

## **Council**

Meeting of 06 May 2026

Business Unit: Community  
Date Created: 28 April 2026

## **Dissolution of the Awahuri Forest Kitchener Park Trust**

### **Purpose Te Aronga o te Pūrongo**

To present the outcome of a decision made by the Awahuri Forest Kitchener Park Trust (AFKPT) to dissolve the AFKPT and transition the operations to Manawatū District Council (Council) as of 1 July 2026.

### **Recommendations Ngā Tūtohinga**

That Council:

1. Accept the decision of the Awahuri Forest Kitchener Park Trust to dissolve the Trust and transition the management of the Awahuri Forest and Kitchener Park to Council as of 1 July 2026.
2. Note that no additional funding is required, and the grant funding to the Awahuri Forest Kitchener Park Trust of \$148,380 + GST be reapplied to the relevant Council operational budget.

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Approved for submission by:  
Shayne Harris  
Chief Executive

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## 1 Background Ngā Kōrero o Muri

- 1.1 Council proposed in its 2012/22 Long Term Plan that a Trust be established to progress the restoration and development of Kitchener Park. More latterly the Awahuri Forest area was added to the portfolio and the Trust became known as the Awahuri Forest Kitchener Park Trust (AFKPT).
- 1.2 AFKPT is a Council Controlled Organisation (CCO). A CCO is any organisation in which one or more local authorities own or control 50% or more of the voting rights or have the right to appoint 50% or more of the directors of the organisation.
- 1.3 AFKPT are obliged to report to Council twice a year on its performance on Council approved the expectations that form the AFKPT Statement of Intent 2025 - 2026:
- Maintain the forest / park, within the existing boundary, as an area of unspoilt nature (scenic reserve) for the benefit of the community and visitors.
  - Actively pursue third-party funding opportunities for forest / park investment (to invest in the activities within the forest / park and development of the forest / park).
  - Plan to develop further walking and cycling tracks within the forest / park to connect to the “loop track concept” described in Council’s Walking & Cycling Strategy.
  - Minimise future flooding impacts to the forest / park through appropriate design and planting.
  - Make the forest / park available for educational opportunities to increase awareness and extend knowledge.
- 1.4 Council provides an operating grant to AFKPT, and a small honorarium is paid to the trustees. Council also invests in the park and forest through budget requests made by Community Assets council officers via Council’s Long-term Plan and Asset Management Planning processes.

## 2 Strategic Fit Te Tautika ki te Rautaki

- 2.1 AFKPT assists in the ecological restoration, management and enhancement of the land contributing to Council’s strategic priority “***an environment to be proud of***”.

## 3 Discussion and Options Considered Ngā Matapakinga me ngā Kōwhiringa i Wānangahia

- 3.1 Over the last two years the AFKPT has experienced high trustee turnover. Matthew Davis, Rachael Harrison and Paul Simpson commenced as trustees in July 2024, replacing long-standing trustees. Matthew resigned in December 2024, Rachael resigned in January 2025 and Paul resigned in December last year. There were different reasons given for resigning however a theme emerged relating to the time needed to complete the trustee role being more than expected and concerns about personal liability associated with governance of a public space.
- 3.2 New trustees were appointed; Vicki Crombie in November 2024, Jo Morris in March 2025 and Tracey Alston in March 2025. Long-standing trustee and chair, Bessie Nicholls, term

was due to end in December 2025 but agreed to extend her term until 30 June 2026 to provide consistency for the new trustees and Jo Morris stepped in as chair.

- 3.3 In February this year Tracey resigned sighting liability concerns and time constraints and as a result the trustees began a discussion about where to from here for AFKPT. The concerns Tracey expressed were held by some of the other trustees along with an underlying feeling that the heavy lifting to transform the park and forest had been completed by previous trustees. In short, the work left to do around maintaining this area of special interest was not a motivating factor and could be managed by Council and its contractors, with some guidance from AFKPT.
- 3.4 Discussions were held during March and April following the presentation of a paper by the chair suggesting the dissolution of the trust. The majority, not all, of trustees agreed to the direction in March and following further discussion in April a motion was passed to agree to the dissolution of the trust by 30 June 2026. Given this direction, Tracey agreed to continue as a trustee until the 30 June 2026 so that a quorum was maintained.
- 3.5 Trust members, Jo Morris and Bessie Nicholls, meet with Council officers on separate occasions to discuss options and to get a sense of how Council might react to the dissolution of AFKPT by the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2026. Council was advised of the AFKPT's deliberations, commented on the feedback from trustees over the last two-years, and were supportive of the AFKPT's direction.
- 3.6 A draft transition plan was developed (ref: [Appendix 1](#)) that outlines a range of activities including legal and financial actions, that need to be completed to enact the decision of the AFKPT to wind up and cease operating.

