

Yarrow Stadium update

This update has been produced to keep you informed about progress on the repair and refurbishment of Yarrow Stadium, and to address inaccuracies and misapprehensions that have arisen in public discussion of the project.

What the Council has approved

Repairing and reinstating both earthquake-prone grandstands: This will include reconfiguring/modernising the East Stand (main stand) ground floor, which needs to be gutted to allow for repairs. This area will house facilities now required for international events – suitable changing rooms, referee room, drug-testing room, etc. Existing TRFU facilities will be destroyed and to make the most logical and efficient use of space, they will be replaced in a separate building.

Reinstating main pitch to appropriate standard: This will be required because the main pitch will be totally destroyed by the heavy machinery needed for stand repairs. The pitch was near the end of its life anyway, and replacement was due.

Other essential updates: Priorities are:

- LED lights for main pitch (current lights are at end-of-life, unreliable and dangerous).
- Extra food & beverage retail space, extra toilet facilities.
- Technology upgrades.
- Seal west carpark, improve its lighting.
- Upgrade east car park and team drop-off area.
- Entry gate improvements.
- Replace South Terrace seating.



Yarrow Stadium light-tower fire September 2017.

This work essentially restores what previously existed, with essential updates.

The estimated cost is \$48 million, with a contingency allowance of \$2 million. So the Council's budget for this project is up to \$50 million. This will be funded with a 25-year loan.



Why the Council approved the project

In a nutshell, the central questions facing the Council were: Does Taranaki need an international-grade stadium? And if so, what needs to happen to achieve this?

The Council strongly believes that if Taranaki is to be a vibrant and thriving region, we need a venue that can host international events. So it is clear that Yarrow Stadium must be reinstated to what it was, with refurbishments that are necessary to meet current and foreseeable requirements for such venues.

An economic study by BERL found that in the 15 years to 2017, the Stadium added \$100 million to the regional economy, and predicted that future benefits would be considerably larger. That's not counting the priceless global exposure gained during high-profile international events such as Rugby World Cup fixtures with a backdrop of Mt Taranaki.

The Council's unanimous decision followed lengthy deliberation. It was based on full consideration of all the possibilities, taking into account expert analyses by engineers, geotechnical specialists, economists and others, as well as a thorough public consultation process.

The project will future-proof the stadium. Lesser options would simply be saddling the region with a Stadium that would not be fit for purpose and able to host international events without further spending.

Yarrow Stadium vision

- ☑ The best regional stadium in New Zealand that regularly hosts national and international sports and entertainment events.
- ☑ A stadium for both major events and community events and the premier outdoor field for team sports codes.
- ☑ A stadium that is loved by sports fans and the local community.
- ☑ A stadium that is a quality experience for event promoters, participants and spectators, which is achieved through superior event facilities, presentation and management and through the early adoption and smart use of technology.

This vision was adopted by both the Taranaki Regional Council and New Plymouth District Council in 2015 after consultation with the regional sports sector, and was reaffirmed by the TRC in May 2019 when it approved the repair and refurbishment project.



Project implementation – what’s happening now

The decision to proceed with the repairs and essential refurbishments was made in May, and took effect with the start of the new financial year on 1 July. Progress to date:

- The Council is finalising loan facilities with the Local Government Funding Agency (LGFA) Scheme. This will give the Council access to loan funding on the most favourable terms available. Full details were set out in a consultation document earlier this year: www.trc.govt.nz/LGFA
- Detailed designs for different components of the project are now being drawn up by three engineering consultancies – Tse Taranaki and Associates Ltd, Calibre Group and BCD Group – and Elliot Architects.
- WSP Opus has been appointed project manager.
- The first contracts are expected to go out to tender within a couple of months.
- Establishment of a project governance group is being finalised, drawing on best-practice criteria.



Checking the facts

Use of Stadium

WRONG

- ☒ “This is not a multi-sport stadium, it will be a stadium for professional rugby players.”

FACTS

- ☑ Yarrow Stadium has hosted NRL league games, FIFA Under-20 World Cup and Phoenix football matches, T20 cricket fixtures and extreme motorsport exhibition events. These have had a total estimated attendance of 130,000 people.
- ☑ Attendance at non-sport events – conferences, exhibitions, trade shows, conventions, corporate functions, weddings and community events – rose from 16,397 in 2014/15 to 33,310 in 2016/17. There were 51 functions, conferences, expos and community events in 2014/15 and the number more than doubled to 128 in 2016/17. This growth is expected to continue.
- ☑ During public consultation leading up to the Stadium decision, the Council was told some groups faced difficulties trying to make arrangements to host events at the facility. The Council is working with the Stadium operator, NPDC, to make use of the venue easier so that it brings the community together.
- ☑ Rugby is the Stadium’s major rent-paying tenant. Without it, the region would struggle to establish and maintain a facility like this. The Stadium can’t succeed without rugby.
- ☑ Rugby remains important to Taranaki people – the region has the nation’s highest rugby engagement rate of any region in New Zealand.

