

\$18m hotel plan for city

Entrepreneur wants to raise standards in the city's high-end accommodation market

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The Taranaki man bankrolling an \$18 million luxury hotel development in New Plymouth has been revealed as former Tenderlink owner Phil Brown.

In late 2010, the Inglewood-born entrepreneur sold Tenderlink, a company he built up from humble beginnings in his garage, for \$21.6 million.

Now he has re-emerged as the sole shareholder of Hobson Hotel Property Holdings Ltd, which has just filed application to the New Plymouth District Council for consents to build a four-plus star 100-room hotel on the corner of Hobson St and Leach St.

The four-storey hotel has a budget of \$18 million, including a construction cost of \$12.5 million. When completed, it will employ at least 50 people.

The hotel will be called Hobson Hotel, and it will operate independently, not as part of any hotel chain or management group.

In an exclusive interview yesterday, Mr Brown said the project was the result of a year-long feasibility study showing New Plymouth had among the highest hotel occupancy rates in New Zealand at more than 80 per cent, yet was not particularly well served in terms of both quantity and quality of hotel rooms.

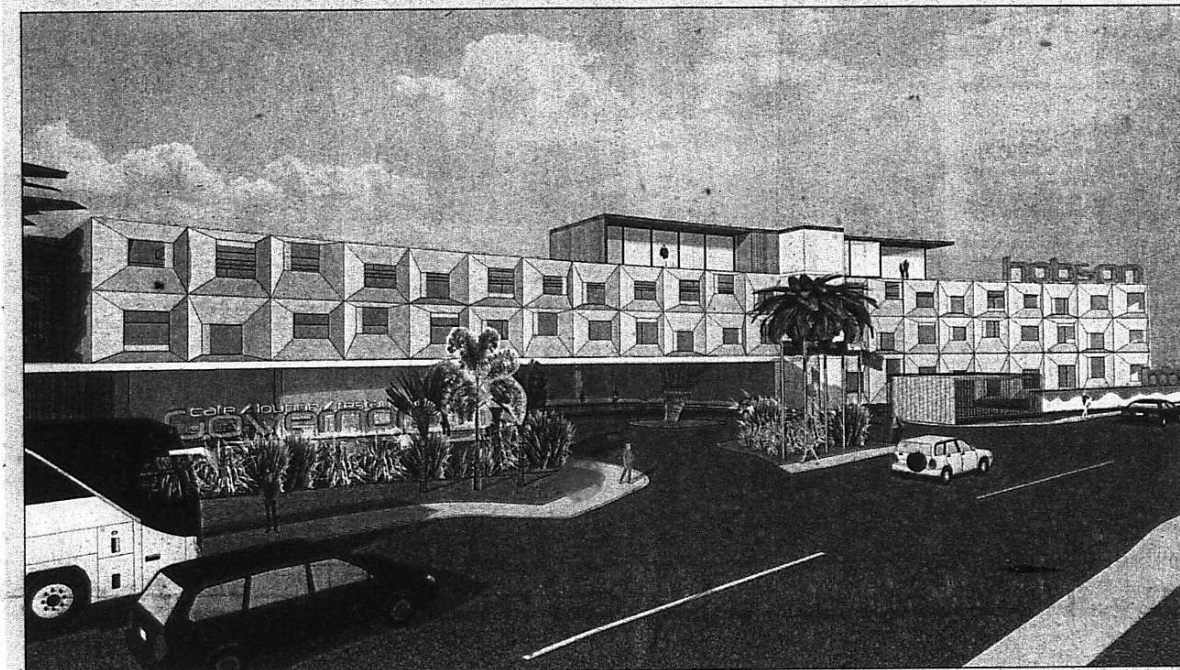
"It's no secret that New Plymouth's overall hotel stock isn't up to the standard of other areas," he said.

"When I had Tenderlink I heard it all the time - that good accommodation is hard to find in New Plymouth. That the existing quality accommodation is quickly taken up by the oil and gas and corporate sectors. So that gave me confidence that a major new hotel project for the region will work."

His research has been supported by Venture Taranaki, which, in a letter supporting the resource consent applications, points out there has been strong growth in Taranaki's commercial accommodation sector over the first four months of this year, with the number of guests nights up by more than 20,000 people or 8.8 per cent on last year.

"The region is, however, currently experiencing a shortage of high-end accommodation capacity," the letter, signed by VT chief executive Stuart Trundle, said.

"The limited availability of accommodation, particularly at the upper end of the market, has contributed to the region being unable to attract and secure some business conferences and events, and has made it difficult to attract an



Top notch: An artist's impression of the hotel.

Graphic: BOON GOLDSMITH BHASKAR BREBNER TEAM ARCHITECTS

Curve makes building 'distinctive'

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Hobson Hotel will be a distinctively curved four-storey building built on a long but narrow site on the south side of Leach St, bordered by Hobson St.

It will be named after Captain William Hobson, this country's first governor-general, who was instrumental in drafting and

signing the Treaty of Waitangi.

The hotel will be themed on his contribution to New Zealand - a restaurant will be named "Governors", and conference and meeting rooms will be named after consultation with local iwi.

Designed by New Plymouth architects Boon Goldsmith Bhaskar Brebner, it will feature the 100-seat restaurant, a foyer-reception and 17 rooms on the ground floor, which will lead up a short flight of stairs to

a mezzanine and conference area for up to 250 people. There will also be underground parking for 35 vehicles and a total of 58 on-site car parks.

The hotel will also have two bars, a day spa, lap pool and gym, with sauna.

Two more storeys will offer a selection of executive and studio rooms, plus four one-bedroom apartments, and the top level will feature one luxury penthouse suite.

In total, the hotel will have 61 studio rooms and 34 executive rooms.

Architect Murali Bhaskar said he was excited by the curved design of the new hotel.

"It's going to be one of the most distinctive buildings in New Plymouth."

A feature will be the rare Jamaican inkwood tree on the site. Research has shown it was probably planted during the 1860s when the area was a nursery.

BTW environmental planner Nik Pyselman said the 30-metre tree was thought to be the oldest of its species in New Zealand and was protected under New Plymouth's district plan.

"So we will have to go to considerable lengths to ensure it remains protected. But we think it will end up as a very good feature of this hotel development."

affluent market to major sporting and cultural events."

Recent examples have been the loss of two high-profile national conferences that sought to use Taranaki but couldn't because of a lack of suitable accommodation, Mr Trundle's letter said.

Similarly, a group of wealthy international Rugby World Cup visitors travelled to Hamilton following their team's match in New Plymouth so they could stay in suitable accommodation.

Mr Brown said he was confident the Hobson Hotel would change all of that.

"The site is on a major arterial route. The hotel will become a landmark building for New Ply-

"The hotel will become a landmark building for New Plymouth."
Phil Brown

mouth and will further enhance the city's reputation for being progressive and vibrant," he said.

Mr Brown, 49, worked in the freight industry before returning to New Plymouth in 1997 to join a business partnership that opened the Crowded House bar and cafe.

He then developed Tenderlink, before selling it to Australasian media giant Fairfax Media in December 2010.



Hobson's choice: Architect Murali Bhaskar, businessman Philip Brown and environmental planner Nik Pyselman in front of the rare Jamaican inkwood that must remain when Hobson Hotel is built.

Photo: JONATHAN CAMERON/FAIRFAX NZ