in December last year, no formal request had been received from the Park Board asking the Council to manage the Park.)

To date, in all responses on this issue, the Regional Council has emphasised the need to maintain and enhance its *existing* Regional Parks and to focus on current priorities. Given the priorities and associated funding allocation set within the Annual Plan, involvement by the Regional Council in Whitireia has not been considered appropriate (as this would increase Rates). *Facing the Future* currently makes no provision for the Council to take on new areas for Regional Parks - "over the next eight years the Council will concentrate on maintaining and enhancing existing regional parks and recreation areas".

#### 4. **Comments by Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**

In 1997, in response to public complaints about the management of Whitireia Park by the Park Board and the Department of Conservation (DoC), the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment confirmed the Park's poor condition. Lack of funding was seen as an issue. The Commissioner made two recommendations:

- More intensive and co-operative management by all parties interested in the Park; and
- Approaching the Wellington Regional Council to take over management of the Park.

The Commissioner also noted that Ngati Toa seek continued Crown "ownership". Therefore, any administration arrangement involving the Wellington Regional Council would need to be similar to that at Queen Elizabeth Park (under the Reserves Act) whereby the Council is appointed to control and manage the Park, with "ownership" retained by DoC. Ngati Toa and Ngati Raukawa would expect some continued involvement in the management of the Park.

#### 5. **Core Values of Whitireia Park**

Officers have visited the Park and have undertaken a *Signature* values assessment of Whitireia Park using information provided by DoC. The Park rates reasonably highly in all three categories (recreation, environment and heritage). Overall the Park would rate fourth in the Regional Park Network behind East Harbour Regional Park, Queen Elizabeth Park and the Pakuratahi Forest. The *Signature* values are summarised in Table 1. The Whitireia Park *Signature* map and the map illustrating the comparisons with the Regional Park Network are shown on the next two pages.





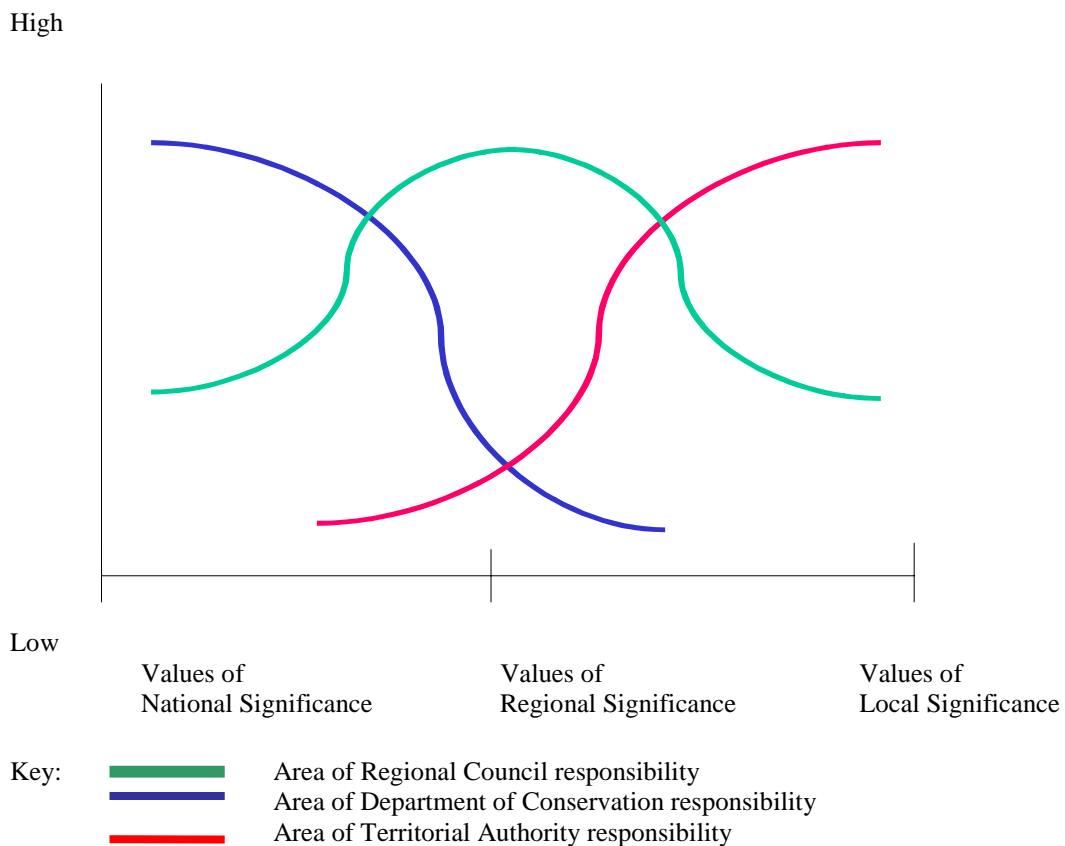
**Table 1 : Whitireia Park Signature Values**

