

## **Hagley Park**

### **Something to Treasure**

If you are a Greater Christchurch resident, you are the beneficiary of the foresight of earlier citizens, who set aside, in perpetuity, the expansive urban open space known as Hagley Park for the recreation and enjoyment of all.<sup>1</sup>

If you are a visitor to Christchurch, you will likewise be welcome to enjoy this central city green space reserve, and doubtless compare it with other major iconic central city parks, such as London's Hyde Park and New York's Central Park.

Hagley Park's long vistas, avenues of trees, woodlands and riverbanks, quiet areas and playing fields provide space and place for placid contemplation, rigorous exercise, organised field sports and a multitude of individual activities. The park acts as lungs for the city. Its trees are carbon sinks.

The reserve comprising North, South and Little Hagley Park is a listed heritage item in the Christchurch District Plan.<sup>2</sup> Governance of its use under the Reserves Act 1977 is a devolved responsibility to the Christchurch City Council from the Minister of Conservation.<sup>3</sup> Any licence or lease within the boundaries of Hagley Park is subject to specific provisions in the Reserves Act.<sup>4</sup> Unlike most public parks in Christchurch, Hagley Park has its own unique statutory management plan, administered by the Christchurch City Council.<sup>5</sup>

### **Something to be concerned about – Vehicle Parking**

Urban public green space is precious. It is inviting. Such spaces serve as commons, open to all without restricted hours of access. Any move to nibble away at this openness for non-recreational purposes is the antithesis of the original vision for Hagley Park.

There have been ideas floated from time to time for converting space within Hagley Park to provide motor vehicle parking spaces, especially close to the main hospital that sorely lacks dedicated parking for its workforce and for patients attending appointments.<sup>6</sup>

Events held within Hagley Park also generate demand for vehicle parking. The pressure is greater the larger the event. One role of the Christchurch City Council is to promote events that showcase Christchurch. A competing role is to preserve Hagley Park as a recreational reserve and conserve its special qualities.

Fortunately, there exists another specific statutory instrument, the Christchurch City (Reserves) Empowering Act 1971, which stipulates that without ministerial consent, no further vehicle parking spaces can be created within Hagley Park.<sup>7</sup>

Further, during the post-earthquake revision of the Christchurch District Plan, the Independent Hearings Panel was persuaded, on the expert evidence presented, that the replacement plan should prohibit temporary vehicle parking within the dripline of Hagley Park trees, where their health or life span would be adversely affected.<sup>8</sup>

### **Something to be concerned about – Impact of Significant Events**

Licenses under the Reserves Act for use of specific spaces within Hagley Park are issued for temporary recreation activities, with limits to their duration. The spaces used are required to be returned to the condition they were in before the activity took place.

Part of North Hagley Park (comprising the Concert Triangle and the Special Events Area) is designated in the Hagley Park Management Plan as the 'Entertainment Zone', available for major public events.<sup>9</sup> These events are temporary, but even during such events, the areas enclosed for paid entry are not to unduly impede access by the public to the park generally. That is to say, frequently used routes through North Hagley Park should not be severed. The Christchurch City Council has to sign off event management plans. It is its responsibility to ensure disruption to other users of the park is minimised.

The attraction of Hagley Park is that it is located centrally. However, some events can be excessively noisy. Might they be best hosted elsewhere, away from residential areas but with generous vehicle parking spaces available?

Post-earthquakes, with the removal of housing from extensive "red-zone" areas along the axis of the Avon River, might there now be scope for designating an area of the "red-zone" for use by major events, in so doing avoiding conflicts at, and reducing pressure on North Hagley Park?

### **Something to be concerned about – Impact of Commercial and Professional Sports**

Hagley Park has not escaped the impact of the age of commercial sports and associated professionalism. Prior to the Christchurch earthquakes, no part of Hagley Park was developed as a venue for professional players and commercial events.

It took the application of two connected pieces of emergency earthquake legislation to allow Canterbury Cricket interests to circumvent the provisions of the Hagley Park Management Plan and amend the Christchurch District Plan in order to develop Hagley Oval into an international venue that meets the current standards set by the International Cricket Council.<sup>10</sup>

The village green atmosphere of Hagley Oval is undeniably attractive. So too is the backing of the Christchurch City Council, whose ratepayers meet the costs of maintaining the grounds. Justification is based upon the economic spin-off and prestige from hosting international professional cricket events.

What's unattractive are the six permanent industrial-scale floodlights that dwarf the surrounding trees in all seasons; not the four retractable ones (similar to those at Lord's in London) consented by the Environment Court.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the hoped-for bonanza for the hospitality and accommodation sectors does not properly compensate for the overall sacrifice imposed on Christchurch citizens, who must bend to the dictates of commercialism and professionalism emanating from overseas. Many of the conditions set by the Environment Court, relating to environmental issues in Hagley Park, have been nullified by amending the Christchurch District Plan for the sole benefit of one sport – cricket.

The need for night TV coverage to satisfy commercial imperatives and viewers throughout the cricketing world is mandated and doubtless will become more onerous over time.

A precedent has been established, even if that fact is denied. Countering the pressures from commercialism and professional sports, that expect local governments to provide the public space and infrastructure they deem necessary or else they will migrate elsewhere, will not be easy. The electoral cycle rapidly ensures institutional memory of obligations fades, unless the public remains vigilant.

Commercial sports should own and operate their own venues and not rely on subverting the public domain.

## References

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11. Environment Court Decision No. [2013] NZEnvC 184  
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