

Whakatane Town Vision Plan

Linking town, river and community

May 2008



Whakatane District Council



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With its location between the Whakatane River and the escarpment, the commercial centre of Whakatane is uniquely defined as an attractive and vibrant setting to do business and for residents and visitors to enjoy. There is a mix of retail, residential, civic and tourism related uses in the town centre. It includes a scale and form of development that is changing but that respects the strong historic and cultural setting of the town centre.

The promotion of a Town Centre Vision provides a framework by which the Council, developers and the wider community can collectively protect those special features that maintain the character of the town centre, while enabling an appropriate scale of development that is economically viable. It will also provide an opportunity to enhance and celebrate other attributes which have been lost or hidden.

The Vision is consistent with our community outcomes that seek:

- A clean protected environment;
- Environmentally responsible development;
- A prosperous economy;
- Strong, transparent and open leadership; and
- A diverse, creative and active community.

The Town Vision identifies key themes and principles to guide decisions about how the town centre should develop in the future. It describes how this could happen with concept plans and ideas about the mechanisms that could be used.

The Town Vision plan is a concept plan at this stage, the detail of which will be refined as the plan develops and various areas are completed, over the next 10 to 20 Years.



INTRODUCTION

The Town Vision plan provides a strategic long term vision for how the Whakatane Town Centre might look in the future. While some parts of the plan may be realised within the next few years, others will depend on market growth and opportunities, and the way the Council chooses to implement the plan.

The adoption of the plan as a Council strategic document will help guide:

- Its capital works programme. Some aspects of the final plan will be achieved by the Council through planned works and upgrades
- Developers and property owners with the inclusion of the Town Centre Vision plan within the District Plan
- Councils investment and freeholding decisions associated with Harbour ground leases

Over the past few years the Council has reconsidered the ownership of land held by the Council through the old Whakatane Harbour Board. The majority of these Council holdings are in long-term perpetual ground leases. These are leases of the land only that can be renewed as of right perpetually. The Council allowed a number of leases to be freeholded during 2001/02.

In December 2002 the Council placed a moratorium on further freeholding as it was considered that any divestment should take place in a more planned and measured way. The Council felt that it should be considering its property and other development decisions in a more strategic manner. The Town Vision project is part of this strategic planning.

The Town Vision plan will allow the Council to use its ownership of property and its planned development of reserve areas or Council facilities to influence the development of the Whakatane central area in line with that vision.

The adopted Town Vision will assist the Council with future decision making in regard to its property transactions. The Council decided that it is not appropriate to consider individual property freeholding requests of harbour leases until the Town Vision Planning was completed.



INTRODUCTION

The Journey to this Point

In December 2005, the Council held a workshop to consider options and opportunities in regard to its land ownership of harbour leasehold land. The workshop promoted the development of an overall plan for the Town Centre and examined the ability of the Council through its land interests to influence the resulting Town Vision plan. The Council approved the formation of a steering group to oversee the plan.

The steering group comprised the Mayor, three District Councillors, one member of the Whakatane Community Board, two representatives from Ngati Awa and two Council staff. Over an eighteen month period the Steering group guided the development of the Town Vision plan.

The steering group engaged Boffa Miskell Limited (a consultancy specialising in urban design, landscape and planning fields) to help develop the Town Vision. Key strategic documents, background information, previous relevant reports, plans and maps were used as background information for the development of the Town Vision.

In April 2006, Boffa Miskell staff met with key individuals and interests within Whakatane to find out more about what the community aspirations are for the town, the factors that will influence its future, and features or values which the community feel should be preserved. Key planning principles based on urban design best practice were established to guide the development of a plan. In mid 2006, the key principles were reported to the Council and to the parties who participated in the interview meetings. An information evening was held to present and discuss the principles with CBD property owners and occupiers.

Plan options were then developed for consideration by the steering group. Consultation occurred with a range of council staff, Environment Bay of Plenty and other parties to assess the feasibility of options. Further detailed work was identified to refine the options and to ensure they were consistent with other Council strategies and projects. In addition the options were peer reviewed.

