

GOMEZ PARK PROPOSAL – 2021

This is a response from GRASS – the Gomez Road association, to correct the misinformation in the Hikurangi Business Associations current Gomez Park Proposal – 2021.

It also our states our groups objections to the project, our position on sports that have a motor, raises and highlights our concerns and revisits issues from the past – costs, environment, noise and residents well-being. It responds to the benefits that HBA claim for the community. It responds to the claims of misinformation being spread by 'groups' in Hikurangi.

(HBA 2021) denotes a quote from the Hikurangi Business Associations 2021 Gomez Park Proposal.

Background: This is what actually happened.

On **Saturday 4th** December 2010, a resident of Gomez road found out from a council-watcher that WDC had commissioned BECA Planning to prepare a Scoping Report for a Motorsport Hub on Council land in Gomez Road. This report was due to be presented to the Environment Committee on **Wednesday 8th** December 2010. Residents were both shocked and surprised to learn that such detailed plans had taken place right under their noses. When residents read the BECA report they realised that other community groups had been consulted, meetings had been held and yet they had not been contacted or consulted about something that had the potential to cause great disturbance to their quiet way of life, have adverse effects on health and well-being and lower property values.

"Whispers of plans leaked into the community" (HBA 2021)

As stated above this is not how residents found out, but speaks to the underhanded and covert way the project was being conducted.

"The recreation park was mistakenly renamed by locals "The Noise Park". (HBA 2021)

The park was not named "The Noise Park" by locals, it was the WDC that called it 'what it was going to be' – the only honest thing they did. HBA minutes 13th June 2018 state "Council call it a noise park".

"Some of the immediate locals to the site strongly voiced their concerns".... "the project was abandoned" (HBA 2021)

It wasn't just the immediate locals – 525 submissions against the 'Noise Park' were made to the LTP in 2012, the majority of these were from the wider Hikurangi community. Your summarised statement minimises the 17 months that residents had to spend their time attending meetings, reading complicated reports, dealing with OIA's, council staff, being lied to, protesting, walking the streets with surveys and letterbox drops, etc., etc., this process caused stress, anxiety and illness, it was particularly hard on a number of the older residents who gave their time and went outside their comfort zones – speaking in public and making submissions to the WDC.

These points are made, not to be petty, but because the history of the project is very important, personal and needs to be respected so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

“Since then some of the outdoor recreation groups who were originally included in the plans have lost the ability to access facilities for their sport that are adequate.” (HBA 2021)

The proposal does not name the groups, however they were: Saloon & Stock Cars, Karting, Mountain Bikes, Gun Club, 4WD's and Archery – these clubs are all still in existence and using the same facilities.

Gomez Outdoor Recreation Park 2021: edited 2011 proposal:

“The plan also proposes to drop some of the noisier activities originally proposed as to keep noise distress to neighbouring properties to the bare minimum” (HBA 2021)

Noise is unwanted Sound and subjective, the definition of a “bare minimum” will vary between individuals. Your statement admits there will be “noise distress” to neighbours, so an undefined bare minimum is unacceptable to residents. There are significant adverse effects from noise, as identified by the World Health Organisation.

1. Activities Covered in the Park

“Our 2021 Proposal is to have 6 activities available” (HBA 2021)

4WD and trail bikes – these sports have motors and are therefore unacceptable to residents as these activities create noise and *Noise is unwanted Sound*. There is no further comment as they are not welcome and are 100% opposed to.

Archery – there is an existing archery club in Mt Tiger, (there is future logging to be done close to the club, but this does not mean it would have to move, if managed correctly) it is a sport that is already well catered for.

Flattening and clearing an area for a designated archery site could lead to a greater weed problem, as stated in the Poynter & Associates Ecology report, you include in Appendix 4: “The existing weed problem and the potential for this also to be increased with new clearings and exposed earth also needs to be managed and subject to a specific surveillance and control regime.” (HBA 2021)

You also state that Archery could either function as an active club (based from the property) where members could meet up to once a week or use it solely as an event venue 2 x per year. Archery needs quiet conditions, this could be an issue if there is noise from other proposed park users nearby.

