

# Petone club says yes to \$19m hotel project

**Paul Easton**

THE Petone Working Men's Club has unveiled plans for a \$19 million conference centre and hotel that will triple its size.

The project was given the green light at a special meeting on Sunday, despite reservations from some members.

Plans include 58 hotel units, a new restaurant cafe and an 1100-square-metre conference centre with seating for 800.

Club president Barry Priest said some of the 176 members at the meeting had reservations about the project. However, it went through "by a large majority", he said.

Opposition came from "a few longer-term members who liked the club when it was smaller".

"People tend to resist change but this place has a 122-year history. Change is going to have to happen."

The club was formed in August 1887. It now has the biggest membership in the country, at almost 12,000.

The club had a \$3 million revamp of its bar and restaurant two years ago.

Mr Priest was keen to get the new project under way "asap". A three-



**View to the future:** An artist's impression shows a conference centre and hotel, with views over Petone Recreation Ground to the harbour.

Picture: APPENDIX ONE

storey building – double the size of the existing large clubrooms – would house the hotel and conference centre. It would be built on industrial land the club already owned to the west. The club was yet to seek resource consent from Hutt City Council.

Construction could start by next January and be finished by June 2012. The project would be funded by

borrowing, with the club seeking investors for the hotel. It was well placed to service debt, with assets of more than \$11m, Mr Priest said.

The club was under pressure from growing membership, boosted by a merger with the 600-member Lower Hutt Memorial RSA last year.

The hotel units will be 3.5 stars, with views over the Petone Recreation Ground to the harbour.

Plans allow for 124 car parks but a proposed roof garden could be replaced by car parks.

Lower Hutt Mayor David Ogden was delighted with the plans. "This will complement everything we've got and provide some [first] class accommodation. It's growing and growing, that place."

There are more than 300 Working Men's and Cosmopolitan clubs in

New Zealand. Many were formed in the 1800s by men seeking cheap beer, a place to play billiards and read books. Some have merged with RSAs and other clubs, while others battled to survive.

The 129-year-old Wellington Working Men's Club closed four years ago. Management said the Cuba St club had failed to compete with other city attractions.