Work over the next six months focused on how the options could be implemented and how practical the options were economically.

A Draft Town Vision was submitted to the council for consideration in September 2007 and the council adopted the draft for public consultation through a special consultative process.

The Council received 538 submission points either supporting or opposing part or all of the Town Vision Plan. The Council heard from submitters who wished to be heard on the 12th and the 20th March 2008, and deliberated on the 28th March and on the 1st April 2008. The Council considered all submissions to the Town Vision Plan and resolved amendments and review of particular aspects of the plan.

THE VISION

Vision Statement

“The Whakatane Town Centre draws on its natural and cultural heritage to emphasise its relationship to the river – a place with a strong local identity that is vibrant and highly valued by residents, business and visitors.”

The Town Vision plan will restore connections with the river, create a vibrant and active environment and establish a community/cultural heart within the town centre.

By creating an overall plan for the town centre, it will ensure that future development is in keeping with the aspirations of the community, and in doing so will help safeguard the particular aspects of the town centre which are valued by the community. It provides an opportunity to enhance and celebrate other special attributes which have been lost or hidden.

Although the Town Vision plan is a concept at this stage, it suggests a framework for future development based on the themes and principles supporting the Vision plan.

Area Defined

The Town Vision planning area includes the Town Centre and surrounds, from the river to the north and Louvain Street to the south, McAlister Street from the west through to the escarpment on the east and running through to include the eastern end of Wairaka. See plan included.



THE VISION

Values and Themes

THEMES

The following are key themes in the vision for Whakatane Town Centre.

HERITAGE CELEBRATION

Whakatane has a unique combination of natural and cultural heritage within its town centre. Features include the river, coast, escarpment, waterfalls, Pohaturoa Rock, and views to the islands off-shore. Layers of use and occupation over time by people living in and around the town centre have generated a myriad of archaeological sites, associations with places, and buildings. The vision is to celebrate this heritage through greater recognition of heritage in all its facets.



PRINCIPLES

The following are the principles associated with the themes that will help to achieve the vision.

To recognise the contribution of natural features to the identity and quality of Whakatane town centre environment and facilitate the interconnections between uses and these features. These natural features include the vegetated escarpment, river, spit, coastline, rock outcrops, water courses, off shore islands and visual access to them.

To recognise Ngati Awa as tangata whenua and acknowledge the effect that significant successive occupation and use of the town centre area has had on heritage values.

To recognise the built heritage resources of the Whakatane Town Centre as a unique feature.

THE VISION

Values and Themes

THEMES

The following are key themes in the vision for Whakatane Town Centre.

URBAN FORM

The land form and the period when most of the building happened in the town centre that still exists today have generated an intimate and interesting urban form which is 'tight' in the middle and then spreads to the west and east. The middle section which is the centre and the subject of this vision is proposed to be maintained at a low height at the river front rising to taller buildings at the rear against the escarpment. It is also proposed to intensify the activity within the centre to increase the public life, support the town centre's economic future and make efficient use of the available land (much of which is surface parking). This intensification will occur by allowing some new or replacement buildings (many public), rationalising the present large areas of surface parking, and also providing new open space areas to provide increased opportunities for public life on the street.



PRINCIPLES

The following are the principles associated with the themes that will help to achieve the vision.

To ensure new buildings are of a scale and design where activities at ground level and street edges contribute positively to public life.

To encourage compatible mixed uses – retail, residential, civic, tourism – in the town centre to generate a vibrant, safe and attractive place for local people and visitors.

To manage urban form such that building height graduates from the river front towards the escarpment, without obscuring the dominance of the escarpment as a natural feature, and recognising the views from the escarpment to the sea/islands.

To encourage car parking in combined facilities at key points (such as gateways to the town centre) that:

- Reduce the need for on-site parking;
- Encourage walking in the town centre; and
- Enable the use of surface parking for activities that contribute positively to the quality of the urban space.

To recognise and encourage the opportunity to partner with landowners, Ngati Awa and private interests in the advancement of the town centre vision.