Residents are concerned that once established on the site a club would wish to use the facility as often as possible to train, to hold competitions, events and even social functions. Clubrooms inevitably cause issues with after-hours use and require ongoing maintenance and security. It is unfair to ask residents to become Park Police. Club members would have keys to the site and clubrooms, it would be impossible to control their access to once per week.

Mountain Biking - we do not object to Mountain Bikes, although we believe they are already well catered for in the wider district, there would be a huge cost in constructing the tracks. The Parahaki Mountain Bike Club met with Evan Cook WDC 31 January 2012 and stated in that meeting: "To construct tracks they use a 3 tonne excavator with a blade and a bucket for banking corners. They come back later and sort out channels to drain water away from tracks". The soil conditions were also discussed. Bare clay is really slippery until a layer of leaf litter develops. The tracks may have to be lined with another material. They also had conflicts with other sports e.g. where motorbikes can create ruts in tracks which get deeper and deeper.

Horse riding – we do not object to ‘casual horse-riding’, but ‘events’ will cause traffic issues on Gomez Road, due to vehicles towing horse floats. In 2011 the intersection of Marua Road and Gomez Road was identified as a hazard that would have to be mitigated – slow traffic, towing large trailers and turning right into Gomez Road, with a blind crest on Marua Road was a potential hazard to traffic heading to Hikurangi from Marua Road, this road is a tourist route from the Tutukaka coast.

Walking tracks – we do not have an issue with the quiet activity of walking, however your suggestion that the track could be opened up privately for fundraising events such as a marathon or orienteering etc., indicates your willingness to add to your Proposal and as feared by residents the park will be vastly different to what is currently being proposed – 2010 all over again!

Since meeting with the residents of Gomez Road, HBA has met with interested clubs, at this meeting it has been proposed that side by sides could join with the 4WDs, planes and helicopters were also discussed and it has been reported from a resident that attended this meeting that HBA did not immediately tell the attendees that these activities were 100% off the table. This shows the intent to introduce others users to the park in the future.

The HBA told the residents there would be only 6 permitted activities, but entertains the introduction of other noisy sports.

2. Land area Details

"trees will not be cut down or destroyed where possible" "destruction or disturbance of these areas will also be avoided where possible" (HBA 2021)

"Possible" is a vague term – in 2010 the commissioned Ecology Report reported that the site required a more formal and detailed botanical survey, at that point the last survey of the area was 14 years old and it noted there had been extensive shrub-land regeneration since that time. It stated then that the native vegetation on the site may well achieve a higher level of recognition in terms of its ecological value, if resurveyed. It is now 24 years since the last survey and the site requires a more formal and detailed botanical survey in relation to the specific ecological criteria used to assess PNA status and its ranking under section Schedule 17A of the District Plan (Poynters & Assoc).

A new Ecology report would also be required at 2021 prices; in 2011 the Ecology report (Phase one) cost \$5749.50 with an indicative fee for Phase two of \$8,000.00.

"A map of proposed land used is attached" (HBA 2021)

On this map you have drawn Pink, Orange, Green, Blue and Purple lines to denote the various boundaries of the proposed activities.

It is very easy to draw a line on a map, the reality is very different with gulleys and streams, steep slopes and rugged areas. The land is prone to erosion if disturbed.

3. Frequency of Events

"It is noted that the intention for the Gomez Outdoor Recreation Park is not to be utilised in a daily come-and-go, as you please manner" ... apart from the exception of the archery course...archery would be permitted to use the property on a more frequent basis if a club was formed...once per week for regular practise... Foot-based activities would open to day-time use, 7 days per week between 9am and 5pm. (HBA 2021)

This does not equate to being utilised on a "daily come-and-go, as you please" manner and if the gates are open to allow the above access, you will need to ensure security is at the gate during the hours stated so that other unpermitted activities do not enter the park.

