Golf course plan open for feedback

Jordan Smith
Local Democracy Reporting

Waipā District Council is seeking feedback on the proposal to rezone roughly 16.2 hectares of the Te Awamutu Golf Club to Medium Density Residential.

The club has a 65-hectare, rural-zoned site, and said the proceeds from selling the land would help redevelop the entire golf course as well as fund the purchase of adjoining land.

The club said the existing course layout creates safety risks from golf balls being hit on to the road, as well as drainage problems that cannot be fixed without expanding the site's boundaries.

The proposal is categorised as Private Plan Change 34, as it requires a change to council's district plan. It includes storm water management wetlands and recreational reserve areas.

Council's district plan and growth manager Wendy Robinson said the submissions are an opportunity for the community to have a say on a proposal that could have an impact on them.

"If this proposal affects you as a neighbour, a road user, a club member, or a member of the wider community, please let us know what you think."

Submissions on the change will close at 5pm on Friday November 20.

LDR is local body journalism co-funded by RNZ and NZ on Air.

Students put robots to work at engineering show

WAIKATO UNIVERSITY
Fiona Ellis

Picking kiwifruit takes a specific technique, but can a robot learn it?

For final year mechanical engineering student Jamie Shepherd, the reality of robot-harvested fruit is still a long way off – but he has been helping solve one piece of the puzzle.

By replicating the way human hands do the job, his bio-inspired robot aimed to pick the fragile fruit without damaging it.

It was one of many projects on display at the University of Waikato's bustling Engineering Design Show at the Hamilton campus recently. Other projects ranged from a robotic hospital guide to a way that cellphones could share information without internet in an emergency.

Shepherd said his project involved five or six days of fieldwork, during which he got hands-on experience picking kiwifruit while wearing a Tekscan Grip system.

Waikato University final year mechanical engineering student Jamie Shepherd.

This used multiple force and pressure sensors to measure the technique, yielding "a lot of data".

The right balance of force was important, as were the angles. A demonstration was set up using imitation fruit connected to the branch by magnets.

"It's performing pretty good. It grips really, really well, and the one advantage it does have over other kiwifruit end-effectors is the way it actually grips around it. Other kiwifruit end-effectors, they actually come from the bottom.

"If you just yank down like this, it's actually hard to pull off, usually you can expect roughly around 40 to 50 newtons of force to take it off. If you go up to 90 degrees, it actually drops to like 10 or 20 newtons to take it off and also you get a cleaner detachment of the stem."

Robotic pickers aren't commercially viable yet, he said, as kiwifruit are easy to bruise and there are a lot of variables.

"This one still has a little bit of challenge navigating tight clusters. There's still a lot of refinement that could be done with the shape of the fingers as well as the shape of the base."

Another project grabbing the attention of passers-by were two roving robots with digital smiles.

Final year software engineering student Jack Unsworth said he wa part of a team working on the futuristic navigational guides. The intention was to stop people getting lost in a big environment like a hospital, though it could also be used in other places, like a mall.

It was operated by a kiosk where people chose the location they want to get to on a map — although there was future potential to make the robots follow spoken requests.

"It's a handover system, so say you start on the first floor, it'll take you to an elevator, and then you'll meet a second robot at the next floor ... it's very accessible."

Unsworth said his role was testing how intuitive the interface was, and people "rated it an overwhelming success".

The event marked the show's 20th anniversary.

Professor Mike Duke, who established the show in 2006, said it reflects the growth of engineering at Waikato, which now has more than 1100 engineering students. The show is a launchpad, he said.

"It isn't just an exhibition, it's a dynamic, live portfolio where the students' hard work does the talking."

Change of Reserve Classification – Pembroke Park

Under section 24 of the Reserves Act 1977, Hamilton City Council is proposing to change the reserve classification of the land occupied by the Pembroke Park Clubhouse at 9 Pembroke Street (Lot 1 DPS 70567 and Lot 1 DPS 1727) from Recreation Reserve to Local Purpose (Community) Reserve.

On 27 August 2026, Council resolved to support Waikato Environment Centre Trust (Go Eco) and The Serve as the occupiers of the Pembroke Park clubhouse, subject to the necessary statutory approvals being obtained. This reclassification would enable the granting of a lease to these two community groups. The reclassification would more closely align with the proposed community-focused use of the site and enable Council to consider a broader range of community activities and future leasing arrangements.

Further information about the proposal can be found at hamilton.govt.nz/haveyoursay or at Hamilton City Libraries.

Submissions
Members of the public are invited to provide feedback on the proposal by **27 November 2026**.

For more information and to make a submission, please visit please visit hamilton.govt.nz/haveyoursay or contact 07 838 6699 or info@hcc.govt.nz.

07 838 6699
info@hcc.govt.nz
hamiltoncitycouncil

Hamilton City Council
Te kaunihera o Kirikiriroa

Shoplifter slugs staffer with deodorant can

COURT
Mike Mather

Cornered as he tried to walk out of a supermarket with bags full of stolen groceries, Gavin Burns reached for a can of deodorant.

He had no intention of simply spraying and walking away.

Gavin John Burns, 45, was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment when he appeared in the Hamilton District Court last Tuesday, after earlier admitting charges of aggravated assault and shoplifting.

Those charges related to an incident on the morning of May 3, when Burns arrived at the supermarket – the name of which has been suppressed by Judge Nicola Mathers – in a town in the Waikato.

Burns, who was wearing a beanie, glasses, and a large puffer jacket, had arrived with two reusable bags and a backpack, which he put into a trolley before walking in.

He went through the aisles, placing various items into the two reusable bags. In the alcohol section he placed two six-packs of beer into the backpack, and then put the backpack on.

He then took the bags out of the trolley and with his haul – valued at $470 – walked towards the entrance of the store, through the "sharks teeth" entryway.

A staff member stood in his way and told him to put the stolen items back.

Burns pushed him to the ground and kept moving – but he did not get far. The victim grabbed his legs and pulled him to the ground. The items in the reusable bags were scattered over the floor.

Burns sat up, grabbed the metal deodorant can, and struck the victim three times on the back of the head with it.

The two combatants got to their feet and Burns swung at the other man while still holding the can – but missed.

Burns then ran from the store, closely followed by his pursuer, and another scuffle took place outside.

The staff member had to give up due to the blood flowing from a "substantial" cut on his head where he had been struck by the can. He also had a grazed elbow and a suspected cracked rib.

Burns, meanwhile, jumped on a bike and rode off.

That incident had been preceded by more shoplifting at the same store on April 13, when Burns had filled a bag with five packs of steak and eight bottles of protein shake. As he exited through the entrance, he was verbally trespassed by the store manager.

Later, he told the police he had stolen the groceries to provide food for his family.

In relation to the May 3 assault, he told a Probations Service report writer: "It just happened so quickly. I should never have done it." In court this month, Burns wept in the dock as his counsel, Wayne Dollimore, addressed the judge.

"He is extremely remorseful," the lawyer said. "I know that's a submission made a lot in this court, but I would say it's very genuine in this case."

Following his release from prison, Burns plans to head to the South Island, to find a job in the fishing industry.

Judge Mathers had a statement from the victim, which she said was "extraordinarily forgiving". "He says he wants to see you upskilled and get a job one day."

The judge also had her own message for Burns. "You say you want to turn your life around. I hope you do."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," Burns tearfully called out before being led away to the courthouse cells.