

Auckland City Council Best Practice Example II

Plan Modification 7 – Mt Wellington Quarry

Source of further information

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Description of Best Practice Example

Plan Modification 7 – Mt Wellington Quarry was lodged with the Auckland City Council as a private plan change request in April 1998. The documents, prepared by Brierley Investments Ltd and Fletcher Properties Limited (“the Joint Venture”), proposed a new zoning regime over the Mt Wellington Quarry which was then zoned in the Auckland City District Plan Isthmus Section as Business 7. This existing zoning was specifically designed for quarrying and quarry-related activities. The proposed new zoning provided primarily for light commercial and retail activity with an intensive retail core and some provision for residential activity.

In dealing with this matter, the Council assigned a number of senior planning staff to assist the Joint Venture (including its consultants and other advisers). While not formally convened as a dedicated team, these Council officers undertook joint studies, data collection and consultation leading to the preparation of the private plan change request.

Method

The Council identified at an early stage that the future sustainable use and development of the nearly-depleted quarry was a critical resource management matter for the City. With an area of 110 hectares, the quarry site offered significant potential for re-habilitation for urban activities. Accordingly, a conscious decision was made to support the efforts of the Joint Venture in terms of administrative and organisational resources being made available.

To this end, the managers of relevant Council groups, such as Traffic and Roading, Stormwater and City Planning, were asked to provide staff contacts. These staff contacts would be involved and would make a contribution to the progress of the plan change. Time spent on the project was to be recovered from the Joint Venture.

By establishing an informal but carefully managed programme of technical and administrative input, the Council was committed to a mutually rewarding outcome. Further, the Council perceived public benefits arising in terms of a revised zoning regime that would provide for urban revitalisation and renewal. Importantly, the Council made its commitment to the project in order to achieve its goal that the correct procedures, in terms of the Act, would be followed.

In this way, a hugely complex, costly and potentially unresolvable planning exercise was successfully prosecuted. The merits of this collaborative approach were in the successful completion and lodgement of comprehensive documentation setting out the Joint Venture ambitions for its land holding.

Lessons Learned

Notwithstanding the close co-operation and working relationship established between the Council and the Joint Venture, some difficulties arose. These difficulties were encountered through the process

itself. However, even after the decision of the Council was released, further matters of concern arose. A feeling of frustration was experienced by the Joint Venture, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout the process, and this was heightened when the Council ultimately declined the plan change request.

The difficulties that arose were of a technical, economic and political nature. They arose out of insufficient communication, misunderstandings and misconceptions. Most, if not all, could have been avoided.

Territorial authorities are charged with a range of tasks pursuant to the provisions of the Resource Management Act 1991. These tasks range in nature from technical, administrative, governance and fiscal. All need to be carefully formulated, applied and concluded.

Before entering into an alliance such as that established for this project, all participants must be clear as to the outcomes they expect and to which their efforts are directed. Even though the Council committed resources to the project, there could be no expectation by the Joint Venture that the plan change would ultimately be accepted. This prospect needed to be clearly tabled at the outset.

The establishment of a Council "project control group" should be formalised. This will immediately impose project management disciplines on the activities and actions of members of a study team. Group and team responsibilities can be identified and allocated, programmes can be established and costs can be agreed, recorded and monitored.

Where projects have significant economic imperatives, all participants must be familiar with the nature of such imperatives so that the implications of delay, inadequate research and delivery and procurement processes can be understood.

While there was co-operation between the Council officers and the Joint Venture, the impartial position of the Council, as decision maker, remained unaffected and unaltered. Nothing else was possible or proper in the circumstances. The regrettable result of this position was that the Joint Venture was surprised when the plan change request was declined by the Council. The Joint Venture felt that approval was explicit in the level of co-operation between the Council and the Joint Venture.

Benefits

Real benefits emerged from this exercise. The proponents of the plan change had the careful and dedicated attention and input of the Council when it was required. In this way, many issues were resolved.

As a result, comprehensive plan change documentation was able to be prepared and lodged with the Council. While this did not eliminate further information requests, such requests were generally limited in scope and modest in implication.

Costs

Any such collaborative approach incurs costs. These costs comprise the overall costs of governance as well as specific costs incurred by the particular exercise itself. The recovery of these costs is sanctioned by the Act.