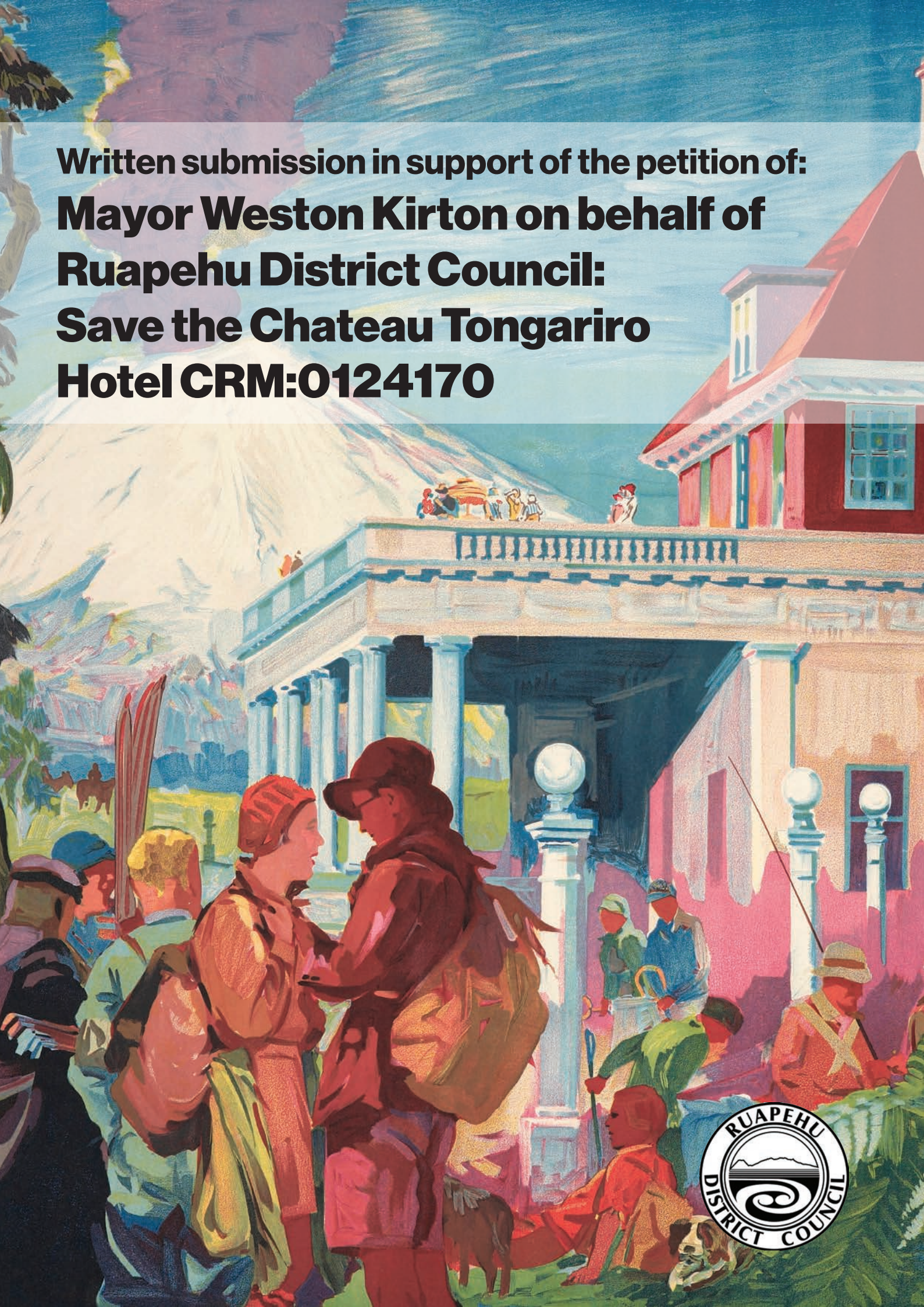


Written submission in support of the petition of:
**Mayor Weston Kirton on behalf of
Ruapehu District Council:
Save the Chateau Tongariro
Hotel CRM:0124170**



Save the Chateau Tongariro Hotel CRM:0124170

Petition request

That the House of Representatives urge the Government to act quickly to save the Chateau Tongariro Hotel, restoring it to its former glory, serving as a vital centrepiece of cultural heritage, economic prosperity, and tourism excellence in the Ruapehu District and throughout New Zealand.

