

Submission on Ohinewai Reserve, Waikare (pg 42) By Ohinewai Area Committee (OAC)

Executive summary

The Ohinewai Area Committee manages the Ohinewai Hall. This hall has significant utilization rate, with approximately 175 bookings last year. The operational costs of the all are covered by booking fees, and other fees. However as the hall is used, and now over 20 years old, it needs regular capital investment to keep it up to the high standard it currently is. This capital investment is covered by income produced by leasing the Ohinewai Reserve out to local farmers. If the council removes this income source from the OAC, the capital expenditure required will have to be sourced from the WDC. This clearly is not advantageous to any of the parties involved. There is also no community drive to have the 'improvements' suggested by the WDC to the reserve. There are alternative locations in the Ohinewai area, either WDC reserves currently without management plans or significant archeological sites that WDC would be much better investing into. So hence OAC does not support the proposed reserve management policy for the Ohinewai Reserve.

Proposed Reserve Management Policy by Waikato District Council for Ihineai Reserve:

1. To ecologically enhance the habitat.
2. To have no stock in the reserve and to replace with native plantings.
3. Ongoing regular pest control.
4. Monitor fencing and undertake stock proofing repairs if required.
5. Coordinate improvements with Department of Conservation and RiverCare.

Proposed Development:

- Install access road and car parking.
- Consider walkways to lake and swamp reserve.

Background

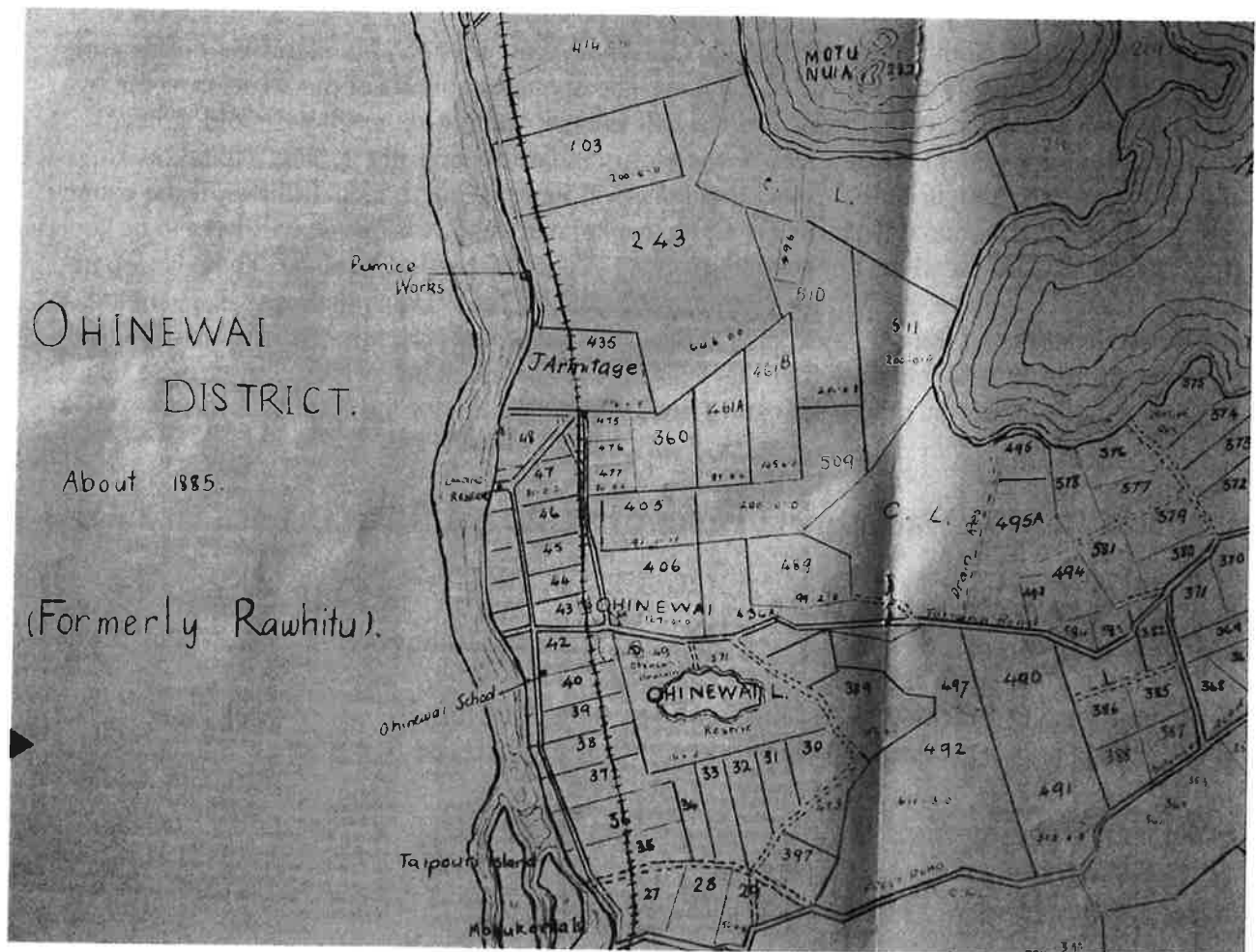
Ohinewai Domain has been in existence since the late 19th Century when European land was divided after the Waikato land wars. As the map shows over the page, the land around Ohinewai Lake, was set aside for a Domain and Reserve.

