



**Royal Forest and Bird Protection
Society of New Zealand Inc.
Upper Hutt Branch:
C/O 16 Morepork Close, Upper Hutt 5018
New Zealand**

1 December 2020

Letter to UHCC and all councillors

RE: Silverstream Spur

Upper Hutt Branch of Forest & Bird would like to state its opposition to the land swap being considered between Upper Hutt City Council and Guildford Timber Company (GTC). This land on Silverstream Spur was purchased in 1989 by Hutt County Council, from Landcorp, and it was noted in the Proposed Purchase Memorandum that *“the bulk of the land is best suited to passive reserve uses which would complement the Silverstream beautification reserve and the Keith George Memorial Park and Silverstream Scenic Reserve which lie immediately across the Hutt River. It would also complement the adjacent Silverstream Railway Society facility as well as providing a buffer between that facility and any other development that may take place in the area of the unformed Kiln Street.”*

Forest & Bird has had extensive discussions with Council and others over a long period of time about the potential for the Silverstream Spur to be protected and re-zoned as a reserve and to be revegetated with native species to form an ecological corridor across the valley, with public walkways and cycle tracks for recreation. It is the last bastion in the Hutt Valley where this could be achieved, linking the eastern and western hills and incorporating a Key Native Ecosystem area, a scenic reserve and the extensive native restoration work around the Hull’s Creek area and the frontages of the Hutt River.

Silverstream Spur represents the only cross-valley corridor point of forest, linking the bushed ranges on either side of the Hutt Valley. As part of this potential corridor Forest & Bird, Upper Hutt has been planting along Hull’s Creek, Hutt River and Forest & Bird, Lower Hutt has been planting at the northern end of Manor Park Golf Course up to the railway line across the Hutt River. This is the narrowest point of the Hutt Valley and an ecological corridor would allow birds and other indigenous species to migrate more easily from one side of the valley to the other. Connecting these habitats is

especially important to allow for movement, genetic interchange, and long-term continuity of species.

Forest & Bird is aware of the competing pressures to provide housing for future generations and to address present urgent housing needs. But this is only one argument of many for the needs of future generations. It would be extremely disappointing that Council placed the need for urban growth and development above that of environmental protection and sustainability. We have already seen numerous mistakes made through the current trend to build single-story separate dwellings in new developments, without adequately incorporating more sensible high-density and multi-storey options – the Wallaceville development is but one example of opportunities missed. Sacrificing the Silverstream Spur to urban development and entering into a land swap for ill-considered purposes would be sacrilege.

We are not opposed to the housing development being proposed by GTC on the hills above Pinehaven. In fact, it's unlikely we would oppose a carefully considered road using a part of the Council owned land on Silverstream Spur to enable access to the Southern Growth Area. We do however, oppose the land swap and will use whatever means are necessary to ensure Silverstream Spur is retained for the residents of Upper Hutt and protected as a reserve, as was the original intent of its purchase.

Protection and enhancement of Silverstream Spur would enhance the aesthetic value of the land as part of a natural “gateway” to Upper Hutt from the south. A protected and enhanced Silverstream Spur would form part of the Green Belt for Upper Hutt City. Transitioning Silverstream Spur towards low-flammability, evergreen native vegetation would improve its ecological value and reduce fire risk. The land is visible from suburbs as far away as Riverstone Terraces and is often shown as a scenic backdrop to the city in promotional material.

Council has a responsibility to engage widely on such a sensitive and consequential decision – this is public land, purchased for purposes that are only now becoming vitally important as our current biodiversity crisis and the effects of climate change deepen.

Forest & Bird would like an independent ecological report carried out of the spur, prior to the public consultation, to assess its ecological value at present and as a future native reserve.

Forest & Bird Proposal

Forest & Bird Upper Hutt proposes that the Silverstream Spur be:

- retained in public ownership, owned by UHCC;
- re-zoned as Open Space;
- designated as a reserve under the Reserves Act;
- managed in such a way as to, over time, convert the existing native regeneration and poor-quality pine forest into a flourishing native ecosystem.

We ask that councillors carefully consider the potential ecological value of the spur in a much more balanced way than is currently being perceived by the public.

Graham Bellamy

For Forest & Bird – Upper Hutt Branch