Petition reason

The future of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel hangs in the balance, with negotiations underway and decisions pending from government officials. There is a strong desire from the local community, as well as from people across New Zealand and around the world, to see this iconic building saved.

By imploring the Government to act with urgency to save the Chateau, we seek to preserve a treasured piece of our cultural heritage along with the economic prosperity and tourism excellence that it represents.



THE NEW ACCOMMODATION HOUSE AT TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK, NORTH ISLAND, RAPIDLY NEARING COMPLETION.
A recent photograph of Chateau Tongariro showing the progress made in its construction. In the distance Mount Ruapehu can be seen on the right of the photograph. —Staff Photographer.

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Executive summary

The Ruapehu District Council (RDC) urges the Petitions Committee to recommend urgent Government leadership to secure the restoration of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel and Whakapapa Village.

The Chateau is a nationally significant heritage building, an economic anchor for Ruapehu and regional tourism, and a drawcard of New Zealand's high-value tourism offering.

Our Parliamentary Petition - signed by 15,469 people across Aotearoa and internationally demonstrates overwhelming public support for saving this Category 1 heritage icon.

Immediate Crown action is required to create a clear pathway for partnership with iwi, credible investors, and Government agencies so the Chateau can be restored to an operationally sustainable state.

This will:

- Protect irreplaceable cultural and built heritage creating a lasting intergenerational legacy.
- Unlock stalled regional tourism growth and restore a key driver of the Ruapehu and regional economy.
- Provide new opportunities for iwi-led cultural revival, investment, employment and training, and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- Redirect existing Crown expenditure from passive holding costs to an active programme that delivers enduring economic and social benefits.



Key points of submission

Ruapehu District Council thanks the Petitions Committee for considering our petition to Save the Chateau Tongariro Hotel (CRM:0124170). The key points of our submission include:

- **Significant public support:** The petition attracted 15,469 signatures from around New Zealand and beyond. Since the petition closed Council has continued to field enquiries from people asking how they support saving the Chateau. The widespread support shows how deeply people care about saving this iconic building and what it means to so many people.
- **Broad political support:** The petition has enjoyed broadly based political support from both sides of the House including from key Ministers.
- **National heritage asset:** Opened in 1929, the Chateau Tongariro is a Category 1 heritage building and an architectural landmark of Neo-Georgian design containing artworks of national importance.
- **Cultural significance:** The hotel is a gateway to the UNESCO dual-World-Heritage Tongariro National Park and embodies decades of cultural, social, and tourism history.
- **Current mothballing costs:** The Department of Conservation is currently spending upwards of \$2 million per annum to maintain the building and its fixtures and fittings including its artworks. Restoration will allow the significant majority of required expenditure to shift from public to private and allow DOC to redirect this money to conservation.
- **Economic contribution:** Before its closure, the Chateau Tongariro Hotel was a cornerstone of the Ruapehu and wider regional tourism economy - generating millions of dollars in economic activity each year, supporting dozens of local jobs, and sustaining businesses across accommodation, hospitality, guiding, and transport services.
- **Employment and training:** The Chateau supported 75 permanent direct jobs and many more seasonal roles and downstream employment positions. It was also a major tourism and hospitality training institution.
- **Tourism recovery:** The Chateau provided a third of Ruapehu's visitor beds and drew high-spending international guests. Its closure has impacted tourism sector recovery, with Ruapehu's visitor spend still only 57 % of pre-COVID levels compared to 81 % nationally. Restoring the Chateau and revitalising Whakapapa Village is critical to bridging this gap and supporting year-round tourism.
- **Iwi aspirations and cultural revival:** Restoring the Chateau and revitalising Whakapapa Village present a unique opportunity to advance iwi aspirations in multiple areas.
- **Alignment with Government tourism and economic growth objectives:** Restoring the Chateau and revitalising Whakapapa Village directly supports Government's visitor-economy and national growth objectives.
- **Investors ready to go:** Minister Hon. Potaka has advised that there are five parties expressing interest in the Chateau. Council has been approached independently by developers with the balance sheet to take the project on without reliance on Government funding plus successful experience with heritage and hotel projects.
- **Significant public good:** Restoring the Chateau will deliver significant public good elements including; heritage, iwi partnership, environmental stewardship, employment and training opportunities, economic growth, and wider regional benefits amongst other things.

