

NEWS

# No light at end of tunnel

A campaign to allow access to tunnels in Auckland City isn't over yet, reports *Erin Hogan*

**B**ill Reid has spent more than two decades bashing his head against a brick wall.

But his 22-year-old battle to open the Albert Park tunnels to the public rages on and he refuses to give up the fight.

In September 2005, Mr Reid, of Glen Eden, signed an agreement with Auckland City Council allowing him to investigate and provide a proposal outlining possible future uses of the tunnels.

Mr Reid believes this agreement allows him exclusive long-term rights to open these tunnels.

George Farrant, chief heritage adviser at the council, says the agreement gives Mr Reid the right to investigate the feasibility of using the tunnels for commercial purposes.

This agreement expired in March this year and Mr Reid recently delivered a letter to the council claiming intellectual property rights over his plans and concepts presented to them.

If Mr Reid can get backing to open the tunnels, he plans a bus route from the top of Victoria St through to Parnell.

He would also include pedestrian access to the University of Auckland by escalator.

Mr Reid says there was interest from a tourist operator to install tourist attractions such as a glow-worm cave, museum and black-water rafting.

But he has had trouble finding a genuine funder for the project and Mr Reid says the council has twice refused to work with him on opening the tunnels.

Mr Farrant is concerned that the tunnels may not be stable and many passages outside the main tunnel are barely walkable.

The council had to stabilise ventilation shafts that feed the tunnel system after two bad cases of subsidence in 2005.

Mr Farrant says it is unlikely the tunnels will be opened to the public but the best chance would be investigating the tunnel entrance near the Auckland Art Gallery.

"It is remote at this stage. There could be a limited section of the tunnels opened up.

"The best possible access way would

be the entrance by the art gallery," says Mr Farrant.

This entrance will be looked at by the council once the construction of the new gallery begins.

Auckland University student adviser Scott Pilkington has written two studies on the tunnels and would love to see them opened to the public.

"I sincerely believe that there is, in fact, a unique ecosystem in there. We don't know very much about how ecosystems develop in man-made cave-like structures and this could be an opportunity to gain some insight."

Mr Pilkington says the tunnels could also provide keys to the past with the possibility of material left behind by construction workers.

"I expect that there will be rubbish in the tunnels left by workers during the decommissioning stage which would render the tunnels like a giant midden heap and could potentially give us quite a lot of insight."

Mr Pilkington concedes however that there would be large costs involved in making the tunnels safe.



ALBERT PARK BOASTS A NUMBER OF TUNNELS

## ALBERT PARK TUNNELS

Dug in eight months during 1942, the tunnels were designed to house 22,000 people in the event of an air raid over the central city in World War II.

Almost 3500m, or just over two miles, of tunnels run underneath the park.

They were filled with clay bricks and sealed off in February 1946.