

# Friends battle for park trees

## Road pushed through 'under false urgency'

By HARRIET PALMER - Taranaki Daily News

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MARK DWYER/ Taranaki Daily News

**DESTRUCTION:** Friends of Pukekura Park are furious the New Plymouth District Council has rushed through a decision to build a new road through the world-famous site. Pictured is secretary Elise Smith, left, and president David Medway.

A battle has broken out over a new road to be built through native bush at the Bowl of Brooklands.

The road will improve access to the TSB Bank Bowl of Brooklands from the park's racecourse end but in the way are numerous large native trees, including several more than a century old.

The group Friends of Pukekura Park claims the New Plymouth District Council is putting events at the bowl before the environment in approving the road under a sense of "false urgency" and with no public consultation.

President David Medway has claimed a decision made in "no more than half an hour" at a council meeting last Tuesday was bulldozed through and scare tactics were used to persuade some councillors who stated they had "been pushed into a corner" over the issue.

The road is to replace the current racecourse entrance which has been blocked by new Taranaki Racing Club stables, is in disrepair and does not allow emergency services such as fire and ambulance access to the bowl.

Mayor Peter Tennent has weighed in to the row saying while he understands the Friends' concerns, events at the bowl would end if access was not fixed.

Mr Tennent confirmed there were "big acts" coming this summer and there needed to be a road for emergency access before the fireworks display in November.

"The decision had to be made yesterday if we want big acts over summer. The mayor would get lynched if the best outdoor facility in the world was unable to be used," he said. Mr Medway said the park was recognised as a Garden of National Significance and in approving the road the council was ending 133 years of good management and care.

He said the decision to start "nibbling away" at its 49ha was "destructive".

"It's inconsistent with policies that have been in place for over 100 years. Who knows what else they've got planned," he asked.

The road had been in the planning since the end of last year when the Taranaki Racing Club decided it needed to finish building stables which would block the entranceway.

The racing club planned the road with council officers and is paying part of the \$235,000 cost.

Mr Medway said in planning there had been no consultation on ecological or environment impact and an arborist was called in only on the request of his group.

The main tree at stake is a large puriri tree estimated to be up to 400 years old.

The Friends said the planned road wiped out shelter belts, putting the tree in significant danger.

Secretary Elise Smith estimated the tree would be dead within 10 years of the road being built. An alternative route was suggested by the group which it said would take up less of the park and save a group of century-old kohekohe trees but this would cost more and has been called less environmentally-sound by council officers.

Ms Smith said the group was considering environment court action but this would be costly and stressful. "We're a group of friends of this park; we don't expect to be watchdogs with teeth."