Whitianga Esplanade Waterfront Redevelopment: Drop in Session Conversation Notes

Friday 20th September, 4:30pm – 6:00pm, Robinson Road Reserve

Around 70 participants mostly representing the local residents around Robinson Road Boat Ramp and Hilton Reserve attended the drop-in session in response to a letterbox invitation from Thames-District Coromandel TCDC. At this drop-in session, the focus of discussion was specifically on the challenges related to trailer boat launching and parking in the Robinson Road and Hilton Park areas. Topics of conversation included the current situation, potential ideas, and how these changes would affect both local residents and waterfront users.

The majority of feedback from the local residents was to oppose the proposed concept of using Hilton Reserve for overflow boat trailer parking.

Council staff assured the local participants that no decisions have been made yet, and this is an opportunity for the project team to listen to local feedback and ideas as an input to formulating feasible concepts. Feedback will help guide the next steps in this project as we move towards more detailed planning and public engagement.

Further information regarding the wider Whitianga Esplanade Redevelopment Project is available at www.tcdc.govt.nz/whitiangaesplanade.

A register of attendees was recorded. For privacy reasons the names of individuals residents have been withheld from these notes.

Everyone at the drop-in was provided an opportunity to express their views and ask questions to the project team. Due to wet weather the venue was held at a resident’s garage and driveway opposite the ramp. The following notes were made at the session.

# Focus Group Discussion Notes

* Dean Allen, TCDC District Manager welcomed the group and introduced the project advisory group members in attendance Rekha Giri-Percival, Peter Mckenzie and Calum Mcgillvray along with Lorenzo Canal appointed as project manager for the feasibility phase. Advisory group member Shelley Balsom was also in attendance alongside board members Caroline Hobman, Bess Kingi and Cr John Grant, although they were not noted at the very start. The recently adopted 10 year Long Term Plan LTP has a budget of $12.5m identified across three years starting 2028 for the Whitianga Esplanade Waterfront Development. A local resident was thanked for hosting a wet weather alternative.
* Lorenzo Canal **–** outlined the project background and context along with the concept ideas for discussion. He made the following key points:
	+ The project team are here to listen to local residents’ ideas, concerns and issues as an input into formulating feasible plans that will be subject to wider consultation and council adoption.
	+ Three user focus group sessions have been held with groups representing a wide range of users, key stakeholders and local iwi. The notes from these sessions are available on the council website.
	+ The primary driver for the study is that the existing Whitianga wharf has a wide range of commercial and public activities and users and is currently undersized and has some known operational and H&S issues. The wharf may need to be either increased in size or a second public pier and pontoon created to address separation of users and increase berth space.
	+ The intention is for all existing boat ramps to remain open. The two local all tide, sheltered ramps are located at the Whitianga Wharf and Robinson Road. Both of these areas have trailer parking constraints. There is a demand of overflow parking at peak times.
	+ Trailer parking availability is an existing issue that is acute during holiday periods and events. A concept idea that is subject to feedback is to use part of Hilton Park for peak overflow parking.
	+ The ramp fee structure, encourages boaties to take their trailers home.
	+ Based on the Dundas Street ramp being a tidal and based on user feedback to date, there is no plan to park trailer boats on Lyons Park.
	+ The Marina boat ramp is fully subscribed and has a waiting list.
	+ The existing Robinson Boat Ramp has potential to be upgraded to improve existing operational issues to enhance efficiency and safety.
	+ The idea of adding pontoons at the boat ramp and/or at a jetty at the far end of the reserve is to provide an opportunity for short stay berthing of boats while trailers are parked or collected at an overflow carpark.

**All participants were invited to address the group with their views, ideas and concerns. Key points were recorded as follows:**