#### **4 Risk Assessment Te Arotake Tūraru**

- 4.1 Given AFKPT contracts Green By Nature (GBN), Council's open spaces and property maintenance contractor, to provide biodiversity advice, and to complete much of the maintenance and development work, risk to service delivery in the park and forest are lower.
- 4.2 Council officers are mindful of the intellectual property developed on the pest plant *Phragmites Karka* as a result of the research and mitigation trials completed by AFKPT – in particular trustee Bessie Nicholls. Bessie's determined approach to understanding and highlighting the problematic nature of this highly invasive pest plant to the environment and the economy has meant that the AFKPT has developed arguably the most significant volume of knowledge about the plant in New Zealand.
- 4.3 GBN biodiversity advisor, Aaron Madden, has worked closely with Bessie and the AFKPT, and also with Horizons Regional Council. While Aaron's advice will remain through his role at GBN, it is pleasing to note that the AFKPT report in their 9-month performance report to Council that their "*determined approach to lobby nationally for Phragmites Karka to be classified as a pest plant and funded eradication across New Zealand continued with involvement of the Ombudsman, a presentation at the national biosecurity conference and an article produced by Professor Barry Scott. This has culminated in increased national and regional council focus and, as a result, the co-ordination role of recording and ensuring new infestations is moving from AFKPT to Horizons and other national bodies.*"

## **5 Engagement Te Whakapānga**

### Significance of Decision

- 5.1 The Council's Significance and Engagement Policy is not triggered by matters discussed in this report. No stakeholder engagement is required. The dissolution of the AFKPT is the decision of the Trust alone.

### Māori and Cultural Engagement

- 5.2 AFKPT contracts Ngāti Kauwhata for Jobs for Nature activity involving pest management, funded by a grant through Trees that Count that is due to expire on, or before, November 2026. As outlined in the draft transition plan, AFKPT will engage with Trees that Count to understand if the funding would extend until November 2026 if the AFKPT wound up by 30 June 2026. The outcome of this will be advised to Ngāti Kauwhata's acting Chief Executive.

## **6 Operational Implications Ngā Pānga Whakahaere**

- 6.1 AFKPT currently engage Ngāti Kauwhata for pest management, and as described above, this contract was due to end, irrespective of the AFKPT decision to dissolve.
- 6.2 As described above, AFKPT contracts GBN to provide biodiversity advice and to complete much of the maintenance and development work at the park and forest. Council officers are reasonably familiar with this work and will discuss the adoption of the AFKPT contract into the existing contract that Council holds with GBN.
- 6.3 Council and GBN will consider advice and direction from AFKPT, as part of the transition plan, to help guide future work in the park and forest.
- 6.4 Officers note the AFKPT anticipate that Horizons Regional Council will take a greater role in the management of Phragmites Karka across the region. As with any landowner, Council will be required to manage the infestation in its land.

## **7 Financial Implications Ngā Pānga Ahumoni**

- 7.1 AFKPT receives an operational grant from Council that is \$148,380 + GST this financial year.
- 7.2 Council officers will work through the transition plan with AFKPT but anticipate that the grant will be more than sufficient to continue the level of service provided now at the park and forest.

## **8 Statutory Requirements Ngā Here ā-Ture**

- 8.1 There are no statutory requirements for this report.

## **9 Next Steps Te Kokenga**

- 9.1 AFKPT and Council officers will finalise the transition and plan and work to implement the plan before 30 June 2026.

9.2 If any roadblocks arise, Council will be advised.

## **10 Attachments Ngā Āpiti hanga**

- AFKPT March and April 2026 minutes
- AFKPT – Council draft transition plan