

## **BRIEFING TO THE WCC – 30 SEPTEMBER 2009**

Good afternoon your Worship and members of Council

On behalf of the Whenuapai Airbase Action Group, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon on this important subject. We represent the 1400 members of WAAG and support the views of all of those 2566 members of the public who made submissions opposing Plan Change 22, (97% of all submissions received).

It would be fair to say that we represent the views of most of the residents of Whenuapai and Herald Island. We also represent the views of those many thousands of residents of Greenhithe, and most suburbs of the North Shore who expressed their opposition to Plan Change 22 in removing the old North Shore City Council at the last local body elections. (It will be remembered that the previous Council supported PC22.)

Existing residents have now faced 7 years of uncertainty, 7 years of concern at the effects of an airport at Whenuapai on their lives, 7 years of wondering whether they should move house, 7 years of worry about noise and pollution which are the inevitable effects when an airport is created near housing, 7 years of having the house shake and the TV drowned out when an aircraft flies overhead and worrying about how much worse that would be if a commercial airport were to be established, 7 years of trying to find the money to fight this plan change, and that has been a challenge in itself. Many of our members are pensioners whose financial means are very limited and yet even they have contributed to our cause – such is their concern.

Your Mayor believes that Whenuapai is an important piece of infrastructure for Waitakere. We totally agree with him - Whenuapai Airbase is an important and necessary piece of **Defence** Infrastructure. However, it simply cannot be sustainable management to allow this infrastructure to be used for commercial airport purposes given its proximity to current and future residential development. WAAG has constantly made this point – it is in the wrong place for a commercial airport.

When Whenuapai was built, it was in the middle of farmland. I flew with the RNZAF from both Whenuapai and Hobsonville in the early 1960's in Bristol Freighters. (Some of you may remember them.) The farmland extended all the way to the East Coast - the area now under the approach to the main runway. Look at it now; there is housing underneath the entire approach into Whenuapai. Is this really a suitable place to build a commercial airport? Would it be built there today if one was considering building a new airport? The answer to both of those questions quite clearly is – **no**. A study of new airport development around the world will establish that modern thinking dictates that airports and communities do not mix. Recently built airports have been located away from residential areas – Osaka, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Hong Kong to some extent – even Singapore has, within the tight restrictions on available land, endeavoured to place its runways so that most of the approaches are over the sea. Even in London, Boris Johnson has made a very serious suggestion that studies be carried out investigate the feasibility of closing Heathrow and building a new airport in the Thames estuary due to the noise from aircraft landing at Heathrow..

Plan Change 22's genesis was the previous Government's 2002 decision to consolidate the RNZAF at Ohakea within four years. Your city, quite understandably, was concerned at the inevitable effect of their departure on the local economy. As we all know, however,

that decision made 7 years ago no longer has any relevance today. A change of Government has seen the whole issue reconsidered and the Defence Force remaining at Whenuapai at least until 2020 or probably even longer given the proposed investment of \$60 million to be spent in upgrading the Airbase. It is therefore no longer necessary to consider loss of income to your city – the main reason for Plan Change 22 has gone. In fact your Mayor expressed his great pleasure in the press when the decision was made that the Defence Force were remaining at Whenuapai and welcomed the news as being great for your city.

Given the clear, unambiguous Government position on Whenuapai Airbase that joint commercial air services will not be considered at Whenuapai, it cannot be right for the Council to continue to proceed with PC22. The Officers' report states that the WASA has three primary features:

- Existing defence activities are recognised and given priority.
- Provision is made to develop and use the Airbase for airport-related activities other than defence activities.
- Existing noise contours are retained.

The first feature is simply unnecessary from a planning and a legal perspective. NZDF activities are recognised by the existing NZDF designation and have absolute priority. Plan Change 22 adds nothing to the current planning regime in this regard.

The second feature (and primary purpose of the Plan Change 22) has been rendered redundant by the Cabinet decision for the NZDF to stay, to heavily invest in upgrading Whenuapai Airbase and to rule out commercial air services operating at the Airbase. Contrary to the assertion made in the Officers' report, non-residential activities are enabled under the current Countryside Environment Zone as discretionary activities, a point acknowledged in Plan Change 22 documentation. This status quo is maintained by PC22 in the absence of an operating commercial airport. These opinions come from our legal representatives.

Noise contours are difficult to understand and are great things for planners, but they do not reflect the reality of the situation. They average out noise to the benefit of the airport operator. If you look at the noise profiles you will see that Greenhithe is outside them. Ask any Greenhithe resident and they will tell you that the noise from a passing aircraft is horrendous. It shakes the house and makes conversation impossible. The same applies to a lesser extent to all housing under the flight path from the east coast onwards. Yet, noise experts will tell you that these houses are not in a noise boundary area. How can this be so? The answer is in the method of noise assessment. The Principal of the Upper Harbour Primary School told me some time ago that when an aircraft flies overhead on approach, all teaching has to cease until it has passed.

