

Report from independent Chair, Marie Shroff

Summary of issues raised

The Community Reference Group established to provide feedback on the draft Council Outcomes statements has met four times between 17 June and 8 July. The Group of 21 members represented a wide range of communities of interest from across Kāpiti and discussions were lively and thoughtful. Most participants were present at all four meetings and were positive and generous with their input.

The Group provided input to a redrafting of the Council Outcomes statements and has agreed that the attached draft wording broadly represents their views.

Inevitably, the Group discussions covered wider ground than the fairly narrow focus on the Draft Council Outcomes. I have undertaken to the Group to feed back to the Council some of their wider views. These give, I believe, rich insights into the concerns and values of a broad cross-section of the community and may be of considerable value to you as you develop your Long Term and Proposed District Plans. I present them here in no particular order although it may be useful to note that one break-out group of six indicated that their top four priorities would be accessibility, affordability, age-friendly, and business-friendly. In relation to the age-friendly issue, this was raised a number of times by different group members and, as will be seen from my comments below, was taken to mean that the District should work for all ages including youth and the elderly.

Thank you for the opportunity to chair this diverse and interesting group process. I wish you well with the rest of the Long Term Plan process. I will track with interest the evolution of the Council Outcomes statements and how they are embedded into the implementation plans.

Marie Shroff

Process

This community engagement pilot has been very successful. At the outset, I wanted to ensure that the process valued the voluntary time from the Reference Group members, and that they felt that they had had a good opportunity to contribute. Importantly, I wanted them to be able to see that their input had made a difference. I think that we have achieved these aims. The Reference Group Members have evaluated the pilot and rate it very highly. They had the opportunity to make recommendations about future Long Term Plan engagement and recommend strongly that the Reference Group model be used again. I also see the value in using a Reference Group later in the process.

Issues identified as important for the Council to bear in mind (in no particular order):

1. Unsurprisingly, **the economy** featured large in the Group's conversations. It was felt that employment issues had wider implications than just economic aspects so it has been given separate status here although co-located with the economic issues to acknowledge the link.

A) Economic issues – Council needs to be more business-friendly and support business growth through infrastructure. A number of participants made the point that the Council seems to throw up unnecessary barriers in relation to both business and private individual activity. A plea was made not to neglect the contribution of the rural productive sector in this. Economic sustainability was a repeated theme and the interconnection of economic issues with several of the other theme areas was acknowledged, notably with the natural environment through tourism and with Kāpiti's sense of identity (issue 3). The Council was seen as having a role to play in business attraction to the District.

B) Employment - A focus on employment and job creation was seen as extremely important. The clear social ramifications of providing more jobs and better jobs for local people were emphasised. The links to building community resilience were also acknowledged, as well as its importance in attracting people to live and work in Kāpiti.
2. Two-closely-linked aspects to a theme of **inclusivity** were identified:

A) Supporting families is important – through provision of well-configured infrastructure (such as pools) and services (e.g. health shuttle). Clear connections exist between this issue and those of access, connections and affordability. An idea for the creation of family-focused hubs for the delivery of a range of services was mooted.

B) Youth-, disability- and age-friendly – the whole of the District should be a good place to live for all ages, abilities and family configurations. It was noted that the District has almost twice the percentage of residents in the 65+ age groups than is the national average which makes the support for age-friendly initiatives even more important. The voice of young people should be acknowledged and supported. Infrastructure should cater for all ages and it was noted that what is good for people with disabilities is often good for the young and the elderly and their families and care-givers. Strategic opportunities should be taken for tomorrow's young people. It was pointed out that UN check-lists exist which could provide good measures of achievement of this aspiration. A role for the Council in advocating on social issues on behalf of the community was supported.
3. Kāpiti's **identity** – we have opportunities to create a great place for future generations to thrive. Finding the District's point of difference was seen as key. The "string of pearls" settlement configuration is valued – different characters of different areas should be supported but also the Council would do well to promote the concept of a single District. There was a very clear view expressed that the northern end of the District does not feel integrated with the rest, and that a perception of neglect is reinforced by poor public transport provision in particular. In this regard an idea of "bus-on-demand" was proposed as was piloted in Ōtaihanga some years ago. The Council was urged to be "relentless" in its advocacy with the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GW) on this issue. It was noted that heritage aspects are important to local character, and that the District Plan has a big influence on the

maintenance of it. A question was raised as to how the Council will deal with the inevitable growth in numbers of young families who will be attracted to the District once the Expressway is completed.

