

Resource Consent approved

Paihia waterfront project moves closer to construction phases

The Environment Court has signed off on the Resource Consents needed to pave the way for a construction start on a multi-million-dollar redevelopment of the central Paihia waterfront.

The court decision ends ten years of consultation with the wider community and four years of discussions and negotiations in the resource management process between the project developer Far North Holdings Ltd and the appellants to reach a consensus on critical aspects of the project.

FNH chairman Tony Norman says the court Consent Order has overcome a major hurdle on the path to bringing the project to reality.

"The next critical step is to obtain the approval of the Minister of Conservation to the proposed work within the restricted coastal zone.

"Subject to the Minister's approval, the next steps will be to press ahead with construction design in preparation for tendering and to put in place a robust funding regime which will allow us to get on with the job," he says.

Mr Norman says because of the huge financial investment needed of close to \$17 million, it is anticipated that it could be eight to 10 years before the entire project reaches fruition.

"However we will be moving ahead as quickly as possible. Our first priority is to tidy up the waterfront area in time for the visitor influx expected for the Rugby World Cup next year. Major construction aspects will follow as soon as funding is in place.

"The first construction priority is to create a groyne and pedestrian deck and walkway adjoining the existing restaurant building. Next will be a new reclamation area on the seaward side of the existing maritime buildings and the construction of new commercial berths," he says.

Initial design concepts have already been prepared but there is still a huge amount of technical work to be completed before construction can start. This includes further scientific analysis of the potential for natural sand regeneration on the proposed central Paihia beach renourishment area, required as part of the Memorandum of Understanding reached with the Director-General of Conservation.

"This could impact on the final design of some of the proposed breakwaters," Mr Norman says. It was possible the company may be able to further reduce the size of the breakwaters at the northern end depending on the outcome of the regeneration studies.

"The installation of breakwaters to protect the beach renourishment programme, the dredging of a new navigation channel to the east of Kuia Rongouru (Taylor Island) and the beach renourishment will follow as subsequent stages," he says.

During the hearings processes compromises have been made to satisfy the concerns of submitters, including changes to the proposed rock breakwaters to create a physical

separation from Motu Maire and Kuia Rongouru Islands to restrict public access to areas of cultural and archaeological significance and changes to improve the visual impact of the project.

"We believe we have done all we can to mitigate environmental concerns without compromising the overall integrity of the project. It is now in the hands of the Minister," he says.

Economic impact

The reconstruction of the central Paihia waterfront has the potential to be a huge fillip for the Far North in tough economic times, Far North Holdings Ltd chairman Tony Norman says.

"In addition to the immediate injection into the economy in the construction phase, the project has the potential for long-term economic impacts

"There is no question that the economic recovery of the district is very dependent on growth in areas such as tourism. But tourism doesn't happen as of right.

"On-going investment has to be made by both the public and private sectors to maintain and improve our position in both the international and domestic visitor markets.

"Paihia is the commercial heart of the visitor industry in the Far North. But it will not remain competitive if as a community we do not recognise the need to make the infrastructural investment which is needed to keep Paihia, the Bay of Islands and the Far North at the forefront of visitor attention.

"Far North Holdings Ltd is doing what it can but we need the continuing support of both the public and the private sectors if projects such as this are to succeed," he says.

Mr Norman says the Paihia project has generally been greeted with real enthusiasm and the company is grateful for the support received in what had been a tenuous planning process.

"We first put the concept to the community 10 years ago and while on the surface nothing much appeared to be happening, the consultations and discussions with interest groups have been intensive.

"The hardest part is almost behind us and we are now looking forward to the time when a physical start can be made," he says.

Project highlights

The redevelopment has been designed to provide a protected haven for recreational maritime users with redesigned and extended facilities for commercial and visiting craft, together with a major overhaul of land-based facilities to provide an enhanced environment for residents and visitors.

Highlights of the proposal include:-

- Close to 325 metres of new beach between the Paihia wharf and Nihonui Point
- Dredging a new navigation channel to the Paihia wharf

- Around 4000 sq metres of reclamation to improve public access and provide for a new helipad, landscaped public areas, a promenade, seating and new public facilities
- New boardwalks, viewing decks, connecting walkways, public shelters and seating
- New commercial berthing facilities for tourism companies
- An additional 12 berths for visiting craft inside a 160-metre floating wave attenuator
- A new building for smaller maritime related businesses
- A new café/restaurant building and food kiosk
- A war memorial in a garden courtyard (already constructed)
- New public toilets and amenities
- Extensive re-development, landscaping and planting of the foreshore to make the area more pedestrian-friendly and more attractive for residents and visitors
- New visitor information facilities and a new tour bus terminus

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