

Museum's situation disputed

An article titled "Museum major losers under council's plan" (June 25), referred to the Whangarei District Council long-term council community plan having been confirmed, 200 submissions requesting funding being restored, other community groups gaining increases and one councillor saying there was little support for an increase (to the museum) during discussion of the submissions.

To witness the community needs, my husband and I attended the meeting and heard the Whangarei Museum and Heritage Trust's submission. Reaction to this submission, especially by a couple of WDC council members, put into question the state of the relationship between these parties.

Apparently, if restored, funding would cost ratepayers \$120,000 a year. Considering the millions council is telling us we are going to spend on new projects, this is a very small amount for our heritage. If we lose the treasures of our past we will never get them back again.

At council meetings we are asked to bow our heads for prayer. May I suggest that some in council should hang their heads in shame.

I am appalled that those making decisions on our behalf, who should be extremely community-focused, have ignored the museum in this way. As one submitter said: "How do we know where we are going if we do not know where we have come from?" An explanation concerning lack of funding would not go amiss. Surely there must be a very good reason?

PAT SLATER
Mānu

■ **Mayor Stan Semenov responds:**

Despite the negativity in this letter, the museum didn't lose anything. Its annual funding in the long-term plan has been maintained at the \$300,000 set last year, which is a great deal of money to Whangarei's ratepayers.

It is \$6000 a week to meet our responsibilities to maintain the heritage Clark Homestead, display the Fraser collection of Maori artefacts and tell the Whangarei story. It is plenty of money, and manages to pay very good salaries at the museum. Mrs Slater's talk that we risk "losing



PULLING POWER: A museum photo of Neville Thomas and his bullock team.

the treasures of our past" is just negative nonsense and it is she who should be ashamed of herself, not councillors.

The museum's funding previously went up 450 per cent in five years, which was simply unsustainable. They actually wanted double this, coming to council in 2006 asking for \$847,669 a year.

By contrast, the museum at Matakoho, the jewel in the crown of Northland's heritage museums, does not get a single dollar from Kaipara's ratepayers.

The sum of \$6000 a week is a 325 per cent increase on what our museum got in 2002, and is 50 per cent more than it was getting three years ago. It is a large amount for ratepayers to contribute and, when you look at Matakoho, I personally believe it could be reduced.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR