



Council approves aerodrome rezoning

At its April meeting Richmond River Council (RVC) approved the rezoning of a part of the Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome for a retirement village and nursing home. However, it relisted the matter in business papers for an extraordinary meeting, on May 5, after the discovery that some objections to the rezoning had been mistakenly 'overlooked', including a proposal by Evans Head Airpark Ltd, a consortium which includes Olympian Grant Kenny.

Paul Shaw

At the April meeting, three opponents of the rezoning used the public-access session to address councillors.

They were aviation enthusiast and developer Bill Finlen, of Paradise Homes, Queensland; former Ballina councillor and pilot Margaret Howes and Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome Committee Inc (EHMACI) president Dr Richard Gates.

Mr Finlen, wants to use the 10 hectare site for a \$60 million airpark which would include 65 homes, short-term accommodation, private hangars, various sporting facilities an aero club, an air museum, a memorial park, shops, history displays, bicycle path and an industrial precinct.

He said council had not followed fair and due process in looking at the airpark proposal.

The issue had been on council's agenda since 2003 and he had been told that council supported the airpark proposal when in fact it did not.

He also said the nursing-home proponent had been given the opportunity to address the Heritage Council on the issue, whereas he had not.

"The fact is, Evans Head could have two major developments in the area," Mr Finlen said.

"It could have a vibrant airpark, with employment for trades and youth etc and in the order of \$60 million and it could have a retirement village ... on a suitable location.

"But RVC has chosen to go ahead with the retirement village at the expense of the airpark."

Ms Howes, who also made a submission opposing the rezoning, said she had been a pilot for more than 40 years and had flown in Australia, the United States and Britain.

She said council did not realise how lucky it was to have the aerodrome.

She detailed uses including fire fighting, air ambulance and mercy flights and said that an airpark would provide jobs in aviation-related industries.

Dr Gates said there were errors of fact in the report on the item in the business papers and found the report to be biased. He said it failed to provide a sound economic basis for the decision as far as ratepayers getting the best possible use of the aerodrome was concerned.

"We are opposed to rezoning of this aerodrome for a retirement village complex for many reasons, but would like to make it clear we are not, nor never have been opposed to a

nursing home facility at Evans Head to meet the needs of local residents and particularly our veterans," Dr Gates said.

"What we are opposed to, is the rezoning of land on the aerodrome for a private regional retirement village and nursing-home complex, which has already come at a considerable cost to Richmond Valley Council ratepayers."

"We believe these other options would not burden ratepayers financially and would keep the aerodrome open and runways in good condition for aviation purposes such as bushfire emergencies."

Mr Exley RVC environmental development services director, said a total of 13 submissions was received, four in support and nine objecting to the proposed rezoning.

A total of four submissions was received from the Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome Committee Incorporated (EHMACI), one of which was circulated directly to councillors.

At the April council meeting Cr Charlie Cox said the vote on the rezoning was probably one of the most important decisions for the lower river to be made in quite some time.

He said there was no other suitable site at Evans Head and no suitable land outside the town for the retirement home. Cr Cox said the development had overwhelming community support and he believed the aerodrome and retirement village could co-exist.

"I don't believe the aviation industry will suffer," he said.

Cr Kinnish said she did not believe all options had been explored

Mr Exley told the May meeting that in light of the omission of three submissions, an investigation had been undertaken into the procedure for receiving submissions and the methods by which they were forwarded to the relevant council officer.

"Submissions which are unclear as to what they relate to, or those which are incorrectly addressed to persons other than the general manager, are more likely to create difficulties for records management and processing," he said. "Changes will be made to the procedure for handling submissions...."

The missed submissions were from Mr Frank D'Alterio, of Discovery Bay, Hong Kong; Mr Peter Lynch, of Chapel Hill, Queensland and Mr Anthony Coleiro, of Concord, NSW.

Mr Exley also acknowledged correspondence



from Dick Smith.

Mr Lynch is the principal of Evans Head Airpark Ltd, a consortium which includes Olympian Grant Kenny and which also proposes an airpark for the aerodrome.

The Evans Head Airpark proposal includes developing at least 60 exclusive homes with direct access to flying facilities as well as an industrial complex attracting aviation linked businesses to the area. It proposes to construct a museum on-site, to display an RAAF F 111 fighter bomber, and incorporate a boutique motel, convention centre and camping facilities.

It says its ultimate aim is to have a museum of such size and array of exhibits to act as a major tourism drawcard for Evans Head into the future.

It says the airpark would continue to offer vital community services to the residents of Evans Head, including maintaining existing air ambulance and fire fighting facilities as well as charter and general aviation-related businesses. Regular public transport services are also planned to be established at the airstrip.

Kenny, who co-owns the Curry-Kenny Aviation Group – Australia's largest privately owned aviation fleet with more than 110 aircraft – has pledged to establish a business on site.

The consortium is led by businessman and aviator Mr Lynch, who heads mining exploration company Waratah Coal.

RVC general manager Brian Wilkinson said after the April meeting that council had sep-

arately called for expressions of interest in developing an airpark at the aerodrome. Three expressions of interest were received as part of that process.

"Council is not in a position to comment on the expressions of interest received as they are subject to assessment with a view to being reported to council; it is likely that details of the expressions of interest will be provided to the June meeting of council," Mr Wilkinson said.

"Council will be meeting with representatives of RSL LifeCare to progress land remediation, potential sale and associated issues in coming months; it is anticipated that the proposed time-frame for lodging a development application will be part of those discussions.

"Council records are currently being checked in relation to objections/submissions that may not have been specifically mentioned in the report to council.

"A determination will then be made as to any other action that may be necessary."

At both meetings Cr Kinnish was the only councillor to vote against the rezoning.

At the May 5 meeting those supporting the rezoning were councillors Col Sullivan, Charlie Cox, Stuart George, Barbara Jeffery, Stephen Morrissey, Robert Mustow and Shirley Wheatley.

Council's amendment to the Richmond River Local Environment Plan 1992 now goes to the Department of Planning and its Minister for review and approval.