To ensure that the vision is economically sustainable in the long term and that Whakatane District Council's ownership through harbour land holdings is strategically utilised in the interests of the vision.

THE VISION

Values and Themes

THEMES

The following are key themes in the vision for Whakatane Town Centre.

MOVEMENT AND CONNECTIONS

The town is currently not well connected to the river - one of Whakatane's greatest assets. There are also issues with vehicular movements to the Heads/boat ramp. A significant feature of the vision is to reconnect the town centre to the river by creating a new street – the cultural link.



PRINCIPLES

The following are the principles associated with the themes that will help to achieve the vision.

To manage the movement of people and vehicles within the town centre by defining vehicle and pedestrian priority areas and streets.

To make walkable and visual connections between the town and the river edge and to provide a continuous, wide and accessible river edge promenade.

To create a mix of connected open spaces that are accessible for all people are safe, vibrant and provide focal points for public life.

The experience of arriving in and departing from the Town Centre is easily recognised by distinctive gateways.

To maintain and extend towards the river, the essence of the built environment in the historic centre of Whakatane that is characterised by:

- A street pattern that creates small blocks (fine grained)
- Active ground floor uses of continuous smaller shops with retail frontages to the street
- Key sites occupied by feature buildings

THE VISION

Values and Themes

THEMES

The following are key themes in the vision for Whakatane Town Centre.

ARTS AND CULTURAL HEART

It is important to celebrate the areas art and culture within a well designed place in the heart of the town centre. Such a place will bring people to the town centre and ensures that the centre will be a place for social and community life as well as retail activities.

PRINCIPLES

The following are the principles associated with the themes that will help to achieve the vision.

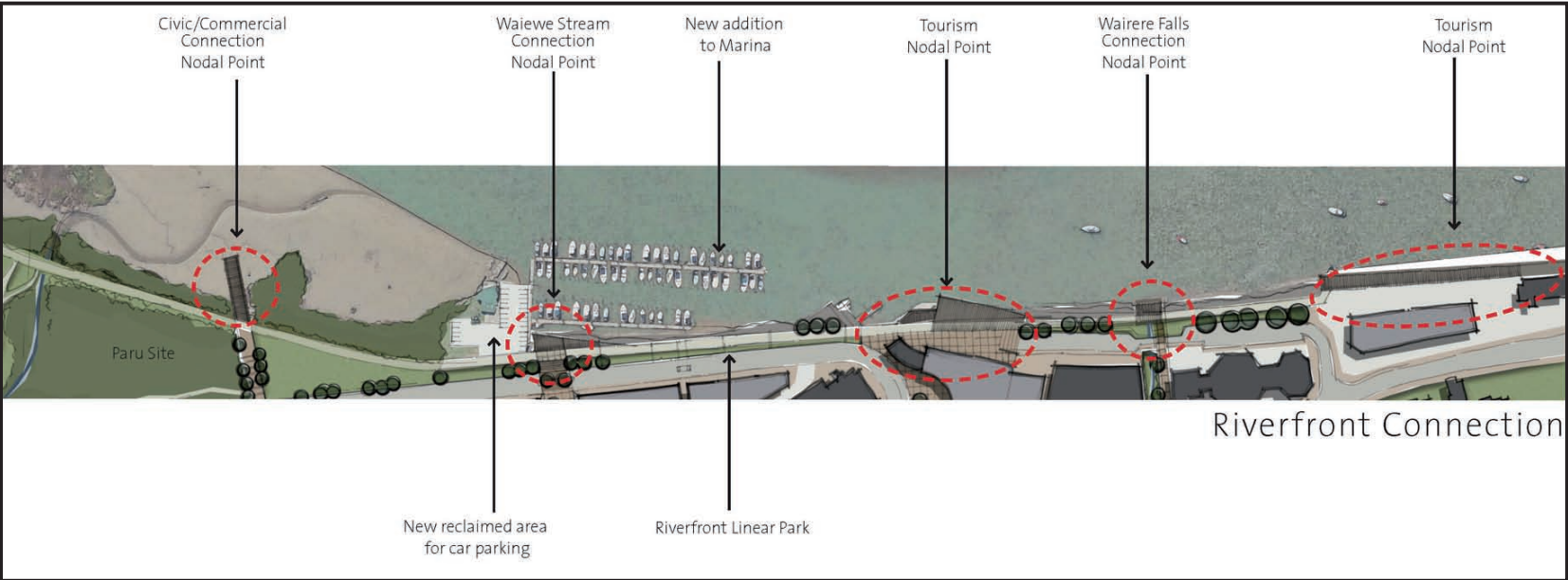
Key civic and cultural activities should be planned in an integrated way, physically grouped and located within the town centre, with a strong connection to the river, anchoring the future identity of the town.



