



## **Media Release**

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### **Dutch Museum Project Chooses Foxton as Top Spot**

State Highway 1 between Wellington and Bulls is already host to some interesting stop-overs for travellers. But now a *major* sight-seeing attraction is planned for Foxton - the one township that's slowly but surely developing into a tourist attraction in its own right.

Looking around Foxton with its imposing 25m high Dutch working windmill and its flat landscape of rolling green paddocks dotted with grazing Friesian cows - just across from the Manawatu river on the edge of town - you could easily be tricked into thinking that you've entered an early Dutch settlement. And over the next few years that image of Dutchness will grow even more intense. A Museum Project is under way - The Dutch Connection - that will bring to life the story of the Dutch in New Zealand.

"We're often called the 'invisible migrants' ", explains Arjan van der Boon from The Dutch Connection museum trust. "The Dutch arrivals and their descendants have made a tremendous contribution to our country - ranging from Lockwood Homes and Vogel's Bread, to Verkerk's deli products and Rembrandt suits. Even Fonterra probably would not be what it is today without all those Dutch names in its cooperative, and its Dutch Chairman Henry van der Heyden

"Still, our major immigration wave of the 1950s and 1960s - more than 40,000 migrants - is not even mentioned in Michael King's recent 'Penguin History of New Zealand', unlike just about all the other European, Polynesian and Asian migrants. We simply blended in too well.

"But now we want to make our mark. Celebrate the contribution we're making to the arts, culture, sports and the economy - today and in decades past - and show

that the connection between the Dutch and New Zealand is a very important one."

The plans for 'The Dutch Connection' in Foxton fit right into the strategic direction for the Horowhenua district, and will create synergies with local windmill 'De Molen' and the Maori Flax Stripping Museum and Maori arts workshop Whare Manaaki, as well as the Audio Visual museum, the town's historical museum, the tourist Trolley Bus, and the horse drawn Tram.

"We are delighted with the Dutch Connection Museum Trust's decision to select Foxton as the location for their museum", says Mayor of the Horowhenua District Council, Brendan Duffy.

"Through this project we believe that the Dutch Community and the community of Foxton can build a solid future based on harmonious co-operation by exhibiting the unique, yet complimentary, social, cultural, economic and political aspects of our past, our present and our futures."

"The main reasons why the Dutch Community from around New Zealand chose Foxton as their preferred museum spot – out of a wide range of options ranging from Christchurch to Matakana in the north – were its central location and easy accessibility on the State Highway 1," says Arjan van der Boon. "And of course the presence of its windmill. De Molen is a perfect replica of a 17<sup>th</sup> century working flour mill, and that will enable us to give visitors a complete Dutch experience. All we need apart from our museum is a Dutch pancake house and a café that serves good coffee as well as a Heineken, and we're sorted!"

The Museum Trust has built a good relationship over the past 6 months with the Horowhenua District Council.

"We're very grateful for the high levels of enthusiasm and cooperation with which our proposals have been received by the Council and the Mayor," adds Arjan van der Boon. "Our plans seemed to provide a perfect fit with their vision for the future of Foxton, and any collaboration will be hugely beneficial for both parties. We're hoping to put this project in place as soon as we possibly can, and the District Council's help to date has already made that goal much more achievable."

"Over the past decade we have built a strong rapport with the Dutch community. Our pride in housing the De Molen Windmill in Foxton already demonstrates that our strategic intent aligns with that of The Dutch Connection Museum Trust, as well as with the many dutch organisations and migrants who now enjoy the fruits of this nation with us." says Mayor Brendan Duffy

Foxton, like many parts of New Zealand, has a small but thriving Dutch community that includes a daffodil grower and the folk who built the windmill. Its business association is active, and Foxton beach is a popular summer destination for visitors from throughout the region. In the near future, the swimming pool complex will get a \$1.5 million upgrade, and the historic District Council buildings will be extended through a \$1.5 million project to include the library, service centre and a tourist information centre.

Foxton attracts 25,000 people every year at its Easter Fair, when there are also annual mural painting pavilions set up on the Molen grounds.

“The tourism potential for Foxton with its beach, the golf course, the 3 museums, the horse drawn tram and the Molen is fantastic! And that’s what in gave us the confidence to establish our Dutch museum and cultural centre here. With De Molen attracting at least 30,000 visitors every year, we feel we can’t go wrong...” says Mr van der Boon.

Now that the location for The Dutch Connection has been selected, a business plan will be drafted, and a concept for the museum and its exhibitions will be developed by Wellington museum expert Luit Bieringa (ex-director of the National Art Gallery). That work has been generously funded by the New Zealand Netherlands Foundation which acts as the Founding Sponsor for the museum.

“We have Dutch artists like photographer Ans Westra and painter Miriam van Weezel who deserve recognition as some of our country’s best artists. But that’s just two examples of who we want to showcase. There are also some 150,000 other New Zealanders of Dutch descent - some 4% of the population – with stories that are worth being recorded and heard,” says Mr van der Boon.

“We want to set up a museum or cultural centre for all ‘Nederlanders’. And we have complete confidence that the other New Zealanders would also love to learn more about their ‘invisible’ compatriots. After all, ever since Abel Tasman sailed the ‘Tasman Sea’ in 1643, and The Netherlands gave our country its western name, we’ve contributed in many ways to its welfare, wellbeing and progress. It’s time to celebrate that effort and achievement.”

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