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Abstract

Regardless of community size, issues surrounding planning for and managing the effects of growth and development are largely similar. With growth comes increasing demand on natural and physical resources, conflicting community aspirations, and reduced willingness and ability for the Community to pay to expand and maintain essential public infrastructure and services to support growth.

Waipa District, population circa 42,000 in 2006, found itself in this environment. Facing increasing development pressure both within existing townships and outside of these on the precious rural land resource, a resource which is significant in the need to retain its productive capability so as to maintain the District's continued economic prosperity.

Early in 2008 Council commenced a comprehensive planning process, the first stage of which was to develop an overarching growth strategy for the District. The draft strategy was taken through the LGA special consultative procedures at the same time as the associated sub-regional Growth Strategy (Future Proof). Joint hearings and decisions saw these documents approved by joint Council's in June 2009, essentially 13 months after the project began.

This paper details the key elements of the process that have contributed towards the successful development of a 40+ year growth strategy in a collaborative way. It highlights how the ratified outcomes are now influencing organisational structure and Governance and decision making across all of Council's activities. Observations about why the project has been successful to date are also provided – with commentary on environment, governance, leadership and ownership.

Introduction

The Waipa District has been branded as the "Home of Champions" for the best part of the last decade. This brand reflects both the success of the Olympians and World Champions from within the community (Waipa can boast more gold medallists within its District than any other) as well the fact that many within the community are proud to call Waipa a Champion Home. Maintaining and enhancing this brand in all aspects of the Council's business has been and remains a key focus.

However, the Community was becoming increasingly concerned about the look and feel of the towns, with shared concerns raised that many of the key elements of the urban characteristics that endeared the District to people were being eroded. In addition, other environmental and governance factors meant that 'Business As Usual' was becoming increasingly problematic. These include:

- Increasing concerns about the pressures being placed on rural land and the natural environment, water, landscapes and ecology;
- Impending Governance changes to water management as a result of the Waikato River Treaty Settlement Act;
- The need to review the District Plan; and
- Increasing central government pressure for the region to develop an agreed land use framework and the commencement of a sub-regional growth strategy.

Empowered by the strength of community feeling and influenced by these external factors, and a desire to get on the front foot to inform sub-regional planning, Council then embarked on an extensive project of investigation and analysis to prepare a

comprehensive planning framework for the District, which is branded **Waipa 2050**. Key objectives of the project were to make sure that project outcomes:

- Value that which makes Waipa a special place and identify actions or activities that will protect or enhance these;
- Define the pattern of future settlement growth in the District; and
- Integrate this planned pattern with cost-effective infrastructure provision.

Waipa 2050 has involved development of a top down integrated suite of planning tools and approaches to meeting the challenges presented by population growth 'head on'. In this respect the project has involved preparation of the following:

- District Growth Strategy – Waipa 2050
- Town Concept Plans – for five 'urban' settlement areas;
- Environment Strategy – focusing on rural, landscape, cultural, heritage protection and development;
- District Plan – as a key implementation tool, supporting and supported by operational asset management planning.

Figure 1 shows the planning framework that will exist once the project is completed.