Public and political support

15,469 signatures

The Save the Chateau Parliamentary Petition drew 15,469 verified signatures from around New Zealand and overseas and since the petition formally closed we have continued to receive messages from people asking how they can help. Throughout the petition people have been sharing stories on their connection with the Chateau.

The ongoing level of interest shows that the Chateau is not merely a local concern but a national treasure with international resonance. This breadth of public engagement underscores the depth of feeling New Zealanders have for protecting their shared heritage and should give Government confidence that a restoration pathway enjoys broad democratic support.

It is worth noting that Council only closed the petition due to the 2025 local elections and are confident we would have easily exceeded 20,000+ signatures within a short time.

Cross-party political support

The petition was formally presented to Parliament by Rangitikei MP Suze Redmayne on 16 September 2025 and was backed publicly at the hand-over by a group of Members of Parliament, including Minister for Conservation Hon. Tama Potaka, Barbara Kuriger MP (Taranaki-King Country), and Carl Bates MP (Whanganui). Minister for Tourism and Hospitality Hon. Louise Upston was thanked for her support by Suze Redmayne.

Labour MP and spokesperson for tourism Damien O'Connor has also met with Mayor Weston Kirton in Taumarunui and voiced his support.

This broad political support signals all-of-government recognition of the Chateau's value - cultural, economic, and environmental - and a willingness to work with local government, iwi, and private investors - highlighting that Parliamentarians understand the stakes and the opportunity.



Ruapehu iwi Unenuku Chair Adien Gilbert, Ruapehu Mayor Weston Kirton, Rangitikei MP Suze Redmayne, and Taranaki-King Country MP Barbara Kuriger with the petition outside the Beehive on presentation day.

Heritage and cultural asset

Opened in 1929, the Chateau Tongariro is a Category 1 heritage building and one of the country's finest examples of Neo-Georgian architecture. It houses an extensive collection of original artworks, bespoke furniture, and heritage fittings that together tell a near-century of New Zealand design and social history.

Enduring Architecture Award

In June 2023 Mayor Kirton accepted an Enduring Architecture Award from the Western Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects on behalf of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel. The enduring architecture award celebrates buildings that have stood the test of time and are 25 years or more in age with the Chateau having been nominated by several member architects.

Its protected status reflects both its architectural significance and its role as a symbol of the early tourism vision that helped shape the modern conservation estate. Losing or allowing the gradual decline of such a structure would be an irreversible loss to the nation's built heritage.

Cultural significance

The hotel stands at the gateway to Tongariro National Park, recognised by UNESCO for both natural and cultural World-Heritage values. For generations it has served as a gathering place where New Zealanders and international visitors experience the living relationship between people and the mountains of Tongariro, Ngāuruhoe, and Ruapehu.

Weddings, conferences, film productions, and countless personal milestones have been celebrated here, embedding the Chateau in the collective memory of Aotearoa and strengthening its status as a cultural icon.