THE VISION

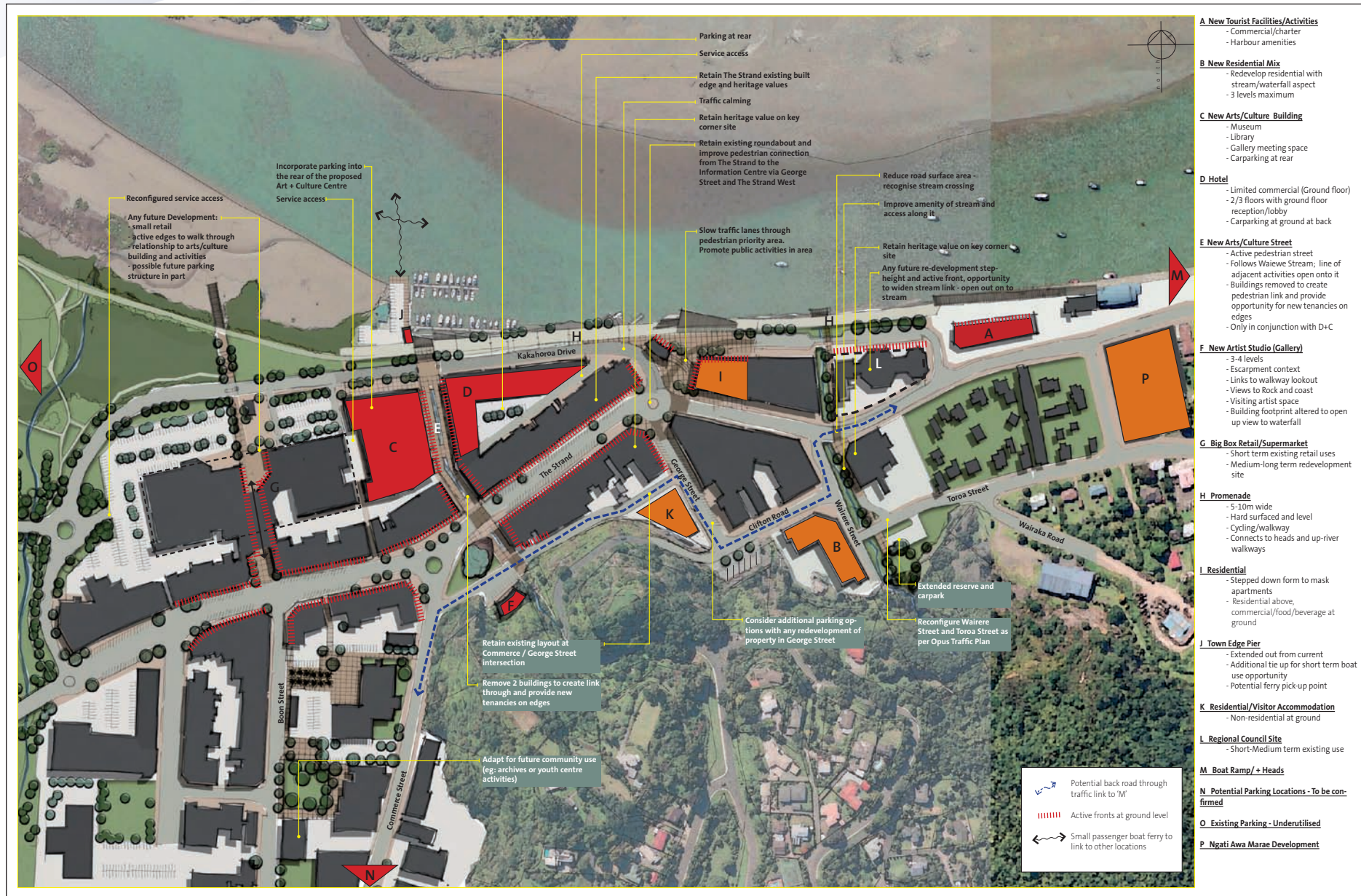
Values and Themes

<p style="text-align: center;">THEMES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The following are key themes in the vision for Whakatane Town Centre.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PRINCIPLES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The following are the principles associated with the themes that will help to achieve the vision.</p>
<p><i>RIVER FRONT</i></p> <p>The Whakatane River and its connection to the sea is the heart and soul of the town – its reason for being - as it provided food, enabled movement, supported an economy and still provides spiritual and amenity value to people living in and visiting the town. The town has grown away from the river and the vision proposes to reconnect as well as enhance the experience of being alongside the river through a generous promenade that extends from the Heads past the town centre and to through to the McGarvey Road camping ground</p>	<p>To recognise the contribution of river activity to the life of Whakatane. To encourage activities that have regard to natural river processes and are sympathetic to the scale and level of amenity in the town centre.