

Ranger station and park hub

A WALK IN THE PARK...

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Establishing a large scale multipurpose all terrain park that was essentially a concept and obtaining all resource consents within strict timeframes and the eventual creation of a specific zone wasn't quite a walk in the park, but it was a fun ride. Jeff Hextall, Harrison Grierson's Tauranga Planning Manager and Peter Watson, Western Bay of Plenty District Council's Reserves and Facilities Manager were in the driver seats. The following article takes the reader on a quick ride through the Parks consenting journey and demonstrates two local authorities working together for a common goal.



11 December 2010 was the day that engines started revving, guns were loaded, and pedals were poised as the TECT All Terrain Park was officially opened. The TECT All Terrain Park is a 1640ha active outdoor playground and much more for the people of the western Bay of Plenty region and beyond. It is a joint project between Western Bay of Plenty District Council and Tauranga City Council and demonstrates how two neighbouring local authorities can work in partnership to provide a sub-regional resource. The opening signified a major step in bringing the vision into a reality.

The vision and key goals of the TECT All Terrain Park Project are as follows:

- To successfully establish and facilitate a regional destination that caters for a wide range of adventure and education activities in a managed sustainable way.

To enable parties to understand the future development of the Park, a Park Development (Structure) Plan was developed which provided further clarity. Specialist assessments were also carried out by Traffic Design Group and Design Acoustics to support the application.

- To develop a unique recreational venue that can position the sub-region nationally and internationally.
 - To showcase sustainable, energy efficient and low impact design, materials and techniques.
- In 2000, the Councils adopted a joint regional parks strategy which identified that there was a need to find a site to specifically cater for "noisy

activities" such as gun clubs that were being displaced by residential expansion. The strategy was further endorsed in 2004 in the sub-regional growth management strategy (SmartGrowth).

Finding a suitable site proved to be no easy task with everybody agreeing it was a good idea but nobody wanting it in their backyard. The solution came in 2004 when a 1236ha production forest came on the market. To satisfy the sales and purchase agreement resource consent had to be obtained within a strict time constraint. This meant that there could be no risk of consents being held up by protracted hearings or appeals. The project team consisted of Western Bay of Plenty District and Tauranga City Council staff and Jeff Hextall from Harrison Grierson.

The project team was charged with carrying out all actions to get the Park operational within tight budgetary constraints. This included the development of: a project plan; development

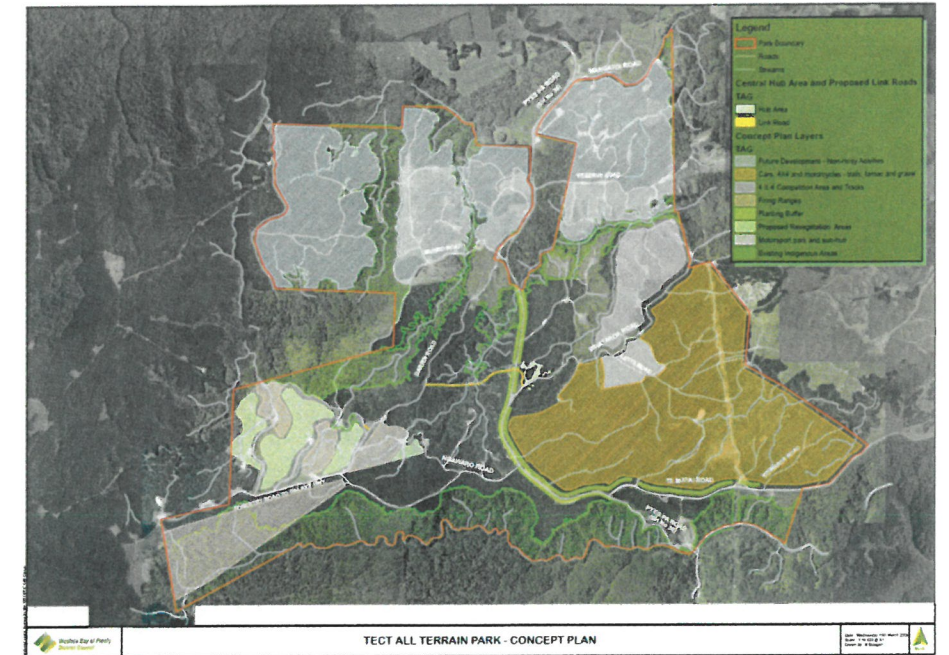
implementation plans including user group management plan templates, operational policy requirements, a long term development plan; land management plans, economic assessments, risk management plan and an OSH Plan; obtaining necessary resource consents; and a marketing and communications plan.

