

WHAKATĀNE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Long Term Plan 2021 - 31
Te Mahere Pae Tawhiti

Summary of key decisions following consultation
He whakarāpopototanga o ngā whakataunga matua i te uiuinga

Your feedback
helped shape the
Long Term Plan

We appreciate the time and effort that many have taken to provide feedback on the development of the Whakatāne District Council Long Term Plan 2021-31.

Through multiple stages of engagement, we received lots of ideas, concerns and aspirations our communities have for the future of the district. We also reviewed community feedback from the past five years to help inform the decisions for this Long Term Plan.

This document summarises the Council's key decisions for the final Long Term Plan, in relation to the feedback received from consultation. It's not intended as a summary of the Long Term Plan and therefore, does not cover everything in the full Plan. The full Long Term Plan is available on the Council's website whakatane.govt.nz. You can also access a hardcopy from the Council's Service Centres in Whakatāne and Murupara, or from Council libraries around the district.

Read the Whakatāne District Council Long Term Plan 2021-31 here: whakatane.govt.nz/ltp

How we collected feedback and what we did with it

I pehea mātau i kohikohi whakahoki kōrero, ka mutu i aha mātau ki tēnei whakahoki kōrero

Mid 2020

SETTING A VISION AND DETERMINING PRIORITIES

To inform the setting of our high-level vision and priorities, we sought feedback from the community about the challenges, opportunities and priorities facing our district. We also reviewed feedback to Council from the past five years. You can read the [Summary of community ideas, aspirations and feedback](#) on our document on our website.

Late 2020

DEVELOPING THE WORK PROGRAMME AND BUDGET

As we reviewed our services, projects and budgets to align with the new vision and priorities, we met with specific groups, organisations, stakeholders and technical advisors to help determine the key changes.

April - May 2021

FORMAL CONSULTATION ON KEY CHANGES AND PROPOSALS

Formal consultation on the Long Term Plan was open 23 April – 23 May 2021. We asked for your thoughts on the specific big decisions that we were working through for this Long Term Plan.

6,000

We analysed feedback from about 6,000 people, received over the past five years.

434

The number of formal submissions received on this Long Term Plan, not including informal feedback from social media and face-to-face conversations.

37

The number of organisations, community groups and individuals presented to Council at hearings.

FORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE LONG TERM PLAN: 23 APRIL - 23 MAY 2021

15,000 LTP brochures distributed to mail boxes around the district	Posts and discussion on the Long Term Plan via social media	Information shared through local newspapers, radio and on our website
Over 1,000 groups, organisations and individuals emailed through our distribution lists	'Chat Box' open for the whole month on Commerce Street, Whakatāne	Mobile 'Chat Box' and in Ōhope and Matatā
Meetings and communications with key partners and stakeholders	'Pop up' events in Murupara, Te Teko and Tāneatua	Presentation to local businesses

Through the consultation process you told us what you liked, what you didn't like and made suggestions. Feedback was received on the key questions we put forward, and a variety of other topics. Elected members read the submissions and listened to feedback and comments. This helped inform the decisions they made for the Long Term Plan. Find out more about these decisions on the following pages.



Decisions on the key consultation questions

Ngā whakataunga o ngā pātai matua i te uiuinga

We're putting funding towards 'Active Whakatāne' to advance active and alternative transport in our district



THE PROPOSAL

Active Whakatāne is an exciting district-wide Strategy that aims to make it easier and safer for people to get around. It recognises all active user groups, from mobility scooters to cyclists to pedestrians. The Strategy was adopted in March 2020, and was developed with significant input from the public and key stakeholders. Two options were put forward for implementation of the Strategy. The options were:

Option 1: To provide a dedicated budget of \$1 million per year towards Active Whakatāne projects over the next 10 years.


Option 2: Not increasing the budget towards Active Whakatāne projects.

