

Far North Holdings

Kellet Street Residential Development

Q&As

Meeting with neighbour

1) You are bullying/threatening a vaunted member of our community!

We went to see this lady precisely to see how we might be able to avoid a situation where she would feel pressured. We wanted to suggest a compassionate and considerate way of ensuring the development caused as little inconvenience as possible and address how we treated and landscaped the boundary. Our feeling was that it was a constructive meeting and we were surprised when the Facebook conversation emerged to the effect that it had not been.

We have been criticised for not attending a subsequent meeting. This was cancelled with the full agreement of the lady's advisor as we all felt it was a family issue and not a community discussion.

Lack of Community consultation

2) Why aren't you talking to / consulting with the community about this?

The original application was made public, received press and was posted on our website. This was 19 months ago. The plans were also provided to Love Opuā, whom are another conduit to the community.

Up until very recently we didn't have anything to tell you, that we hadn't already told you back in May 2018.

As soon as we got the final, corrected consent through in early October we decided that managing director Andy Nock would update the community, in person, at the Love Opuā community meeting on 30 November.

Before we did this we wanted to speak personally with neighbours – because we felt that was the decent, considerate thing to do. But that process was stopped when the matter blew up on social media very shortly after the first meeting.

We told the community about these plans 19 months ago having looked at a number of options, including apartments which we felt were not in keeping. We also said clearly in our public statement that we were inviting Opuā residents to review the plans and to let us know at that early stage if there were any concerns. We have had NO submissions from anyone over the intervening period.

Many comments we did get at the time were positive, including from the local members of the Bay of Islands - Whangaroa Community Board - who supported housing to address local need.

Back in May last year we said the Consent application was simply about securing a development option for this piece of land, which has long been vacant and providing less-than-satisfactory value for Far North ratepayers. And could potentially help with the shortfall in local housing. We said we were ascertaining what may be acceptable going forward.

3) You have no intention to consult. You say in your press releases that “they are entirely within Consent parameters and we don’t anticipate any formal requirement for public notification or consultation.”

The key words are “formal requirement”. We also said: “as a Council-owned company we are aware of an expectation that we listen to the views of the communities in which we operate and keep them informed of what we plan to do there.”

The RC has been through a rigorous 18-month process and was assessed by an independent planning consultant appointed by Far North District Council to ensure impartiality.

As a result of various aspects of community engagement over recent years we have set aside a bush covenanted area to be protected under the Reserve Act and will be developing a fitness trail linking the school/Kellet Street area with the Marina. The RC does not stop our engagement with the community on this project and we will continue to listen and engage in discussions as required.

One aspect of the way we do things, that we will attempt to change, is that we do not provide regular updates on projects where there are no developments over extended periods of time. An example of this is the school parking issue. The reality is that while it has appeared from the outside the “nothing is happening” on this matter, we have been working with engineers and Far North District Council to help develop a plan for the school to work through with the Ministry of Education. The latest correspondence between Far North Holdings and Council was as recent as a couple of weeks ago.

4) Your ‘consultation’ is a sham! Where are the newspaper and radio advertisements? Where are the flyers? Where are the multi-media-presentations?

Buying radio and newspaper advertisements to reach a proportion of a population of 600 that we might or might not reach through other means is a chronic waste of money. Everyone knows that newspaper articles have a far better reach than advertisements, and our news release of 18 May last year was carried in the local print media.

We feel that between print media, social media, our website, a presentation to the Community Board at a public meeting and ongoing discussions with the school and Love Opuā, we will have reached a large proportion of local residents who are interested in community affairs.

Now we know what’s permissible, and do-able, the company will continue to review any concern and problem areas and, we feel sure, reach resolution. Our presentation to the Love Opuā community meeting on 30 November will be the start of this exercise.

5) Love Opuā doesn’t represent the community!!

Perhaps not. But it’s the closest thing to an organised community group that the town has. In the email that provided notice of the meeting on 30 November, Dr Brian Hepburn said he would be standing down from the Chair of Love Opuā. We would encourage some of the people who have been questioning Love Opuā’s relevance as a community organisation to stand for the soon-to-be vacant position and turn the organisation into what they hope it to be.

Far North Holdings benefits hugely from having a single group, representing a good cross-section of community opinion, to deal with on Opuā community matters.

The Petition

6) You have to act on this. It has been signed by 200 people out of 600!

We're grateful to the petition organisers for undertaking this work. It provides a useful barometer of public opinion.

It is significant that a third of the town has signed this petition. Equally, though, two thirds have chosen not to.

Perhaps this is because they understand that five of the six statements (items #2, #3, #4, #5 and #6) are incorrect or misleading.

- there has been ample opportunity for input and discussion, and there will continue to be further opportunity for the community to provide input for our consideration;
- the largest title will be bush covenanted, subject to protection under the Reserves Act. So effectively we will be creating a reserve where one isn't in place at the moment. One of the Consent Conditions is that a suitably qualified person confirms that the management measures in the approved vegetation management plan have been successfully implemented, including ongoing maintenance. Visual amenity has been at the forefront of the design. As made very clear in Clause 6 of the 'Reasons for Decision', what we have offered in our Consent Application is **over and above** what would be required of any other developer working in the Coastal Residential Zone. As we made clear in our news release of 14 November, management plans will be put in place over the next few years to ensure that impact on neighbours is eliminated or reduced as far as humanly possible;
- any variations that arise out of discussions with neighbours or other parties will of course be subject to Consent Variation if required. And of course applications for those Variations will be submitted if necessary;
- The only formal alternative proposal for the use of this land that has ever been submitted to us was for a five-storey apartment building. We felt this was inappropriate for Opuā.
- the petition fails to acknowledge the large area, about 2,800m², that will be set aside as a green reserve in the middle of the development. Or the covenants that ensure that native trees outside of roadways and house plots will be protected.