	<b>Recreation Values</b>	<b>Environmental Values</b>	<b>Heritage Values</b>
<b>Whitireia Park</b>	<b>High:</b> Used by picnickers, walkers, swimmers, cyclists, fishers, rock climbers, and golfers. Regionally important for rock climbing. Whitireia is estimated to have over 50,000 visitors per year.	<b>Moderately high:</b> Some nationally threatened plants on cliffs and estuarine areas. Te Onepoto inlet retains a fringe of saltmarsh and sedges and is an important habitat for wading birds. Native scrub is regenerating in gullies. Prominent headland and ridges at entrance to Porirua Harbour.	<b>Exceptional:</b> Many remains of Maori occupation around the coast - midden sites, pits, terraces and pa sites. Reputed that Kupe left an anchor stone at Onehunga Bay.

**6. Is the Council the Appropriate Organisation to Administer the Park?**

When considering the issue of which organisation should manage the Park, it is useful to consider the values of the area and their level of significance on the Governance Continuum.

**Governance Continuum**



## 6.1 Regionally Significant

The area has values at each of the three levels of significance (national, regional and local). However, overall its closest fit is in the area of regional to sub-regional significance. Therefore, it would be appropriate for the Regional Council (or possibly Porirua City Council) to administer the Park.

## 6.2 Adds Different Experiences

A further consideration is whether the Park would add to the experiences offered by the Regional Parks Network. Each of the Parks in the Network adds a different experience for users and has its own unique features:

- East Harbour Regional Park - a rugged rocky shore, lakes and wetlands, Maori archaeological features, historic lighthouses and bush walks.
- Queen Elizabeth Park - sandy beaches, coastal dune systems, World War II and Maori heritage features.
- Pakuratahi Forest - native and exotic forests, beech tree stratification, river environments, heritage railway formation, tunnels and bridges.
- Belmont Regional Park - wide open spaces and hill tops, excellent views and recreation opportunities, World War II heritage features.
- Kaitoke Regional Park - high quality natural forest, bush walks, water collection features.
- Battle Hill Farm Forest Park - a working farm and forested areas, educational opportunities - a classroom in the field, a New Zealand Wars site.
- Akatarawa Forest - native and exotic forests, motorised recreational opportunities.

Whitireia Park offers a similar experience to East Harbour Regional Park. However, it differs in that Whitireia is more accessible, and contains both a rugged rocky shore and sheltered inlets, (e.g., Te Onepoto Inlet).

## 6.3 Highly Accessible

The Park's accessibility means it offers significant opportunities for environmental education and Community Connection (see Section 9). The flat coastal track is easily walked by young children, the elderly and (with a little development) disabled or people with limited mobility. This contrasts to many tracks in Regional Parks which have steep grades.

The Park is accessible by public transport (which is not the case for some of our Regional Parks). It is close to two cities (Wellington and Porirua), and it would add to the equity of distribution of the Parks throughout the Region (the only other parks bordering Porirua City are Belmont Regional Park and Battle Hill Farm Forest Park).

## 6.4 Appeals to Different User Groups

An additional benefit is that the demographics of the local population are different from the usual users of the Parks Network. Some ethnic groups and people from lower socio-economic groups are not well represented in the existing Park users. Whitireia Park receives high local visitation, with around 50 - 60 percent of visitors coming from Porirua City (Department of Conservation visitor survey, February and March 1999).