The Park development process also had to plan and factor in the continuing use of large areas for production forestry until milling rights expired and to provide for on-going forestry production in parts of the Park; raising fundamental issues in regard to potential timing of development and the potential of conflict between forestry operations and Park use.

The consenting issues were made more complex by the Park still effectively only being a concept. Although 35 user groups had expressed interest in relocating or establishing at such a site the specifics of what activities and where were still to be determined. This made discussing issues regarding effects and consent challenging. Accordingly the resource consent application and ensuing consent had to be developed in such a way as to provide enough certainty to all parties as to what the effects of the proposal would be while providing enough flexibility to provide for a wide range of potential activities and users, not all of which were known.

This difficulty was overcome by developing a comprehensive set of conditions which effectively provided the resource management parameters for the Park. To enable parties to understand the future development of the Park, a Park Development (Structure) Plan was developed which provided further clarity. Specialist assessments were also carried out by Traffic Design Group and Design Acoustics to support the application. In regard to the latter the acoustic assessment was peer reviewed by Hegley Acoustic Consultants Limited and a composite noise rating (CNR) methodology was developed to specifically address gunshot noise.

The process was helped by potentially affected parties being relatively few and location of the



proposed Park within an established production forest. The few property owners in the area were supportive including the Department of Conservation whose estate adjoined significant parts of the proposed Park. The biggest difficulty was getting the then Transit New Zealand (TNZ) on board. The Park is bisected by State Highway 36 and TNZ was concerned about potential adverse effects on the state highway. This presented a significant roadblock to obtaining consent for the Park within the timeframe.

The fundamental issue was one of approach

to addressing potential adverse effects. TNZ and Council consents staff sought certainty in regard to knowing what activities were to be established and associated traffic movements and hence effects on the State highway and others. As the Parks development was still very much at a concept level it was not possible to provide this information. The counter argument was that there were established standards for intersection design and the like and effects could be controlled by linking the ability to use various accesses to the Park by ensuring that the infrastructure standard was consistent with



Dignitaries at the opening ceremony



Local rally drivers test out the circuit in the park

these requirements. Whether or not the actual activity being established was for mountain biking, shooting or other activity wasn't material to the actual effect on the state highway, the real issue was the effect on the capacity and functioning of an intersection, for example. Accordingly performance based conditions were proposed.

To address the concerns of TNZ, conditions were developed linking the ability to use the Park with the development of an overall long term development plan, individual activity management plans and special event management plans, which ensured that the effects on the State highway would be addressed prior to any activity commencing. In addition specific road upgrade triggers, including monitoring provisions, were built into the consent. After extensive negotiation matters were resolved and the Park was granted resource consent by an Independent Commissioner in December 2004.

In 2007 an additional 381ha came on the market and the Councils purchased this land to both ensure that the land was not purchased by another party whose activities were not compatible with those of the Park, and to provide an improved park layout. Since the original consent there had already been changes in land uses in the area with production forestry conversion to dairy farming taking place.