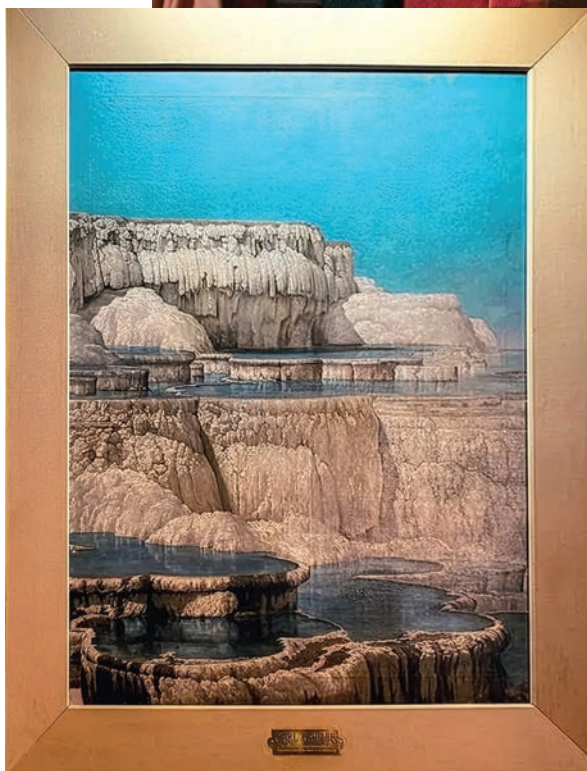


Mayor Kirton accepts the 2023 Enduring Architecture Award from the Western Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects on behalf of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel.

Crown mothballing spend

The Department of Conservation is currently spending upwards of \$2 million per annum to keep the Chateau in a stable state and to protect its Category 1 architecture, interior finishes, and art collection.

- These funds are essential to prevent deterioration but do not generate any economic return for the region or the nation.
- Redirecting even a portion of this annual spend toward an active restoration and redevelopment programme would create jobs immediately and begin unlocking the economic, cultural, and tourism benefits of a fully operational Chateau and Whakapapa Village.
- Continuing to fund indefinite mothballing is, in effect, a sunk cost. A Government-led pathway to renewal offers a far higher public value for every dollar spent.



Starting the restoration process will save the Crown upwards of \$2 million per annum currently being spent on keeping the Chateau in a stable state and to protect its Category 1 architecture, interior finishes, and art collection.

Painting of the White Terraces by Carl Kahler (1856-1906) painted prior to their destruction in an eruption of Mt Tarawera in 1886 hanging in the Chateau lounge.

The highest recorded sale price for the painter was US\$826,000 by Sotheby's New York in 2015.

Tourism in Ruapehu

Tourism is Ruapehu's second-largest industry after agriculture/forestry providing a higher share of GDP, jobs, and business opportunities in Ruapehu than in New Zealand overall. Protecting and growing this sector is critical for the district's economic resilience, especially as it continues its long rebound from COVID and other recent economic shocks including the loss of the WPI mills.

Economic Contribution

- **GDP share:** Tourism generated around 6.7% of Ruapehu's GDP (Infometrics 2015 baseline), compared with the national tourism share of about 3.7% of GDP (Stats NZ, year-end March 2023).
- **Trend:** While the 6.7% figure is from 2015, more recent Infometrics reports show tourism has remained a major contributor despite COVID disruptions.

Employment

- **Jobs 2023:** Infometrics data shows 839 people were employed in tourism-related industries in 2023, representing 12.5% of total district employment.
- **National comparison:** Nationally, tourism accounted for 6.9% of total employment as at March 2023 (Stats NZ Tourism).
- **Key point:** Tourism therefore provides roughly double the employment share in Ruapehu compared with the New Zealand average.
- **Business base:** Historic benchmarking shows the visitor sector has supported around 11% of all jobs and 9.3% of businesses in the district (2015 Infometrics data). These figures underline tourism's importance in the Ruapehu economy.

Additional Context

- **Visitor spending:** MBIE's Monthly Regional Tourism Estimates show international visitor spending in Ruapehu is still only about 57% of 2019 levels, compared with 81% nationally, highlighting the importance of the Chateau to the tourism economy.
- **Year-round potential:** Ruapehu's natural assets - ski fields, Tongariro Alpine Crossing, cycle trails, and heritage attractions - support year-round tourism, making the sector a stabilising force for local (and regional) employment and revenue. While Ruapehu has traditionally been perceived as a winter-snow destination the district now has more summer than winter visitors.