Waipa District Growth Strategy

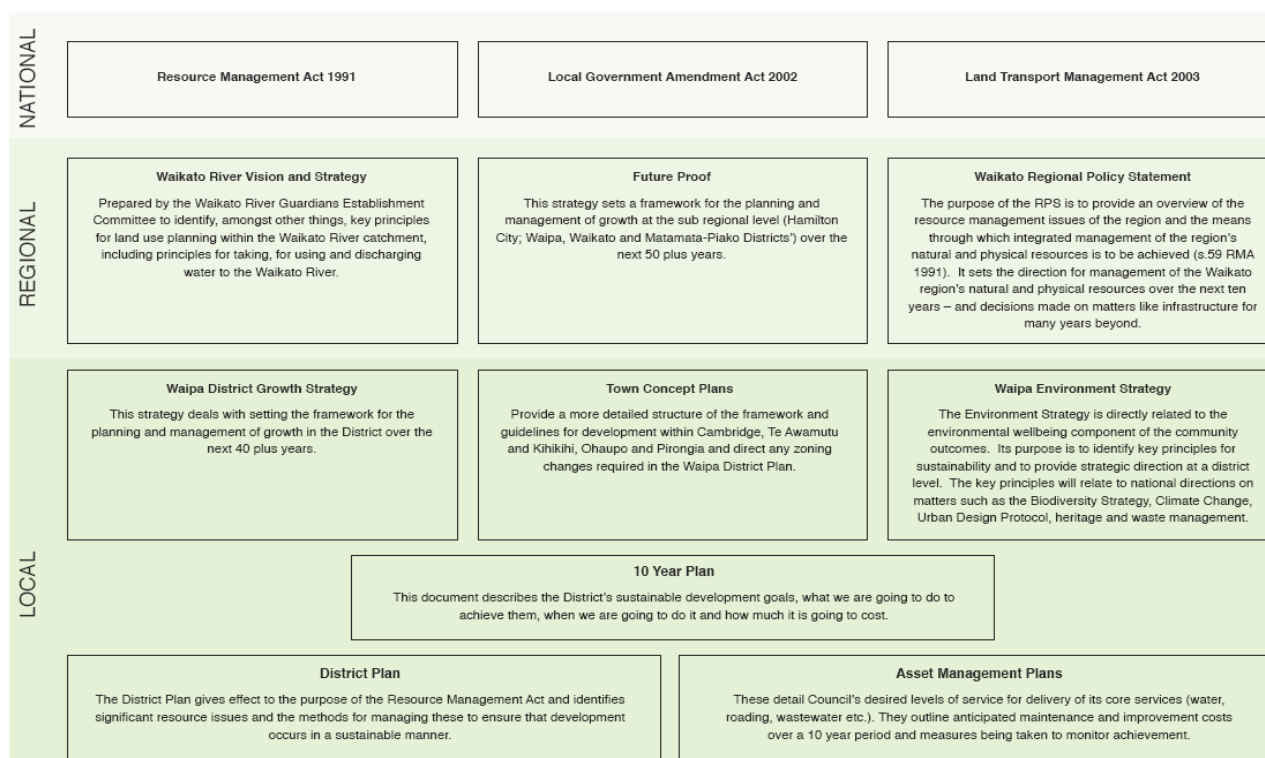
The successful completion of the District Growth Strategy has been the key to the success of the project to date. Started in May 2008 and completed in July 2009 the growth strategy was developed via the following 3 step process:

- Step 1 – The Base Case
- Step 2 – Growth Scenario Development, Evaluation & Strategy Development
- Step 3 – Growth Strategy

Step 1 – The Base Case

A 'Base Case' approach was a key phase undertaken initially to confirm the issues created by, constraints to and opportunities for growth in the District. This 'snapshot' revealed a number of key challenges requiring consideration including.

- Retaining the District's amenity, character, culture and heritage;
- Protecting the land based economy;
- Planning and providing for an increasing and ageing population;
- Pressure on sensitive environments;
- Desire and demand for increased contribution from tourism activities to the local economy;



- Protection of culturally sensitive areas and provision for Tangata Whenua values and interests;
- Infrastructure provision (particularly affordability);
- Cross boundary issues

Step 2 - Growth Scenario Development & Evaluation

A scenario based approach was used to assess different growth models for the District against the key issues identified, desired community outcomes and cross boundary issues. Waipa population, commercial and industrial projections were developed and fed into the 'sub-regional' equation for discussion and confirmation as to agreed allocations of growth to be applied to the District. The scenarios evaluated were:

- Business as Usual
- Managed growth to the 2 main towns and smaller village settlements
- Compact settlements focussing on the 2 main towns and significant focus on improved infrastructure provision efficiencies (including potential cross boundary provision), energy use, environmental protection and enhancements.

In order to compare and assess the scenarios, each were described in terms of what the District, and its urban areas, would look in 2050. In doing so, particular focus was given to:

- urban living,
- rural living,
- employment,
- travelling,
- hard infrastructure provision,
- community infrastructure provision; and
- biodiversity & soil protection.

