

Media Release

Foxton, 4 October, 2013

Dutch National Museum Gets Home Next to Windmill

Project to Revitalise Foxton Township is Now Under Way

New energy has been blown into the sails of a project to establish a Dutch museum and cultural centre in the heart of Foxton, right next to Dutch windmill *De Molen*.

"Horowhenua District Council has made a momentous decision, by investing in a project that will transform the future of Foxton and also the future of the Dutch community in New Zealand," says Arjan van der Boon, Chairperson of the Dutch Connection Museum Trust. "Now that we are getting a home for our museum for and about the Dutch in New Zealand, we can move full steam ahead with our plans to create *Onze Plek* – Our Place."

Horowhenua District Council recently voted unanimously to move ahead with the purchase of the empty Mitre 10 building to house Foxton's new Culture and Community Centre. The Dutch Connection will take pride of place in the almost 1500m² building on Main Street in the centre of town.

"It was touch and go at times, as to whether the project would get the support it needed from Council, especially after the financial crisis hit a few years ago," says Arjan. "But the intention and dedication from all participants in the project saw us through the rough patches. All six partners in the Te Awahou – Nieuwe Stroom scaled down their ambitions. What's more, Council assisted us to revise our original ambitious plans and create an affordable solution that will still achieve everybody's aspirations."

TANS is an integrated cultural, community and service facility that will include a local library and community centre with a Maori art and crafts gallery, plus a national Dutch museum that tells the story of one of our country's earliest and major immigrant groups. By combining all that with the stories of a historic flax and river town – Foxton as the birthplace of the Manawatu – a major tourist

attraction will be created that includes the current Flax Stripper Museum and De Molen, plus a raft of new river activities.

"Foxton has a fascinating long history, both Maori and Pakeha, as well as a lot of existing attractions like the MAVTech audiovisual museum and the Clydesdale Horses drawn tram," says Arjan. "De Molen already attracts over 30,000 visitors every year. All this adds to the tourism appeal that will be strongly driven by the TANS project. Once we are up and running, well over 100,000 visitors per annum will want to come and soak up the feeling of old heartland New Zealand, that you can still experience here. It will attract new businesses and will transform Foxton into a flourishing tourism town on State Highway 1, just like Tirau further north."

The Dutch Connection museum will be a real-life storybook to record and showcase the Dutch immigration experience – the good, the bad and the beautiful – all the way from when Abel Tasman was the first westerner to record his encounter with the Maori in 1642, until today. As a cultural centre it will be host to a range of activities, and a focal point for the Dutch community which is spread far and wide from Invercargill to the far north. It will provide a sense of home to the Dutch – a place to feel proud and share experiences.

"We've always been the 'Invisible Immigrants' in this country," says Arjan. "There are some 140,000 of us, or well over 3% of the population, and we've achieved great things in agriculture, business, sports and the arts. Still, we're missing from the pages of history. Michael King didn't even mention us in his bestselling 'History of New Zealand' – unlike all the other immigrant groups. The Dutch have to tell *Ons Verhaal* ourselves, and share Our Story with the nation and overseas visitors. It's a story well worth telling, to celebrate all the things we've brought and achieved here."

For more editorial information:

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Photos:

- Windmill De Molen
- The Horse Drawn Tram (with De Molen)

Links:

- TANS – Business Case:
<http://www.horowhenua.govt.nz/Documents/Agendas%20and%20Minutes/Business%20Case%20Te%20Awahou%20Nieuwe%20Stroom%20Project.pdf>
- TANS – Draft Drawings:
http://www.horowhenua.govt.nz/Documents/Agendas%20and%20Minutes/0304_001.pdf