Chateau's share of the tourism economy

The Chateau Tongariro Hotel was a cornerstone of Ruapehu's tourism sector and wider regional visitor economy.

- **GDP & jobs:** At its peak, the Chateau accounted for around 10% of Ruapehu's tourism-focused GDP and about 9% of jobs in tourism-focused industries (Chateau Economic Impact Study 2024).
- **Accommodation capacity:** With 106 rooms and ~70% average occupancy (peaking at 78% in 2017), the Chateau supplied around 30% of the district's commercial visitor beds.

The Chateau was a high-end accommodation anchor and gateway in Whakapapa; its absence removes capacity, diminishes visitor choice, weakens the package appeal of Ruapehu, and reduces spillover demand for transport, guiding, food & beverage, and ancillary services.

Economic assessments and local stakeholders' accounts point to a measurable weakening in visitor spend recovery in Ruapehu relative to national trends, with the Chateau's closure identified explicitly as a contributing factor.

- **Guest numbers:** Hosted 38,000 guests in 2017, with a five-year pre-COVID average of ~27,000 guests annually.
- **Regional spend:** The regional spending generated by the Chateau was estimated at ~\$5.5 million per annum.
- **Visitor mix:** Summer guests were ~75% international / 25% domestic; winter guests ~85% domestic / 15% international.
- **Key points:** Chateau guests typically stayed longer and spent more than the average tourist, supporting restaurants, adventure operators, transport services, and retail businesses across the Central Plateau.

The closure of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel has removed a major drawcard for high-value international travellers impacting tour operators, KiwiRail excursions, and hospitality businesses across the Central Plateau weakening the entire regional visitor economy.

Restoring the Chateau is therefore essential to regaining high-value markets and sustaining year-round jobs and investment.

Employment, wages & training opportunities

The Chateau was a major source of quality employment and skills development in a rural district:

- **Jobs:** Averaged 75 permanent staff (2015-20) and up to 120 during the summer peak.
- **Local spend:** Contributed about \$3 million per year in wages and \$650,000 per year in local goods and services, injecting \$68,000–\$72,000 each week into the Ruapehu economy.
- **Training Hub:** Provided hands-on training across hospitality, hotel management, culinary arts, customer service, event management, housekeeping, maintenance, and tourism operations, creating career pathways for local people and supplying skilled staff to the wider New Zealand tourism industry.

- **Tourism consistently provides a higher share of GDP, jobs, and business opportunities in Ruapehu than in New Zealand overall.**
- **Within this sector, the Chateau Tongariro Hotel was a singular economic powerhouse, combining high visitor spend, significant employment, and nationally recognised hospitality training.**
- **Protecting and restoring this asset is critical to Ruapehu's economic resilience, supporting the tourism sector, and to realising Government goals for regional development, high-value tourism, and skills growth.**

Key Sources

- Hutch Consulting: Chateau Tongariro economic impact (2024)
- Stats NZ Tourism Satellite Account (year-end March 2023)
- Infometrics Ruapehu District Economic Profile (2015 baseline; 2023 employment update)
- MBIE Monthly Regional Tourism Estimates (2024)
- Visit Ruapehu Regional Visitor Development Plan (2017)

Support for iwi aspirations

The future of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel and Whakapapa Village cannot be separated from iwi aspirations for the Tongariro National Park. This landscape is of deep cultural, spiritual, and historical significance to mana whenua, who are recognised under Treaty settlements and the Te Awa Tupua framework as kaitiaki with enduring rights and responsibilities.

For any long-term solution to succeed, the Crown must ensure that mana whenua are central to decision-making, governance, and economic participation. This is consistent with Treaty of Waitangi obligations, government policy commitments to partnership with iwi, and the principles of equitable regional development.

Restoring the Chateau represents an opportunity for the Government to demonstrate leadership in Treaty partnership by embedding iwi as full participants in shaping the Park's future.