Reference: BERL report (www.trc.govt.nz/yarrow1)

TV1 news clip May 2019 showing main pitch set up for soccer: (www.bit.ly/YarrowTV)



Scope and cost of repairs and refurbishment

WRONG

- ☒ “Repairing the stands for \$33 million will get the venue back to the state it was in for the Argentina-All Blacks rugby test in 2017.”
- ☒ “If only one grandstand was replaced, and the other demolished and replaced by a grass embankment the cost would be even less. The playing area could be widened to allow international cricket to be played there as well.”
- ☒ “The refurbishments are already budgeted for in the existing Asset Management Plan. The Council is double-dipping.”

FACTS

- ☒ There is no \$33 million option. Repair of the stands, without undertaking other refurbishments, was costed at \$36 million. However, the venue would still not be suitable for top-grade national and international events. The project approved by the Council includes refurbishments that are either essential or important for getting the Stadium back up to proper operational capacity and able to host top-grade national and international fixtures.
- ☒ Replacing end-of-life lighting with up-to-date LED fittings is one leading example. There are also things like extra toilets and space for more food options, which users tell us have long been needed.
- ☒ This work simply continues a programme developed in consultation with the wider sporting community before the earthquake-prone issue arose. Nothing has changed – apart from an opportunity to get work done cost-efficiently and more easily while repairs are under way.
- ☒ The refurbishment programme was being funded from the previous Yarrow Stadium rate, which is now replaced by the new rating arrangement that also covers the cost of grandstand repairs. There is no double-dipping. Nor are there depreciation reserve funds. Not all the works in the asset management plan were funded.
- ☒ The Council also considered demolition of one or other Stand. Each has different issues (the West Stand’s relate to ground stability, the East Stand’s relate mainly to construction/engineering), but the repairs in both cases are complex and the cost of each is about the same. So repairing one stand and demolishing the other would still come at a significant cost, close to that of the proposals that have been adopted, and the result would be a substantial reduction in the Stadium’s capacity and potential.
- ☒ NZ Cricket has made it clear that it does not see the Stadium as a future venue for international fixtures. So it makes no sense to expand the pitch size in the hope of attracting international cricket matches.



Yarrow Stadium light-tower fire, September 2017

Consultation process

WRONG

- ☒ “The consultation period was badly timed because it coincided with Easter, ANZAC Day and school holidays.”
- ☒ “The consultation was shonky. Public opinion was ignored.”

FACTS

- ☒ The consultation period ran from 18 March to 23 April, which was longer than legally required.
- ☒ School holidays started on 12 April, four weeks after consultation started. The Easter public holidays were on 19 and 22 April, as the consultation period was ending. ANZAC Day, 25 April, occurred after the consultation period had finished.
- ☒ There were 526 submissions. Most supported the Council’s preferred option at the very least, with many favouring more elaborate and expensive options.
- ☒ A number of submitters were clearly very concerned about the affordability of the project. In response, the Council cut the project’s budget while ensuring that essential refurbishments would still take place.
- ☒ Right from the start of the consultation period, some submissions clearly indicated lack of support for any of the options. At the request of sporting groups, however, an option of ‘other’ was subsequently added, although ticking this would in effect be supporting an option that didn’t exist.
- ☒ The Office of the Auditor-General has declined to act on negative claims that have subsequently been made about the consultation process.

Decision-making process

WRONG

- ☒ “The Taranaki Regional Council’s Yarrow Stadium decision was made behind closed doors with little or no debate among Councillors.”

FACTS

- ☒ After submitters had been heard over the two days of verbal submissions in May, Councillors spent a considerable time publicly discussing and debating the issues raised and what changes should be made to the original preferred option. These changes were confirmed and adopted unanimously at a subsequent meeting a week later.
- ☒ Both these meetings were fully open to the public, and members of the public were present. In fact, the second meeting was covered by TV One news.

The Waikato experience

MISLEADING & INCOMPLETE STATEMENT

- ☒ “Waikato Rugby Union is closing one of its main stands because of low crowd numbers.”

FACTS

- ☑ All the stands at FMG Stadium Waikato remain in use. The Waikato Rugby Union is opting not to use the WEL Networks Stand for domestic fixtures. The stand, however, will be used during the All Blacks-Tonga rugby test on 7 September.
- ☑ The WEL Networks Stand has been undergoing detailed seismic assessment.
- ☑ A disclaimer on the All Black ticketing website referred to the seismic assessment and advised patrons they have the option of seeking alternative seating if they prefer.