</p> <p>To make walkable and visual connections between the town and the river edge and to provide a continuous, wide and accessible river edge promenade.</p>



THE VISION

The Concept Plan



THE VISION

Visuals



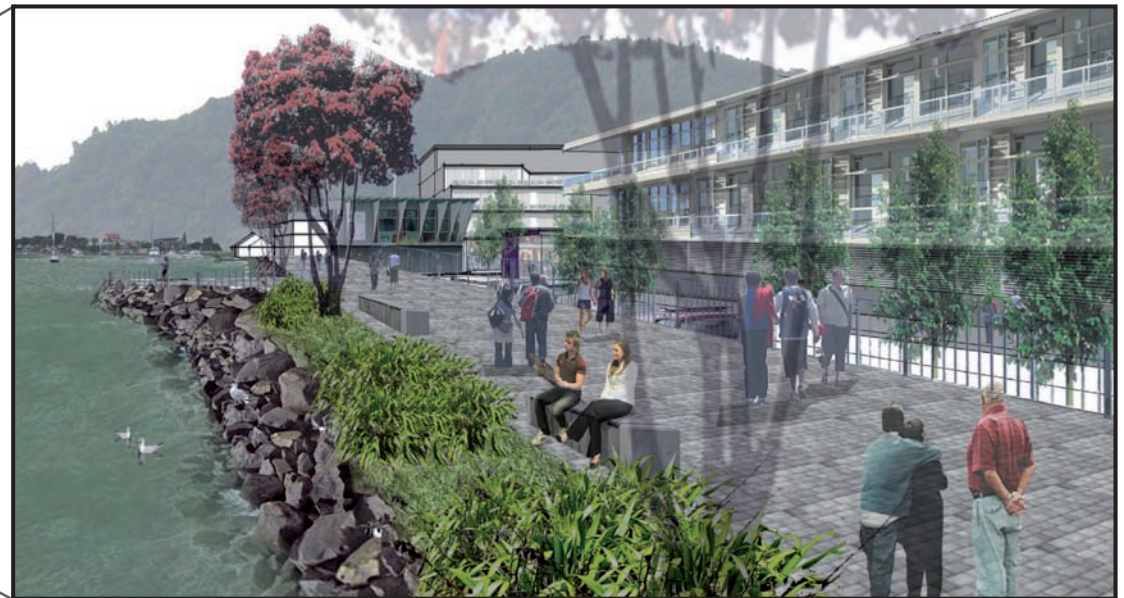
Location plans with artist impression of a new street providing river linkage between the strand and Kakahoroa Drive



THE VISION

Visuals

Location plans with artist impression of a new waterfront promenade looking east to the information centre



THE VISION

General Commercial Influence on the Town Centre

In today's competitive commercial environment, town centres need to be proactive if they wish to succeed in attracting a wide range of diverse visitors, potential retail consumers and business. Visitors and shopper preferences change over time and the development of other retail opportunities in outer locations emphasises the need for town centres to have a point of difference by creating a vibrant and appealing environment with activities that anchor the CBD.