The extremely comprehensive book produced for the centennial of Ohinewai School and District in 1983 does not mention this land at all. All sorts of land and activities are mentioned that currently now has a different land use, but not this part of the area. Thus we can infer that due to the low lying nature, or some other reason, this area has not been valued as a community asset by the local Ohinewai area.

In more recent times, the Ohinewai Reserve had become weedy, poorly maintained fences and thus was not adding a lot of value to the farmers who were renting the reserve for farming purposes. However in recent years, there has been an investment in time, materials and effort to clean up the weeds, improve the fencing, and bring the reserve land up to a good farming standard. Thus it is now an asset that is leased out for cattle grazing at a good commercial rate. The expectation is that the lessees maintain the pasture, fences and any other infrastructure in its current standard. This lease is currently managed by WDC.

As pointed out, the Ohinewai Reserve is not currently used as a public space. This is not only because the area looks like private land, at the roadside. But the overbridge over SH1, is narrow and

effectively prevents people walking or biking across the SH, so people in the housing in Ohinewai area west of SH1 would be unlikely to use the facility even if it was developed.



There has not been a request made to the Ohinewai Area Committee to have access made to the Domain by anyone in the local community. There is also an issue near the Domain where people park their cars to sleep, drop their litter, etc. To have access into the Domain itself may bring this problem down to the Lake, which is of concern as to who will look after the Domain and ensure nothing disreputable occurs away from the public eye.

The Hall

The Ohinewai area built a community Hall, starting in 1913, and this Hall served the community well over multiple decades. Investments were made into carbide generators, to generate light, to tar sealing of the parking area. However, eventually the Hall after 70 years of use, was becoming tired. And significant community effort went into building a new Hall.

This new Hall was opened in 1994. As part of the fund raising, the community asked the Council to place a small levy per ratepayer (currently \$24) to pay off the loan required to complete the Hall. This loan was paid off approximately 3 years ago, but the community requested that this levy remain in place, so that the Hall could continue to be invested into.

The Hall is used extensively by the community. It had approximately 175 bookings over the last year, some of these bookings were not just single day bookings, but over a complete weekend, or

consecutive number of days. This level of booking means that the Hall is in use more than 50% of the days of the year!

There is also a healthy range of people and organisations that use the Hall. This includes sports and recreational groups, religious group, the local school, businesses that service the local farming community, individuals and families celebrating events.

Thus the Hall is in very regular use, across a wide range of people and organisations.

Ohinewai Area Committee

The Ohinewai Area Committee (OAC) is a community group that, similar to a community board, but has the flexibility and informal attitude that works better in this area. It has two main focuses, firstly to manage the Ohinewai Hall and secondly to interface with the Council to ensure Council services are used to upkeep the area.

The OAC has four income streams:

- Hall hireage;
- Leasing of the small paddock behind the Hall;
- Community Rates levy;
- Leasing the Domain land.

There is a positively reinforcing cycle, as the Hall is well maintained and it is sort after by the community. Because the Hall is used by the community, it has high level of running expenses. Thus the income produced from the first three income streams, Hall hireage, leasing of small paddock and community rates levy are used for the running of the Hall. Thus the direct expenses of cleaning, electricity etc. are covered.

The OAC is committed to strategic infrastructure upgrades to keep the Hall in excellent condition. The money for this comes from the leasing of the Ohinewai Reserve / Domain to local farmers. This income has been saved up and used to invest in capital improvements.

The reality is that the Hall is now over two decades old and has had extensive use. It requires an injection of capital to keep the high standard. Examples of significant capital investment over the last three years:

- New Air Conditioning Units \$23,870
- Gutter replacement \$1,237
- Replacement of ceiling in meeting area & new cost effective LED lighting \$2,820
- Donations to Ohinewai School swimming pool, tennis court electricity costs, provision of a defibrillator.

Further capital investment and community support will continue into the future.