THE FEEDBACK

Council received 267 submissions on this question, with around two-thirds (66.3 percent) in favour of option 1. Submissions noted the overall benefits to health and reduced transport costs for the community, with multiple submissions emphasising increased safety and overall accessibility. Comments noted that completing Active Whakatāne projects faster would be a game-changer for children, youth, families, elderly and less-able members of the community, reducing levels of isolation and improving mental wellbeing. Several comments noted the importance of active transport for the district as we transition towards a low carbon economy in light of our climate change responsibilities and challenges.

THE DECISION

Following consideration of feedback, Council decided to proceed with option 1.



We're reintroducing
a work programme to seal
metal roads each year

THE PROPOSAL

In 2012, budget for road sealing was removed as part of decisions made to help keep rates down. Throughout the following nine years, there has been continued demand from specific communities to reintroduce funding towards sealing metal roads, citing health and safety concerns. We're also continuing to see an increase in population and traffic on our roads. Three options were put forward for sealing of metal roads. The options were:

Option 1: To provide dedicated funding of \$500,000 per year towards road sealing over the next 10 years.

Option 2: To provide dedicated funding of \$1 million per year towards road sealing over the next 10 years.

Option 3: To not introduce a programme to seal metal roads.

THE FEEDBACK

Council received 257 submissions on this question. 29.6 percent were in favour of not funding sealing of metal roads, with the remaining 70.4 percent split across options 1 and 2. Many comments identified health and safety concerns as a key reason for increasing funding to seal metal roads. Some comments noted that rural landowners pay their share of rates as a justification for increasing the funding to seal metal roads. A number of submitters also advocated for specific roads to be sealed; however, this prioritisation is determined by the Council's Road Sealing Policy, which considers factors like health, safety and cost efficiency.

THE DECISION

Following consideration of feedback, Council decided to proceed with a mid-point between options 1 and 2, dedicating \$750,000 per year towards road sealing over the next 10 years. To support this decision, Council will review and update the Road Sealing Policy to determine which roads should get sealed first.



We're strengthening and upgrading the Whakatāne District Council main offices to make sure they are fit for the future



THE PROPOSAL

The Whakatāne District Council Civic Centre (main offices on Commerce Street, Whakatāne) are no longer fit-for-purpose. At a minimum, some critical health and safety upgrades are needed. This includes seismic strengthening, temperature regulation, meeting building compliance standards and security enhancements. The extent of the work that is required for these critical upgrades prompted further thinking about changes that will help future-proof the building, support modern, adaptable ways of working and provide greater benefits to the communities we serve. Feedback was sought on which components to include in the project as follows:

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Changes to enhance the interface between Council and the public, and embrace the role of the main Council office as a community hub.	✓	✗	✗
Making enhancements for productive, modern, adaptable work spaces.	✓	✓	✗
Undertaking core improvements to meet needs for health, safety and resilience.	✓	✓	✓
'Greening' of the Civic Centre to improve our environmental footprint in support of our climate change commitment.	✓	✓	✓

THE FEEDBACK

Council received 222 submissions on this question. Approximately two-thirds (68 percent) of the responses were in favour of option 3 - the lowest cost option - with concerns raised about the rates impact of the project in light of other big Council priorities that need to be progressed. Other themes of feedback acknowledged the important function of the building as an emergency operations centre in times of need, the building being a reflection and focal point of our town, and the cost efficiency benefits of making all improvements now and not having to upgrade again in the near future.

THE DECISION

Following consideration of feedback, Council decided to proceed with option 1.

Council debated this matter for some time, requesting additional information about the options and also holding a dedicated workshop session to focus exclusively on this matter. A key concern for Council in the decision-making process was rates affordability, and this was carefully weighed against the investment needed to enable the organisation to deliver better things for communities into the future.





