

Some questions for the Mayor

By Marilyn Cox

Who wasn't naked in his spa pool

After the local government elections back in October I rang the Whangarei District Council and asked if I could have an interview with Morris Cutforth, the district's new mayor. I wanted to find out his thoughts on some of the issues facing Bream Bay.

I had imagined I could just phone up, as I had done after the previous mayor Stan Semenov was elected and have a 10 - minute chat.

However, the mayor's secretary told me that Mr. Cutforth was extremely busy with all sorts of people wanting to talk to him, but if I submitted a list of questions he could see me for half an hour one morning in a month's time. The date I was allocated clashed with one of my print deadlines so I had to postpone. I finally did get to meet the mayor last week on Monday 6 December at 8.30am in the mayoral office in Forum North.

Deputy Mayor and Bream Bay Ward Councillor Phil Halse was also in attendance and, in fact, it was Councillor Halse who answered many of the questions.

The question list was compiled after consultation with several members of the Waipu and Ruakaka Residents and Ratepayers Associations.

Q 1) When will Ruakaka South get a reticulated sewage system?

The mayor expressed surprise that the houses at Ruakaka Beach and along Marsden Point Rd. still operate septic tanks and concern that this situation could lead to pollution in the Ruakaka River.

Councillor Halse said this was "definitely a priority. We are waiting to hear from the Government about a subsidy."

He is confident the subsidy will be forthcoming.

"We qualify on all the main criteria. The council had hoped to have confirmation before Christmas but it is definitely worth the wait. The subsidy can be up to 50% of the contribution required from each household."

How much is this likely to cost each household?

Councillor Halse - "I don't really want to say as things can change. In the district plan it is calculated at \$19,900 but I hope it will be a lot less than this."

Q 2) Have you thought about possible cycleways in Bream Bay. There is a suggestion that there should be one from Waipu Township to Waipu Cove. What would be the best way for proponents of this cycleway to proceed?

Mayor Cutforth: "I was reading something recently about peak oil. The world is going to be short of oil within the next 25 years and no viable alternative fuel has yet been found. Cycleways are a very good way of preparing for this situation."

Councillor Halse: "I think the first bit of the cycleway from Waipu to Riverside Place could be done relatively easily as there is a wide piece of road reserve along there. It gets a bit more difficult for the next bit. We need to approach it in stages. We should start with a scoping report to see what can be done. We should see if our parks and roading guys can put some funding into this."

"People in the community who want to see this cycleway should work to get something organised to put before the council by next April when the annual plan is set."

"If you come prepared you have a lot more chance of getting money allocated for this."

Mayor Cutforth said he thought such a cycleway would be well used by both holidaymakers and Waipu residents.

Q.3) Should all new subdivisions be required to make provision for cycleways?

Councillor Halse: "This should be part of the development contribution. We could have money designated especially for a cycleway."

Mayor Cutforth commented this could be used for funding a proposed cycleway from Onerahi to the city.

Shouldn't funding raised by developments in Bream Bay be spent in Bream Bay?

Mayor Cutforth said Councillor Halse keeps pointing out to him that once you are elected as a Whangarei District Councillor you need to work for the whole Whangarei District.

Councillor Halse - "It works both ways."

Q4) What options are there for the Whangarei District Council to work more closely with the Department of Conservation in the Bream Bay area? The Department holds 700 hectares of prime coastal land and is short of funds to improve and maintain this. Much of it is in gorse and weeds. Should the council be taking some responsibility for the maintenance of some of this public asset, particularly in places such as the Uretiti day visitor area and various public access ways to the beach?

Councillor Halse - "There is definitely room to move on this."

Mayor Cutforth - "We are already working more cooperatively with the Northland Regional Council. It's a matter of us all finding the time to get together."

Q5) What measures will the council be taking to control dogs on the beaches this summer?

Mayor Cutforth: "What do we usually do Phil?"

Councillor Halse: "Dogs are permitted on the beach from the power station down towards Mair Rd. On all the other beaches dogs are not allowed."

Councillor Halse felt there should be more provision for special exercise areas for dogs.

"We are a bit behind on this."

At this point the Mayor's cellphone rang and he took the call, explaining that it was a regular weekly appointment with a radio station. We moved into the Deputy Mayor's office. Mayor Cutforth appeared several minutes later saying he didn't want to miss out on anything.

When I commented on the short duration of the radio interview he said the station had called him when he was first elected and asked him how it felt to be mayor.

"I told them I don't know yet and that I was naked and sitting in my spa pool."

The mayor now has a weekly conversation with this station pretending to be taking the call in his spa.

Q6) Some residents of One Tree Point have a vision that a cliff top walkway similar to the famous walkway in New Plymouth could be created here. What do you



Yours truly in the Mayoral Office with Morris Cutforth.

think about this idea?

Councillor Halse said some of the householders living along the cliff top are opposed to this walkway proposal, as they don't like the idea of the public walking along the reserve strip in front of their sections for security reasons. There is also the problem of the cliff being composed of soft sandstone and dangerously unstable in places.

Mayor Cutforth (who is a marriage and funeral celebrant) said he had conducted a wedding in a garden out at One Tree Point the previous weekend and thought it was "a beautiful spot."

Q 7) A large new development for a truck stop service centre has just been notified for Port Marsden Highway near the One Tree Point roundabout. A comment has been made that this is too close to Christmas for many people to have time to make a considered submission. Timing applications so public notices go out just prior to the festive season does seem to be common practice amongst some developers. Do you think extra time for submissions should be granted when the submission period falls over the Christmas/ New Year period?

Mayor Cutforth asked Councillor Halse what the usual period of notification was.

Councillor Halse replied that it was about six weeks but the problem with this occurring over the Christmas period is that the offices of lawyers and other professional people whom submitters might need to consult with are closed over this time and he felt the notification period should be extended.

"It's better for the developers to have everyone fully notified right from the start anyway, that way they don't get part way through the process before striking problems."

Councillor Halse said he had concerns about the proposed truck stop development. State Highway 15A had been part funded by Carter Holt Harvey and the port so that trucks could travel unimpeded from the highway to the port.

Doesn't The Big Tomato group of three shops and a restaurant and bar already compromise the highway?

Councillor Halse said Wayne Henare, who built these shops, already had resource consent prior to the Highway being built.

The interview, which was scheduled for half an hour, took 45 minutes.

"Give me a ring anytime", said the Mayor as I left his office.