

Report on Marsden Park Environmental Education Programme in Nelson

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Background:

As part of the Envirolink project submitted by Nelson City Council, Drs. Mark Hostetler and Colin Meurk developed a biodiversity continuing education course and pilot tested it to a select group of developers, planners, and environmental consultants (2 July 2008). The primary focus of the Envirolink project was to develop and to offer a continuing education course (for built environment professionals) on preserving and restoring biodiversity in urban and rural properties. The rationale for this project was to upskill built environment professionals, filling the gap between policy and implementation. Many design and management practices could be implemented by built environment professionals, but if they are not engaged or do not understand which techniques to use, such practices may not be realised. In particular, many significant management issues appear during the construction and post-construction phases of a project and built environment professionals need to be aware of these and provide solutions to maintaining a functional, biodiverse community after residents move into a community. A long-term goal is to produce a course package (which includes a 'take home' resource manual and power point presentations) so that it could be offered in various cities and regions throughout New Zealand.

In addition to the course, Nelson City wanted to explore the possibility of installing an environmental education programme within a subdivision, targeting local residents. Many biodiversity and stormwater designs are contingent on long-term, homeowner engagement and continued management of homes, gardens, and neighbourhoods. As a second objective, we explored the possibility of implementing an environmental education programme on a 100 ha development called Marsden Park. A long-term goal is for Marsden Park, with its environmental education programme, to serve as a model and local example of how to not only incorporate biodiversity into residential subdivisions, but also how to engage homeowners moving into these communities.

The following is a short summary of discussions with the Marsden Park developer, highlighting future possibilities for developing and implementing an environmental education programme for Marsden Park.

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Marsden Park and implementing an environmental education programme:

We spent Thursday morning with developer/landowner John McLaughlin (john@marsden-park.co.nz) and planner Tony Quickfall (tony@quickfall.co.nz), exploring the Marsden Park development. After taking a field trip to the site, we went back to Nelson and had a discussion with John, Tony, a surveyor Paul Newton (paul@newtonsurvey.co.nz), and Nelson City staff representative Anna Crosbie (anna.crosbie@ncc.govt.nz). After reviewing the plans, both Colin and I thought the design of the community could be a good example of conserving and restoring biodiversity when subdividing a large section of land. The 100 ha site had open space that identified remnant vegetation and plans to restore areas with native plantings. John was very interested in post-construction issues and wanted to implement an environmental education programme in the community to engage homeowners and promote buy-in to the goals for the community.

We talked about creating dynamic signs and Web site that would address natural resource conservation within the community (similar to the Florida programme at the Town of Harmony – see <http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/gc/harmony>). In addition to this, we discussed the option of the developer starting a conservation club within Marsden Park to help residents look after the long-term management of open space, homes, gardens, and neighbourhoods. Nelson City Council experts, DOC, and other interested groups and organizations could offer occasional workshops for residents in Marsden Park. Mark Hostetler offered to use the Town of Harmony educational framework (that he and his graduate students developed), which includes signage and Web site design – this educational programme has been tested in Florida and shown to work. Mark has html files (web site) and Adobe Photoshop files (sign panels) that could be used and adapted to a New Zealand context. The content, photos, and illustrations would have to be made specific to Nelson and to Marsden Park. John thought it would add value to his community and Nelson City staff thought it could be a good demonstration project to promote this concept of engaging residents.

Talked turned to how this could happen for Marsden Park. John was interested in perhaps supplying funds for the dynamic signs and a place to house the web site, but expressed reservation about funding a position for somebody to develop the content and graphic layout for the signs and the web site. We discussed ways to find funding to hire somebody to create the content and layout for the signs and web site. Based on the Town of Harmony experience, Mark estimated that it would take a minimum of 6 months (full time) or 1 year (part time) for somebody with environmental education/interpretation skills to develop the content and layout of the signs and web site. Tony suggested writing a grant to hire an environmental educator to develop the programme – this could be a three-way partnership among Landcare Research, Nelson City Council, and the Marsden Park development team. A grant could be submitted to MFE's Sustainable Management Fund or another Envirolink grant. Who would actually develop the web site and sign content? A potential environmental professional to do this is Rhys Taylor (National Coordinator, Sustainable Living Programme; email: anneandrhys@clear.net.nz), who expressed interest in contract work to develop the programme and information from the Sustainable Homes programme could be used. The grant would primarily pay salary for this person and the developer could supply matching funds to pay for the signs, graphic panels, and hosting web site. The grant would highlight the possibility of this residential community to serve

as a demonstration project; further, the signage would benefit people living outside Marsden Park as several planned walking and biking trails and public commercial areas are accessible to local residents. Educational signs could be installed in these public areas.

Who could set up a research programme to measure the impact? Kathryn Scott (Social Researcher, Landcare Research LIUDD programme, email: ScottKM@landcareresearch.co.nz), can help develop the research programme to measure any impacts that the programme could have. Mark Hostetler (because he has conducted such research in the U.S.) could also help with this research. However, need to find funding to conduct the study.

In addition, as expressed by Martin Workman, Nelson City Council may be able to use internal Nelson City staff or hire a consultant to develop the educational programme. Mark Hostetler can provide the framework (e.g., web site and photoshop files) from the Town of Harmony educational programme to help construct the Marsden Park educational programme.

The timeframe for the creation of this education programme is as follows. It is estimated that the first homeowners would move into Marsden Park March 2010. Thus, the project should get started by March 2009 in order to have the environmental education programme up and running by the time the first homeowners move in. Ideas for the upkeep of the signs and web site (over the short term) would initially be the developer, perhaps in conjunction with Nelson City Council. Over the long term, residents within the community, again in conjunction with Nelson City Council, could also help with upkeep and maintenance of the signs and web site through a conservation club established within Marsden Park.