

# Court ruling delights Long Bay park group

By Wayne Thompson

A group that has spent \$250,000 in public donations fighting for a green backdrop to Long Bay Regional Park is pleased with an Environment Court decision to protect key areas from housing.

Long Bay-Okura Great Park Society convener Fiona McLaughlin said last week's decision on development policies to be followed would soften the effect of housing on the regional park.

"The court has protected the most important areas by creating a heritage protection area to prevent building on the Awaruku ridge.

"There is also protection of the skyline above Grannies Bay at the northern end of the park."

Ms McLaughlin said the court had also directed the North Shore City Council to work with the society and other appellants to prepare a draft structure plan by November 30.

"We are looking forward to working with the council to ensure it achieves the best outcome for the environment and the marine reserve and regional park."

In 2002, the society collected 57,000 signatures calling on the city council and the Auckland Regional Council to protect the Long Bay-Okura

Peninsula by creating a great park.

The pressure resulted in the city paying \$23.4 million to developer Landco for 38.5ha alongside the marine reserve and the regional council spending \$8 million to buy 5.8ha and extend its park.

The city council prepared a structure plan for subdividing the 360ha left inside the metropolitan limits, where Landco was the major landowner.

Landco, the regional council and the society opposed the plan.

"In the court our goal was to ensure that at least the minimum necessary buffers were provided to protect the park and that they were protected under the law," said Ms McLaughlin.

"We spent \$250,000 on the case and that was provided by small donations by everyday persons from Auckland and other parts of the country and overseas."

She said preparing a structure plan did not mean there was no hope of fulfilling the goal of adding to the park.

"We are looking at what our strategy will be from now and there are options we are looking at."

North Shore City Council environment group manager Trevor Mackie said the court had provided guidance for developing policy and rules for the subdivision and management of land uses.

He said the council's original application provided 1800 to 2000 sections, with Landco planning for 3000 to 3200.

The court's decision came somewhere in the middle of those figures.

ARC chairman Mike Lee said the body appealed to the court because a backdrop of housing would ruin the experience of the park's one million visitors a year and could affect heritage, landscape and ecological values.

"The judgment is a clear signal that urban development cannot come at any cost."

He said developers must take the public's enjoyment and environmental effects into consideration.

Landco development managing director Evan Davies said the company had not yet formed a view on how the complex decision affected its proposals.