## 6.5 Regional Council Appropriate Park Manager

Based on the above, the Council could be seen as an appropriate manager of the Park and that Whitireia would add to the existing Parks Network. However, the Regional Council still needs to decide if it **wants** to take it over and, if so, for what purpose.

# 7. Fundamental Issues to be Resolved

## 7.1 Service Levels

The Council has been asked to take over Whitireia Park in response to public concerns over the management and condition of the Park. This suggests that, the purpose of the Council taking over management is because it could make funding available to improve the service levels and condition of the Park. The public realises that DoC does not have the resources to fund the Park to the service levels provided in Regional Parks. Representatives from DoC have indicated that they would like to spend more money on the Park, but that their focus is on areas of greater national significance and values, rather than regional significance. There is likely to be an expectation from the public that the Regional Park service levels will apply at Whitireia Park if the Council takes over management. After all, why else would the Regional Council take it over?

There are two key service level concerns:

- securing the Park and having a physical presence to reduce vandalism and undesirable behaviour;
- raising and maintaining the standards of Park facilities (and service levels) to those in the Regional Parks Network.

### 7.1.1 *Improving Security, Reducing Vandalism and Related Service Levels*

DoC and Board have decided to employ a security firm for a physical presence in the Park to address vandalism issues. The firm has previously been employed to open and close the gates at the Park. DoC officers have indicated that an increased presence is highly desirable and said the public view is that there is currently not enough presence to address enforcement issues and answer public inquiries.

In the Regional Parks Network this issue is addressed through the presence of a Park Ranger who deals with:

- enforcement issues and compliance with Bylaws and Management Plans;
- public inquiries;
- relationship building with Park users, lease and licence holders, neighbours, etc;
- overseeing land management activities and work undertaken at the Park to ensure it meets required standards;
- asset management and monitoring safety standards;
- working with community groups;
- undertaking educational programmes.

The Park Rangers are an important contact between the Regional Council and the Regional Community. They live and work in the community and can also be a conduit for inquiries and information relating to other Council functions. They can promote and educate visitors about Council services within the community.

### 7.1.2 *Deferred Maintenance*

Standards at Whitireia Park are generally below what is accepted in the Regional Parks. Whitireia Park is located on an urban fringe, like most of the Regional Parks. Therefore, public expectations are often for a higher standard of facilities than is provided on the DoC estate, generally located in more rural and wilderness areas.

DoC and the Board have undertaken a number of improvements in the Park over the last few years. These have largely arrested the decline in the Park standards. However, there is still deferred maintenance to be addressed, including:

- road maintenance (some edge work is programmed this year);
- maintenance and upgrading the inland track;
- the removal of several car bodies along the coastal escarpment (difficult access means helicopters will be required);
- plant and animal pest control (the Council's Biosecurity Department have expressed concerns about the state of pests on the Park, particularly plant pests);
- fence maintenance and upgrading;
- removal of the derelict woolshed and yards and the children's play equipment; and
- upgrading the toilet block.

Some of this work could be undertaken through annual operating expenditure on the Park, while more expensive items (capital works) would need to be funded by way of loans.

Funding will be necessary for both operating and capital works.

## 7.2 **Planning and Identifying Opportunities for the Future of the Park**

The Whitireia Park Management Plan is 20 years old and overdue for review. There are costs associated with the current land management practices that may not need to be spent if the development concept for the Park is changed, (e.g., internal fences if stock were removed). However, the Whitireia Park Board did a reassessment of the management plan approximately two years ago and believe that the plan and open space concept are still appropriate.



The Council recently undertook a visioning exercise for East Harbour Regional Park which identified a potential alternative development concept providing for regeneration in parts of the Park, the removal of grazing and the expansion of recreational opportunities. A similar exercise would be beneficial for Whitireia Park to determine the best options for management, (e.g., grazing versus regeneration/revegetation or afforestation, opportunities for recreational enhancement, biodiversity projects, etc).

This process could also contribute to the Council's Community Connection objective through public involvement in the preparation of the concept and management plan review, (e.g., similar process to the successful Hutt Floodplain Management Plan exercise).

