

**Ruakaka Parish Residents and Ratepayers Association Inc.**

PO Box 151, Ruakaka, 0151

19 November 2013

**Our Submission to the Hearing held 18 – 20 November 2013, re: Proposed Private Plan Change 113 (Ruakaka Racecourse) to the Whangarei District Plan**

My name is Warren Daniel and I am currently Secretary of the above Association and am authorised to speak on its behalf. Furthermore, I have resided in Ruakaka since 1967 and am a retired veterinary surgeon. Personally, I have never had any affiliations with the Whangarei Racing Club.

In this submission, we are endeavouring to present a non-factional 'middle-of-the-road' viewpoint which we think represents the opinions of the majority of Ruakaka's residents and ratepayers.

At the outset, I should categorically state that the majority of the Committee of our Association supports the proposed Plan Change 113. Some of the comments that we will make on the Application will be based on a level of realism gained by long standing local knowledge of our area.

The Whangarei Racing Club, via its racing facilities, activities, etc. at Ruakaka, engenders a high level of local goodwill.

**1. Benefits that Accrue to our District**

We recognise the economic benefits it brings to our community, the employment it provides, the entertainment it provides and the amenity values that its race course brings to our district. Some of these financial inputs into our community have already been quantified by other submitters and do not need to be repeated.

Over the years, it has provided an avenue whereby it has provided local clubs, organisations, etc., an opportunity to raise funds by the provision of labour by their members on race days. The Club, itself, has also put on fundraising activities on race days to benefit local and Whangarei charities.

The employment opportunities that WRC enables via trainers, etc., are of huge value to local non-skilled persons who would otherwise be unemployed.

The Club provides invaluable publicity to Ruakaka – it is known throughout the racing and betting community in New Zealand. I have read the Ruakaka race

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results in Australian Newspapers. There is no other avenue offering Ruakaka (not Marsden) similar publicity via TV, Radio or newspapers.

## **2. WRC's Need for Private Plan Change 113**

From the evidence presented at this Hearing we recognise and we sympathise with the need for the Club to seek other revenue streams to stay in existence. From the press and evidence presented to this Hearing, it is obvious that the racing industry is in crisis. It could be said that some of the problems are self-inflicted – the industry has not kept up with the need to provide entertainment and other attractions.

From the side-line, for many years WRC, was very similar to most other racing clubs – they only provided a diet of racing and betting. To their credit I feel that recent and the present committees are now attempting to entice patrons by providing alternative activities on race days.

It is really encouraging to see that the Club has been granted more race days through the winter months. Our local accommodation and retail sectors has an annual 'boom and bust' cycle. A busy summer period is followed by quiet winter months. This increase in winter racing will, in small way, assist to smooth out the cash flows of those sectors.

This racecourse is in a wonderful setting to provide alternative entertainment. I do feel that the Club could far more aggressively promote this grandstand to community for more functions. Although revenue streams generated by this means would not be huge it would at least help with maintenance costs.

## **3. Advantages of Racing and Training Horses at Ruakaka Racecourse**

This Club is very lucky in that it has an all weather track and has been recognised by Racing Authorities on that account. That aspect has been covered by the Applicant.

One aspect that I thought WRC would have brought forward, and stressed, in their evidence was the benefits that horses derive from beach training and swimming. It should be mentioned that Donna Logan started up her training career by getting hold of 'broken down horses, which had been abandoned by other trainers. By training them on the beach and in the water they were nursed back to full function with some becoming winners again.

There is no doubt that walking and swimming horses in saltwater is of great therapeutic value for joint and tendon injuries as well as cuts and bruises. This

course does offer other advantages to trainers, e.g., - an all weather track means no interruption to horses preparations, jockey training can be uninterrupted.

The above measures would lead to an increase in horses at the racecourse and on the local beach.

Local people express fears about the use of the beach for horse training. While there are no laws stopping the riding of horses on the beach we believe that it is incumbent on WRC to ensure that they do not cause undue nuisance and alarm to other beach users.

There is a protocol in place between WRC and Whangarei District Council which sets out the terms which govern the use of the beach for training purposes. With an increase in horse numbers it will be even more important that the rules, as set, are stringently enforced.

#### **4. Northland's Equine Centre of Excellence**

By staying in existence, the nature of this course makes an ideal place to be further developed as the centre of Northland's equestrian activities. This would include Pony Club (already caters for the local Club, dressage, eventing, etc. A cross country course would need to be developed elsewhere in near proximity.

