

11. BRIGHTON PIER PROPOSED TOURIST HELICOPTER OPERATION

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Corporate Plan Output: Policy and Advice	

The purpose of this report is to present a request from Skyview Helicopters to operate a tourist helicopter from the seaward end of the Christchurch Pier. The proposal will be considered by the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board with their recommendation being forwarded to the Parks Committee.

BACKGROUND

The concept of operating a tourist helicopter from the end of the New Brighton Pier was considered by the Council through the Community Board/Parks and Recreation Committee in August 1998. The Council declined that application.

The following information has been received from Robin McCarthy of Skyview Helicopters, outlining a similar tourist helicopter proposal:

“Background Detail

A similar proposal in principle was put to the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board on 3 August 1998.

*The Board resolved to recommend “...to the Parks and Recreation Committee that the Pier liaison teams views be taken into account, and that the helicopter operator be advised that this activity does not fit in with **current** pier or residential activities.”*

On 12 August 1998 the Parks and Recreation Committee considered the proposal and concurred with the views of the Pier Liaison Team. The Committee’s recommendation was adopted by the Council on 31 August 1998.

Proposal, Incorporating Changes

Whereas the original proposal sought to operate a 4 x passenger seat turbine helicopter, this new proposal is to operate a 2 x passenger seat Hughes 300 helicopter (appendix 1, will be tabled).

Scenic flights of approximately eight minutes duration will be conducted over the City centre. Descent approaches and climbing departures (to 1,000 feet) will be made offshore (see appendix 2, will be tabled) thus avoiding residential areas. Daily variation in flightpaths will also be adopted.

The New Brighton Aerial Training Area is a long established designated airspace whose Western boundary runs along the Coastline. The area commences at 1,000 feet above the shoreline and extends out to sea. It is used on a daily basis by all the local flight training operators. The effect of the proposal would be no different to that of an aircraft (aeroplane or helicopter) transiting to and from the training area.

Proposed hours of operation will be from 1300 hours to 1700 hours Tuesday to Sunday inclusive (weather permitting). No operations will take place on Mondays.

Additional Infrastructure

Again it is proposed that a circular raised platform consisting of four equal and easily removed pieces (fitted with small wheels) will be put in place. It will be erected just prior to the commencement of each day's operations then dismantled and removed on the completion of the day's activities. A surrounding net of trampoline grade material will be placed around the platform extending to the Pier terminus rail. It will also be removed at the conclusion of each day's operations (appendices 3 & 4, will be tabled).

Access to the raised platform will be controlled by the proposer, by way of a rope barrier strung across the entrance to the circular Pier terminus. No restriction to any other part of the Pier will be required in order to comply with Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) safety requirements.

Changes to the Pier over the past 12 months

The Pier and its surrounding infrastructure has now been completed. The library is up and running with double glazing "noise" protection. The distance from the proposed operating position to the library is 330 metres.

Noise

The area surrounding the library is subjected to the noise of the sea with waves breaking continuously between the High and Low tide marks. Attenuation (lessening) of any helicopter noise naturally occurs due to the permanent wave generated noise.

Furthermore a busy road runs along the entire length of the South Western side of the library. Car parks exist at both the South Eastern and North Western ends of the library where vehicles continually come and go.

The whole surround of the library is designed for maximum people movement. The applicant has rested in the library and has not discerned any external noise.

The noise generated by the Hughes 300 helicopter some 330 metres distant is insignificant when considered in the context of both the library's location and other background noise.

Pier Users

The two predominant activities currently taking place at the Pier's circular terminus are fishing and sightseeing.

Fishing takes place at any time of the day along its entire length with a concentration near to and at the end of its terminus. The proposal will not greatly impede on fishing activities as only the circular terminus will be inaccessible for a limited period of time on any one day and then not every day due to weather conditions precluding flying activities.

Likewise sightseeing will continue to take place and will be enhanced by the operation. Not only will people still be able to walk 320 metres of the 330 metre Pier, they will also have a choice to enhance their sightseeing by taking a unique helicopter scenic flight.

Financial

The proposer recognises that it will be using a man made facility thus affording it an opportunity it would not otherwise have had. Balanced against that argument is a will, to incur a substantial financial risk in bringing the proposal to fruition, thus further enhancing the Pier's (and New Brighton's) visitor attractions.

However, the proposer would make an annual financial contribution in the sum of \$3,000 towards the Pier's upkeep and enhancement.

