

Still working on Pikes Point

John King reports

Trustees of the Auckland Recreational Airports Trust and more than a dozen supporters turned up at the Auckland Regional Council's annual district plan review on 23 May to argue for the reinstatement of Pikes Point as a recreational airfield and education centre.

Forty years ago, Pikes Point was a refuse landfill on the northern shore of Mangere Inlet in the extreme north-eastern corner of Manukau Harbour. As reclaimed seabed it was later returned to the administration of the Auckland Harbour Board, and in the early 1980s the flat vacant land was developed by a group of microlight owners, later joined by the Sport Aircraft Association's Auckland Chapter and more recently the Roskill Modellers, into a grass airstrip more than 700 metres long.

Surrounded by empty harbour, heavy industry and stacked empty containers, miles from the nearest houses, Pikes Point provided a unique location, close to the heart of Auckland and clear of the airport's control zone. Such civic and recreational usage of the site was entirely in accordance with the expectations of those local body people who were involved in getting the required Empowering Act through Parliament, with no commercial purposes envisaged for a disused rubbish tip.

In the local government shake-up of 1989

the land was vested in the newly formed Ports of Auckland Ltd, a transfer which went largely unnoticed among the many major upheavals of the time. As POAL had no immediate plans for the land it allowed the flying clubs' continuing operations on a three-month rolling tenancy agreement and happily accepted the regular rental cheques in exchange for the area being kept mown and tidy. With the short-term arrangement, the hangars and clubhouses erected by the groups had to be of a temporary nature and so were a varied lot.

When in early 2005 Auckland Regional Holdings, the investment arm of the regional council, was seeking to purchase the 20 per cent of POAL it did not already own, ARH chair Judith Bassett publicly stated that: "Under ARH's 100 per cent ownership all POAL land will remain in public ownership, and this will assist in the integrated development of the total waterfront area for port operations and public use. As a shareholder, ARH can focus on the evolution of land use not needed for ongoing port operations for the benefit of the Auckland region and the public, and we are sure other civic entities will want to work with us to achieve this goal."

But despite those high-sounding words with their apparent promise of a more certain



Neville Hey

Which is more useful: Pikes Point in its last days as an active airfield in 2005 (above) — or as industrial wasteland, seen last month?

future for the urban airfield, just five months later POAL terminated the aviators' tenancy and required Pikes Point to be completely cleared by the end of the year. The reason given was the need urgently to relocate used imported vehicles from the wharves to another site before they were allowed on the roads, with a rail link — rapidly shown not to be viable — as the proposed means of transport.

An active airfield was going to be turned into a used car park, and for once noise complaints had nothing to do with it.

Strong petitions and a mass visit of more than 100 aviators to an ARC meeting, to try to persuade it to have Pikes Point made into a public reserve and use other, more easily accessible land to store used cars, were rebuffed. Nothing could change ARC chairman Mike Lee's stance that the use of the land was "core POAL business and therefore outside the council's area of control".

By early 2006 the land was cleared of all vestiges of an active airfield. Gone were the clubhouses, hangars, aircraft and people, forced to relocate or sell their machines. Members moved to Parakai, North Shore, Ardmore and Mercer as no single location could possibly replace Pikes Point.

The Auckland Recreational Airports Trust, formed not long before the eviction as a legal entity to run Pikes Point but also with a broader task in mind, turned its energies towards locating an alternative site, at first with some help from the ARC. All that showed, however, was that no other single place had all the necessary attributes of open space, large enough and with no obstructions or near neighbours, to form an airfield suitable for microlights and light experimental types.

But the trustees haven't given up. New emphasis is being given to the educational aspect of recreational flying, inspired by the success of Des Lines's projects at Swannanoa, near Christchurch (see page 15). The idea is that today's often troubled youth might possibly be pointed in a useful direction through fostering interest in some of the science and technology inherent in aviation.

"We aim to provide aviation-related recreational and educational facilities for the region," said trust chairman Brian Wigley.

"This city needs recreational facilities which are accessible to us all, especially our young. Many boys grew up building model boats, cars or planes, and youth must be en-



Sonia Smith

couraged to take up hobbies and interests which will put them on the right path for their future wellbeing."

Mr Wigley's statement to the Auckland Regional Council review committee on 23 May was supported by presentations from trustees Andrew Guyan and Gordon Sanders.

"Pikes Point would be a perfect site for this and the trust would like to lead the way," said Mr Sanders. "It can be changed into a park. We can raise the necessary finance, but a facility must be based on an operational airpark so it is accessible to school groups and draws the experienced people who will be the organisers and presenters.

"Should this be a green park or just another drab warehouse monument to council indifference?"

After recounting his unpleasant experience of being ordered off Pikes Point's active runway as a pedestrian some years ago, ARC chairman Mike Lee read a prepared statement of rebuttal. He reiterated, and emphasised, that POAL owned the land and had every right to use it for its own commercial purposes.

"Our hands are tied. ARC cannot interfere in the day-to-day operations of POAL."

He described how the ARC had recently spent many millions of dollars buying large areas of land for regional parks and finally acknowledged the trust members' presentations. "We will look at it once again and go over all the points raised."

The Auckland Recreational Airports Trust can only wait and see.



John King

Gordon Sanders (left), Brian Wigley and Andrew Guyan try to look philosophical after giving their presentations to the Auckland Regional Council's annual district plan review.



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