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In

Residents keen to buy land for open space

By ANNABEL SCAIFE

A GROUP of Mt Eden residents is vowing to buy a controversial crown-owned site to make up for the lack of green space in their ward.

That is, if a developer with plans to build 22 multi-storey townhouses on the prime land doesn't get resource consent first.

The townhouse proposal has Auckland City Council officers approval and is scheduled to be considered by the regulatory and fixtures subcommittee today.

The Mt Eden North Residents' Association opposes the Kelly St development as it believes the heritage value of the neighbourhood will be destroyed, including the loss of trees, and because of an urgent need for parks in the area.

But council officers say the proposal by Glenstone Ltd complies with the district plan's high density residential 7a zoning. Properties surrounding the Environmental Scientific Research (ESR) block of land are all zoned residential 1.

Residents are also concerned that extensive earthworks — ESR plans to remove 1700 cubic metres of contaminated soil and the developer another 4100 cubic metres — unnecessarily put their health and wellbeing at risk.

"If we were transforming it into a park we would be looking at environmentally sustainable alternatives to excavation or earthworks of this magnitude," says association spokeswoman Rachel Power. Trees would be planted to extract the chemicals from the soil.



WE NEED GREEN: These Mt Eden residents are furious that this old jacaranda and other trees will be removed if resource consent is granted for a housing development in their neighbourhood.

Photo: JASON

The group has lobbied the council to make an offer on the site. But councillor Glenda Fryer says when she looked into the possibility last year, ESR offered the 4500 square metre property for nearly double the \$1.65 million bid by Glenstone Ltd. The company has a conditional sale contract with ESR.

"It never came about because ESR never offered the land to council," says Ms Fryer. "In other cases crown land is offered to councils first."

The council's June 2001 Future Open Spaces Strategy emphasises that open space in the Eden-Albert

ward is "extremely low" compared with a citywide average.

It says residential growth will mean rare opportunities to obtain additional open space and recommends funding by the council to buy these areas.

Residents say the money could be found if they were given the opportunity to make a bid on the property.

"Mt Eden is a very creative place," says resident Peter Petousis. "There's a huge amount of support out there."

A trust would be formed and local groups and the wider Mt Eden com-

munity asked for help. Ideas for community use of the space include a sculpture park, native bush restoration, a temporary marketplace or a market space with a centre.

Local artist Stanley Palmer says the \$1.65m for the land is cheap.

"It's such a little amount when you consider the price of development around here. The money is an issue."

Ms Power says community gardens and other parks are common in other parts of Europe.

"The site is irreplaceable. It will never come up again."

Superheavy slugger struggled to get support for trip to