Whakatane is fortunate in having a large number of intrinsic features that have instant appeal and provide numerous 'raw materials' for urban designers to work with. These features include the natural landscape, the river front, the seaside amenity, the escarpment, the climate, the northerly aspect and the proximity to attractive beach locations.

The Council is in an opportune position to provide for the planned Arts and Culture facility (Museum/Library) in a way that can be integrated with the town centre and accelerate retail opportunities by creating links and spaces that promote activity.

The attractiveness of the town centre will be enhanced through the measures and themes promoted by the Town Vision plan. The Council can maximise opportunities using the Council's extensive landholdings with only a small number of acquisitions of private land being potentially required for public works.

The Council will acquire a number of properties in areas where the plan provides for a public use (eg roading) and there are private property interests. The options for acquiring will vary depending on the circumstances of individual property owners.

It is considered that the Town Vision principles will effectively contribute to the Town Centre being an attractive destination for visitors and residents in the future. It is considered that the retail community and the public at large will benefit from the combined effect of the measures proposed in the concept plans and that the plan makes good strategic use of Council's land ownership.



THE VISION

Relation to other Council Work

The Council has adopted a carparking strategy for the Whakatane town centre to provide a framework for current and future car parking requirements for Whakatane.

Built Heritage Study - The Whakatane Built Heritage study is a joint initiative between the Council, Environment Bay of Plenty (EBOP) and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT). These agencies agree that information on the built heritage in the Whakatane town centre is useful for this resource to be managed appropriately in the future. The study provides an assessment of built heritage in the Town Centre, and makes recommendations for the most effective ways (both statutory and non-statutory) to provide for its management in the future. The Town Vision has recognised Built Heritage values in its principles and themes.

Capital Projects - The Council has planned for redevelopment of Library-Museum Facilities (Arts and Culture) in the next 3 years. While the location of an Arts and Culture Centre has yet to be decided, it has been considered as part of the Town Vision. It is recognised that the location of such a facility cannot be considered in isolation but must relate to the tourism, accommodation, retail and civic functions within the town.

Other capital works - The continued development of river walkways and wharf improvements are in keeping with the Town Vision themes and have been included in the plan.

The overall plan considers other planned developments by third parties such as the Ngati Awa Marae Complex, the apartment developments in the town centre and a possible marina facility.



IMPLEMENTATION

The Council has available a wide range of approaches – from a very “hands-off” approach, through to a very “hands-on” approach, using a range of regulatory and non-regulatory mechanisms. It is anticipated that a combination of the available mechanisms will be used in conjunction with the structure plan option.

In looking at implementation it is important to bear in mind that the Town Vision will take many years to come to fruition. The Council’s role over these years is to guide and facilitate development towards the Vision.

Implementing the Whakatane Town Vision plan

The council considered that a mix of methods both regulatory and non regulatory is needed to achieve the aims of the Town Vision .

The Council supports an implementation approach that combines incentives, community will and regulation to achieve the principles of the Town Vision. Without prejudicing any practicable option to achieve the Vision over time, the Council prefers an approach that will combine:

- (a) A review of current District Plan objectives and policies to align them with the Town Vision themes and principles
- (b) A review of current District Plan rules and other methods to implement the Town Vision.

This may include the development of further design guidelines, development plans for specific sites or areas, financial incentives, additional or changed rules;

- (c) Other incentives;
- (d) Land purchase through negotiation;
- (e) Partnering with developers where appropriate.

