

Date: Wednesday 27 March 2024
Time: 1.00pm
Meeting Room: Waiheke Local Board office
Venue: 10 Belgium Street
Ostend
Waiheke

Waiheke Local Board

OPEN MINUTE ITEM ATTACHMENTS

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Deputation to Waiheke Local Board re Landowner approval (LOA24-003) for weed removal and planting in Council Reserves - Deputation statement, 27 March 2024

Thank you for this opportunity to raise an issue that we believe is serious in terms of a viable future for Waiheke conservation groups.

I'd like to clarify first that nothing in what I have to say is a criticism of the Waiheke Local Board, individually or collectively; in fact we're grateful for your intervention in this matter.

In this forum, I don't want to address the continuing problems in the emails received in the last couple of days from the Auckland Manager – I'll respond to those by email.

Rather, what I want to say today is an attempt to clarify what I believe the *real* issues are in relation to Council's interactions with Waiheke conservation groups.

History

In the early 1990s, Don Chappell and I and Edward Meyer in Hekerua Valley, and Penny Ericson in McKenzie Reserve, started tackling weed infestation in the Reserves, working entirely informally with neighbours. That work expanded to Newton Reserve when I moved to Newton Road in 2000. We did that work without any Council input for around 9-10 years.

In 2003, both Penny and I started up formally constituted groups, in Newton Reserve and McKenzie Reserve, with fantastic support from Gary Wilton as a newly appointed Parks Officer for Waiheke.

Right from that very early stage we were told that Council had no funds for labour to undertake restoration work in the Reserves, so if we wanted to see weed removal and planting not involving sprays, it would have to be done by local voluntary groups. So we willingly took on that challenge, out of love for the island's native flora and wildlife, and wanting to see badly weed- and predator-infested Reserves made healthy again. We also set up rat-baiting programmes.

Over the past 20 years, Waiheke community groups, with some funding for plants from Council, and supported by neighbours and other volunteers whom we've recruited from Auckland, have contributed literally *hundreds of thousands of person-hours* to restoring the public reserves on Waiheke, working hard to remove what has over time amounted to acres of densely infested invasive weeds, and lovingly replanting those areas with natives, most lovingly raised by Ivan Kitson's and Rob Morton's teams. *The result has been a spectacular transformation of our public reserves from weed-infested jungles to vibrant native bush, all carefully curated through local expertise.*

To achieve that transformation, the group coordinators have spent, *collectively*, literally *thousands of hours of their own time* over the past 20 years - in meticulous and time-consuming scoping, planning, strategising, networking, liaising with Council, putting in detailed and time-consuming funding applications and annual plans, planning for working bees, supervising working bees, communicating, recruiting and training volunteers,

reporting on volunteer activity, educating ourselves, and sharing our accumulated expertise with others, both on Waiheke and beyond. None of this labour has been compensated.

Not only is our labour not paid for, for the most part the tools and equipment used have been our own, occasionally replaced when they wore out by a small tool allowance in a grant that we would have to apply for, and which would inevitably be less than what we'd requested.

In addition, group coordinators and other members have transported plants and volunteers in our own vehicles, at our own expense in terms of petrol and wear and tear on our cars.

Huge generosity, mostly from the group coordinators and some other group members, has provided the food and drinks with which we've thanked people who've turned up faithfully month after month, year after year, to work really hard for half a day. Over the summer months, we've carted huge piles of free cardboard and seagrass from the beaches, using our own vehicles and petrol.

At a conservative estimate, for me alone, these costs collectively have been around \$16,000 out of my own pocket, over more than 20 years. I've no doubt other group coordinators have made similar contributions from their own pockets.

For the first 15 years, in fact, Council's grants system required that we pay for the plants out of our own pockets, and then apply for a refund at the end of the year's project, having to fill out further forms to replicate details on the receipts, and the refund to our personal accounts might then take 2-3 months.

If all of these practices occurred in an employment context, they would be categorised as employee exploitation and illegal.

For the current landowner approval applications, I personally spent around 10 hours in scoping the projects, discussing them with committees, meeting up with the Community Park Ranger, transporting her to the sites, writing plans for Council, getting quotes. I then spent a further 3 hours making landowner approval applications at Council's request - *which I pointed out at the outset were not necessary, and one and possibly both of which Council has now acknowledged were not necessary*. I've also spent around 3 hours in total since then, in emails and phone calls, attempting to sort out Council's use of an inappropriate landowner approval template and clarify for Council staff why it wasn't appropriate to a community group. That's 5 hours of my time wasted on a task that Council now acknowledges as unnecessary for one of those applications, and possibly unnecessary for the other - *but I jumped through those hoops because it was the only way to get the funding*.