How restoration supports iwi aspirations

- **Partnership:** Establishing iwi-Crown partnership structures for the Chateau and Whakapapa Village, ensuring mana whenua leadership in governance and operational decisions.
- **Employment and workforce development:** Creating sustainable, well-paid jobs for iwi across hospitality, guiding, environmental management, and cultural tourism, directly addressing local employment needs.
- **Training and career pathways:** Re-establishing the Chateau as a national hospitality and tourism training hub, with specific pathways for iwi youth into management, culinary arts, customer service, and cultural interpretation.
- **Business development:** Opening procurement and commercial opportunities for iwi-owned enterprises in guiding, retail, food and beverage, cultural experiences, and environmental services.
- **Cultural expression and storytelling:** Ensuring authentic iwi narratives, whakapapa, and kaitiakitanga are embedded in the visitor experience, enhancing cultural revitalisation and delivering on the Government's tourism strategy for authentic Māori offerings. Whakapapa Holdings Ltd the operators of the ski area and Sky Waka Gondola have voiced a vision for this in their partnership with mana whenua.
- **Equitable economic returns:** Structuring the revitalised Chateau to provide iwi with a fair share of the economic value generated, supporting intergenerational wealth creation and self-determination.

The Crown has an obligation to uphold Treaty partnership principles in determining the future of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel and Whakapapa Village.

By restoring this nationally significant heritage asset in partnership with iwi, Government can deliver a model supporting economic equity that strengthens local communities, supports cultural revitalisation, and advances national tourism and regional development objectives.

Delivering on Government's visitor economy and growth objectives

Restoring the Chateau Tongariro Hotel and revitalising Whakapapa Village are not only heritage and regional projects - they are national growth opportunities. The redevelopment aligns directly with Government's objectives for a high-value, sustainable, and regionally dispersed visitor economy.

Restoration of the Chateau and Whakapapa Village will:

- **Attract high-value visitors:** Providing premium accommodation that draws international travellers who stay longer, spend more, and contribute to higher-value tourism outcomes. Prior to its closure the Chateau represented 30% of Ruapehu's commercial accommodation. Due to its position in the market these beds attracted higher-value visitors who stayed longer and spent more on experiences.
- **Boosting regional dispersal:** Strengthening Ruapehu as a central North Island hub encourages visitors to travel beyond main gateways, distributing benefits across the Thermal Explorer Highway and central plateau.
- **Driving year-round tourism:** Supporting both summer and winter demand with accommodation, experiences, and cultural offerings, reducing reliance on snow seasons and creating stable employment.
- **Accelerating post-COVID recovery:** Addressing Ruapehu's lagging international spend recovery (57% vs 81% nationally) by reinstating one of its key anchor attractions.
- **Supporting iwi aspirations and partnership:** Embedding mana whenua leadership, business opportunities, and authentic Māori storytelling in line with Government's Māori tourism and Treaty partnership commitments.
- **Enhancing workforce development:** Restoring the Chateau's role as a training hub builds skilled talent pipelines for the national hospitality and tourism sector. With tourism being a major regional economic activity training institutions such as the Chateau are critical to providing employment pathways for youth encompassing Taupo and the Central Plateau area.
- **Strengthening the regional economy:** Generating GDP, wages, and business growth across Ruapehu and the wider central North Island, aligning with the Government's regional development and growth agendas.

Investor readiness and the case for action

There is clear and credible investor interest in restoring the Chateau Tongariro Hotel and revitalising Whakapapa Village.

Minister Hon. Potaka has advised DOC has five expressions of interest (EOI) while in response to the petition Council has also been approached by established developers with the financial strength, heritage expertise, and track record to successfully deliver this project without reliance on direct Government funding.

Council believes this project is 'low-hanging fruit' that delivers on Government's stated objectives for tourism and economic growth.

We ask that Government envisage the impact of a \$100+ million private investment in the central North Island providing new jobs, training and skills, regional growth, iwi partnerships, and heritage protection.

Government must now show leadership by putting in place the iwi partnerships, policy settings, and lease framework needed to unlock the opportunities that restoring the Chateau and Whakapapa Village will deliver.