Customers please note

FOR INTENDING TICKET HOLDERS - Aisles 34-40

Notice relevant to Aisles 34-40 only (shown in bottom row of venue map in orange): A Detailed Seismic Assessment (DSA) is currently being undertaken on FMG Stadium Waikato's WEL Networks stand. The WEL Networks stand will be open for the All Blacks v Tonga Test, however if you would prefer a seat in another part of the stadium for this match, please refer to alternative seating options.

References: FMG Stadium Waikato statement (www.bit.ly/WaikatoStadium);
 Ticketing disclaimer (www.bit.ly/TestDisclaimer);
 RNZ news item 25 August 2019 (www.bit.ly/FMGStadiumnews)

Stadium Q&As

Why not just demolish one stand and keep the other?

The earthquake-prone problems relate to ground instability as well as construction/engineering issues. Ground instability means remediation work is required to make it safe for use by a large number of people, regardless of whether they're housed in a grandstand. So repairing one stand and demolishing the other would still come at a significant cost, and the Stadium's would still not be suitable for international events. It'd be a backwards step.

Why not demolish one stand and make the pitch larger to allow for cricket?

Repairing one stand and demolishing the other would still come at a significant cost because the problems are with ground instability as well as construction/engineering. NZ Cricket has made it clear that it does not see the Stadium as a future venue for international fixtures. We'd be wasting our money and our time.

Isn't this an opportunity to reshape the stadium into something more easily used by other codes?

We're not starting from scratch, we're working with what we already have. If we were to start again, the cost would far exceed what we're spending on repairs and essential refurbishments.

I've heard the main stand will have to be completely demolished. Is that right?

That's wrong. The main stand's problems relate mainly to engineering/construction and the interior will be largely gutted to allow the repairs to be carried out. It will certainly not be demolished.

Why not just repair the stands for \$33 million and leave it at that?

Repair of the stands, without undertaking other refurbishments, was costed at \$36 million. However, the venue would still not be suitable for top-grade national and international events. So it would be a waste of money. The other refurbishments aren't luxuries. They're necessities.

Where did the Council get all its figures and estimates?

Three engineering consultancies – Tse Taranaki and Associates Ltd, Calibre Group and BCD Group – collaborated to develop and peer review the structural repair options. Elliot Architects prepared the master plans, and other specialist experts provided advice as required on geotechnical issues, stadium/venue design and other matters. Venue users, both sport and non-sport, were also consulted.

I've never been to the stadium and I never will. Why should I have to pay for it?

The whole regional community benefits from the stadium – to the tune of \$100 million over the 15 years to 2017, according to an economic study that also predicted a significant increase in future years. And attendance at major events doubled between 2014 and 2017 (see BERL report www.trc.govt.nz/yarrow1). In a wider sense, it's all about ensuring Taranaki remains vibrant and thriving, with a broad range of economic, social and recreational opportunities, and able to attract skilled newcomers to help make it even better.

Why should all this ratepayer money go into a stadium that's just for rugby?

Did you see the Stadium on TV the day we announced the project? It was set up for soccer! (www.bit.ly/YarrowTV) Yarrow Stadium has hosted NRL league, FIFA Under-20 and Phoenix football, T20 cricket and extreme motorsport exhibitions. 130,000 attended these. And non-sport use has been growing too. Yarrow Stadium is for much more than rugby! See www.trc.govt.nz/yarrow1



Why are ratepayers funding a new gym and offices for the rugby union?

The gym and offices will need replacing because they have to be destroyed to allow the stand to be repaired. They are being relocated to a separate building because we need to reconfigure and update the main stadium's ground floor to provide for current requirements for international events – drug-testing area, referee room, etc. It's all about making the best use of space. And don't forget that rugby pays rent and is the Stadium's anchor tenant – without it, we wouldn't have a stadium allowing us to host international fixtures across a range of codes.

Why are you ignoring public opinion?

We're confident the community at large shares our vision for Yarrow Stadium: The best non-metro stadium in the country for national and international sports, entertainment and community events, offering a quality experience for all who use it. We talked to stadium users, sporting and non-

sporting, and we ran a thorough consultation process. Many people and organisations shared with us their perspectives and opinions. We took all this into account when we made our decision.

Wasn't your consultation flawed? What about the extra 'none of the above' option that was added during consultation?

Right from the start of the consultation period, some submissions clearly indicated lack of support for any of the options. At the request of sporting groups, however, an option of 'other' was subsequently added, although ticking this would in effect be supporting an option that didn't exist. The Office of the Auditor-General found no reason to investigate our process, despite a couple of complaints from those who disagreed with our decision.

ENDS