We're smoothing* rates increases over three years to help soften rates increases

We're making sure we use debt more effectively to help fund the things our communities need

THE PROPOSAL

Over the coming years, rates will increase because of inflation, but also because we need to do more to address the opportunities and challenges facing the future of our district and its communities. A key driver of increasing costs is the need to meet increasing expectations, standards and population growth impacts for our three waters services (water supply, sewage treatment and disposal and stormwater drainage). With these cost increases, we consulted on a proposal to smooth rates for the first three years of the Long Term Plan (2021-24). This approach aims to offset a big increase in the first year of the plan by smoothing some of the costs over the second and third years. The options were:

Option 1: To smooth rates for the first three years of the plan.

Option 2: Not smoothing rates and continuing to set them on an annual basis.

THE FEEDBACK

Council received 238 submissions on this question. Just over half (55.9 percent) were in favour of smoothing rates (option 1) with the remaining 44.1 percent in favour of the current annual approach to rates (option 2). Although this question was about rates smoothing, many comments related to rates affordability and the level of rates increases – for more about this, see the following section called 'getting the balance right'. Comments also focused on the need for certainty around future rates increases versus the need for flexibility each year to respond to unexpected things.

THE DECISION

Following consideration of feedback, Council decided to proceed with option 1.

** Note: This 'smoothing' applies to the overall rates, and there will still be variability for individual households and properties.*

THE PROPOSAL

We need to address significant challenges and opportunities facing the future of our district and communities. One of the funding tools available to us is debt. Borrowing money to pay for things means that we can deliver some projects that might otherwise be unaffordable. It also allows for current and future ratepayers to contribute to the costs of the services and facilities they are using and benefiting from. We consulted on a proposal to increase our debt limit. An increased debt limit would provide flexibility to draw more debt when needed to help fund increasing costs of infrastructure, and provide head room for unexpected costs (like natural disasters). The options were:

Option 1: Increase our debt limit to 175 percent of total revenue.

Option 2: Retain the current debt cap at 150 percent of total revenue.

THE FEEDBACK

We received 110 responses in relation to this question. 39.6 percent were in favour of option 1, with the remaining 60.4 percent in favour of option 2. Council acknowledges the concerns and hesitancy raised by submitters about the use of debt. In particular, because loans are mostly repaid from rates revenue, we need to be mindful of the implications for affordability. A number of submitter comments were supportive of debt, provided it is for the long-term benefit of the district.

THE DECISION

Following consideration of feedback, Council decided to proceed with option 1.

Council thought carefully about this proposal and the reasons behind it. In making the decision to proceed with option 1, the Council recognised that councils generally have few funding tools available to them, and that our current use of debt is relatively conservative. Our new debt cap is set annually at 175 percent of total revenue. We have looked at similar sized councils to ours and their debt caps range from 150 percent to 250 percent. Our new limit remains well within this typical range.



We've made difficult decisions to find a balance between the things we deliver and the cost of rates to our communities

THE QUESTION

As part of consultation on the Long Term Plan, we asked if we “have the balance right between the things we deliver and the cost to our communities?” The options were:

- Option 1:** That the Council’s proposed priorities for the next 10 years are about right.
- Option 2:** That the Council should deliver more for our communities - keeping in mind that doing more would mean an increase in costs.
- Option 3:** That the Council should reduce rates and debt and if so, what services should be reduced or cut.

THE FEEDBACK

There were 218 responses to this survey question. Of these, 44.5 percent were in favour of option 1 (about right), 36.2 percent in favour of option 2 (deliver more), and 19.3 percent in favour of option 3 (reduce rates and debt). While the least-favoured option from the survey was option 3 (Council should focus on keeping costs down), this topic also drew a substantial amount of commentary. Overall, there continues to be tension between the demand for more/improved/better services and outcomes, but with a concurrent demand for reducing the rates increases. This is similar to feedback that we have seen in previous consultation processes, and Council perception surveys over past years.

THE DECISION

Council acknowledges, and continues to be very mindful of, the need to keep rates affordable - particularly in recognition of the economic context for many of our communities. As we developed the Long Term Plan, we made choices about projects and services to include in the budgets and other things that we have had to forgo in the interests of rates affordability. The challenge to Council is to find an acceptable balance between the level of rates costs and the need to carry on the work that our district needs to address major challenges and opportunities.

