



A sporting history and future: Working together in Waitara

Initiative: Waitara Community Development Project

Theme: Community Building

Waitara is a place of rich sporting history. In the last 120 years we have had 80 sports people represent New Zealand in their codes. We have also had New Zealand representative coaches in swimming, rugby league, wrestling, special Olympics and surfing! We are proud of our sporting history and culture and are determined to continue to grow this heritage into the future.

Waitara today continues to turn out accomplished New Zealand sports people but our community has been questioning whether we will continue to do this without improving the current level of facilities we offer our sports people.

Clifton Park is our primary sporting facility. It sits on Princess Street in Waitara opposite our High School. It is the home of the Waitara Bears Rugby League Team, Waitara Netball, a run-off venue for Waitara High School sports and houses a defunct bowling club. The space is a green, vast open space but with some very run down facilities.

For example, the Clifton Park netball courts are uncovered, under-sized and with run down facilities and unsafe practice spaces. The club currently operates without an indoor court large enough to meet safety requirements in terms of minimum recommended run-off areas and the outdoor courts at Clifton Park are below standard because of the trip hazards caused by the tilting of the underlying concrete slabs. On Wednesday afternoons Clifton Park is used for the Future Ferns competition where up to 160 netball players use the space. There are no change facilities and no toilets. Further to this, the competition is cancelled on average 3-4 times a years due to bad weather. Waitara is also home to three of the nine Taranaki Premier netball teams: Tysons, Raukura and Waitara High School A Team. All of our premier teams compete in New Plymouth and Stratford at indoor venues because Waitara does not have a venue appropriate for hosting. This means Waitara never gets a home game, and our supporters must always travel to a game. This effectively excludes some supporters. The same situation applies to the 13 other netball teams that currently train at Clifton Park but have to compete in New Plymouth due to our under-par facilities.

Netball is not alone in this struggle. The league grounds have no lighting and, while the club has recently had a resurgence in members, they are struggling to provide for the next generation of league competitors. The clubrooms are poorly located in relation to the main field and parking spaces, and the building is becoming dated which discourages players from staying for long after a match. Add to this a defunct bowling club rooms and grounds which was the target of significant recent vandalism and Clifton Park's proud history is a distant memory when considering its present condition and its use for the future prowess of Sports in Waitara.

And Clifton Park isn't the only problem.

Both athletics and Waitara Gym Sports are currently located at Pukekohe Domain. Here the grass isn't being mowed or tracks marked. Not surprisingly the numbers participating in athletics have dropped so significantly that the club now struggles to fund the regional sporting fees. For gym sports, the issues are also safety related. They squeeze 70 competitors into an old rugby gym that is not large enough. Their national level competitors don't have a vault run up of correct sizing and any run off either happens out the door onto the grass or into a wall. Needless to say, serious competitors can be easily lured elsewhere.

Other clubs, such as adult basketball, hockey and softball, have relocated to New Plymouth already, or all but stopped in Waitara for similar reasons.

In true Waitara spirit, this situation meant things could only get better! In October 2010 league, netball and Waitara High School sporting supporters came together with the Waitara Community Development Project to form 'The Clifton park Community Sports Group' (SPCSG). The purpose of this group is to working together to get better facilities and capacity building happening within the clubs. At the same time Waitara Gym Sports purchased the bowling club and had a feasibility study done on renovating it to become a \$2.2million dollar state of the art gym sport facility.

Both the Taranaki Electricity Trust (TET) and the TSB Community Trust (TSBCT) had awarded funding for the building purchase and feasibility study. However when it came to funding the \$2.2million required to build the rest of the facility, the question was raised by the funders about whether granting that level of money would have the most benefit to the wider community. As such, the funders jointly recommended Gym Sports and CPCSG start to work together with their support to progress joint plans for Sport in Waitara. This work began in June of 2011.

More partners joined the conversation and TSBCT, TET, Sport Taranaki and New Plymouth District Council agreed to work together with the Waitara community, including the CPCSG and Waitara Gym Sports, to consider what would be the best development of Clifton Park for all users. In December 2011 TSBCT, TET and the Council commissioned sport and recreation consultants, Global Leisure Group Limited, to prepare a plan for the future shared governance and development of facilities at Clifton Park. It was agreed with these stakeholders and the CPCSG that the primary purpose of a new facility at Clifton Park would be to increase community participation in regular sports activity and informal recreation (including pay as you play) and to enable residents to develop their skills and abilities. Clifton Park would also continue to be a neighbourhood park for the immediate residential population.

In March 2012, Global Leisure presented its discussion document with a recommended governance structure and facilities. We are now in June 2012 and, to date, we have a draft constitution which will be the governing body for Sports Central Waitara. We have Waitara's gym sports, rugby league, netball and athletics all signed up to be foundation clubs and basketball and the High School are not far behind. This has been ground breaking work in Waitara. In a town fierce with sporting rivalry, we are now seeing codes working together to achieve their goals.

We also have two funders, the Council and the Regional Sports Body, working together for the first time ever, to provide support, financial and otherwise to achieve stronger sports in Waitara with the proposal of a new multi-million dollar multi-sport facility at Clifton Park.

Our stakeholders have said they see the initiative as a ground up process that is a first for Waitara: "All stakeholders were at the starting line together, the usual model is someone doing a plan and going out to the community".

It hasn't all been easy. Challenges include balancing different interests and agendas, keeping options open, the significant time required and the pressure this way of working can place on volunteers and staff. The joint funding and selection process of consultants by TSBCT, Council and TET involved 'vigorous debate' and hard questions have been asked: stakeholders have asked 'when do we walk away from a project such as this, yet still ensure that it has the people skills and resources to succeed?'

So we have learnt a lot! Most of all, perhaps, the lesson is to start – you just have to learn to bite your tongue, listen and sit back a bit. Be prepared to change, to lose, to be challenged.

Clifton Park is viewed as an evolving project which will provide a valuable pilot and inform other approaches. The project will continue to build the capacity of local organisations and will produce some kind of multi-use facility. The process has been well documented and there are plans to evaluate the initiative further down the track. Measuring the value of collaboration will be one evaluation aim.

In short, this process has been a long journey! With many twists and turns along the way, we are making good progress and the future of sport in Waitara is certainly looking rosier.

Intent:

To support the sporting future of Waitara by improving local facilities in a collaborative and effective way.

Key Learnings:

- Try to identify all stakeholders, as it's easy to offend people inadvertently by not including them. And always be open to including others who show interest.
- Even the best laid plans don't always go according to plan, so being open and trying to let go of preconceived ideas helps allow the process to be flexible. This means innovations can be included and unpredictable collaborative processes don't derail the whole project.
- It's a tricky balance of tight and loose – somehow being persistent yet also challenging (and being challenged for) entrenched views for example. This is where the art of compromise comes in, and a sense of humour can be very useful!

- It's also an evolving situation - communicating well and giving clear messages is important, so is recognising that these messages may change.
- Knowing that a supportive team will take things further (if not faster at times), towards achieving the bigger picture - the outcomes sought.

Key Outcomes

- Relationships are stronger, despite (and maybe even because of) the vigorous debate we have shared. We know we have some shared vision for Waitara and that we each have roles to play in achieving that.
- All parties have learnt that funders and Councils are not just about providing money – they have other valuable resources such as administration, advice and all kinds of 'people support' from strategic thinking to connections and influence.
- Working together has been incredibly creative. In fact the strategic, high level partnering approach models the kind of collaboration many of those involved would like to see more of in the community.
- Council, TET and TSBCT are also looking at how to support capacity building of organisations and more sustainable organisations as a result of this project.

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