Variation to the District Plan

The District Plan sets out Objectives, Issues and Methods for the use of land in the District. It has a number of zones recognising the different activities that take place in the District. In the area covered by the Town Vision plan, activities must comply with Business 1 zone rules as well as potentially having regard to provisions preserving the Strand Character Area. These rules are intended to recognise the pedestrian nature of this part of the town centre, and manage building size and form, vehicle access and parking, as well as maintaining public spaces and having regard to important natural features.

The Town Vision could be given effect to through a change to the District Plan introducing or amending rules that would ensure that development progresses along the lines of the Town Vision. Any variation or plan change would need to go through a full public consultation process under the Resource Management Act and would consider the effects that a plan change would have on the owners, residents and users of the Town Centre.

IMPLEMENTATION

Structure Plan

A structure plan is a framework to guide the development or redevelopment of a particular area by defining the future development and land use patterns, areas of open space, the layout and nature of infrastructure (including transportation links), and other key features for managing the effects of development.

Structure plans comprise one or more maps, plans or diagrammatic representations of the proposed layout, features, character and links for areas being developed or redeveloped. The maps or plans do not typically go into such detail as to define individual lot boundaries or the physical form of buildings and structures. The maps, plans or representations are usually supported by text explaining the background to the issues which initiated the structure plan and the management approaches to be used to deal with those issues.

Structure plans are rarely stand-alone documents. They often originate from, or interact with, other plans, particularly those produced under the Resource Management Act and Local Government Act. The principal means of implementation may follow a regulatory or non-regulatory path. However, practically there will often be combination of both paths to meet the wide diversity of issues encountered.

Partnering with Developers

This involves establishing partnerships with developers who wish to develop in accordance with the Town Vision. This may range from full financial partnerships, making the Council a part-owner of the development, through to the Council simply endorsing and supporting developments. There are a number of ways the Council could support a developer by:

- Facilitating the development by matching potential developers with property owners;
- Undertaking consultation with the Community on key issues;
- Providing in-kind support (see financial incentives below);
- Changing ground lease terms and conditions (including sale);
- Collaborating and partnering on community focussed funding applications to entities such as the Lotteries Grants Board.

Financial Incentives

In order to encourage development in accordance with the Town Vision plan the Council could offer financial incentives. These could include a number of mechanisms such as waiving or reducing applicable fees such as resource consent fees and inspection fees. These costs would however need to be recognised as a cost to the community. This could make it more attractive for developers to undertake certain types of development.

IMPLEMENTATION

Designation

Designations are a mechanism under the Resource Management Act 1991. They can be used by the Council to set aside land for public works and other projects of a public interest nature. Designations enable public works to be carried out as if they were authorised by a rule in the relevant district plan. Designations also restrict activities which are inconsistent with the designated work thereby preserving the land for the future works. Designations must be included in the District Plan, a notice of requirement to include the designation in the District Plan would have to be completed before a Designation would take full effect.

Acquire land under the Public Works Act 1981

The Public Works Act 1981 deals with the rights of central and local government to acquire private land for public purposes such as reserves, schools, hospitals, roads and airports, and the procedures for acquiring and disposing of this land. The Act provides a clear statutory framework for negotiation, acquisition, and compensation. An example of the use of this Act would be if the final Vision required a new road to be built. The Council could use the Public Works Act to acquire the land required for the road.



GOVERNANCE

It is considered that a structure plan framework could be adopted to guide implementation of the Town Vision Plan. If this or other 'hands on' options are used to direct the plan the Council needs to consider how it will manage and govern the implementation process. To ensure successful implementation of the Town Vision plan, the Council needs appropriate structures, skills and expertise. This will ensure that the plan has momentum, longevity and that the complex interrelationships that make a town centre a great place are managed.

The plan will require the integration and alignment of all the Council's property decisions, transactions and other plans and policies with the adopted Town Vision plan. This will involve implementing, facilitating and monitoring the adopted Town Vision plan including oversight of commercial development of both Council-owned and privately-owned sites, development of public space and public facilities (library, art gallery and museum).

Key considerations for an appropriate governance and management structure include:

- Balancing the objectives of commercial property development expertise with the public good development objectives for the town centre
- Maintaining the integrity of decision making regarding design quality.
- Cost effectiveness relative to the scale of the assets and the timing of the developments. Council's interest in the land ear-marked for both public and commercial development is approximately \$7m with development expected over an extended period of years.