4. **Connections** – comments about this spanned several issues and embraced physical connections (e.g. transport, broadband, roads and cycleways/walkways/bridleways) as well as social, cultural and economic ones. The encouragement of connections between communities (both geographic communities and communities of interest) was seen as likely to enhance inter-group understanding and contribute to the growth of District-wide cohesion. Connections over time were also seen as important – museums and heritage infrastructure are important to this. The connections between the environment and the economy came up several times.
5. **Access** – comments on this covered both ease-of-access aspects (transport, spatial planning, town planning etc) and also issues of wide accessibility for people with disabilities (see comments on connections with issue 4). The need for fair and easy access to Council processes was also implied in some comments. Council should listen well to the community and take action accordingly.
6. **Environmental sustainability** – the strong support expressed for this indicated a high value placed on it by Pākehā communities for cultural, economic, social and spiritual reasons. The natural environment is part of our identity and needs to be supported - it is part of how Kāpiti sells itself to the rest of the country. There are very rich opportunities in a region so close to rivers, forest, mountains and sea. Productive use of rural land needs to be safe-guarded against other uses. The value of volunteers in this area (and, indeed, in others) was acknowledged as was the Council's historically strong support for volunteers in the District. A particular concern about the state of waterways was raised with road run-off and the proximity of sewage treatment and septic tanks named as factors in deterioration in addition to the well-known farm run-off issues.. In connection with this, it was noted that the development of new wetlands through the Expressway project will be welcome. The importance of the role of the Regional Council in this area was noted and the Council was urged to work closely with GW to ensure good results.
7. **Heritage/arts/creative** – the Council was seen as a natural leader this area. Our heritage feeds into our identity but it was felt by some that the heritage and cultural history aspects of our culture are neglected in favour of the arts and craft sector. In relation to the arts sector, the District is seen as “crafty” but has more to offer in the arts area than is acknowledged. The arts and creative sector is strong in Kāpiti but Council could help position it better through celebration and promotion – it is not currently on the country's creative map.
8. **Affordability** of Council activities – this was a cross-cutting issue through a number of others but seen as sufficiently important to warrant its own heading. It was acknowledged that Council's revenue is derived entirely from rates and charges to residents and rate-payers and that keeping these charges as low as possible while still achieving quality outcomes would be a key challenge which must be met. In connection with issues of affordability, support for continuing with self-funding social housing was expressed. The Council should advocate on this issue with other agencies.
9. **Democratic responsibility and accountability** – it was seen as very important that objectives be measurable. Seeking community input in relation to activity strategic objectives and levels of service would be worth considering in relation to this issue.

What has been positive over the last decade or so and should be built on:

In the interests of trying to build on the positives of the last few years, participants came up with a range of things that they individually felt had produced positives for the District over the last decade or so and left them feeling proud as residents. These comments are not the view of the Group as a whole but I believe it might be helpful for the Council to hear the range of views. They are summarised here for your information, once again, in no particular order:

1. Creative District – there is a thriving arts and creative community in Kāpiti. The Discover Kāpiti Heritage group and the Mahara Gallery were things to be proud of.
2. Transport – the extension of the rail service to Waikanae in particular was seen as a plus.
3. Sport, parks and reserves - Council's foresight in making the strategic purchase of the Howarth block was praised as was the provision of good dog parks. Healthy sports clubs in the District are producing top class athletes and Council's contribution through strategic investment in facilities such as the hockey turf and aquatic centre was recognised. The great open spaces and beaches are highly valued – the Paraparaumu Beach development was singled out for particular mention.
4. Village character - The Council has done well in supporting the retention of the differing village characters. The relatively small size of the population assists this. The District is seen as a safe place to live over all and there are good working relations between a number of diverse groups.
5. Education and youth – the Council's support for the Youth Council and the Kāpiti Youth Service was praised as was the support for the secondary-education-to-tertiary-level-to-business conduit around clean technology. Growth in the number of primary schools attests to the attractiveness of the District for young families.
6. Volunteers – the strong volunteer culture in the District was valued and the Council's strong support for it, particularly in recent years, was acknowledged.
7. Town planning was praised – in particular the building level rules in relation to flooding for Ōtaki were seen as protecting the integrity of residential areas.
8. Support for farming – Councils' support for the sector adds value to the favourable climate in the District. The Council could help build on this natural advantage of the District.
9. Business – the growth in small businesses in the District has been supported by good infrastructure development - the airport has been a big plus. Good internet infrastructure is also attractive to business. The District's branding/identity has improved.
10. Sustainability – the District's sustainable “clean green” image was seen as very positive. The “progressive” character is seen as being attractive to new residents. It was noted that there are large planting groups active in the District which link older age groups with the volunteer culture. The investment in cycleways/walkways/bridleways and rules to reduce urban sprawl were seen as very positive. Some comment was made in support of water meters as a way of changing people's attitude to water conservation. The Sustainable Home and Garden Show was seen as “excellent”.
11. Iwi relationships – these are seen as strong and positive.

12. Elder access to Council – the strength of the connections with Grey Power and the existence of the Older Persons' Council were praised.
13. Citizens' Advice Bureau – support for this was appreciated.
14. Council's support for heritage initiatives was appreciated.
15. Kāpiti's geographic position on the coast and as part of the greater Wellington region is a point of satisfaction.
16. Council's efforts in trying to reduce the adverse impact of the Expressway on residents were noted.

What aspects of the current situation make people sad?

Participants were also asked what aspects of the current situation in Kāpiti make them sad. Again this is an account of individual views rather than of the group as a whole. In no particular order, the responses were:

1. The Aquatic Centre – there was disappointment that it is not a 50m pool nor connected to an indoor sports facility as was mooted at the outset. Disabled access to the pool was seen as a problem both in that it now restricts use by other users and also that it was not included originally. The fact that the pools are designed for different age groups is not very family-friendly.
2. Transport – Kāpiti and Rimu Roads are a disaster area, probably as a result of past Council failures to plan for the area long term. Public transport is not good enough, particularly for Te Horo and Ōtaki.
3. Integration of the District – the isolation of the area north of Waikanae is a cause of regret – internet access is not good, the Ōtaki Town Centre development process were not seen as wholly positive. The Government's ultrafast broadband policy in relation to Ōtaki was seen as a negative.
4. Water meters – the costs are seen as a negative by some people and the communication was seen as less than satisfactory, especially for people with disabilities.
5. Business – the Council should be more business-friendly and customer focused, the handbrake is still on one notch too far.
6. District Plan – subdivision rules don't work well for some business sectors, the process and results of the coastal hazards assessment was not good enough, land movement from production to housing is regrettable.
7. Rates – these are seen as too high for some people's incomes.
8. Heritage and the Mahara Gallery – regret that the Council did not take a lead on this earlier.
9. It was noted that the group wishing to set up an Abbeyfield community for older residents had struck hurdles in finding land with a consequent reduction in housing choices for older residents.