Financial impact of proposed reserve management plan:

The impact of the proposed management plan would remove a significant income source from the Ohinewai community. Although we do have reserves that would last for a handful of years, they would quickly become consumed. Thus we would end up with the following problems:

- Reduce / stop capital improvement to the Hall. The Hall is one of the few places in the surrounding area that is well maintained, easy to access being next to SH1 off-ramps, and great value for money. However, if the capital investment isn't made due to lack of funds,

the Hall would start to feel old and the on-flow effects of loss of rental would be felt. We don't want to end up in a situation like the Huntly Hall.

- Increased financial requests to Council and, therefore, rate payers. Currently the OAC is able to run its finances in a self-contained way, thus the Council does not need to provide additional financial support. If the main income stream of the Domain lease was to disappear, the OAC would need to apply to the Council for funding.
- New financial cost to Waikato District Council of building and maintaining the roadway, parking area, rubbish provision, toilets, signage and tracks proposed, this would be an ongoing cost for the council, likely to increase over time as use of the area increases.

If the Ohinewai Domain remained as is, rented for grazing under the aegis of the Council and the Ohinewai Area Committee, then we would be able to retain financial independence.

Non-Financial Impact of proposed reserve management plan:

Concerns and questions about the proposed change to the Domain are:

- Because of its semi-remote location, currently it doesn't have an issue with vandals, littering, rubbish dumping etc. Who would maintain it once the public had access to it?
- Have there been any requests by the public to access this land? This is a rural community and the local community utilise existing facilities without having to utilise this Domain land for their recreation. Especially with the paddock available to the Hall.
- There are a number of public accessible lakes in and around the Huntly area, why does the Ohinewai Lake and Domain need to be changed to be the same as these when it doesn't appear to be required/requested?
- The OAC were not made aware of any issues with the cleanliness of the water at the Lake. How serious is this? There is riparian planting, the Lake is fenced off, there are other cattle run farms nearby – is the Domain usage causing the issues?
- If the grazing was maintained, then new fencing would need to be put in place to keep the cattle and the public separated, especially round Health & Safety issues.
- A road would need to be provided for the public to have true access down to the Lake.
- If the land was planted out, who would maintain the quality of the land thereafter – currently this is all handled by the leasee.
- Current issues with the people stop along Tahuna Road next to the Domain to sleep, litter and create a nuisance – we expect that some of the activities there would transfer to a less visible spot of the Domain.
- Currently the wildlife at the Ohinewai Lake enjoy an uninterrupted life due to the riparian planting and it currently being fenced off. Our expectation is that if people had access to the Lake, this existence would change for the wildlife where they could be caught, harmed, etc.

It appears that this is an “All or Nothing” exercise, rather than an exercise at looking at the community needs as well. The amount of proposals in the Management act seems very excessive to that required.

Recommendation:

Therefore it is the Ohinewai Area Committee recommendation that the Ohinewai Reserve is removed from the reserve management programme, and that that reserve is moved back to a 3 yearly contract with farmers, thus maximize the farmer investment into the pasture / fences / infrastructure and the financial return to the Ohinewai community.

Alternatives:

As the reserve management plan indicates, the Ohinewai Recreation Reserve is of low to medium ecological value. This is because it is farmed land, in good condition, and has been cleared of native vegetation for decades and maybe even a century.

Therefore we strongly believe that if investment is to be made in reserve type areas in the Ohinewai area, that the following options, as marked on the map over the page, would be far better for the environment / ecosystem / cultural heritage of the area. And as such would make a far better investment.

Points 1a & 1b: Southern Lake Waikare Reserve (1a) and North lake Waikare Reserve

These two Council reserves are between the Lake, and Waikare Road. Waikare Road is part of the scenic drive network, due to the picturesque lake, along the eastern lake boundary. Both of these reserves have parking sites already existing, and have stock exclusion. Both have native bush covering, and provide habitat for native birds (fantails and wood pigeons and possibly more) and have a considerably higher ecological value than the Ohinewai Reserve.

Work has been done in at the Southern reserve in removing pest trees, and the northern site gives wonderful views across the lake. So these two areas could be improved by the council if they want to improve the ecosystem and / or provide amenities to the public. They are currently not signposted, or marked on maps. So the public will not be aware of them, unless they are inquisitive. And being on the scenic drive, will likely attract those who are interested in exploring and taking the road less travelled.

Point 2: Archaeological sites #1

In the early 1980's it was planned for a massive opencast mine in the Ohinewai area. As part of this planning a comprehensive archaeological survey was undertaken as there was a cluster of archaeological sites here. These included shell middens containing fresh water mussels, charcoal and fired stones - these shell middens were substantial being 400m long. Associated with this was some earthworks and pits in good condition. The size of the site is indicative of long term occupation. And it was noted in the report that occupation sites like this are rare in the Waikato as most sites are associated with hills, not the flat land. So preservation of this site should be given important consideration.