Such a Centre of Excellence could include a Jockey School, Farriery training, etc. A fully equipped Equine Veterinary Hospital could be established thus attracting Veterinary students 'seeing practice' as well as newly qualified graduates seeking equine experience. The ability for convalescing horses to access the beach would be very beneficial to their recovery.

Ancillary Saddlery, Canvas Making, feed stuff supply activities would follow the establishment of a larger volume of equine activities at the Course.

To cater for these activities a larger area would need to be set aside, for stables, holding stalls, veterinary hospital, and all ancillary services.

**Concerns must be expressed about the apparent lack of space allowed for the conduct of equine related activities in proposed Plan Change 113.**

It is unclear from the presented plans just how much space would be set aside in Precincts B and D to fully accommodate a full range of equine activities.

The provision of the above facilities would further enhance the attractiveness of Ruakaka Racecourse to trainers to establish their operations here.

From such activities, there would be a spin off to our community by the provision of new jobs, more spending in our retail and accommodation sectors, etc.

#### **5. Time Line for Development To Take Place**

The likelihood of any mooted residential development occurring would seem to be in the long term. When the Ruakaka Structure Plan was formulated in 2008/ 9 there were about 3,500 consented vacant residential sections available in the Ruakaka – One Tree Point Area. I don't know the current figure but I would suggest that it would still be well over 2000. Thus there is still a large land bank of residential sections available for sale or development here. Any sale of residential sections resulting from this Plan Change could only be made at a discounted price – something that WRC would not desire. Thus any action resulting if the Plan Change is granted will likely to be very long term.

#### **6. Retirement Accommodation**

Issue can be taken with the evidence presented by Mr Brandon re: this topic. It must be pointed out that many retirees have shifted into our area (mostly from Auckland) in recent years. Those shifting to Marsden Village cite cheaper houses and rates, flat land and easy access to the beach and local shops, library and medical services.

A few days ago the Secretary of the local 60's up Club was complaining of the drop in her Club membership – she stated “they are all shifting up to the Jane Mander Ryman Village in Whangarei”. I, personally, know of many elderly friends who have shifted into retirement complexes in Whangarei and elsewhere. Many would have stayed here if retirement accommodation had been available here. They would not have needed to leave their circle of friends and other community links.

The small retirement village at Waipu, (Saorsa) often has a waiting list for its units and the Ranburn Rest Home is very well patronised.

It can be said that a demand exists in Ruakaka for the provision of small scale residential development that caters for the elderly.

## 7. Beach and Road Access

- a. Surfers Gap -Our Association would welcome with open arms the closure of Surfers Gap to vehicular traffic. Currently, it offers the only vehicular access to the beach north of the Ruakaka River Mouth. For some years, we have had tried to bang the collective heads of Whangarei District Council, Northland Regional Council and DoC to have a properly designed and constructed vehicle beach access provided northwards of Marsden Village close by the NIWA facility. We have not been successful. With the provision of a more northern vehicle access the portion of beach in front of Marsden Village could be declared a Vehicle Free Zone similar to that in existence in front of the Ruakaka Surf Lifesaving Patrol area. This latter vehicle free zone has achieved its aim. It has also resulted in a reduction (but not complete cessation) of vehicles accessing the Ruakaka Wild Life Refuge from the south.  
  
Marsden Village have petitioned for a vehicle free zone in front of their village.
- b. Road Access - We do query the possibility of their being only one access route into the whole racecourse property. It has been stated that this access road is subject to flooding in stormy weather. It would be very vulnerable should this coast be affected by a significant tsunami. A second evacuation route out is necessary for emergency reasons. The option of a second route into the racecourse from Peter Snell Road at the north western corner of the course should be closely re-evaluated.
- c. Pedestrian Beach Access from behind the Grandstand. This will need to be made readily accessible to the public. The present sign "Private Property, Keep Out" is not welcoming to the public and would need to be removed. Perhaps the roadway could eventually be vested into the ownership of the Whangarei District Council.

## 8. Ruakaka Wild Life Refuge

Considerable thought has been put into what effects the likely outcomes from this proposed Plan Change 113 will have on the Refuge.

