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Council, developers race for green space

Competition on for park land versus townhouses in Christchurch

CITY LIVING
Tina Law

City councillors have a \$35 million war chest to buy land for new suburban parks in the face of competition from private developers, amid concerns Christchurch's townhouse boom is limiting access to green space.

The council has identified gaps throughout the city where residents live further than a 500m walk from a park that is at least 3000m².

St Albans and Linwood have the greatest number of households that suffer from a dearth of parks, according to council figures.

Council parks planning manager Kelly Hansen said in St Albans, between Bealey Ave and north of Holly Rd, there were no parks, no schools, no play spaces and low tree canopy cover, and that intensification was charging ahead.

"This is the area where we need to acquire new parks, and quite urgently, before the opportunities are lost," Hansen told councillors at a recent briefing.

She said the council had put in an offer to buy vacant land in Sherborne St, which already has multi-storey units next to it, but has yet to hear back. "When opportunities arise to acquire parks in priority areas we need to act quickly, as vacant sites are quickly snapped up by developers. Once a site is developed, it's extremely difficult to try and recreate that opportunity."

The council has a goal that 80% of urban properties should be within a 500m walk from a park at least 3000m² in size. The city is meeting that goal, with 87% of properties falling within that, but Hansen said the average hides a problem.

The gaps were located in areas where people no longer had large backyards or the ability to travel longer distances to a park, she said.

For many people, parks were a part of their everyday life, where they walked the dog, learned to ride a bike, spent time with friends, or sat under a tree on a hot day.

Many took those opportunities for granted, but a growing number of residents were missing out on that, and not because they had made a poor choice or because they did not value parks, Hansen said. "As a city we have allowed the neighbourhood to grow without making sure the green space grows with it, so that is the challenge we face."

The council needed to ensure that urban intensification is matched by investment in accessible public green space, she said.

If the council were to do nothing, more people would rely on the same parks, existing gaps would become worse, and solutions would be more expensive, Hansen said.



Christchurch City Council has put in an offer to buy this property on Sherborne St in St Albans to turn it into a neighbourhood park.
PHOTOS: IAIN MCGREGOR/THE PRESS



The suburb of St Albans has a growing number of townhouses, but the number of green spaces has not kept up.



This small neighbourhood park on Gloucester St is one the council developed to help address the dearth of parks in the area.

The council has \$35m to spend on developing more parks in urban areas over the next seven years. About 17% of that is funded by developers. The money is in addition to the \$33m the council will spend on new parks in new subdivisions, which is paid for in its entirety by the developers.

The most recent example of the council developing a new park in a built-up area is Te Ara a Rongo – Gloucester/Worcester Park.

“It’s just going mad now. Every day I go out and another villa is gone and eight units go up there.”

Pauline Cotter
Innes ward city councillor

Innes ward councillor Pauline Cotter said St Albans was one of the areas of greatest intensification in the city, and the longer the council waited to acquire property the more expensive it would be.

"It's just going mad now. Every day I go out and another villa is gone and eight units go up there."

Some of the units were small, she said, and if the council did not provide parks then residents would have no access to green space. "We are trying to get children off their screens, but we'll never [do that] if there is nowhere to go."

The council's citizens and community general manager, Andrew Rutledge, said gaps in park provision had always been known, and were identified and mapped out in the public open space strategy for 2010-40.

He said land acquisition for parkland purposes had always been a council activity.

Nats rule out bed taxes and bank levy

ELECTION POLITICS
Henry Cooke

National has upgraded its promise of "no new taxes on working people" – made just 14 days ago – to "no new taxes" at all. This includes it ruling out bed taxes.

The party has now ruled out the bed taxes and bank levy it had left itself open to adopting and ruled out any "new taxes" if elected this year, despite Prime Minister Christopher Luxon openly considering those policies in media interviews earlier this month.

But a National spokesperson has confirmed this would not stop its planned increases to fuel taxes, or stop it introducing congestion charges to the new digital road user charges system planned to eventually replace petrol taxes.

The new promise came as Luxon launched his Botany electorate campaign and a few hours after Labour released a fiscal strategy that would see the books return to surplus at the same time as National, but structurally higher government spending and taxation over time. "Our promise of no new taxes this election reflects our disciplined economic management, focused on growing the economy, creating jobs, lifting wages and keeping taxes low," Luxon said.

Finance spokesperson Nicola Willis said it was possible to invest in frontline services while not adding taxes. "National has brought the Government books under control through disciplined spending and by creating the settings to support economic growth. That work means we don't need to reach for new taxes ... Under National, there are no new taxes on the table. That includes no accommodation levy or bank tax."

The Government had committed to looking at a bed tax as part of its regional deal with Auckland, but Willis said there was "no way" to create one without increasing costs for Kiwis. "We determined there is no way to do an accommodation levy without increasing costs on Kiwis booking a weekend away, so we'll look at how existing mechanisms could be used to support councils with the costs of tourism."

She said a congestion charge did not count as a new tax because it had already been legislated for. "Time-of-use charging has already been legislated for – in fact, almost unanimously by the whole Parliament."

Labour campaign chairperson Kieran McNulty said the pledge amounted to a promise of "cuts". "If you're ruling out revenue, you have to cut spending."

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