Scenarios were consulted upon widely across the community to glean a range of perspectives and opinion on what was desired. Tāngata Whenua were also engaged through a series of Hui which culminated in a Waipa 2050 Tangata Whenua perspectives paper which then formed part of the final growth strategy itself.

Evaluation criteria were developed in order to assist the Council to make a decision on which scenario or combination of scenarios would be the most effective in maintaining a sustainable Champion Home.

The criteria focused on key elements or opportunities for promoting, managing or providing for sustainable development in the District and responding to the key issues/challenges for the District.

The Council in making its decision on the preferred scenario was informed by public submissions as well as the outputs from a key stakeholder workshop.

An indicative estimate of the hard infrastructure costs to the community associated with each scenario also formed a key part of the evaluation process, proving to be a particularly important element for Council in the midst of an economic downturn and the development of the 10 year plan. This element in particular aided demonstration that a 'business as usual' planning approach was not economic when compared to a more directive approach.

Council adopted a hybrid scenario that generally reflected the settlement pattern identified in scenario 2 but with many of the infrastructure, energy and environmental elements of Scenario 3.

Step 3 - Growth Strategy (Waipa 2050)

The vision developed for the District is:

Te Whakakotahitanga O Te Iwi O Waipa Kia Anga Whakaua, Kia Hapai I Te Taiao

Uniting the People of Waipa for progress while sustaining the Environment

The key themes include:

- Directing growth to existing settlements (both urban and rural);
- Improving the understanding of and retaining the character of the District (built, cultural or otherwise)
- Providing more diversified living, employment and activity opportunities within the district to reduce reliance on other centres;
- Identification, protection and enhancement of biodiversity / ecological corridors and features; and
- A general direction on improving land use practices within the rural environment

These themes are now instrumental in directing the implementation of the Growth Strategy – both within the remainder of the Waipa 2050 project and within Council generally.

Implementation...where is Council at now?

The growth strategy has been instrumental in guiding the development of Councils rural and urban frameworks that have been further developed in the Town Concept Plans and Environment Strategy since June 2009.

These documents are providing further definition of the high level strategy, reflecting additional community input and aspirations within the established 'framework' set by Waipa 2050. They are now influencing Council activities at an operation level (asset management activities, annual planning, cash flow forecasting, purchasing of goods and services, Council project design and development etc).

The Council has also recently completed a full review of its organizational structure. The outcomes of the growth strategy helped to inform this process, highlighting critical importance of closing the gaps that existed between land use planning and infrastructure asset management and development.

Other implementation activities currently being completed include:

- Review of the Council's Code of Practice for Subdivision & Development;
- Commencement of discussions surrounding a sub-regional 3 waters strategy;
- Completion of the Waipa Integrated Transport Strategy; and
- Full review of the Waipa District Plan.

Why has the project progressed so well?

Projects like this are complicated and there are many elements that can contribute to their success or failure. Observations about key elements that have contributed to the successes achieved to date are:

- **Community Empowerment**- this has been essential, definition of the project was heavily influenced by Community opinion about what was working and what wasn't within the district;
- **Strength and Stability** of Governance and Leadership – Waipa has had stability of leadership at both Governance and Senior management levels, with much of the occurring within an election cycle;

- **Timing** – Factors like being able to kick off the project with a well established Council and management team, burgeoning changes in sub-regional governance arrangements, the need to inform a sub-regional growth management and associated RPS and RLTS processes;
- **Tangata Whenua Collaboration & Independent facilitator** –Council had existing and well established relationships with tangata whenua. The appointment of an independent facilitator to sit alongside the project team was invaluable, particularly with this facilitator also fulfilling this role at the sub-regional level for the parallel 'Future-Proof' study.
- **High level of Community and Key Stakeholder Engagement has been key.** There have been numerous opportunities for community and stakeholder engagement not only through submission processes but also through evaluation workshops. These processes have resulted in the establishment of good relationships.
- **Teamwork & Inter Agency Collaboration** - undertaking the District Growth Strategy in parallel with a sub-regional strategy, whilst challenging from a co-ordination and timing perspective, also ensured more comprehensive and focussed engagement from interested parties and neighbouring councils.