It was first gazetted in 1958 and since then has suffered a continual decline in its ecological value. I have photographic evidence on the state of the lower portion of the Refuge dating back, not for just 11 years but for 76 years (1937)

Its degradation has continued, unabated, since DoC became responsible for its stewardship.

We must accept a big dose of reality regarding the Refuge. It is severely compromised by adjacent residential development along its entire length from the river mouth to its upper extremity at the bridge on Marsden Point Road. Its ecological value is considerably reduced.

Much has been said about the lack of migrating seabirds roosting and nesting in the Refuge. The simple fact is that they have run out of suitable clear sandy areas to do so. That used to exist throughout the lower part of the Refuge. The unbridled expansion of mangroves in previously white sandy areas has been responsible for the loss of suitable habitat. That degradation has been countenanced by DoC who have placed barriers in the path of our Association's attempts to commence a mangrove clearance programme to try to start to restore the lower part of the Refuge.

We are not saying that its Refuge status should be revoked but WRC should not be asked to shoulder the responsibility for its upkeep and maintenance. Restoration to its original pristine state should involve joint effort by the local community, DoC, Whangarei District and Northland Regional Councils.

a. Cat and Dog ban

The suggested covenant that residents in any new homes built as a result of this Plan Change should not keep any dogs or cats is ludicrous when such conditions do not exist in any of the already built on or consented subdivisions that are adjacent to the Refuge. The ridiculous situation could arise where a resident on one side of the racecourse boundary line would be prevented from keeping a household pet while those on the other side could have say 6 cats and 3 German Shepherd Dogs. Dog Control By-Laws do say that dogs should be under control at all times and that requirement needs to be stringently enforced. Cat owners could be encouraged to attach warning devices (bells) to their collars.

A ban on cats and dog negates the proven psychological benefits that are derived by both young and old pet owners. It would reduce the attractiveness of any residential subdivision to would be purchasers. That would be unfairly financially detrimental to WRC.

b. Planted Buffer Zone - We think that the proposed planted buffer zone between the racecourse and the Refuge is desirable. We feel that the

- employment by WRC of staff to carry out pest control and eradication in the adjoining part of the Refuge is unreasonable – if one is to be employed, costs should be charged to all adjoining properties and to DoC.
- c. Ecological Management Plan – it is proposed that this be prepared co-jointly by DoC, WRC and Patuharakeke TB. We feel that this ignores the very valuable contribution that can be made by local interested groups. We would like to see the Bream Bay Coastal Group and our Association invited to join any group formulating the Ecological Management Plan. Local knowledge in this area would be very valuable.

9. **Building Heights and Effects on Marsden Point Road Residential Sea Views.**

We are heartened by the height restrictions to be imposed in buildings erected in Precinct C. We have reservations about those proposed for Precinct B. It is stated that buildings above 2 storeys high (with a maximum height of 4 storeys) shall not cover more than 10% of the ground area of the Precinct. The number of such buildings is not specified – is it several or just on building with a large footprint. This could be of concern to local Marsden Point Road residents.

It is to be hoped that buildings are painted in colour schemes appropriate to the local environment.

We are also concerned about any extensions to the Grandstand Building. Consultation with residents whose views are compromised by any grandstand extension should be made obligatory.

We firmly believe that height limits should be applied to vegetation. Tall trees can cause as much obstruction to views and often cause a high degree of angst to residents.

To their credit, WRC have in the past listened to the concerns of residents and have removed tall offending pine trees from their boundary.

10. **Public Consultation- Project Management Plans**

We are happy with the decision to use a Management Planning method for this proposed project. The concept of an overall generalised Management Plan is acceptable. This hearing is covering much of what is envisaged and public submissions have been called for. However, it must be agreed that there has been a very big lack of detailed information made available – and often the “devil lies in the detail”.

Presumably, more detail will emerge as each Precinct Management Plan is devised. We feel that public consultation should occur as each Precinct Management Plan comes to light. The events arising from this proposed Plan Change 113 are likely to occur over a long period of time. Circumstances will change and adjustments will need to be made to cope. It is vital that public consultation and input is provided for.

The formation of a Community Liaison Group could be of very real benefit to both the community and to WRC. It would help to keep lines of communication open. Our Association already belongs to such Liaison Groups – Northport, Refinery, Marsden Cove, WDC Wastewater Group.

We thank you for your consideration of our Submission and we will await your decision with very great interest.

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(WJ Daniel)

Secretary