The most important focus is on getting the basics right – delivering the core services and infrastructure that our district needs to function effectively and safely. Beyond this, we’ve had to prioritise, and this means we can’t necessarily deliver all the things our communities want – it’s simply unaffordable.

Below are some of the ways that we have considered and responded to the concerns about rates affordability.

Some of the ways we consider rates affordability He whaiwhakaaro ki ngā Tāke Kaunihera

Prioritising our work programme by making decisions about what to include, and what not to include	Considering the timing of what we deliver so we’re not facing all the costs at the same time	Securing funding from sources other than rates, whenever we can	Reducing rates by using some reserve funds where it is appropriate and financially sustainable to do so	Making some key projects contingent on receiving external funding contributions
Continuing to facilitate and support economic development and job creation	Smoothing rates increases over the first three years of the Long Term Plan	Using debt as effectively as possible to spread costs over time	Adjusting policy settings that determine how rates are distributed across different communities and sectors of our district	Providing a range of rates payment options and rates remission and postponement policies for those struggling to meet costs



OTHER KEY THEMES FROM CONSULTATION

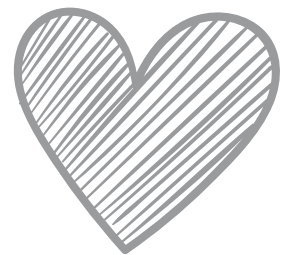
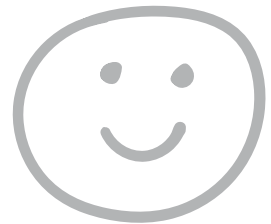
Ētahi atu kaupapa matua i ahu mai i te uiuinga

Focus on our smaller communities He arotahi ki ngā hapori paku

Numerous submissions have come forward that request enhanced outcomes for our smaller communities - in particular Te Teko, Murupara, and Matatā. Feedback relates to service requests and projects for specific communities, rates costs for socio-economically challenged communities, and general perception of more effort and investment needed in small towns. Requests and feedback fall across a range of Council departments. In many cases, we can be responsive to requests within existing work programmes and budgets - these may already be within existing work programmes, or require reprioritisation of work programmes to bring rural projects to the fore.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

- Including funding of \$400,000 for a pathway from Te Teko to Kōkōhinau Marae.
- Increasing annual funding for the Murupara Community Board from \$10,000 to \$15,000 for local initiatives.
- Prioritising and being responsive to smaller requests through existing work programmes.
- Increasing annual funding for the Rangitāiki Community Board from \$15,000 to \$19,000 for local initiatives.
- Investigating different options for a public gymnasium/equipment in Murupara.
- Continuing to work with community and police regarding safety and security at Thornton Reserve, and to appeal to police on the option of CCTV.
- Investigating further into requests for new public toilet facilities at Edgecumbe and Thornton east bank, but not providing budget in the Plan for the moment.





Walking and cycling Te hīkoi me te eke paihikara

Through engagement on this Long Term Plan, the community continues to express strong support for walking and cycling. Many submissions shared suggestions of specific ideas and projects across the district. Some of the feedback related to the implementation of the Active Whakatāne District Strategy (see page three). Other feedback included support for development of trails across the district including providing connection and amenity to smaller towns, development of opportunities for mountain biking, and many specific suggestions for new or improved walking and cycling infrastructure.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

- Providing funding toward Active Whakatāne (as discussed earlier in this document).
- Forwarding of specific ideas and initiatives to the Active Whakatāne project team.
- Supporting the establishment of a cycle group trails trust.
- Continuing to work in partnership with the Mountain Bike Trust to progress mountain biking opportunities.
- Increasing annual funding from \$50,000 to \$100,000 per year to partner with community groups on the development of community facilities (including, but not limited to, working with cycling advocacy groups).
- Forwarding the consideration of a second bridge across the Whakatāne River (for pedestrians and cyclists) to Council's spatial planning project, to be considered alongside the questions of how and where our population can grow.