As stated under: #7 Access to Property, you propose a gated system at each access point... locked outside of events or club usage, residents would expect someone to be in charge of making sure the gates get locked.

You also stated at the meeting with residents that Trail Bike events would only be two per year and 4WD events would only be two per year – a total of 4 days per year. However your Proposal states:

"Taking all of the activities into account, excluding the options of foot-based activities such as orienteering, it is proposed that a maximum of ONE EVENT PER MONTH be allowed to be held on the property, which can be from any one of the four activities described above." (Trail rides, 4WD's, Mountain biking, Horse trekking). (HBA 2021)

Under Trail rides: you say the course would be utilised only at a maximum of one event per month. Under 4WD: you say a 4WD club would be able to use the track to hold event days at a maximum of one per month. That is potentially 24 activities per year for just two of the proposed activities.

There will be no sports with motors, but this information is very different and misleading and gives residents no confidence in what we are currently being asked to consider, this is 2010 all over again.

4. Parking

You propose to use the same parking plan from 2011, you also state that the carpark needs to accommodate car/trailer set ups and turning space. **As stated any activity that has a motor is not welcome.**

Casual horse riding, biking and walking activities that are acceptable, do not require a large carpark. Any future car park would likely require resource consent. It would also have to be in keeping with the environment, we do not want rubbish bins that are left overflowing with smelly rubbish; therefore users would have to take rubbish with them. There are concerns that a carpark could be used by overnight by freedom campers; drinking and/or loitering.

5. Toilets

"The toilets would be made available for each event or club session, but would be locked outside of those hours. (HBA 2021)

So it sounds like you would like the casual walkers/runners to find a bush if they need to go to the toilet. We also have concerns regarding who would be responsible for the daily cleaning, locking and unlocking and dealing with vandalism and graffiti,

6. Clubrooms

Residents do not see the need for any club to establish themselves in onsite clubrooms. There are too many issues associated with after-hours use, social events, security, and ongoing maintenance, unnecessary clearing of the land, setting a precedent of clubrooms on the site and the addition of other activities and the ability to hold large scale events.

7. Access to Property

"We also propose that there be substantial fencing installed around the access points". (HBA 2021)

This would not only be very costly but of little use, given the size of the site and the many other ways that determined people could enter it.

8. Ongoing Security

You have said who is responsible for the facilities during an event – but that is only on the day.

“If security of the property becomes an issue after hours, it is possible to look into options around installing security cameras, or seeking assistance from a security monitoring company.” (HBA)

Who determines when security has become an “issue after hours” and how many incidents are necessary for security to be considered?

Security needs to be in place from day one, as part of any conditions to be met in consents, this would include cameras and monitoring. It is unfair to expect residents to police facilities and to have to put up with vandalism, graffiti and the like, as well as the worry of such behaviour coming on to their properties.

Community Groups to Potentially Host Fundraising Events

You told residents at the meeting May 20th, that between 300 – 600 riders attend trail rides, and 40 – 50 4WD's attend event days and you stated a maximum of 4 events per year, making \$8 - \$10K per event. Your proposal lists 10 community groups (but not limited to that number) that could benefit from hosting an event. You only make that amount money from the trail bikes and 4WD's.

Archery events would be organised by the archery club for the archery club, mountain bikes, horse riding and foot-based activities would not raise such amounts.

It would take years for that many hosting groups to make any worthwhile money, if they are in such dire straits as you claim they will have closed before they get a turn to host an event.

However, the Proposal says ONE EVENT PER MONTH and with the goal of your Proposal being to raise money for the community groups it would inevitably lead to the noisy events being held more frequently. Residents do not want the noise and inconvenience of hundreds of cars and trailers using the road 4 times per year, let alone every month or even worse what it would become in the future.

