

Mr Lovell-Smith attacks Q.E. II 'backbiting'

Civic pride had prompted contractors at Queen Elizabeth II Park to contribute towards the cost of the park fountain, and reaction by some Christchurch city councillors on learning that the contributions did not meet the full expense were ungracious, the park's structural engineer (Mr Bill Lovell-Smith) said yesterday.

Mr Lovell-Smith, who was closely involved with all aspects of the development of the park for the Commonwealth Games, was referring to comments made at a meeting of the council parks and recreation committee on Tuesday.

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The committee had been told that there was a shortfall of \$5958 in the cost of the fountain, the contractors and sub-contractors having supplied \$19,625.

Professional reticence had stopped him from airing some facts during the last four years of the "epic controversy" about the park, Mr Lovell-Smith said yesterday.

"However, in view of the continuing use of this amenity as a political scapegoat, culminating recently in the ungracious attitude of councillors to the contractors and sub-contractors in their gift of the fountain to the park, I feel that it is time to put some facts before the public," he said.

"I was not invited to explain or comment on the cost overrun of the fountain at the council committee meeting; instead I read of it first in 'The Press,' so I feel I have the right to a public reply."

The contractors, sub-contractors, and consultants whose names were inscribed on the fountain, contributed \$19,625 to its cost.

"The understanding was, at the time, with the Mayor (then Mr N. G. Pickering) that any shortfall would be met by the City Council."

Landscape work

Mr Lovell-Smith said the fountain had always been considered as part of the landscaping by the city at the park.

"Because of this, the contribution by the contractors was a generous gesture towards the cost of landscaping the park," he said.

"The original estimate for the construction of the park, made in August, 1971, was \$3,892,000. The final figure for the construction is in the order of \$4,665,000, and this includes extra costs, beyond the original brief, of \$450,000

for additional electronic equipment, restaurant, and landscaping, the latter orig-

inally to be undertaken by the reserves department.

"Regardless of site or converting existing facilities, Christchurch was up for this sort of cost when it accepted the Commonwealth Games, whether we knew it or not. The standard of facilities required by the international sporting bodies ensured this.

Edinburgh cost \$8m

"I would point out that the facilities in Edinburgh for the 1970 Commonwealth Games cost about \$8m, and without being immodest I can say they do not match Queen Elizabeth Park. The cost in Edmonton for similar facilities for the 1978 games is expected to reach nearly \$30m.

"Queen Elizabeth Park was built during a period of cost increases of about 30 per cent, but we still managed to hold our cost increases to 8 per cent. Estimates for the Montreal stadium for the 1976 Olympic Games have risen from \$70m to \$160m,

and the building is still only half finished," he said.

"The low cost and the completion of the project in under two years is entirely due to the generosity and co-operation of the main contractors, Paynter and Hamilton, Ltd. and all the secondary contractors and sub-contractors, too numerous to mention by name, who cut profit margins and gave generously of their time, labour, and money without thought of public knowledge or acknowledgement of their generosity.

Civic pride

"This was done purely out of civic pride and the determination that Christchurch should have a Games facility of which it could be proud. In addition, the same firms and people contributed generously in cash to the fountain.

"I have no doubt, and in fact can quote Sir Ronald Scott, in saying that the park contributed significantly to the success of the Games both financially and socially, and the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee has acknowledged this in its generous donations out of profits towards the cost of the project.

"It is sad today, and a sad commentary on our politicians, that when the excitement is over, this stadium continues to be an excuse for political backbiting, and the generosity of those concerned with it must now indeed taste bitter to them, as it does to me," said Mr Lovell-Smith.

'Let it rest'

The trustee for the contractors' contributions (Mr N. B. Ullrich) said that since the council had already paid the outstanding amount, councillors should let the matter rest.

"The contractors made

their contributions out of the goodness of their hearts—it was a gesture at the time of the Commonwealth Games.

“They also absorbed a lot of increased costs involved in the construction of the complex, so I don’t think they would feel too enthusiastic about taking the hat around again,” said Mr Ullrich.