No one has offered an apology for Council's mistakes.

In addition, I've spent at least 3 hours on preparing for this deputation and answering further Council emails. I hate wasting the Board's time on these matters, but it seems to be the only way to get any resolution.

The real problem

However, the real problem is this – that, for the most part, none of this extraordinary work and commitment by many groups over more than two decades has been formally acknowledged and appreciated by Council – apart from a couple of morning teas for conservation volunteers organised by Liz Ross, which most of us couldn't attend because they were on weekdays when we had to work.

More importantly, our collective expertise is being not only ignored, but undermined.

So I'd like the Council staff attending today - and others in the relevant teams who aren't present - to understand *the huge emotional and motivational impact of the barriers that Council's bureaucracy is now inflicting on us.*

The current high-handed actions by Council's Auckland staff towards these conservation groups is not only an inexcusable waste of our professional time, it's hugely demoralising. And it's hard to retain respect for Council personnel when they ignore our local expertise, and then don't have the courtesy to apologise for their mistakes.

It's really hard work to keep volunteer groups motivated and available, especially as the demographic of the island changes and there are fewer people still wanting to be engaged. We're also a lot older.

Having Council put up impossible and unnecessary barriers, through what are clearly errors on their part, just constitutes further nails in the coffin of volunteering on Waiheke.

The profound frustration of all this is that it's completely avoidable. All it requires is that Council's so-called 'partners' actually walk the talk of their declarations of "enhanc[ing] collaboration with Local Boards and communities" - that isn't happening with our groups. Both Gary Wilton and Huw Hill-Male recognised the huge expertise that group coordinators and planners had built up, and the island networks and goodwill that made it possible for all of this mahi aroha to happen.

Waiheke's new Community Park Ranger did spend 2 hours with me scoping the Newton Reserve and Onetangi projects. However that isn't long enough for her to learn about the overarching strategy and work involved, and more senior personnel have not visited us and evidently don't understand either the Waiheke natural or volunteering environments. The invitations to meet that I extended to senior personnel in 2023 were never replied to.

Waiheke is not Auckland. Council needs to first accept our invitations to establish relationships with our groups; meet with us and get to fully understand the work that we are doing, how we've achieved our extraordinary transformation of the Reserves over the past 20 years, and how our carefully designed strategies are framed and operate in the best interests of both the natural environment and our volunteering communities. They might even learn something themselves about conservation strategy on the ground.

I'd like to extend our invitations again to those senior Council personnel again, including the various Managers copied in Annette Richards' email of 22 March 2024. Members of the ORA

and KNR groups are willing to donate more of our own time to arrange and attend meetings so that we can show Auckland-based Council staff, in detail, our revegetation strategies.

Frankly, unless those relationships are established, it's likely that Waiheke community willingness to stay engaged in community conservation work will be damaged beyond repair.

Thank you for your attention.

Pam Oliver
45 Victoria Road South, Onetangi 1081
Convenor Kaitiaki of Newton Reserve
Planting coordinator, Onetangi Residents Association
27 March 2024

Decision of the Waiheke Local Board

This decision has been made under delegated authority by: Chairperson Cath Handley and Deputy chairperson, Bianca Ranson on 26 March 2024.

Urgent Decisions delegation resolution: WHK/2022/172

The use of the Urgent Decisions delegation was authorised by the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Janine Geddes, Acting Local Area Manager. The authorisers are satisfied that the decision is required urgently and it is not practicable in the circumstances to call an extraordinary or emergency meeting of the local board.

The following information was provided to the decision-makers to inform their decision:

Attachment A: *Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024-34*

Attachment B: *Draft Auckland Council's submission on the March 2024 consultation draft of the Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024*

Note: Attachment B is confidential until the close of the Transport and Infrastructure Committee meeting on 27 March 2024.