The case for public good investment

Restoring the Chateau Tongariro Hotel is not just a private development opportunity - it is an investment in public good outcomes that extend far beyond the hotel and Whakapapa Village itself.

The Chateau is a nationally significant heritage landmark, a gateway to New Zealand's only dual UNESCO World Heritage National Park, and a cornerstone of the central North Island visitor economy.

While there are interested investor/developers with the necessary financial capability to fund the bulk of the restoration some Government investment will be essential to support the public good elements that the restoration of the Chateau and Whakapapa Village will deliver. These include:

- **Heritage protection:** Safeguarding one of New Zealand's most iconic Category 1 heritage buildings for future generations.
- **National identity:** Preserving a landmark that embodies nearly a century of cultural, social, and tourism history in Aotearoa.
- **Environmental stewardship:** Ensuring Whakapapa Village and its facilities are managed in ways that protect and enhance the surrounding World Heritage environment.
- **Iwi partnership:** Enabling equitable mana whenua participation and supporting iwi aspirations for employment, business development, and cultural revitalisation.
- **Regional development:** Delivering wider economic and social benefits to a rural region facing recent industrial closures and ongoing affordability challenges.
- **Workforce training:** Reinstating the Chateau as a training hub for hospitality and tourism, building skills and career pathways for young New Zealanders.
- **Visitor economy growth:** Strengthening New Zealand's international reputation as a high-value, culturally authentic destination.

What needs to happen

Success is simple and measurable

A firm Crown commitment to a programme enabling the revitalisation of the Chateau Tongariro Hotel and Whakapapa Village to an operationally functional and sustainable state—one that safeguards heritage, honours Treaty obligations, embeds iwi partnership, and restores the Chateau's role as a generator of jobs, training, and regional economic growth.

The call to Government is clear

The Council has confirmed interest from credible investors ready to investigate and potentially undertake the redevelopment of the Chateau—and, potentially, the wider Whakapapa Village precinct.

These investors have the vision, capability, and resources to deliver.

However, progress depends on Government leadership to remove barriers and unlock the opportunity.

Government must now:

- 1. Commit to a transparent, time-bound process** to qualify and select a suitable investor or developer with the appropriate vision, experience, and financial capacity.
- 2. Enable the necessary policy and lease settings** - including long-term lease flexibility or a carve-out from Tongariro National Park - to make investment viable.
- 3. Work directly with iwi and investors** to co-design governance and partnership arrangements that reflect Treaty obligations and mana whenua aspirations.
- 4. Champion the project** at Cabinet level as a model for public–private partnership that delivers economic growth, heritage protection, and regional development.
- 5. Act with urgency** to secure a commitment ensuring the Chateau's restoration can begin without further deterioration or loss of opportunity.

The people of New Zealand have spoken loudly—not only through more than 15,000 petition signatures, but through the widespread and ongoing public, iwi, and political support that shows this cause goes far beyond Ruapehu.

Now is the time for Government to step up, show leadership, and do everything required to save the Chateau—our national treasure and a cornerstone of the central North Island economy.



THE FIRST SNOW OF THE SEASON AT TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK, NEAR THE CENTRE OF THE NORTH ISLAND.
A view of the Chateau and Mount Ruapehu taken last week. During the winter months the park provides one of the best winter sports grounds in the Dominion. —Staff Photographer.



A CASTLE IN THE SNOWS: THE CHATEAU AT NATIONAL PARK PHOTOGRAPHED AFTER A HEAVY SNOWFALL.



SNOW-PLUGH IN USE AFTER A HEAVY SNOWSTORM AT TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK
The snow-plough operating on the road from the Chateau up the lower slopes of Ruapehu after a recent blizzard had rendered the road impassable for motor traffic. —Lloyd Wilson



GOLF IN THE SNOW.



WINTER AT TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK, NORTH ISLAND: SCENES LAST WEEK IN THE VICINITY OF THE CHATEAU.
Upper left: The Chateau surrounded by snow, with nearby Mount Ruapehu (centre) as massive background. UPPER: A heavy party of winter sports enthusiasts on the snow-covered path. LOWER: A picturesque view of the park looking up the valley of the Chateau, looking the picture of winter sports.