Parking at the school

7) Far North Holdings appears to have found a way to avoid taking into account the effect the development will have on the school.

The company was asked by Council simply to engage with the school around traffic management concerns. Council has taken on board the school's comments and concerns in issuing its consent, and placed Conditions on FNHL as part of the Consent.

These Conditions are the construction of additional footpaths, pedestrian crossings and a boardwalk to provide safe access between school and car park. And to ensure that our new driveway does not reduce the number of car parks available on FNDC/FNHL land.

Here are links to the two plans; [the first](#) being the work required by the Consent to the pedestrian arrangements, and [the second](#) being the car park arrangement, that ensures existing car-parking numbers are maintained.

FURTHER TO THIS, we are voluntarily dedicating considerable time and resources to resolving a parking issue which exists presently and is entirely unrelated to this development. We have been working with engineers and Far North District Council to help develop this plan for the school to work through with the Ministry of Education. The latest correspondence on this matter between Far North Holdings and Council was as recent as a couple of weeks ago.

Playground and Fitness Trail

8) What about the Playground? That's a broken promise. The kids who you consulted with originally are going to University now!!!

The playground is still a happening thing. We were not able to build anything on the reclaimed area until August this year. The ground needed time to settle. We took representatives from the school onto the land in February this year and they saw for themselves the impact of subsidence on the boardwalk.

One of the gross unfairnesses in the recent social media beat-up was the lack of acknowledgement by some of those involved in that discussion, of this issue. They knew full-well the issues behind building on that land yet still they criticised us for the fact that we have not yet done so.

They were also well aware that we have indeed been progressing the playground matter. Again, something not acknowledged in the social media comments.

On 28 February this year, following conversations we had been having with them about the playground, the school asked us for \$50k to pay for a playground design they had selected. They said they would ask Council for match-funding. There were additional significant costs involved in the design proposed by the school, specifically around flooring, fencing and shade. These were not included in the \$95k price-tag.

To accommodate the larger playground, there was a request to increase significantly the 170 sq m of land we had already agreed to dedicate to the playground to 285 sq. m, just 55 sq. m less than double the area already agreed. We agreed to this.

The school's funding application to Council was rejected. On enquiry, we learned that Council considered the application incomplete and not as compellingly presented as the successful applications.

On 24 April this year the school put the matter back to us and said it was no longer prepared to secure match-funding.

So FNHL returned to the drawing-board. In August this year we were close to putting a playground design suggestion to the school when another exciting opportunity arose. We advised the school of this on 12 September and have spent the intervening time doing the necessary due diligence on the concept. We tried presenting this to the school in early November but were advised that everyone was too busy to speak with us. Accordingly, we plan to present the proposed playground concept to the community at the Love Opuia meeting on 30 November; and ask for feedback.

9) What about the exercise pathway from the school?

The largest site, number 17, occupies a significant portion of the area and will be set aside as a green bush reserve in the middle of the development. We propose that this will include a fitness trail that is planned and project-managed by a group of parents associated with Opuia School, and which Far North Holdings will help create once plans are ready.

10) What's with this 'cultural centre'? That's just a sop to Maori who had a pa here, in an effort to get this project across the line!

It is not a sop as the activity is still to be determined. The company felt an area for low cost housing/respice/cultural activity was something that should be reflected in the proposal, based on the history of Opuia and the need to be inclusive. No decisions have yet been taken over this element of the plan and it is of course subject to discussion with all sectors of the community.

Technical

11) The cliff face is insecure. You will cause slippage. A large slip buried a car some years ago just to the Southside of the powder store.

FNHL is guided by its engineers in such respects.

12) You are adding a whole lot of extra sewerage to the Opuia sewerage disposal system.

The RC requires FNHL upgrades a significant length of the existing pipework, so this benefits Opuia residents.

Aesthetics / design

13) The designs are ugly!

I think that's subjective. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In the Facebook discussion 18 months ago there were views expressed both for and against. We are not going to build anything that we can't sell because it's too ugly.

The plans use the land's contours and reflect existing Opuia housing and lot sizes.

The proposed units are modest in scale and reflect the two-storey development in the area. As we said on social media 18 months ago, if you have a better design that will work on this space we'd be very keen to see it.

Rationale

14) Why are you building these things anyway?

This piece of land which has long been vacant and providing less-than-satisfactory value for Far North ratepayers. The land is currently vacant but has in the past been used for Harbour Board housing. We know there is a lack of local housing as Opuia businesses are asking about what the timing and availability is.

15) You're all about the money. You need to be considering community value too. This land, as it is, offers way more community value than it will if it has houses on it.

We understand the point. As things stand, we are tasked by our shareholder, FNDC, with securing the best commercial return we can on shareholder assets but we are, like with the marina, balancing economic, environmental, cultural and social outcomes.

16) These are luxury accommodations for wealthy people. Why don't you build more of what this community needs – affordable homes for young families?!

That would result in higher density housing than we propose with this project, to justify the site infrastructure costs. So if you stop to consider the issues being raised at the moment - traffic, sewerage, site coverage, etc - all of these would be aggravated with an 'affordable homes' model.

The company is looking at other potential solutions elsewhere for low cost/ social housing.

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