HBA went to the WDC in 2018 and requested permission to hold monthly trail bike rides and more frequently if there was demand.

Noise, Ecology & Traffic

The Proposal recommends conducting the feasibility studies again with the current proposed activities being considered.

In 2011-12 just over \$27000 was spent for phase 1 feasibility studies, there was also the Scoping report at \$15000 and these feasibility studies will cost a lot more at current prices. Your June 2021 minutes state "all needs to be looked at through feasibility studies, query with council if that is included in what \$30,000 from LTP was set aside for." The 30K won't go very far.

a) Noise – "They used computer modelling software to predict noise activity during events with 22 receivers around Gomez Road and Marua Road." (HBA Proposal)

We have asked a number of people how they interpret this statement and every one of them believes you are saying that there were 22 physical receivers that measured sound placed around Gomez and Marua road. From what you go on to say about how noise limits on some of the receivers reached the maximum capacity etc. we take it that you also believe this to be the case.

There were no physical noise receivers placed around the area, the receivers referred to are residential properties that had the potential to be the most affected by noise from various activities. There are more houses that have been built since the modelling was done.

In other words the "receivers" mentioned, were the actual residents, people that are affected by noise to varying degrees and sensitivities – the most important people in the entire process!!

We could call this misinformation, but it is more likely ignorance on the part of the person who interpreted an old report and thought they understood what it said – it is only those of us who dissected every report and lived through the 2010-2012 proposal that know what it actually referred to.

Ambient noise levels in the area were monitored by a WDC environmental health officer to determine background levels at different locations.

Costs

"To be addressed post council consultation." (HBA 2021)

This is unacceptable, as Council consultation costs ratepayers significant amounts of money as was the case in 2010 – 2012, reports have to be commissioned, experts engaged and a community consultation process undertaken.

In 2012 the WDC advised that the quantifiable costs of the project to date (approx. 17 months) was \$97,934.69. If the project had gone to the next stage it would have totalled \$313,500 and still not one sod of dirt would have been turned on the site. The council had set aside \$4 million for the project. Your Proposal does not include the stock cars, go-karts and gun clubs (at this stage) but bearing in mind this was 10 years ago, todays costs will be horrendous and not justified for the fund-raising you are trying to achieve.

Work required on the Property

“Excessive earth moving will take place to clear particular places that require clear/flat areas where no trees, scrub, plants, weeds or leftover tree roots can be present.” (HBA 2021)

In 2012 it was recommended that the Council undertake investigative bore holes on site to confirm geology and likely geotechnical, erosion/sediment and ecological issues for construction.

This country is under laid with a hard silica pan which once exposed is prone to water erosion.

Do you have any idea how much this would cost and involve as you have to consider erosion, sediment/silt control, storm water and protecting flora and fauna identified in the ecology report?

Benefits to the Community

1. Land that is currently under utilised will be able to be used in a relatively non-evasive way to nearby residents, in a way that is beneficial to multiple groups with the wider Whangarei community. (HBA 2021)

We disagree that the proposal will use the land in a relatively non-invasive way to nearby residents. Residents live in a peaceful, quiet, rural environment – this is what they value, it is their Sense of Place, well-being and safety. The wider Whangarei community is well catered for. There is also the need to consider the flora and fauna in the area, it is impossible to be relatively non-invasive to flora and fauna with the amount of disturbances you propose.

2. Clubs that may be struggling to remain functioning due to lack of property ownership or appropriate locations to train/hold events will have somewhere stable that is purpose built to fulfil their needs. (HBA 2021)

The Whangarei District caters very well for sports, recreation, leisure, shared paths, walks and trails. If there are sports that are struggling to find a home or places to train/hold events perhaps that is because some of those sports are not sustainable due to the noise they make and the damage they do to the environment. Back in 2010 the WDC sought to bring all these noisy, destructive and ‘annoying to the general public’ type sports to Gomez Road, completely overlooking the fact that people live there.

