

WDC defends bridge barriers

A 74-year-old Te Kuiti resident says he's lost his "freedom" following a council decision to install steel barriers on two pedestrian bridges over the Mangaokewa Stream.

Long-time resident Dave Parlane, who suffers from arthritis, says he regularly uses his only mode of transport - a mobility scooter - to cross the bridges from his Hinerangi St home to check on a property he owns, feed the ducks or simply to "get some air".

However, Waitomo District Council (WDC) recently installed fixed steel barriers on the bridges near the Te Kuiti Bowling Club and Te Kuiti Camping Ground to stop people from illegally crossing them on motorbikes or horses.

Since their installation earlier this month, many residents have queried the decision on WDC's Facebook page saying people who use walking frames, ride bikes or push a pram cannot easily negotiate the narrow gaps between the steel bars.

Comments include:

"What about those pedestrians who push prams etc, not overly user friendly for them" and "hmmm, who are we thinking of in the long run . . . our children/elderly?"

Mr Parlane feels he and other mobility scooter users are being penalised because of a minority who break the law.

"You might say, I like to get out and be independent because it makes you feel like you're alive," he says.

"It's therapeutic.

"I like to get around and say 'giddy' to people but since the barriers went up it feels like I've lost

my freedom.

"They [the barriers] are a hindrance which stop me from going places.

"When you're incapacitated you feel like people should be helping you not putting up barriers.

"Mobility scooters are an accepted form of pedestrian traffic and should be able to freely cross pedestrian bridges."

COUNCIL'S VIEW

Mayor Brian Hanna says the council-owned area in question along the eastern bank of the Mangaokewa Stream (on the Esplanade) is designed solely for pedestrians and as a dog exercise area.

The council's Public Amenities Bylaw states it is prohibited to ride motorbikes and horses in the area and anyone caught breaching the bylaw could face an infringement fine of \$300.

"The barriers on the bridges were established purely in response to numerous public complaints about motorbikes crossing the bridges causing safety hazards and horses leaving manure," says Mr Hanna.

"I realise it is going to be inconvenient for some cyclists to get off their bikes and push them through the barriers, but that happens in a lot of places.

"I know there is also an issue for mobility scooters, but I'm not sure how many people on scooters actually use the bridges and there are alternative ways across [King St East bridge].

"So we're not going to undo what we've done, but if anyone has a real issue come and talk to us so that we can ascertain whether or not it is a significant problem and how we can address it."



ACCESS DENIED: Mobility scooter user Dave Parlane can no longer cross two pedestrian bridges over the Mangaokewa Stream in Te Kuiti because Waitomo District Council have installed steel barriers to stop motorcyclists and horse riders.

Minister visits college

OTOROHANGA College students and staff warmly welcomed the Minister of Education Hekia Parata when she visited the North King Country on Tuesday.

Following a traditional Maori greeting, Ms Parata discussed the college's increased academic results with senior management staff.

Principal Timoti Harris says Ms Parata was particularly pleased with the college's strategy of identifying and targeting learning and teaching to certain groups of students.

"The minister was told of the college's journey over the past seven years to systematically and relentlessly lift student achievement, attendance and retention, resulting in the sustained and significant improvements that have been achieved."

Ms Parata also visited Korokanui School.

TENA KOE: Otorohanga College students and staff greeted the Minister of Education Hekia Parata when she visited the North King Country school on Tuesday.



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