

6927

AIR FORCE MUSEUM

of New Zealand

Air Force Museum of New Zealand: Submission in support of Christchurch City Council grant

Introduction

The Air Force has made a significant contribution to Christchurch and Canterbury society and to its economy. Christchurch is the birthplace of the Royal New Zealand Air Force and for more than seventy years its citizens benefited from the presence of the Air Force Base. The value of the Air Force to Christchurch was recognised more than fifty years ago when the Freedom of the City was conferred on RNZAF Base Wigram.

Although RNZAF Base Wigram closed in 1995, the Air Force Museum remains on the historic site and continues to afford economic, social and cultural benefits to Christchurch.

The Air Force Museum

While situated in Christchurch, the Museum is important as a national institution and one of the largest museums in New Zealand. In recognition of the stature and importance of the Museum, admission is now free. It is expected that in the next 12 months in excess of 60,000 people will visit the Museum.

The Air Force Museum is first and foremost a museum with the distinct ethical and social values inherent in such institutions, but it also operates as an attraction within the tourism sector and generates income through functions and events. It is an award winning organisation with several national and international awards, including Best Visitor Attraction in the New Zealand Tourism Awards. It is also an important memorial to all of New Zealand's military airmen and airwomen and attracts large numbers for its ANZAC Day services.

Christchurch – economy, society & culture

As a national institution based in Christchurch, the Museum plays an important economic, cultural and social role in the city. Since 2003 a Council representative has been appointed to the Trust Board in recognition of the importance of the relationship with Christchurch.

Direct contribution to the economy of the city is through annual expenditure of over \$1 million together with the wages and salaries of 27 staff, and the indirect spending of two major contractors. The Museum also contributes to the city finances by being an integral part of the tourism and visitor sector and particularly by being one of a suite of venues that allow the city to attract large, lucrative conferences and conventions.

The Museum is part of the Christchurch community. It has been a venue for Council run community events, such as the Antarctic Festival while long term planning for use of the site includes ongoing discussion with the city events team. With a site of some 37 hectares, the Museum, through the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) is a key stakeholder in the development of the South-West area of the city, and has been actively working with the Council on roading issues, boundary treatments and community access to the site.

The NZDF draft long term land management plan for Wigram includes cycle and walkways, soft boundaries and other mechanisms to ensure the best outcomes for the community as well as the Museum. The Museum enjoys a good working relationship with key neighbours including the Wigram Residents' Association and Ngai Tahu.

More than 4,000 school children a year, mostly from Christchurch schools, benefit from the Museum's curriculum based education programmes.

Re-development proposal

The current facilities available to the Museum are no longer adequate to provide for the needs of the collection, meet current museological standards, or to provide the level of visitor experience demanded of a modern museum.

In 2003 the Board commenced investigation and planning for a major extension to existing buildings which would meet all identified requirements. The concept was refined into a set of building plans by Architecture Warren and Mahoney.

The proposal provides for the relocation of existing sub-standard restoration facilities into a purpose designed publicly accessible workshop, and for a new gallery to display aircraft currently in open storage. A fully equipped education space and a new circulation spine are also planned to ensure full functionality for the new building. Once completed, the Museum will offer visitors an unrivalled opportunity to experience the conservation and restoration of museum objects at first hand. It will present the stories of New Zealand men and women in imaginative and innovative ways and in a context which links them to the development of the nation. A redeveloped memorial will also serve as a solemn reminder that the Air Force is a military service.

Relinquished space in existing hangars will be adapted to create improved storage for off-site collections.

As the first phase of redevelopment, and to demonstrate its commitment, the Board has invested \$640,000 in the redevelopment of the main history gallery which was opened in October 2008.

Feasibility

An independent feasibility study has shown the Museum can realistically expect an increase in visitor numbers of around 50% as a result of the development. The study also shows that the Museum can sustain the increased operating costs associated with such an expansion.

Unlike many other cultural institutions, the Museum has never sought Council funding for operating or capital costs. The Museum has secure long term operational funding and does not need to seek ongoing additional operating costs from other agencies.

Christchurch City Council support

Christchurch City Council involvement as a key stakeholder and as a strategic partner in the project is critically important. It has been established that substantial central government funding could be made available but this will be dependent upon the provision of support from local government and the community. A contribution from the City Council would also stimulate interest and support from corporate sponsors, philanthropic trusts, the international aeronautical community and from individuals.

The Museum Trust Board sincerely thanks the Christchurch City Council for its proposed commitment to the Air Force Museum of New Zealand and looks forward to working with Council to provide a facility that will be highly valued by the citizens of Christchurch.