

College promoter impressed

By: NEAL, Tracy

Nelson offers the right ingredients for a United World College, says the man driving plans for a New Zealand branch.

Queenstown-based project director John Hilhorst was in Nelson yesterday to look at potential sites for the \$74 million development.

"Nelson has the degree of diversity and good community spirit that we are looking for," he said.

"It's a go-ahead place with good connectivity nationally and internationally."

Nelson Deputy Mayor Rachel Reese, who has held preliminary talks with representatives of the trust behind the project, confirmed that between three and five sites in the Nelson region were being looked at.

She said this week that a top-of-the-south approach, which included Nelson and Marlborough, would be the best way to provide support for the type of college planned.

It was announced on Thursday that the region was being eyed as a possible location for the planned New Zealand college in a global network of 13 United World Colleges, of which former South African president Nelson Mandela is honorary international president.

NZ UWC trust chairman Tony Baldwin said this week that Nelson was among a small list of New Zealand regions being considered for a college and campus, which would educate and house up to 250 scholarship students from around the world.

United World Colleges runs a demanding two-year academic programme ending with the International Baccalaureate exam. Students are selected on personal merit, irrespective of race, religion, politics and ability to pay.

Mr Hilhorst, who has led the establishment of the New Zealand Alpine Sports Academy and the Wakatipu High School International Programme, said yesterday the trust was looking for a place that best represented New Zealand.

It would not be in an urban environment, with some of the sites considered quite remote, and others within 5-6km of a good-sized community.

"The features that are important for us include stunning environmental values. We would like to be in a regional community that allows good connection with the people of New Zealand.

"The school is very much about engaging with its community it's not just about landscape, but the people of New Zealand and that's embodied well in the Nelson community," Mr Hilhorst said.

The college and campus would cost about \$74 million to build, employ 85 staff and have annual running costs of \$7 million.

Cr Reese said the intention is for the college to have a focus on sustainable development.

The project would require considerable fundraising, with help from New Zealand and global philanthropists.

Mr Hilhorst said Air New Zealand, Contact Energy and NZ Post had come on board as corporate sponsors, and the trust was in talks with other corporates.

Mr Baldwin said a site originally earmarked in Queenstown had not been ruled out, but because the trust realised it would be "hard-pressed" to get the consents needed, it had to look at other options.

The focus now was on completing stage two of a five-stage plan that would see the college open by September 2012. Site selection was on a tight timeframe, and would need to be finalised by December this year, Mr Hilhorst said.

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