However, this work will involve time and cost, beyond current work programmes.

### **7.3 The Future of the Board**

The membership of the Board was agreed as part of the deed of purchase from the Raukawa Marae Trustees in 1976. The Board includes representatives of the Porirua City Council, the Smith family (who contributed funds for the purchase of the land), local and user groups, and two nominated by the Raukawa Marae Trustees (one being from Ngati Toa).

Should the Regional Council take over management of the Park, there would be no reason to retain the Board, other than as a vehicle for communication and information continuity. This issue would need to be worked through with DoC and the Board.

There may be alternative and better ways of achieving the purpose of the Board, (e.g., through effective public consultation and communication or Community Connection).

### **7.4 Treaty of Waitangi**

The land contained in the Park was donated by the people of Ngati Toa, Te Atiawa and Raukawa around 1848 to the Church of England to establish a school for Iwi children. The school was never built and the land was placed under the control of the Otaki and Porirua Trust Board in 1943. Several Treaty of Waitangi claims have been lodged over the land. The outcome of these claims could impact on the Regional Council's possible management role in the Park and potentially the ability of the public to access the area.

However, there are provisions under the Te Ture Whenua Maori Act (Maori Land Act) 1993 to create Maori Reserves to be held for the enjoyment of the people of New Zealand. These reserves are often managed jointly by Iwi and local authorities. Precedent exists for land held as reserve and used in Treaty claim settlements, to be managed in this way after being returned to Iwi. The decision on this would be made through the Treaty settlement negotiations. The Council may wish to investigate how its investment in the Park may be protected through this process, prior to considering taking over management of the Park.

## 7.5 **Iwi Involvement in Managing the Park**

Ngati Toa was approached by the Board to discuss how they would feel about the Wellington Regional Council taking over management of the Park. They said they were agreeable to Council management of the Park with two provisos:

- (1) That it does not affect claims lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal; and
- (2) That the Wellington Regional Council does not get ownership of the Park.

In view of the Treaty claim, it is likely (and proper) that Iwi would want a continued involvement in the future management of the Park. Such involvement has not occurred before in areas managed by the Council and guidelines for Iwi involvement would need to be agreed between the Council, the Crown and Iwi.

## 7.6 **Property Rationalisation**

### 7.6.1 ***Radio New Zealand***

The Park is partly a reserve under the Reserves Act 1977, and partly leased from Radio New Zealand. The lease expires this year, but the Crown has asked for an extension. The Crown is negotiating to transfer the leased land to the Park; the portions needed by Radio New Zealand would then be leased back to them. It is desirable that this matter be resolved prior to the Council taking over management of the Park.

### 7.6.2 ***House Site at Te Onepoto Bay***

The Department of Conservation own a section of land in Te Onepoto Bay which was recently purchased from a private landowner. This land has been declared reserve and should be incorporated into the Park.

### 7.6.3 ***Legal Road***

There is currently a legal road around part of the coast to Te Onepoto Bay. This road should be closed and incorporated into the Park.

### 7.6.4 ***Future Golf Club Lease Extension***

The Golf Club is currently a nine hole course and would like to extend to an eighteen hole course. They currently do not have funding for the expansion.

These issues and the deferred maintenance will mean that the first few years of Council management would not be easy. The Park Ranger's role would focus heavily on enforcement and contract management initially. Subsequent years could focus on educational, community and volunteer involvement in the Park. Whitireia Park will be similar to the experience when the Council took over management of Queen Elizabeth Park.

## **8. How Would Whitireia Park Contribute to the Council's Wider Objectives?**

Whitireia Park provides a number of opportunities to contribute to key Council objectives and outcomes. If a strategy was developed and received public acceptance, to enhance the values at Whitireia Park, then it could contribute to Regional Policy Statement implementation, biodiversity, Community Connection, improve Iwi relations and provide opportunities associated with the Environmental Education and Communication Strategy.

### **8.1 Iwi and Community Connection**

Local Iwi have a close association with the Park and have been actively involved in its management through the Whitireia Park Board. They have expressed an interest in maintaining an active role in the management and planning of the Park. This provides an excellent opportunity for the Council to enhance its relationship with the Iwi involved in Whitireia and to develop the type of relationship that might be extended into other Parks.