Conclusions

The proposal presents as an opportunity to further enhance the Pier's attractiveness and boost the New Brighton economy.

Effects are acknowledged but have been considered and mitigated. The operation will take place well offshore and not from the immediate foreshore, as has been the case in the past with a larger turbine powered helicopter.

Flight paths have been designed to match those of either an aeroplane or helicopter passing to and from the New Brighton Training Area or operating within the Training Area itself.

The proposal warrants a 12 month trial period. The positive effects outweigh any real adverse concerns."

WHY IS THE COUNCIL CONSIDERING THIS MATTER AGAIN

Given that the Council considered a similar proposal from Mr McCarthy in 1998, the question will be asked as to why this matter is back on the Council's agenda.

The proposal is clearly different from two aspects:

1. The helicopter is a smaller (less noisy?) machine.
2. The "new" Council has the prerogative to reconsider the issues.

LEGAL ISSUES

The Pier is owned by the Christchurch City Council with the seaside end being out of the Christchurch metropolitan limits, above the seabed which is controlled by the Crown. The Council clearly maintains the responsibility to allow/limit activities along the length of the Pier outside the city boundary. This could include licensing of the proposed helicopter operation if the Council found such an activity to be appropriate.

OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Since the opening of the Pier, a number of Units of the Council have assumed responsibilities for various aspects of its operation. To co-ordinate these activities a Pier Liaison Group has been set up which includes officers of the Council and members of the local community.

The Pier Liaison Team meets monthly and at its 16 July 1999 meeting members were advised that an application was likely to be received by the Council for the operation of a helicopter from the end of the Pier. The team briefly discussed the matter and were unanimous in their view that this would be a totally inappropriate venture to be operated from the Pier and that it would be to the detriment of Pier visitors (including fishermen and tourists), users of the Public Library and surfers/windsurfers who recreate in the vicinity of the Pier and seawards.

The Chairperson of the Pier Liaison Team, Mr Peter Francis, the Council's Community Advocate for this area, further advised that the beach helicopter trials of some years ago created significant concern and complaints from the local community.

GENERAL COMMENT ON THE PROPOSAL

1. The proposed hours of operation are 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm Tuesday to Sunday. This would compromise the busy weekend period when up to 2,000 people enjoy recreation on the Pier.
2. The proposal puts the seaward "bulb" end of the Pier out of bounds for tourists and fishermen during the proposed hours of operation.
3. The bulb end of the Pier is the favoured fishing spot and accordingly the proposal would severely compromise the use of the Pier for fishing purposes and the comfort of the fishermen. Furthermore, tourists will feel "cheated" in that they cannot walk the total length of the Pier, unless of course they are very short and can walk under the platform.
4. The proposal advises that whilst there would be restrictions for public access to the bulb end of the Pier, Civil Aviation Authority requirements would place no restriction on the rest of the Pier. Whilst that may be the case, the risk of accident, including unauthorised access onto or under the platform and the unlikely risk of a take off or landing accident must significantly impact on the Council's responsibilities in terms of health and safety for the general public.

5. The proposal comments that the library has double glazing which is confirmed. However, the soon to be leased ground and first floor tenancies in the remainder of the building, shortly to be leased for hospitality type activities, do not have double glazing. Accordingly, given the prevailing easterly wind, there is likely to be a significant noise impact on those elements of the building plus the surrounding environment, including the Pier.
6. The effect of the down draft from the helicopter blades on take off and landing is likely to be significant on windsurfers, swimmers and board riders using the sea around the end of the Pier.
7. Recreational kite flyers are likely to cause a hazard.
8. If the Council did decide to proceed with this type of initiative, it would be usual for such a commercial opportunity to be offered by public tender.
9. If the Council was of a mind to proceed with a commercial proposal of this type, the Council should first obtain comment from the Pier and Foreshore Society who made a significant financial contribution in the building of the Pier. Comment should also be obtained from Pier users and the local community.

CONCLUSIONS

Given that this proposal has been presented previously albeit in a slightly different form, officers can only reiterate that the significant social disbenefit to the community in general and to the Pier users in particular from a tourist helicopter operating from the end of the Pier outweighs the modest financial benefit of \$3,000 per annum which has been offered.

Recommendation: That the application from Skyview Helicopters to operate a helicopter from the end of the Brighton Pier be declined.

Chairperson's

Recommendation: That the Board strongly oppose the operation of helicopters from New Brighton Pier and beach.