- Ensuring that implementation of the adopted Town Vision plan remains appropriate and effective over a number of Council planning cycles.
- That any structure or entity is simple and easily understood by all those likely to engage with them.
- A clear focus and responsibility for implementing the plan.
- Forecasted population growth for the Whakatane area.
- Limited internal experience and capacity to manage larger scale commercial and other development.

Effective commercial development under any adopted Town Vision plan will rely heavily on a well considered, clearly articulated development plan that has wide community support. This is important because:

- Clear planning objectives and regulatory support for the plan will give direction and certainty to developers; and
- Well developed public understanding and support for the plan helps to provide accountability across Council electoral cycles and continuity over a number of Council planning cycles.

GOVERNANCE

The Town Vision Plan will be developed, Implemented and Adopted through the establishment of a Town Vision Development Group (TVDG)

A Town Vision Development Group could be established either:

- as a Council sub-committee under the Local Government Act reporting to the Council (this entity is not required to have any elected members); or
- as an informal advisory body appointed by the Council's CEO.

The TVDG would be responsible for the adopted Town Vision plan's development and implementation including overseeing commercial development. The TVDG may comprise of approximately 6 members with expertise in planning and design, commercial, development and investment expertise, and community/tangata whenua representation with skills appropriate to the role of the TVDG.

The Town Vision Development Group would work to clearly specified terms of reference, a dedicated council officer providing project management and coordination across council and stakeholders. Day-to-day commercial expertise for property development and investment advice could be obtained through a long-term contractual relationship with a development advisory firm.

The TVDG would provide the Council with governance that incorporates the necessary commercial and urban design expertise. Combining all aspects of the adopted Town Vision plan under the TVDG addresses the lack of scale.

This option also has the advantage of effectively integrating implementation of public space and public facilities developments with commercial development.

To balance the public good and commercial aspects of the Town Vision Plan, it is suggested that the membership of the Board should comprise two commercial development experts, two planning and design experts and one community and /or iwi expert. The skills mix of the board could change as the focus of the Town Vision plan shifts from planning to implementation.

Board selection would be skills based and could include an elected member if they bring one or more of the required governance skill sets.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q How will the Town Vision plan relate to the fringe area and surrounds?

A The Town Vision project is one part of a range of strategic planning works for the development of the Town and the District. eg. residential growth strategy, industrial strategy, transportation strategy.

Q What is the time frame for implementing any changes?

A Where the Town Vision plan provides for Council projects these will be implemented as part of programmed capital works. The Council would promote any District Plan changes to give effect to the Town Vision plan as soon as possible. Any developments that involve privately owned property will be given effect as opportunities arise. It is anticipated that the term of the Vision Plan will be up to 25-30 years

Q How will the affect existing consents?

A Any consents that have been granted or applied for would not be affected.

Q How will this affect new consents?

A New consents would be considered within the context of the relevant District Plan provisions at the time of application.

Q How will this affect the District Plan?

A An variation or a plan change to the District Plan would be initiated to give effect to the Town Vision possibly through a structure plan.

A variation or plan change to the District Plan would be a publicly notified process which anyone can make a submission on.

Q How much will the vision plan cost me as a ratepayer?

A Some Council projects included in the Vision plan have been provided for in existing council plans and budgets (LTCCP 2006-16). Where new infrastructural works are needed these will be funded from a combination of rates, development contributions and Harbour funds (where appropriate). Any commercial development envisaged by the plan will be privately funded.

Q Is the Council going to sell harbour endowment land?

A The Council may divest specific sites in order to facilitate development in keeping with an adopted Town Vision plan. Any sale of harbour endowment land must be in keeping with the Local Government Act 2002 and requirements for consultation in the Councils LTCCP.

Q: What about the development of properties in the plan area that are not specifically identified?

A The existing District Plan provisions apply for any proposed development.

For more details visit our web site: www.whakatane.govt.nz