

The New Zealand Post Community Relationships Award – New Plymouth District Council’s 2007 Entry

By creating a strategic alliance with Te Ātiawa hapū, Ngāti Tawhirikura, New Plymouth District Council is giving credence to their vision that their community will develop special relationships with tangata whenua which are strengthened and valued by its citizens.

“I want to congratulate those on both sides of the partnership who had the vision to move forward in this work.” - Prime Minister Helen Clark, 6 June 2007

From 1853 – The history of ownership

Ngāti Tawhirikura is one of the ancient hapū of Te Ātiawa Iwi whose settlement in Taranaki became obscure as a result of their migration to the Wellington region in the 1830’s. Though they regularly travelled between the two regions, their interests were overtaken when the Katere Reserve became one of 17 reserves made when the Crown acquired the Waiwakaiho Block in 1853. Within the reserve was Te Rewa Rewa pā and urupā. In 1887 pursuant to the Native Land Court Act 1886 ownership was awarded to nine Maori owners but vested in the Public Trustee. In 1905 in a climate of increased defence spending to train volunteer groups, almost 80 acres of the Katere Reserve was taken by the Crown under the Public Works Act for the Taranaki Rifle Volunteers to use as a rifle range.

The land remained with the Ministry of Defence for training purposes, and in 1975 the New Plymouth District Council made approaches to erect a sewage pond on the site. As an alternative site for a rifle range could not be found, another site for the sewage pond was acquired instead.

As a result of the Council’s attempts in 1979 local Iwi representatives sought the assistance of the Historic Places Trust to ensure the protection of archaeological sites. In 1986 the Rewa Rewa site was registered pursuant to the Historic Places Trust Act 1980.

In 1999 the Council commenced work on a coastal walkway extending 7km between Port Taranaki and the mouth of the Waiwakaiho River connecting popular recreational features, residential areas and the CBD to the sea. In order to create a coastal walkway extension that will add a 2.5km long cycle and walking path from the end of the existing coastal walkway at the Waiwakaiho river mouth to Bell Block, the Council entered into consultations with a number of stakeholders including Te Ātiawa Iwi who directed them back to the descendants of that area.

For Ngāti Tawhirikura it may have taken over 100 years but the time had arrived for their mana whenua and kaitiakitanga to the Rewa Rewa block to be finally recognised.

Journey of Discovery

One of the biggest challenges for New Plymouth District Council was to bring together the various stakeholders, including the New Zealand Defence Force and Department of Conservation to look at the development of the Coastal walkway extension, and this required significant investment in relationship building between hapū and crown interests.

Ngāti Tawhirikura however struggled with their capacity to participate in the process. With the Council's support they were able to undertake their own journey of discovery, growing their capacity, unwrapping their history and relationship to the area. What has been revealed has added significantly to the Council's repository of historical information. Ngāti Tawhirikura developed their own legal entity, rebuilt relationships with disgruntled descendants, and received independent legal advice to ensure the protection of their interests.

New Plymouth District Council had already undertaken its own journey of discovery beginning with the Long Term Strategic Plan 2002-2012 by identifying Iwi Relationships as one of five key strategic issues which needed to be tackled if the district was to achieve their vision of a caring, dynamic, diverse and safe place to be.

In 2003 the Council recognised it had a responsibility to acquire the Rewa Rewa Reserve from the Crown pursuant to sections 20 and 50 of the Public Works Act for the purposes of fostering hapū and iwi activities and facilitate for the extension of New Plymouth's coastal walkway.

By undertaking this project the New Plymouth District Council also had the impetus to develop a Coastal Strategy that would include their responsibilities under the Resource Management Act 1991 and Local Government Act 2002.

Effective Project Management

The process of transfer of the land to Council has been complex and time-consuming with the involvement of the New Zealand Defence Force, their agent the Property Group, the Office of Treaty Settlements (OTS), Department of Conservation (DOC), Council's Surveyor, Land Information NZ acting on behalf of the Crown, Ngāti Tawhirikura hapū and members of adjoining hapū Puketapu and Ngāti Te Whiti, and the iwi of Te Ātiawa. Legal representatives for all parties were also engaged.

By providing quality project management through the Chief Executives Office and Community Assets Group, and using skill and expertise of staff within Property Assets team and the Iwi Relationships team, the Council was able to ensure that information entering the public arena was factual and that the background to the Council's decision was clearly articulated. The Council was then able to make a well supported informed decision to pass in September 2003 the following resolution:

“That having considered all matters raised in the report in relation to the surplus Ministry of Defence land at Rifle Range Road (Rewa Rewa), the Council authorises an application to the Crown to have ownership transfer to the Council as a reserve under the Reserves Act for the purpose of fostering iwi activity and extending the coastal reserves and New Plymouth walkway.”

