

Quiet Sky celebrates progress on helipads

The rapid proliferation of helipads on Waiheke Island over the past decade has long been a concern for many residents. With more than 50 helipads, the island has roughly same number as Busan, South Korea, a city of 3.4 million people that ranks third in the world for helipad numbers according to international non-governmental organisation the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat. Community lobby group Quiet Sky Waiheke was formed in 2021 to push for tighter regulation of helipads, greater consideration of the cumulative noise impact of helicopter operations in the consent process to approve new helipads and to address potential safety issues as Waiheke's airspace grew more crowded.

It's been a long and often frustrating effort, but Quiet Sky spokesman Kim Whitaker says the group is finally seeing the seeds of real progress. Auckland Council's planning strategy team are signalling potential District Plan changes which will address the group's concerns, maybe by as soon as the end of the year, a new Helicopter Practice and Guidance note was recently released by the council, and an amendment to the Civil Aviation Bill that would grant the Minister of Transport greater powers to regulate the effect of aviation activities on people is progressing through Parliament. "[This is] the fruit of a sustained campaign by Quiet Sky Waiheke, solid work by the Waiheke Local Board, councillor Pippa Coom and MP Chlöe Swarbrick and significant media coverage both locally and nationally," Kim says.

One of Quiet Sky's biggest disappointments has been how council planners have handled helipad resource consent applications. "They have failed to consult with the CAA over the safety and feasibility of flight paths, failed to adequately consider noise effects beyond the limit that defines the activity status... and failed to consult with the Department of Conservation over



Waiheke has as many helipads as Busan, Korea.

impacts on marine reserves, biodiversity focus areas and scheduled significant ecological areas," Kim says.

But in a recent opinion piece published on the council's Our Auckland website, council chief planning officer chief of strategy Megan Tyler acknowledged the community's concerns and wrote the council was working with the Civil Aviation Authority to gather and analyse flight data from Waiheke and other Hauraki Gulf Islands. Once this is done, the council's Planning Committee will use that information to consider options for the future - including a change to the Auckland Council District Plan (Hauraki Gulf Islands Section). "This will likely be towards the end of the year, when our planners have completed the bulk of their work on the government's National Policy Statement on Urban Development... which must be our planning department's primary focus at the moment because it is a legislative requirement to implement this work within the Government's given timeframes."

In the meantime, Tyler says council staff met with Quiet Skies and reviewed its resource consent rules, leading to an updated Helicopter Practice and Guidance Note to guide officers processing applications.

Kim says Quiet Sky would still like to see

a firmer commitment to complying with the Ministry of Environment's National Planning Standard 15, which specifically rules out averaging noise effects from helicopters over a period of time - a practice which reduces the apparent impact of a helipad on paper. But the group is pleased to see considerations and rules they've consistently pointed out should be applied to helipad consent applications, but council planners have dismissed as irrelevant, are now being included in consideration under the new guidance note.

"Quiet Sky Waiheke are of the opinion that if this practice note had been available during processing of the recent Oneroa Bay and Te Matuku Bay consents... that the consents would likely not have been granted."

Kim says the rules themselves have not actually changed so Quiet Sky believes it's likely other helipad applications on Waiheke were incorrectly granted. "We are researching options for redressing these past errors, whilst being hopeful that the planners will self-correct for future [helipad] applications." • Paul Mitchell

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Public consultation is key to exporting Auckland parking strategy to Waiheke

The Waiheke Local Board supports Auckland Council's Draft Parking Strategy in principle but doesn't want it implemented on the island without agreement between WLB and Auckland Transport.

Auckland Transport's draft plan aims to remove roadside car parking from several Auckland streets and replace it with bike lanes and priority passage for public transport.

The plan's broader aim is to lower carbon emissions across the AT network, which includes Waiheke, with an end goal of more sustainable transport options.

At its July 22 board meeting, WLB stressed that while it supported the strategy which, in its view, would be "an effective lever in supporting mode shift to mitigate climate change," the plan should not be implemented on Waiheke without agreement between WLB and Auckland Transport.

In the past week, the vote to adopt the plan has been delayed until after the local board and mayoral elections in October - with a decision most likely in February 2023.

The draft plan has met with opposition from several groups, with the bulk of over 900 submissions, which included several business owners across Auckland, stating they were opposed to the removal of car parking in favour of cycle lanes and busways. Auckland Council's planning committee, headed by Cr Chris Darby, voted 13 to 10 in favour of a revised town parking plan. Darby has said he wants

AT to seek further consultation with the Independent Maori Statutory Board which oversees Mana Whenua interests at the council.

According to the minutes of 22 July, consultation and engagement with the Waiheke community over infrastructure changes are paramount. The board requested that any changes to Waiheke's on-street parking provisions must not exclude the opinion of residents and local businesses impacted by those changes.

Any kerbside removal, mooted to be on the main arterial roads from Matiatia to Onetangi, must be subject to a memorandum of understanding between WLB and AT.

Recommendations, as they relate to Waiheke's Be Accessible Plan (2018) state the WLB favours making mobility parks at "transport and retail locations a high priority for retention and extension where required".

The WLB would also like to see parking revenue generated on the island, reinvested locally "in alignment with Waiheke's 10-year Transport Plan and local parking infrastructure".

WLB Chair Cath Handley was asked whether the WLB and other local boards had put the vote in the too-hard basket by delaying it until after the elections. Handley said from the WLB's perspective "there was simply insufficient public

feedback from Waiheke locals to justify any sort of conclusion to be drawn about the Waiheke response".

When asked if the WLB thought putting cycleways on Waiheke was practical given the narrow arterial roads of the motu, Handley said in her personal view it was. "In many instances, but not all." She added: "We must ensure maximum safety for those who chose to cycle or walk. There are other ways to make roads safer for cyclists and drivers; for example,

by providing alternative cycling routes, slowing speeds, sharing tight spaces with the right signage and markings and so on."

The WLB supports mobility parks at transport and retail locations, saying they "must be considered a high priority for retention and extension where

required"

When asked how mobility parks could be retained under the plan, to allow those with mobility issues to go shopping in places like Oneroa, Handley says operational decisions are made by AT and the board only "highlights the things that we believe matter to residents".

"AT transport design teams come back to boards with proposed solutions and AT consults publicly about those. The issues we've highlighted for those with mobility issues have also been highlighted in other areas across the city." • Jim Birchall

"We must ensure maximum safety for those who chose to cycle or walk."
- Cath Handley

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