The consenting process followed a similar path to the previous consent with some new land owners to resolve issues with, and TNZ again being 'interested' in the proposal. The additional land changed the focus of the Park so that the split on each side of the state highway was more even. With the new land the logical 'Park Central Hub' moved to the eastern side and the potential of a large scale activity divided by a state highway caused major concerns with Transit New Zealand. The solution was the creation of a dual lane underpass beneath the State highway which provided for the seamless integration of the Park without affecting the State highway. The previous requirements for long term development plan,

individual activity managements and special event management plans, and triggers for roading upgrades were updated. Resource consent for the new land area was granted by an Independent Commissioner in 2008.

With two major land use resource consents in place, plus numerous regional consents for earthworks and stormwater, the Park was at a stage where more comprehensive development planning could occur with greater certainty. The consent conditions and associated key infrastructure provided key parameters to the Parks development format.

Although the Park had all necessary major consents, having these as separate consents was not ideal and there was a general concern from potential user groups that the ability to fully utilise the Park may still be restricted by reverse sensitivity issues. By 2009 the Western Bay of Plenty District Council had embarked on the first review of the Western Bay of Plenty District Plan. This provided the opportunity to provide a consolidated planning framework for the Park in a cost efficient manner. Accordingly a specific All Terrain Park Zone was proposed to replace the previous Rural G Zone.

The All Terrain Park Zone combined the key elements of the previous resource consents and the New Zealand Transport Agency ("NZTA"), (as successor to TNZ), was a key player. A further round of consultation was undertaken and NZTA was the only party wishing to be heard in regard to the new zone at the Proposed District Plan hearings. Only minor tweaking of provisions was undertaken and eventually all matters with NZTA were resolved.

Specific objectives and policies were developed that provided the framework for the Zone, and



Underpass works and intersection upgrade

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rules and other methods evolved from the previous consents. The Zone provides both certainty to the Councils and other parties as to the effects that can be generated and the various triggers for additional works. A wide range of activities were provided for under an "umbrella definition" of "All Terrain Park activities". In addition, provisions had to be included to enable the existing rural activities to occur, principally forestry operations.

By being clearly identified in the District Planning Maps the location of the Park is effectively "put in lights" to fully inform people of the Parks location and to further avoid incompatible activities such as rural life stylers seeking peace and quiet being established in the area.

In addition to the consenting and project team roles Harrison Grierson staff worked with the Council providing engineering infrastructure assessments, including provision for new roads and intersections, landscape concepts, surveying services and contract management. This enabled a comprehensive approach to the Park's development and ensured a strong link between concept, policy and actual physical works.

The Park concept continues to evolve and key to the continuing involvement has been the development of sustainability concepts, educational roles, iwi involvement in celebrating and acknowledging the historic and contemporary importance of the area to local Maori, and increasing numbers of user groups wanting to be part of the Park's development.

The Park now has a full time Park Manager, an on-site Park Ranger and a central hub site including an Arrival Centre. User groups are using and further developing their areas for individual activities with current regular activities including mountain biking, walking, equestrian, and motor cycling. The motor sport, four wheel drive and shooting facilities are currently being developed.

The success in establishing the Park has been a result of a number of factors. Key factors included a strong political will and support behind the Park; significant external funding from particularly the Tauranga Energy Community Trust (TECT) (\$3.5 million); a strong partnership between Western Bay of Plenty District and Tauranga City Councils; good site selection; a supportive community; pressure and commitment from user groups; and a strong project team.

Overall, it has been an example of progressive community oriented thinking with key components and outcomes being:

- A tangible result for the Joint Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council Policy on Subregional Parks (adopted 2000).
- The beginning of a partnership that defines the Councils' commitment to open space, recreation and protection of landscapes and cultural features on a subregional scale
- The creation of a connection between City and Rural Communities

From a concept to reality, a few resource consents later and a new zone with one short hearing, it hasn't so much been a walk in the Park, but a rather interesting drive. ■

For further information on the TECT All Terrain Park visit:

www.westernbay.govt.nz/Major-Projects/TECT-ALL-Terrain-Park/

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