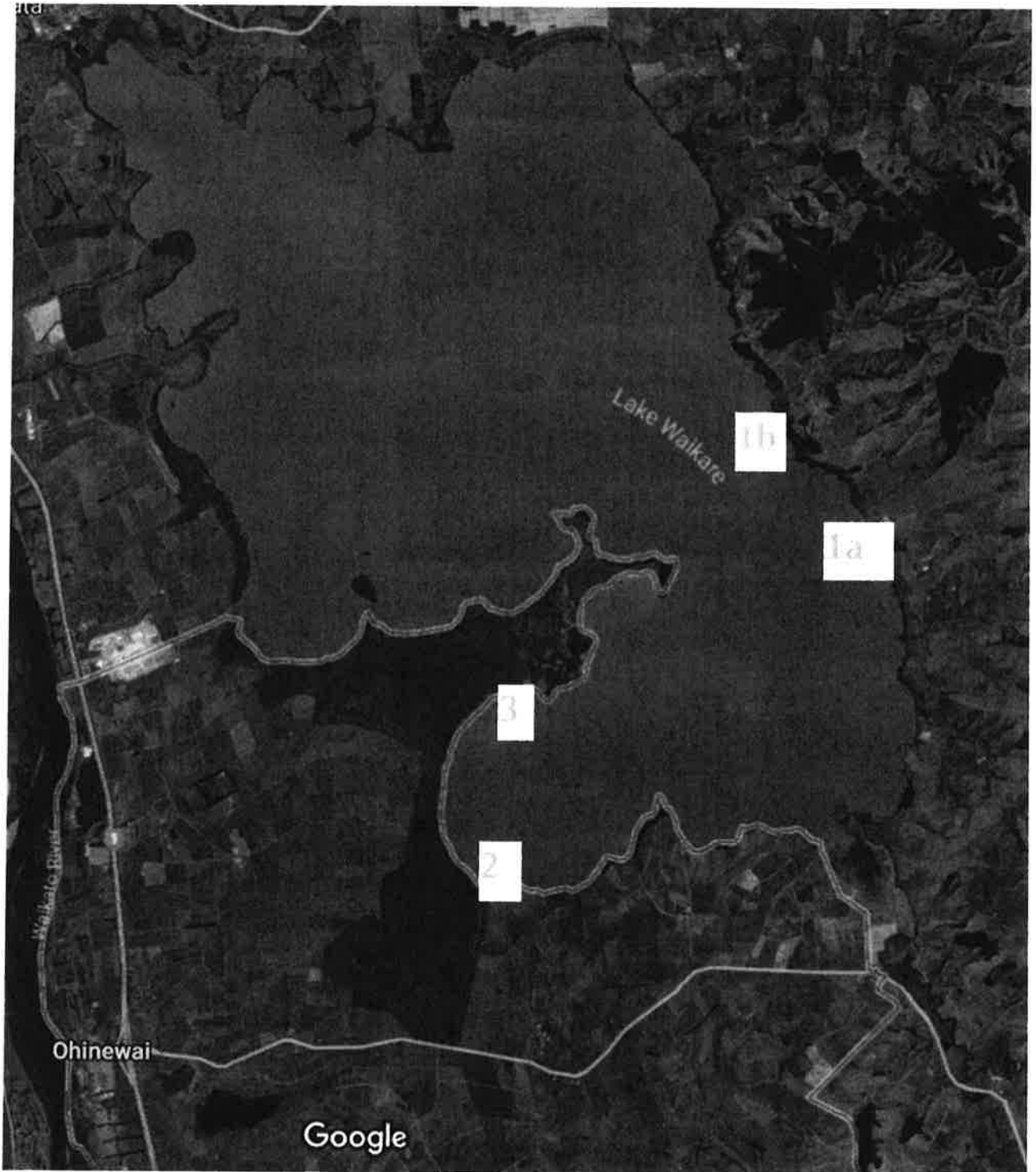
Thus in terms of preserving historical heritage for future generations, this foreshore area could be protected and enhanced for future analysis.

Point 3: Archaeological sites #2

This is an area that has had small level of terracing undertaken, and was likely a garden area. Thus may be another site that would benefit from more intensive management.

Signed by the current Ohinewai Area Committee:

Chairperson:	Peter Brown	
Secretary/Treasurer:	Catherine Maher	
Elected members:	Joy Dugdale	David Whyte
	Bruce Bateup	Bruce Holmes
	Doug Dodds	John Hill
	Graham Dwight	Neil Dwight
	Lyn Welch	



Historical and Archaeological information sources, copies held at the Waikato University Library.

Lumsden K. 1983 Paddle-steamers, Pen-nibs and Pasturelands. A centennial History of Ohinewai School and District. Copy held at Waikato University Library.

Foster, R. 1983 Archaeological Site Survey Ohinewai Coal Field