If PC22 were to come into effect and a commercial airport ever established at Whenuapai, the fact that the existing noise contours will be retained provides no comfort to residents. The reality is that NZDF do not use the full extent of the "noise bucket" currently enabled by the District Plan and are unlikely to do so in the future. The addition of commercial air services to the full extent permitted by the noise contours **would** result in a great increase in noise over and above what is currently experienced by residents from noise sensitive activities on and around the flight paths.

We also note that your officers comment that to continue with the Plan Change carries the potential to antagonise the Government in a manner that it impinges on other decisions the Council may be hoping to influence before it goes out of existence. Very sage advice – particularly when it is coming from an ardent supporter of Plan Change 22!

In pursuing Plan Change 22, your Council is inflicting unnecessary worry and uncertainty into the lives of many tens of thousands of people, many of whom are not even in your city. Is this really what you as Councillors feel is reasonable? We know that some of you feel that a change of Government could see the situation change back to the Defence Force leaving, but may I suggest that even if there was to be a change of Government, by that time it would be neither practical nor sensible to reverse the operational decisions. Here, I would like to refer you to page 5 paragraph 19, headed 'Operational Implications of Remaining at Whenuapai', of the 'Cabinet External Relations and Defence Committee' paper provided in your agenda material. The seven reasons for Defence remaining at Whenuapai are very compelling, regardless of which Government is in power. I have copied the paragraphs below for your convenience.

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19. There have always been risks with consolidating all the RNZAF's operational Activities at Ohakea. Retention of Whenuapai would avoid these risks. Key advantages include:

- The risks to light safety from operating the Air Force's mixed fleet from one location would be reduced. Under consolidation this risk was considered high, potentially forcing the relocation of flying training from Ohakea to Woodburne.
- Greater coherence with the Navy would result as maritime capabilities (Sea Sprite helicopters and P-3K Orions) would be essentially co-located. To a lesser degree the same applies to co-operation with the NZ SAS at Papakura.
- Greater long-term flexibility would result as air capabilities are developed and obsolescent capabilities are replaced. Reduced reliance on one congested base and its vulnerability to such threats as natural disasters, adverse weather conditions, breaches of physical security, or sudden closure due to an accident or malfunction.
- Having two operational bases is preferable to one congested base which would limit opportunities for exercising and training with international partners in New Zealand.
- There will be continued high visibility in the wider Auckland region (containing nearly a third of the country's population), with correlating advantages of recruitment, retention and public perception of the Air Force.
- There should be greater opportunities for greater shared services of facilities between Defence units in the Auckland region, or with wider whole-of-government interests short of large-scale commercial ventures at both Whenuapai and Ohakea.
- There would be a continued civil defence presence in the most populated area of New Zealand.

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Finally, I would like to turn to finance. The Western Leader recently reported that the WCC had currently spent \$517000 on Plan Change 22. I understand from the reporter that this figure was obtained under the OIA. WAAG was shocked by this figure! When the costs of all the other parties are also considered, some of them public bodies whose funding comes from the taxpayer, the total cost to all parties to date must well exceed \$1m dollars.

It amazes us that your Council officers quotes this expenditure as a disadvantage for withdrawing the plan change in your briefing paper because it, and I quote, ‘abandons a *course of action that Council has made an investment in and is at an advanced stage*’. It seems to us that this is throwing good money after bad. The situation has changed as a result of the Cabinet decision on Whenuapai Airbase and the basis and purpose of Plan Change 22 no longer exists. Investment in the process to date is not a reason for continuing with a plan change that has no foundation. Hearing costs and appeal costs will be significant and to what purpose, when the Government has made is manifestly clear that an airport will not eventuate? It would be a gross waste of taxpayers’ money.

The Whenuapai Airbase Action Group does not want to spend more money or inflict further cost on Waitakere ratepayers, but we are committed to opposing Plan Change 22 if you vote to continue with it. We do not want to, but we would have no other option.

Before finishing, I would like to emphasise that WAAG has no problem whatsoever with the RNZAF. All of us knew that they were there when we built or bought our houses and we recognise the valuable work that they do in our community – even if they do arrive back occasionally at night. What we do object to is the unnecessary intrusion into our lives by a new commercial airport that is neither wanted nor warranted.

Thank you for your patience in listening to me. I urge you all to adopt Recommendation 2(b) Agree that proposed Plan Change 22 – Whenuapai Special Area be withdrawn.

It is time that this matter was brought to a close and certainty was given to residents.

Thank you and I look forward to listening to your deliberations tonight.

Russell Stewart  
President  
Whenuapai Airbase Action Group Inc

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### **Joint use of Whenuapai**

31. Under the previous Government, Defence officials engaged Waitakere City Council (WCC) and its business partner Infratil regarding their proposal for full commercial joint civil-military use of Whenuapai. This revealed that it would take five years to work through the resource consent and civil aviation licensing issues before any scheduled air services could commence, and there was no guarantee that at the end of the process the WCC business case would stack up. There was also strong opposition to the WCC proposal throughout the region and no guarantee that consent would be obtained.

32. Work by consultants Beca Carter Hollings and Ferner on the likely investment needed to comply with resource consent demands and Civil Aviation licensing requirements suggested that significant changes to the Whenuapai Master Plan would be required and that the total cost would be considerable. Further, the frequency of civil flights in order to make the venture viable would interfere with military operations.

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