News print photographs of the Chateau from the 1930's



Under construction 1929



James Smith and Henry Woods, 2nd chairman and 1st chairman of Foodstuffs Ltd - 1936



1930s



Summer night - 1930s



1940s



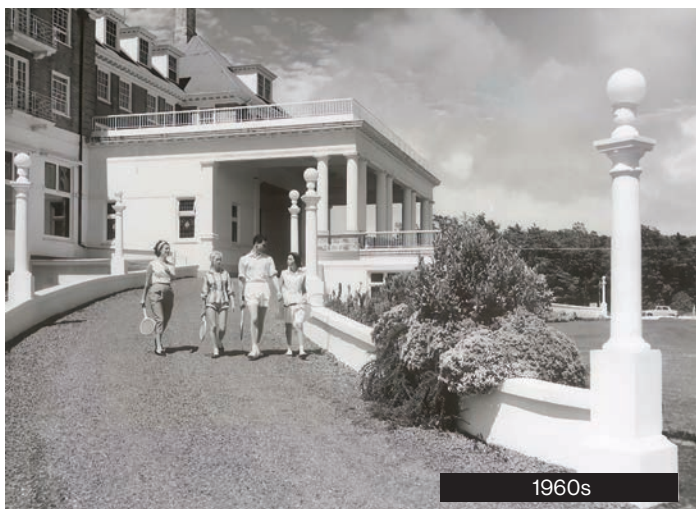
1950s



Early 1960s



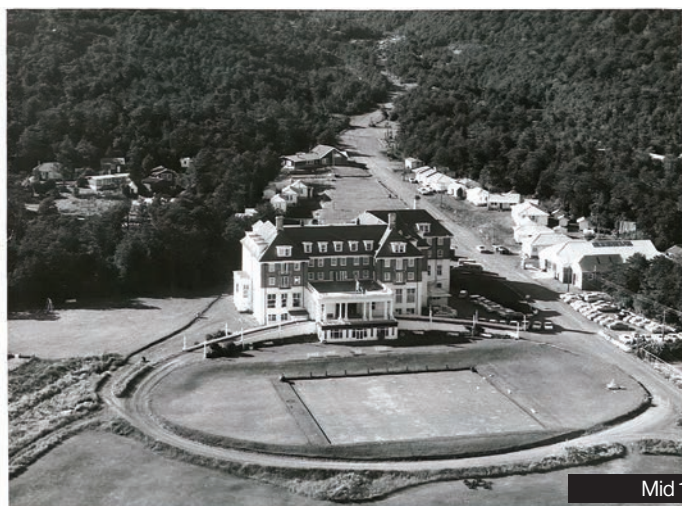
RNZAF aerial 1965



1960s



Early 1960s



Mid 1960s



Late 1960s



Mid 1970s





Mt Cook Lines bus 1975



1970s



Early 1960s



Air NZ promotion mid-1970s



Mid 1970s



1940s

Throughout the petition period there has been wide-ranging interest in the future of the Chateau from media, central and local government politicians, iwi, senior business leaders, and the general public.

“The Chateau remains on the national agenda because so many New Zealanders have a personal connection to it - it’s part of our shared story.”

Mayor Weston Kirton



TVNZ 7 Sharp September 2025



Whena Owen TVNZ Q&A March 2025



John Campbell September 2024

Both local and national politicians support the Chateau - LGNZ Conference



RDC CE Clive Manley, Mayor Kirton, Regional Development Minister Hon. Shane Jones, Kawerau Mayor Faylene Tunui, Taupo Mayor David Trewavas



Air NZ CEO Greg Foran said that the Chateau was a “drawcard” in discussions with Mayor Kirton at the Mayoral Forum July 2025



Ruapehu iwi Unenuku Chair Adien Gilbert, Mayor Kirton and Conservation Minister Hon. Tama Potaka on petition submission day



Parliamentary Petition

**Save the Chateau Tongariro
Hotel CRM:0124170**



ruapehudc.govt.nz