

Te Whare Ohaaki a long journey

► Kelly Deeks

Good things take time and for Putauaki Trust in Te Teko, its new architecturally designed office hub, Te Whare Ohaaki, was finally opened in March 2024 after being proposed back in 2019.

Located in the middle of Putauaki Trust's industrial zone and adjacent to the Putauaki Trust dairy farm in Kawerau, Te Whare Ohaaki provides a magnificent setting for all of the Trust's strategic decisions.

Developed as a place to meet and work, Te Whare Ohaaki is named after long-standing trustee Charles Ohaaki Elliot in recognition of his long service and continued contributions to the Te Teko community.

The building features tall glazing units and skylights, maximising views of Mt Putauaki as well as capturing sunlight for psychological and energy-saving benefits.

Putauaki Trust CEO John O'Brien says the Trust has come a long way since the days of trustee meetings being held in an old shear-er's quarters.

"Our brief to our architects DD2 Architec-ture was the building had to focus on our maunga, should be environmentally friendly, and ideally incorporate natural and sustaina-ble materials and solar energy, and use local labour and contractors," he says. "The focus is on Putauaki as it is the maunga of all of our shareholders and descendants, and we do have tupuna buried on the maunga."

As well as being available to the trust's shareholders, trustees, and staff, the board-room will also be available for the community to hire for hui. John says as community groups sit back and look at the maunga, they may start to set some lofty goals and objectives.

The planning process was long and plagued



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by Covid price escalations and supply chain issues, however the project's construction contractor GF Builders took a mere nine months to build it.

At a well-attended opening ceremony on March 28, John paid tribute to past trustees who had set the foundations for where Putauaki Trust is today, and to the board

from 14 years ago who made the courageous decision to rezone about 110ha of Putauaki Trust's rural whenua to industrial. 240ha of property in this same location continues to be



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zoned rural, and is where Putauaki Trust runs its profitable and sustainable 750 cow dairy farm.

The new industrial zone addressed a forecast shortage of industrial land in the Eastern Bay of Plenty by ensuring land was appropriately zoned, serviced, and accessible for easy development. Putauaki Trust looked to attract entities with long term sustainable businesses, providing employment for not only the local community but also for Putauaki descendants.

Putauaki Trust and Foresta have now signed an agreement to lease with Foresta intending to build New Zealand's first industrial scale plant to produce biomass fuels as a replacement for coal. The initial stage of the project

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will take place on a 9.6ha lot at Putauaki Trust's industrial zone and although several conditions need to be satisfied before building can begin, both parties are hoping for a start date before the end of this year. Foresta plans to invest about \$300 million into building its plant, which at full production will employ more than 100 workers.



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