

# Keep Whangaparāoa's Green Spaces.

## Healthy Communities Need Space

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BEGINS

### Does the Gulf Harbour Country Club have the Wrong Owners?

Keep Whangaparāoa's Green Spaces Incorporated (KWGS) believe that for most of its life, the Gulf Harbour Country Club (GHCC) golf course has been owned by the wrong people; property developers rather than genuine golfing business interests. The manicured land, zoned open space and Encumbered for 999 years to remain as a golf course, has historically changed hands for prices at a fraction of what it would bring as residentially zoned blocks.

Unfortunately, this has enticed a string of opportunists who have purchased the golf course thinking they can convince Auckland Council to rezone the land and let them build houses on it. KWGS believe the latest saga is yet another example of this opportunistic behaviour. The modus operandi has been similar over the years; buy the golf course by offering a premium over its value as a golf course business, talk up impressive plans about its golfing future, but quietly let the business drift along, then start the narrative that the only hope for the golf course is some mix of property development and a reduced or compromised golf course. All that in the remote end of the Whangaparāoa Peninsular which is already beset with transport, roading and other infrastructure problems.

KWGS spokesperson Howard Baldwin says there has never been a better opportunity to break the cycle of property developer owners than now. "Gulf Harbour is booming with expansions to the Marina, and significant development on the already residential-zoned land, with scope for 1000 more dwellings taking place. KWGS is not opposed to on-going development where existing zoning permits. Golfing interests recognise this and KWGS has fielded several enquiries from parties interested in restoring the internationally acclaimed Robert Trent Jones course to its former glory as part of the original plan for Gulf Harbour. That plan was a unique master-designed, integrated community with the golf course and marina as anchor businesses."

Colin Wells (Golf Vacations NZ Ltd) says that Gulf Harbour Golf Course has been likened to California's Pebble Beach and promoted by Tourism New Zealand as one of New Zealand's marquee golf courses. It has attracted many international visitors, helping support the local economy. "With the recent opening of two world class golf courses at Te Arai the potential to grow Auckland as a premier golfing destination is unlimited. However, to lose the Gulf Harbour Course would be a travesty and severely impact on Auckland's potential to attract the visiting golfer."

KWGS believes that Auckland Council holds the key to the future of this cherished green space. They must uphold their commitment to the Gulf Harbour community made by Rodney District Council in January 1995 to protect the land and use it as a golf course later enshrined via the 999 year Encumbrance on the land finalised in 2006. Baldwin says, "Imagine if no Encumbrance or commitment by Council, existed, and you purchased a house with a view of, or access onto, the golf course and subsequently Council agreed with the owner to change the land use to residential. You might well be unhappy, but you went ahead with your purchase after legal due diligence with your eyes open to the possibility that things change. So be it."

"However, imagine a scenario where you bought your house knowing the council had committed to the Gulf Harbour master plan requiring use of the green space as a golf course, and entered into a 999-year Encumbrance protecting the land from development but subsequently approved a land use change. Having reduced the risk of your investment by relying on the Encumbrance, you would quite rightly feel devastated and betrayed by Council. In other words, the Council cannot enter into an Encumbrance like this and then treat it as a trivial thing that can easily be set aside without seriously damaging the financial position, aesthetics and quality of life for existing Gulf Harbour home-owners especially the 400 course-side houses - plus those properties further afield."

In 2021 the council made a commitment to KWGS as follows: "if the council receives a request to vary (or remove) the covenant from the golf course land, the council will consult with the Gulf Harbour community before any decision is made on such request". KWGS's position is the council has no choice but to uphold the Encumbrance in favour of the community and in order for this situation to be resolved they must declare that that is their position.

KWGS believe, this alternative narrative to the one being put forward by the property developer owner is compelling. The opportunity exists for a passionate new owner with golfing interests front and centre to restore Gulf Harbour golf course to once again be one of the premier golf courses in New Zealand. The right owner would create flow-on benefits to the Gulf Harbour community and see more housing development where zoning already permits resulting in a prosperous future for a community which values green space and the natural environment.

These issues and the owners recent Resource Consent Application to Auckland Council and our challenge to it will be discussed at our Public Meeting on Thursday 7th December at 7 p.m. at the Wentworth College Sports Centre, Gulf Harbour.

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