There is potential to develop volunteer programmes, (e.g., Friends of Whitireia Park) tapping into the adjacent community and Iwi to assist in management and maintenance of the Park. The Park Ranger could work with volunteers to undertake a variety of projects that would contribute to enhancing biodiversity and improving the Park environment, (e.g., revegetation of gullies, coastal clean-ups, etc).

### **8.2 Environmental Education and Communication Strategy**

There is significant potential to develop educational programmes at the Park, (e.g., field trips on coastal and marine environments, increase awareness of biodiversity issues, etc). Some local school groups currently use the Park, as it is accessible and low cost. However, there are numerous other schools in the area that do not use the Park and there is currently a limited number of activities groups can do. The Park Ranger could develop and run programmes targeted to the needs of local schools that would contribute to the Council's environmental education objectives.

Environmental education and Community Connection programmes would also increase the Regional Council's profile in the Porirua community.

### **8.3 Regional Policy Statement Implementation**

Coastal margins are one of the ecosystems most under threat. Improving the protection of the coastal environment, Te Onepoto Inlet and the nationally rare plants found on the Park, would contribute to the active protection of some of the Region's most rare and special ecosystems (Ecosystems Objective 5) and to the maintenance of regional biodiversity (Ecosystems Objective 4). The Whitireia peninsula is also identified as a regionally significant landscape.

### **8.4 Biodiversity**

There are a range of initiatives that could be undertaken at Whitireia Park which would contribute to biodiversity. These include:

- protection of the rare plants on the Park;
- extending pest plant management;
- animal pest management (the Biosecurity Department considers that the area has significant potential to become a Mainland Island);
- planting of native and regionally appropriate species;
- management of Te Onepoto Inlet to enhance the fringe saltmarsh and sedges as an important habitat for wader birds.

## 9. The First Ten Years

The Council has two significant decisions to make:

- (1) Should Wellington Regional Council agree to take over control and management of Whitireia Park?
- (2) If the answer to question (1) is “yes”, then when and on what terms (stakeholders plus service levels) should the Council agree to take over control?

These questions are appropriately addressed through the review of the Long-term Financial Strategy. At that time, the matter would be considered in the context of all other demands, (e.g., Asset Management Plan renewals and service levels, East Harbour Regional Park) on Council lands as outlined in the “Porcupine Diagram” (**Attachment 2**), and in the other areas of the Council. Should the formal proposal to manage Whitireia Park get incorporated into the Long-term Financial Strategy, then the community will have to decide whether the Council’s involvement warrants the additional funding required.

The Park is unlikely to deteriorate further while being managed by the DoC and the Board. Therefore, there is no particular need for the Council to take it over immediately. Provision could be made in the Long-term Financial Strategy for the Council to take over the Park at any time during the next ten years, and this will determine when the programme of work would occur on the Park and when money would be required.

An indicative programme of work, should the Council take over management, is outlined in Table 2.

