FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Funding loss could limit public access to Te Mata Park**

The loss of vital funding from the Hawke’s Bay Regional Council will set Te Mata Park back by a decade and will fail to protect the region’s most popular recreational and tourism asset.

The Hawke’s Bay Regional Council Long-Term Plan proposal to pull its $120,000 a year Park maintenance funding will see Te Mata Park Trust launch a ‘Protect the Peak’ campaign next week.

Te Mata Park Trust Chair Mike Devonshire said the huge growth in use of the Park requires more funding, not less. Over 1 million visitors explore Te Mata Park every year and since 2018 the Park has been awarded the highly coveted Green Flag international award for well managed parks and green spaces, five times, ranking it one of the best maintained and managed parks in the world.

The Trust recently met with HBRC Chair Hinewai Ormsby and Chief Executive Dr Nic Peet as well as presenting to the HBRC Environmental and Integrated Catchments Committee with a plea to increase funding to $240,000.

Devonshire said, “We’ve been blindsided by the HBRC’s preferred option to pull funding for Te Mata Park - the jewel in the region’s crown.”

“There’s no way we can lose $120,000 in funding. We already need to try and find a third of our yearly operational funding, and this loss would mean we need to try and secure over 60% of our operational funding elsewhere. This is a huge ask. It would be a backward step and unbundle all the investment that has gone into enhancing the Park.”

He added that health and safety within the Park would become a higher risk without regular maintenance, and therefore the trust may need to consider some form of closures.

“We are a trust and we have a duty of care to uphold and I’m not sure if we want to any greater risk of health and safety due to a reduction in maintenance.

“You only need to look at what happened with the cyclone. It had a huge impact on the park with many trees destroyed but we had the financial ability to quickly do some work clearing tracks and re-open in five days.

Mr Devonshire said cutting Te Mata Park funding will have a miniscule impact on rates and he believed both ratepayers and all 184,000 residents would support investing less than $1 each to protect the Park annually.

“At the current HBRC funding level, it’s 65 cents per resident per year to look after the Park to its current standard and we think it should be $1.30, which will cover the cost of two fulltime maintenance contractors.

Key projects over recent years include purchasing addional land, a new visitor shelter, a Schools for Trees planting programme, public toilets, car parking, upgrading and building new walking and cycling trails, upgrading the Park’s water and effluent infrastructure, and significant felling of dangerous trees.

Nearly 60,000 native trees have been planted in the last four years as part of the Trust’s native revegetation programme.

Hastings District Council is also a key funding partner, providing $120,000 for operational and administration support.

Bayden Barber, chairman of Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Inc, and former Te Mata Park trustee, said the regional council has a cultural and social responsibility to protect and enhance Te Matā, Te Mata o Rongokako, Te Karanemanema o te Mata o Rongokako.

“As a community, we are called to protect our maunga (mountain), preserve its wild beauty, and ensure it is maintained as a sacred place for generations to come.

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