Subject: Feedback to the Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024-34

The Waiheke Local Board:

- a) support the Auckland Council submission to the Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024-34.
- b) support Auckland Council's recommendation on inter-modal interfaces, noting that in addition to the region's port and airport having considerable impacts on our roading and freight networks, support:
 - i) the inclusion of critical regional ferry transport infrastructure in the GPS and
 - ii) associated investment to ensure that ferry transports land-based infrastructure is strategically planned for, which is particularly critical for island communities.
- c) agree the need for more emphasis on investment in public transport and active transport over roading to improve congestion and to take into account Auckland's finite space, topography and existing built environment.
- d) note that increases in public transport costs for Aucklanders due to the reduction in PT subsidies, will have:
 - i) an inequitable impact across the region, as poorer communities face the longest public transport journeys and
 - ii) the impact of reducing PT patronage and increasing congestion across the region.
 - iii) an impact on Waiheke Islanders in particular as the ferry routes between Auckland and Waiheke are still excluded from the Public Transport Network by legislation so residents are already paying the highest fares of any public transport users in the country.
- e) do not support the reversal of the speed limit reductions recently introduced by Auckland Transport after consultation with communities and recommend:
 - i) that decisions about local and regional road speeds are best made by the communities that live in them.

- ii) Waiheke Island's speed restrictions should not be changed by nationally imposed reversals of Safe Speeds implementation as:
 - A) Waiheke's speed restrictions follow input from the community with respect to Waiheke Local Board Plans, and
 - B) are consistent with public feedback, and
 - C) the Waiheke Local Board's 10- year Transport Plan that was fully consulted with residents.
 - D) Waiheke Island's current speed restrictions do not form part of AT's blanket restrictions but have been approached on a island-wide basis to make roads safer as all of them are shared roads with cyclists and walkers, with very little separate footpath or cycling infrastructure on the island roads.
 - E) the roading network on Waiheke Island does not lend itself to a blanket approach to speed limits, due to the narrow roads and hilly topography.

School Speed Zones

- f) support a blanket speed reduction around schools and not just between school hours as driver behaviour needs to be consistent at all times as school zones often have after hour activities e.g. sports, evening events.
- g) do not support the abandonment of the Safe Systems evidence based approach to road safety and agrees with Auckland council's concern about the lack of focus on improving safety for people walking, cycling and other active transport methods, noting that the current rates of deaths and serious injuries for people walking and cycling in Auckland are 20 times greater per kilometre travelled than for vehicle occupants.
- h) do support the reduction in expenditure on temporary traffic management, while maintaining safety of workers and road users and recommends a review of the requirements for this, particularly as it relates to Traffic Management Plans (TMPs) for event management requirements. As a local example on Waiheke, popular long-standing regional events such as the Wharf 2 Wharf road race (held for 29 years), and other local events which provide significant economic stimulus to the Waiheke economy, have been abandoned due to the high costs of TMPs.
- i) note the silence of this GPS on enabling better and safe access for those with mobility challenges, and the need for the disability sector to have an opportunity to review and advise improvements to this policy document that is inclusive of their diverse needs.

Road Maintenance

- j) agree with Auckland Council in its support of the goal of increasing road maintenance and reducing potholes and that Auckland faces significant challenges, with investment in renewals of the region's road network falling behind the level needed to keep pace with degrading assets, primarily due to increased costs, limited funding availability and a lack of stable and consistent funding source.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

- k) recommend that:
 - i) the GPS specifically reference the need for engagement with Māori across the transport sector, in line with legislative obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi under the Local Government Act (2002)
 - ii) that the GPS include a focus on enhancing Māori outcomes and improving transport equity

Emissions

- l) note that Waiheke Island has its own community-built Local Climate Action Plan, and consistent with that, request:
 - i) the GPS provide the transport sector with a clear approach to reducing its emissions which does not rely primarily on the ETS.
 - ii) in conjunction with pending changes to the ETS, a focus on mode shift continue to be maintained in order to achieve significant reductions in transport emissions.
 - iii) the approval process for potential transport investments includes an assessment of their whole of life emissions impacts and their contribution to government's climate goals.

- m) request:
 - i) sufficient funding be provided to enable provision for walking and cycling on new roading infrastructure as well as low-cost improvements to close gaps in the existing network.
 - ii) the current approach to funding maintenance of walking & cycling infrastructure be maintained.
 - iii) all road improvement projects include costings for building in safe walking and cycling infrastructure.



Cath Handley
Chairperson
Waiheke Local Board

Approved via email

Bianca Ranson
Deputy Chairperson
Waiheke Local Board

Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024-34

March 2024

Not Government policy

CONSULTATION DRAFT



Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024/25–2033/34



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