Operating costs for the Park have been assessed as in the order of \$350,000 per annum (see **Attachment 3**). This is similar to the annual operating budget for Battle Hill Farm Forest Park, but less than Queen Elizabeth Park and Belmont Regional Park. The budget would provide sufficient funds to maintain the Park at similar service levels to the other Regional Parks, including a resident Park Ranger. Additional funding for policy, planning, heritage and ecological work would also be required, as outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2 : Process and Programme of Work**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Suggested Programme</b>	<b>Estimated Cost Beyond Current Work Programmes</b>
<b>Year 1</b>	<p><b>Operations:</b> No work required.</p> <p><b>Strategy &amp; Marketing</b> Negotiating and putting into effect transfer, addressing key issues, role of iwi, board, etc.</p>	<p>Property consultants and legal advisors \$20,000. Policy consultant \$30,000</p>
<b>Year 2</b>	<p><b>Operations:</b> Employ a Park Ranger, commence management of the Park, to service levels of other Regional Parks and begin addressing deferred maintenance and animal and plant pest control.</p> <p><b>Strategy &amp; Marketing:</b> Undertake a strategic visioning exercise and commence review of management plan, including community involvement. Start environmental education, volunteer &amp; community programmes. Commence marketing the Park. Undertake ecological and heritage assessments</p>	<p>Operating cost \$350,000 Pest Control \$40,000</p> <p>Landscape and policy consultants \$60,000 Community consultation &amp; information \$35,000 Environmental education funding Marketing \$5,000 Ecological &amp; heritage work \$20,000</p>
<b>Year 3</b>	<p><b>Operations:</b> Continue management of the Park and addressing deferred maintenance. Continue plant pest control. Continue environmental education, volunteer &amp; community programmes. Commence revegetation and any afforestation work. Commence capital work upgrades.</p> <p><b>Strategy &amp; Marketing:</b> Continue review of management plan and implementing strategic vision. Continue marketing and promotion.</p>	<p>Operating cost \$350,000 + environmental education funding + revegetation/afforestation funding</p> <p>Plant Pest Control \$20,000 Funding for capital upgrades</p> <p>Policy consultants \$50,000 Community consultation &amp; information \$35,000 Marketing \$3,000</p>
<b>Year 4</b>	As per year 3	As per year 3
<b>Years 5-10</b>	<p><b>Operations:</b> As per year 3</p> <p><b>Strategy &amp; Marketing:</b> Continue marketing and promotion, and deal with any planning and policy issues that arise.</p>	<p>Operating costs as per year 3</p> <p>Marketing \$3,000 Planning &amp; policy work \$10,000 consultant or staff time</p>

The cost of any capital works projects to upgrade or provide new facilities would be additional to the annual operating cost and would be funded by loans. Loan servicing costs (money to pay interest and principle on the loans) would need to be added to the operating budgets. Table 3 outlines expected capital works projects. The Department of Conservation may undertake some of these over the next few years if funding can be obtained.

**Table 3 : Potential Capital Works Projects**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
Rangers house (purchased adjacent to the Park)	\$150,000
Toilet replacement or upgrade	\$100,000
Inland Track benching and surfacing	\$60,000 - \$70,000
Roading upgrade and reseals	\$70,000
Coastal Track upgrade	\$20,000 - \$30,000
Fences – revegetation plots and internal	\$70,000 - \$100,000
Removal of children’s play equipment and woolshed	\$5,000
Revegetation	Cost dependent on size of areas to be revegetated

## 10. **Communications**

Regional Parks staff will prepare a press release in conjunction with Corporate Communications to publicise that the Council is considering taking over management of Whitireia Park through its review of the Long-term Financial Strategy.

## 11. **Recommendations**

*That the Landcare Committee:*

- (1) *Receive the report and note its contents.*
- (2) *Note the recreation, environmental and heritage Signature Values of Whitireia Park.*
- (3) *Agree that Whitireia Park has regional significance and that at some point in the future the Wellington Regional Council may be the appropriate level of government to manage the Park.*
- (4) *Agree that should the Wellington Regional Council take over Whitireia Park, then it would be appropriate to bring it up to the standards and service levels of the Regional Parks Network and that sufficient funding will need to be allocated for this purpose.*

- (5) *Either:*
- (a) *Ask officers to model the costs for consideration through the Long-term Financial Strategy for the year commencing 2000/01*

*or*

  - (b) *Agree that taking over management of Whitireia Park should not be considered through the next Long-term Financial Strategy process.*
- (6) *Note that there are still significant issues to resolve and work through with the Department of Conservation and Whitireia Park Board prior to the Council agreeing to take over the Park.*
- (7) *Agree to the process and programme of work outlined in Table 2, should the Council agree to take over Whitireia Park.*
- (8) *Note the opportunities to contribute to key Council objections and outcomes through maintaining and/or enhancing the values at Whitireia Park, (e.g., Community and Iwi Connection, Environmental Education and Communication Strategy, RPS implementation, Biodiversity).*

Report prepared by:

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**Attachment 1: Letter from Whitireia Park Board requesting that the Wellington Regional Council take over management of Whitireia Park**

**Attachment 2: Porcupine Diagram : Opportunities Within Existing Regional Parks Network For The Next Three Years**

**Attachment 3: Projected Annual Operating Costs for Whitireia Park**