Enhancing nature

E whakangako ana i te taiao

Various submissions sought enhancement of waterways, especially Awatapu Lagoon, Sullivan Lake and Matatā Lagoon. These follow a history of related requests and community interest in enhanced outcomes for these waterways, and several community/care groups have established to support improvements. A range of feedback and requests were received for projects that enhance sustainability, biodiversity and improve our impact on the environment. This included, for example, the management of pest species, concerns about chemical weed spray, support for environmental advocacy groups and encouragement for our climate change responsibilities.

COUNCIL RESPONSE:

- Acknowledging that the forward work programme for Council wastewater and stormwater will have a significant impact on environmental outcomes.
- Acknowledging Council's Climate Change Strategy is being implemented and continues to gain momentum.
- Providing funding of \$100,000 towards strategy development for management of Sullivan Lake and the Awatapu and Matatā Lagoons, and ongoing additional funding of \$75,000 per year towards implementing the strategy.
- Acknowledging pest species management is generally a responsibility of Bay of Plenty Regional Council, but also forwarding feedback to the Tree Strategy currently under development.
- Acknowledging that chemical weed sprays are nationally established as a very effective solution – any change in approach would need a further conversation with the community about costs, levels of service and implications.
- Forwarding submissions for funding requests to the Council's community funding application process where appropriate.
- Providing a small increase in funding towards Sustainable Bay of Plenty from \$2,500 to \$6,000 per year.
- Reviewing the areas and frequency of mowing to look for cost efficiencies and opportunities to plant trees for carbon sequestration.



Youth focus He arotahi rangatahi

There was a range of feedback from and/or about youth wellbeing in the Whakatāne District. The feedback related to a range of matters including recreational opportunities, need for a community hub and funding requests to support specific projects and forums.

COUNCIL RESPONSE:

- Acknowledging the work of the Whakatāne District Youth Council, including an ambitious local research project underway.
- Providing funding of \$10,000 for development of a youth strategy and ongoing funding of \$10,000 per year thereafter for youth initiatives/implementation of the strategy.
- Increasing funding to the Whakatāne District Youth Council from \$2,000 to \$5,000 per year for initiatives to improve youth wellbeing.



Support for the arts

Requests were received from the community to do more to support and progress the arts. Specific examples include a request to collaborate on the development of an arts strategy for the district, to provide funding for a Molly Morpeth Canaday Award Coordinator and Community Arts Coordinator, and establishment of a community arts centre.

COUNCIL RESPONSE:

- Providing funding of \$30,000 for development of a Whakatāne District Arts Strategy, and \$30,000 per year thereafter for implementation.
- Sourcing \$10,000 to support coordination of the Molly Morpeth Canaday art awards (to be sourced from external funding).



Our new vision
'more life in life' is
for communities to
flourish, fulfil their
potential, and live
life to its fullest.

Thanks for
your feedback
Tēnā koe i whakahoki
kōrero mai

We encourage you to continue to be involved in decision-making for the future of your district.

Our conversations continue at many levels as we work closely with communities, stakeholder groups, whānau, hapū and iwi, central government, neighbouring councils and others. We encourage an approach of 'working together' and invite you to continue to be involved, because it helps us understand the priorities of our communities and because it presents significant opportunities to deliver better outcomes for our district. Your involvement and feedback is important as we continue the journey together. There are many ways to be involved:

- Sign up to our online engagement platform '**Kōrero Mai**' to be notified when decisions are coming up that need community feedback.
- Make a submission to Council on specific projects and decisions when opportunities are available.
- Make general enquiries in writing, email, by phone or by visiting our offices in Whakatāne and Murupara.
- Make **requests for service online** or by contacting our offices (such as for specific maintenance requests).
- Get involved in stakeholder groups and user groups that advise our activities.
- Become a volunteer in community-led projects and initiatives.
- Contact the Mayor, elected Council members, or your local Community Board members for a chat.
- Keep in touch through social media and our website.



WHAKATĀNE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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