

Oral presentation by President of Friends of Pukekura Park Inc. in support of submission relating to proposed new access road into the Bowl of Brooklands from Pukekura Raceway

1. In terms of Section 2 of the Taranaki Botanic Garden Act, 1876 the original area of Pukekura Park was vested in a Board of Trustees for Public Recreation to be held by it “in trust for a **botanic garden and public recreation grounds**”. In 1929, the Board of Trustees was dissolved and Pukekura Park was vested in the Borough of New Plymouth subject to the same trusts. The New Plymouth Borough Land Exchange and Empowering Act 1934 vested Brooklands Park in the Borough of New Plymouth, subject to the same trusts as the Borough held Pukekura Park under the Taranaki Botanic Garden Act 1876. **Those trusts have not changed.** In accordance with Section 6 of the Empowering Act mentioned, Pukekura and Brooklands together are officially known as Pukekura Park.

2. Pukekura Park has rightly been recognised by the New Zealand Gardens Trust as a “Garden of National Significance”, a classification which recognises its qualities and significance as an outstanding garden and of which the Council and the citizens of New Plymouth are justly proud and protective. Indeed, not only is Pukekura Park a garden of national significance, it is also regarded as “the jewel in the Crown” of New Plymouth. No lesser a person than the Mayor himself is recently quoted - on the Council’s website and elsewhere - as saying that the jewel in New Plymouth’s crown is Pukekura Park, “which has gained international acclaim as much for its botanical collection and gorgeous setting as for its cricket ground”.

3. Brooklands Park was formally handed over to the Borough of New Plymouth at a ceremony at Brooklands on 10 March 1934. This ceremony was attended by a large number of citizens and the then Governor-General, Lord Bledisloe, who officially declared the grounds open as a public reserve. Jas. McLeod, the Chairman of the Pukekura Park Board at the time, said in the course of his acceptance speech that the Board “recognised there would be criticism, much of it, perhaps, of a helpful nature, for as time went on there were bound to be changes. Nothing would be done, however, that would interfere with the natural beauties of the surroundings. **And nothing would be done to interfere with the native bush within the property.** The speaker pointed out that around the whole of that bush there would be planted belts to protect the bush from what were termed “ground draughts”” (*Taranaki Herald* 12/3/1934, p. 3).

4. Thomas Horton was Curator of Pukekura Park from 1924-1949. He was responsible, among other things, for planting the row of magnificent kauri, totara, rimu and other native trees along Horton Walk; for the plantings of native trees in Kindergarten Gully; for the planting of innumerable native trees in the native bush areas at Brooklands; and for planting the many kauri and other native trees in what is known as Kauri Grove at Brooklands. He was also responsible for planting the shelter belts around Brooklands to protect the native bush there from the “ground draughts” referred to by McLeod. Horton’s personal motto was consistent with the policy of the Pukekura Park Board at the time. He recorded it in his work diary for 1937, now in Puke Ariki, as “**To plant, plant, plant, & plant again, native trees preferred, and destroy only useless, or dangerous trees**”.

5. It is an adherence to these and similar policies by administrators and custodians over the 133 years since Pukekura Park was officially opened in 1876 that has materially assisted in creating and maintaining the “jewel in the Crown” that the Park is today. It is incumbent on those presently having custodianship and management of the Park to ensure that this continues.

6. It therefore follows that, to be consistent with these policies, **no long-established native vegetation in the Park should be sacrificed in favour of a perceived need for facilities such as improved access to a recreational use in the Park unless that need is clearly shown to be imperative.** Even then, the need should be met in a way that does the least damage to the native vegetation in question, even if it is more expensive to meet it in that manner.

7. It is the Friends’ opinion that the perceived need for the alternative access from the Racecourse to the Bowl as presently proposed has not been clearly shown to be imperative. Furthermore, it is patently clear that provision of that alternative access will involve the sacrifice of long-established native vegetation, something which should be avoided if at all possible. The Friends’ consider that insufficient consideration has been given to the importance of the several very large and smaller Kohekohe trees which will be destroyed, and to the effect that their removal, and the removal of other components of the native vegetation in the immediate environs – together with associated extensive earthworks - will have on the ecology of the affected area. The native vegetation which will be lost if the present proposal proceeds is very much more valuable than just common “scrub”. The loss of such long-established vegetation and the opening-up of the area will almost certainly have an adverse affect on the ecology of the affected area and its environs.

8. It is the Friends’ submission that there are two principal reasons why Council should defer reaching a decision on the present proposal.

Firstly, it is of considerable concern to the Friends that this proposal is being considered in isolation, and not in the context of a development plan for the Park as a whole. In these circumstances, it is surely in the interests of wise and sound management of the Park that this issue be considered in the context of such an over-all plan. The Friends welcome and support the steps being taken at present toward the formulation and completion of a long-overdue development plan for the Park.

Secondly, Pukekura Park is owned by the Mayor, Councillors, and citizens of New Plymouth. As I have already mentioned, it is the Friends’ view that implementation of the present proposal, which involves significant tree-felling and earthworks, will have adverse effects on long-standing native vegetation and the ecology of part of the Park. Given this potential, it is the opinion of the Friends that the present proposal should have been publicly notified, and still should be, so that all citizens of New Plymouth, as joint owners of our ‘jewel in the Crown’, are aware of what is being proposed and have an opportunity to comment on it.

David Medway
President, Friends of Pukekura Park Inc.
9 June 2009.