3. Community groups from within Hikurangi that may be struggling will benefit hugely from any income brought in by having the opportunity to host an event. (HBA 2021)

Just because a group is struggling to raise money, it does not give them the right to invade other people’s lives, ruin a natural landscape, kill the fauna that live there, forever change a quiet and peaceful community and cost ratepayers ridiculous amounts of money.

4. Local businesses will benefit by attendees of events spending their money within our community. (HBA 2021)

There will be minimal benefits to local businesses, from events. If a club established a clubroom, then they would have facilities to provide food and drink, organisers of events would source bulk food from wholesale suppliers. Local businesses need to generate their own 'buzz' in the town, plan events in the township, look at places like Waipu who run regular festivals and events in the town that bring people in from all over the district. Perhaps HBA would do better to focus on this sort of thing instead of bringing stress to a small rural community.

5. The property is currently being used as a rubbish dumping zone and drug growing property which is of a hazardous nature. (HBA 2021)

At times there is illegal rubbish dumped on the property, when locals see this they call the council and a contractor comes out, it is not a widespread issue on the property. Neither are drugs a widespread issue, so it is unfair to say these two things are all that it is used for. It is currently growing beautiful regenerating bush and providing a habitat to Kiwi and other fauna.

6. Sports that are not easily accessible to people living in our district could now be available for our community to join, such as archery or orienteering. (HBA 2021)

Hikurangi is only 20 minutes from Whangarei, it is not a vast distance to travel for a sport, these sports are catered for in the district.

7. Schools who seek outdoor recreation activities will benefit from the use of this property. (HBA 2021)

Schools are welcome to use the property if walking tracks are developed, there is an opportunity for education in the future, once FOGOFF has reached a point where the public can safely enter.

8. If this property is developed it will benefit the proposed idea of creating a walking/cycle track that link from Gomez Road over to Tikipunga, through Glenberrie Forest. (HBA 2021)

Walking tracks are not objected to.

TRANSPARENCY AND MISINFORMATION

At the residents meeting held on Thursday 20th May, HBA said they had a new proposal for the land in Gomez Road and it was important that they did not repeat the mistakes of the past. HBA stated that this time they were starting off by talking to the residents first and wanted to have an open, honest and transparent discussion. When HBA talked about the past they were referring to the 2010 – 2012 plan for the Noise Park.

What HBA didn't tell us was the past that included the following:

HBA went to the WDC in 2018 and requested permission to hold monthly trail bike rides and more frequently if there was demand. This request was granted by WDC with Resource Consent conditions.

HBA made a submission to the 2020 Annual Plan requesting \$15K to assist with Resource Consent preparation.

What HBA didn't tell us about events that had happened only a month before the residents meeting:

HBA did not disclose that FH had made a submission regarding the park in the 2021 LTP. The organisations work closely together and it has been confirmed in an email that HBA knew about the Friendship House submission that had been made prior to the residents meeting on 20 May.

HBA did not disclose that WDC had approved \$30K to go towards this process (not sure what process you mean) in year 2 of the LTP – this is in the HBA May 2021 minutes and was prior to the residents meeting.

HBA told residents the new proposal would not be presented to the council until the draft proposal was circulated and feedback sought. We are not saying that this is not the case but the June 2020 minutes state that HBA would be holding a zoom meeting with WDC and mentions discussions beginning with the Council.

In fact HBA minutes show WDC involvement as far back as June 2018 with a proposal to hold trail bike rides as community fundraising events. There is discussion on cutting the track and planners visiting the site. HBA says that all of these discussions, proposals and submissions have nothing to do with the current Proposal, despite sounding very similar, we accept what you say. At the time of the May 20 meeting, HBA in good faith should have disclosed this information to residents, if they wanted to work collaboratively with residents.