* A local resident addressed the group based on the following notes provided .
	+ *Our team have spoken with over 500 ratepayers from Hahei Cooks beach through to Simpsons beach Wharekaho about this project.*
	+ *We have summarized their feedback regarding Council projects into 5 main categories. Their wishes are.*
		- *Rock walls for Buffalo beach and the Whitianga estuary Robinson road side.*
		- *The three waters done well so we don't have restrictions in the summer time and Wharekaho has mains water reticulation .*
		- *Roading repairs particularly the one way subsidence area from Cooks beach to Ferry landing.*
		- *CCTV in the main street to help reduce retail crime*
		- *Safe street lighting and foot paths especially where there are none.*
	+ *These projects benefit the ratepayers daily •*
	+ *In other words rate payers want the basics done brilliantly and a 12.5 million dollar project and its associated rates rise is something council can consider once all the basics are fully completed.*
	+ *Robinson Road and Hilton Park are not the right areas for All trailer boat parking for the town because.*
		- *The council is proposing to create a new green area in town and in the process ruin two existing green areas.*
		- *Our roads are not designed for the increased traffic congestion.*
		- *Council are fixing one set of health and safety issues in town by transferring them to Robinson Road and Arthur Street and around the school.*
	+ *This is a residential area not a commercial area and we are entitled to our quiet enjoyment of the area without noise and nuisances.*
	+ *Where would the existing users of the Reserve and Hilton Park go now that it will be filled with boat trailers?*
	+ *Tourists will no longer be able to park and admire the view*
	+ *Robinson Road reserve is a Heritage site and therefore notifiable to Wellington for any changes of use. We will fight to maintain this status of the area.*
	+ *Iwi will need to be consulted on the expansion of the area for trailer boat parking. Has there been a cultural Impact Assessment done for the proposed extra parking and jetty construction and ramp extension?*
	+ *Has the council consulted with the Oyster farm owners in the estuary about the affects this proposed change may have on the farm?*
	+ *The council’s proposal will increase the erosion of the foreshore around Robinson Road which has recessed over 3m with the additional boating traffic in the estuary. What does the proposal include to address this?*
	+ *Does a responsible council design a new launching facility area for all trailer boats that create extra pollution for the area and is this in keeping with the Council’s policy on climate change?*
* Residents took turns to speak and comments included:
	+ This might not be the right time to initiate new projects and rates should be focused on core activities.
	+ Robinson Road and Hilton Park residents felt they should have been consulted first before any project was considered.
	+ Concerns about Hilton Park’s unsuitability for overflow parking due to its wet conditions and potential environmental impact.
	+ Potential road safety concerns, particularly the potential risks for children attending nearby schools and daycare centres due to increased traffic.
	+ Roads may not be suitable to handle the additional traffic from boats and trailers.
	+ Specific concerns about trailers parking on Arthur Street, particularly the difficulty this could pose for emergency services (FENZ) to access the area during emergencies.
	+ There are existing issues with the ramp and congestion at peak times.
	+ Confusion about whether the boat ramp at the Esplanade would remain open or closed during peak times.
	+ Comments about inefficient car parking layout and manoeuvrability at both Robinson Road Reserve and Whitianga waterfront.
	+ Issues regarding the silt buildup in the harbour and the fact that the area is a floodplain.
	+ Residents questioned who would manage the logistics of boat drop-offs, as skippers usually handle both boat and trailer, which complicates parking and jetty use.
	+ Increased erosion from larger boats exceeding speed limits was raised as a significant issue. This is an existing issue.
	+ A comment was made about the silt and material coming from the wade stream.
	+ Potential increase in pollution (greenhouse gases) due to the longer trip from Robinson Road to the sea.
	+ A question was raised about whether a cultural impact assessment had been conducted in consultation with Iwi, especially given the nearby heritage site. The project advisory group includes Ngati Hei.
	+ The orientation of the boat ramp is perpendicular with the current and is difficult to use at times. The current ramp/pontoon alignment at Robinson Road could be altered to improve operations.
	+ Residents voiced concerned about the growing number of trailer boats in the area and the impacts they may bring.
	+ A former commercial operator commented they never complained about the situation at the wharf.
	+ Marina negotiations should be prioritised to enable access to land for better boat parking and manoeuvring.
	+ Suggested to move the Council offices to allow for additional parking spaces on Council-owned land.
	+ A suggestion was made and then countered about the Hoppers hard stand area.
	+ There were recommendations to relocate the playground to Taylors Mistake to improve children safety and make space for boat trailer parking closer to the ramp.
	+ Request for a cost assessment to evaluate the project’s impact on ratepayers.
	+ A local resident supported the Robinson road boat trailer parking concepts and commented that, based on her observations during morning walks, she did not see a significant issue with boat trailer parking currently.
	+ Residents felt the channel in the area was too narrow for the increasing number of boats.
	+ Trailer boat users can organise themselves based on facilities available.
	+ A suggestion that overflow parking could be provided at Buffalo Beach reserve.

These meeting notes summarize the concerns and suggestions presented by community members regarding the proposed developments around Robinson Road and Hilton Park.