

Thames airfield development - funding of further investigations

TO	Thames Community Board
FROM	Sam Napia - Director Strategic Relationships and Projects
DATE	22 January 2018
SUBJECT	Thames airfield development - funding of further investigations

1 Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to seek the Board's support for a recommendation to the Thames-Coromandel District Council that the Council fund preliminary engineering investigations that will assess the suitability of the Thames airfield for development.

2 Background

The underlying zone of the subject area is Airfield, with an airfield designation. The airfield has hangars, aircraft fuelling facilities, clubrooms and other amenities. Tourism operators, clubs, recreational flyers, helicopters and commuter flights operators use the airfield. The airfield has the potential for expansion of the number of flights and the range of aviation-based activities.

In 2005, Airbiz was commissioned by the Thames-Coromandel District Council to develop a Master Plan (**Attachment A**) to provide the Council and the community with a way forward for development of the Thames airfield. The objective of the Master Plan was to develop planning options and provide land allocations in order to best maximise the value of return on the land.

The Master Plan report considered various development options under the following main headings:

- Residential / Air Park
- Light / Industrial / Retail / Commercial activities
- Recreational areas
- Motel / camping
- Chartered / scheduled services
- Temporary events
- Helicopter operations

The Thames Community Board resolved on the 6 March 2006 to receive the information and adopt plan 1A (**Attachment B**) as the development plan for the Thames Airfield.

The next step was to address the planning recommendations included in the report. On 12 March 2007, the Board resolved to make provision for the funding of a private plan change that would allow potential developers to construct hangars with living accommodation on site, and provide a broader range of activities related to the airfield.

Plan Change 2 and Variation 23, under the Operative District Plan, was approved by the Council at its meeting held on 24 June 2009.

This included an administrative plan change to address a number of matters and issues relating to the consistency, accuracy and user friendliness of the District Plan, and update provisions relating to the Thames Airfield (for example, removing the redundant runways and associated airfield height rule from the planning maps).

As part of the initial background work on the plan change, confirmation was sought that a number of possible development options and existing developments on the airfield site were permitted activities. A Certificate of Compliance (**Attachment C**) was granted on 26 August 2008 for the existing activities carried out on the site to provide certainty as to their compliance.

The plan change, however, did not address residential development and other commercial opportunities, and there were no submissions made to the District Plan review to progress development.

3 Issue

Subject to the support of the Community Board for the contemplated development options, Council funding is required to undertake the above described preliminary engineering investigations.

4 Discussion

In 2007, expressions of interest were sought for the management of the operations of the airfield; however, negotiations stalled as the current zoning precluded the ability to expand commercial aircraft maintenance business, together with the inclusion of hanger accommodation. In essence, the zoning prevented any potential manager investing in improvements to make a financial return.

The main use of the airfield is by locally owned aircraft, primarily for recreation; use of the runway for flying schools from out of Hamilton, Auckland and Tauranga, who use the strip for touch and go training; Skyworks Helicopters; and, a fuel supplier. Thames airfield is in a location to attract aviators from the greater Auckland and Waikato area, there is an opportunity for charter activities and scheduled flights of small aircraft in the near future. These activities are permitted under the District Plan Appeals version.

Requests have been received for residential accommodation associated with airfield activities, it is now considered timely to progress the Master Plan.

A land status report was prepared in January 2017 by Schwarz Consultancy, which provides the history of how the land was acquired and information if the Council was looking at declaring any of the parcels surplus, or revoking the reserve status.

In respect to Part Section 9, the report concludes that while the land is held for aerodrome purposes, it will not be possible to use the land for residential purposes, as this purpose is not compatible with the current reserve purpose assigned to this reserve. Additionally, if the Council decide to revoke the land intended for residential purposes, Council's title to the reserve land would revert to the Crown, due to the provisions contained in section 25(1) of the Reserves Act 1977, as Council's title to the reserve land had been derived from the Crown.

In July 2017, Brookfields reviewed the Schwarz report and concluded that residential activity intended for permanent use is outside the purpose of the designation over the airfield and is therefore subject to the rules of the underlying zone (airfield zone). Associating residential activity with airfield activities does not obviate the need to comply with the requirements of the designation, or the RMA. Therefore, to develop the airfield for residential purposes, an application for a non-complying activity, or a plan change, would be required which will necessitate public consultation.

The Thames airfield is held in three titles, of which two are subject to the Public Works Act 1981. The other, Part Section 9, is held for aerodrome purposes, in trust, subject to the Reserves Act 1977. This was the area identified in the Master Plan as being suitable for further development in association with the operation of the airfield.

If development in the manner now contemplated is to proceed, the first matter to determine is site suitability for building with particular reference to flooding, stormwater, and geotechnical issues. The indicative cost of this engineering investigation is \$30,000.

Thereafter, further investigations will be required, but only if the preliminary engineering investigation concludes that the site is suitable for development. These further investigations would include:

- The Kopu to Thames Structure Plan review;
- NZTA and legal access to the property from SH25 (currently the access is across the rail trail land, leased by the Hauraki District Council);
- Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) to be reviewed - Draft prepared in 2007. This should be done in conjunction with the Kopu Structure Plan transport study (Beca);
- Site survey and concept plan to be prepared (a review of Plan 1A);
- Consideration of other developments proposed within the area;
- Civil Aviation rules on airfield development;
- Planning matters.

5 Suggested resolution(s)

That the Thames Community Board:

1. Receives the 'Thames airfield development - funding of further investigations' report, dated 22 January 2018.
2. Recommends to the Thames-Coromandel District Council that the Council fund a budget of \$30,000 for preliminary engineering investigations in 2017/18 to assess the suitability of the Thames airfield for development, to be funded from Council District retained earnings.

References-Tabled/Agenda Attachments

Attachment A *Airbiz Master Planning Study - August 2005*

Attachment B *Thames Airfield Development Plan 1A*

Attachment C *Certificate of Compliance - August 2008*

Attachment A

Attachment A - Thames Aerodrome Master Planning Strategy - August 2005

Attachment B - Certificate of Compliance - August 2008

Attachment C - Thames Airfield development plan 1A