Expected Benefits and Value to the Community

- Creation of Rewa Rewa Reserve Agreement that will open up the land to public access previously acquired by the Ministry of Defence
- Guide for future development and change in the district over the 150km of coastline and to create a rich cultural landscape that would support a diverse range of choices for work, lifestyle and recreation
- Ngāti Tawhirikura will be able to return to the land and use it for a variety of cultural and income generating activities
- The status of Ngāti Tawhirikura as a hapu of Te Ātiawa has been reinforced
- Create a joint innovative approach to the management of the reserve
- Reinforce the value of appropriate consultation, representation and decision-making with communities of interest
- Fulfil the Council's outcomes identified in their Long Term Council Plan 2006-2016
- Create a model for civic and tangata whenua partnerships that provides a 21st century solution to an historical dispute
- Engage the wider community in participating in the relationship as it grows
- Establish stronger relationships between Tangata Whenua, Local and Central Government
- Grow Civic leadership

Creating a Participatory Approach with Stakeholder Buy In

The Council recognised immediately negotiations began the need to deal with the issue of mana whenua.

Te Ātiawa is the Iwi authority with at least nine hapu, who have a high level of autonomy. Only six are represented on the Te Ātiawa Iwi Authority (TAIA) which is recognised by the OTS as the mandated entity for treaty negotiations.

Ngāti Tawhirikura needed to be able to:

- (i) Identify the previous owners and their descendants
- (ii) Discuss this project with them and seek their endorsement
- (iii) Grow their capacity as a hapu

The Council's response was to provide resources to the hapū that allowed them to achieve those objectives. The end result being the development of a legal structure for the hapū, endorsement by descendants of owners that the reserve management be retained by the hapū, the development of stronger relationships with other hapū of Te Ātiawa.

The Ministry of Defence had already declared the land surplus with no further interest in its ownership or use and the Crown who were an interested party by virtue of the land having value for the settlement of Waitangi claims, only wished to see that it was disposed of fairly and according to their rules it had established.

However due to time constraints, the citizens and ratepayers feedback was only gathered through the positive response to media which indicated recognition of the value of the site for recreational and cultural purposes.

An Innovative Approach

The significance of the purchase of this land was considerable and an innovative approach was required to make it happen. The way in which NPDC approached the hapū was part of the innovation that achieved success, recognising the sensitivities of the history and loss of land, the historic sites contained on the land, and the desire of the hapū to return to the land and exercise their right as kaitiaki.

The provision of resources, independent advice and expertise to the hapū so they could make informed decisions going forward assisted them to build their capacity. The classification of the reserve in 'fostering iwi activity' will allow for the hapū to display their own innovation as they move towards finding ways for income generation along the Coastal walkway.

The Community Outcomes of connected, secure and healthy, sustainable and together are appropriate in respect of this issue. The innovative partnership agreement has achieved:

- (i) a new Council/hapū partnership model
- (ii) a new approach to ancestral land taken which has established an enduring gift for its citizens and generations to come
- (iii) put into effect the concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) for other Council's to emulate
- (iv) opened up a rare block of undeveloped land within urban New Plymouth for public access

Value for Money

All of the financial implications were able to be considered as part of the Annual Plan process. The purchase was subject to valuation and in real terms the sale price was a little more than what would have been paid for, for prime real estate in central New Plymouth or Oakura and the land concerned is in excess of 30 hectares in area with a lengthy coastal frontage.

With the extension of the foreshore from the New Plymouth Port to the Waiwakaiho River and now with this agreement facilitating access to Bell Block, the potential economic spin offs are significant, especially for Ngāti Tawhirikura who now have the capacity to plan their economic revival.

Being sensible and doing the right thing!

By being committed to the development of the partnership with Ngāti Tawhirikura the Council accepted:

- (a) If they chose not to proceed with acquisition of the land, leaving hapu to seek its return through the normal process of treaty settlement claims, this would have left the hapu in a very uncertain position
- (b) Neither the former owners, hapu or Iwi would have had the resources to purchase back the land
- (c) It was unlikely that the opportunity to purchase the land would have arisen again.

“This agreement with the Council gives Ngāti Tawhirikura control over their own destiny...a place where they can stand and say – ‘This is what it means to be Ngāti Tawhirikura’. Their generosity of spirit allows public access for the first time since early last century...I look forward to seeing the fruit of this partnership over the coming year!”
– Peter Tennent, Mayor, New Plymouth District Council 6 June 2007

Footnote: The background to the document is the original plan of the historic Te Rewa Rewa pā site done by Elsdon Best in 1927 when he described it as *‘a fine specimen of an old time fortified place, the trend of the earthworks showing how well the Māori understood taking advantage of the natural formation of land, how he confined his inner defence to the higher ground and accepted the assistance of nature in scarping natural slopes and in the location of his ramparts and ditches’*.