

What is Shaping South Waikato?

Shaping South Waikato is the name Council has given to its District Plan Review. This Review will take place in phases over the coming two to three years and involving stakeholders like yourself is an important part of the process.

Why do we need to review the District Plan?

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires that district plans be reviewed within ten years of becoming operative. The South Waikato District Plan was first notified in 1993 and it became operative in 1998. This plan is currently under review, and it is anticipated that the revised version will be notified for public submissions in early 2012.

The RMA requires that a review of the district plan considers all sections of the plan, regardless of when those parts became operative. In the South Waikato district the Rural Residential zone and Heritage parts of the plan only became operative in March 2009. Therefore, while they are to be reviewed, it is not proposed to make any significant changes to these parts of the plan.

TIMELINE

April – September 2010: Release of six Issues Papers for public comment

March 2011: A 'draft' District Plan is released for public comment

April 2012: Plan notification and statutory process begins

What will the review achieve?

A review of the district plan allows communities to reassess environmental outcomes and priorities, and to redefine their vision for the future of the district. This reflects the fact that we live in a changing environment with evolving issues and levels of knowledge.

Some of the land-uses and practices that were considered normal and acceptable ten years ago may now be unacceptable due to cumulative adverse effects on the environment. For instance, the effects of global warming and climate change need to be considered now to avoid future unsustainable land-use situations.

There are also new trends in how and where people live that have implications for the district's environment (like greater rural residential development).

This process has some guiding principles.

- We aim for a workable district plan following the ABC rule – accessible, basic and concise.
- We aim for a district plan that is South Waikato responsive.
- We want to identify and, where possible, resolve issues prior to the formal notification process. This will be done by issuing a draft District Plan for informal comment, prior to the RMA process commencing.
- We aim for a district plan that encourages environmentally sustainable economic development.
- We aim for a district plan focused on planning issues and with a strong link between policies and rules.



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What have we done to date?

We are making some steady progress. To date:

- EMS from Hamilton was employed to help Council develop a new District Plan (Craig Sharman and Murray Kivell).
- We held intensive workshops with Council planners and other staff to identify the issues that we know the new plan needs to tackle. We also identified which parts of the existing District Plan work well and which don't. The intention is to only 'fix what is broken'.
- From these discussions six main issues that the District needs to address were identified, namely:

- The enhancement and consolidation of the district's urban areas;
 - Enhancing the economic performance of the district through better targetting of District Plan provisions;
 - Identification of significant landscapes and natural areas in the district and consideration of how they are to be protected and managed;
 - Identification of matters of significance to iwi and consideration of how these are managed;
 - Consideration of climate change, potential for new renewable energy generation, and energy use;
 - Consideration of water quality and rural land use intensification.
- Council has hired the Isthmus Group and Wildland Consultants to report respectively on what landscapes in the South Waikato are outstanding, and where the most significant natural areas are. Work on both of these projects has already started.
 - We are engaged in discussions with adjoining Councils to identify opportunities to work together across the region.
 - We have begun meeting with local stakeholders to identify their concerns and hear their views on what the new District Plan should contain and do.

Where to from here?

Council will:

- continue meetings with stakeholders, including large corporates, smaller businesses and community groups.
- produce first two issues papers on improving the District's urban areas and enhancing the District's economic performance.
- conduct appropriate additional background studies, eg appropriate noise standards.
- align our proposals with the RMA amendments, Regional Policy Statement and National Policies and Standards.
- produce a draft District Plan for informal feedback March 2011.
- process a proposed District Plan through formal RMA submissions and hearings to be notified in April 2012.



What are our significant resource management issues?

When the first district plan was written it was a legal requirement to detail the significant resource management issues for the district. Based on these issues and the overall objective of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), the objectives, policies and rules for the district were set.

Many of the issues focused on the effects of land use and land management and the potential risk activities may have on:

- amenity;
- natural and cultural heritage features;
- Māori cultural and spiritual values; and
- Lakes and stream water quality.

With the most recent amendments to the RMA it is no longer a requirement of the district plan to identify and discuss the major issues. However, we still think it's a good idea for the new plan to start with an appreciation of what the issues are, so objectives are set and a planning framework with a

focus on addressing those issues is developed.

The above issues to a certain extent have been managed appropriately during the past 10-15 years of district plan operation. They are considered on a daily basis with every resource consent application that council receives, assesses and decides whether to approve or decline.

All of the above issues remain current. However, many other issues have developed which are of global, national, and local significance. Some of the big issues that we are already looking at are:

- The effects of climate change as a natural hazard that needs to be managed and planned for.
- Managing growth and land use change so that it does not impact negatively on the range of natural and built features that makes the South Waikato unique.
- Balancing the desire for a range of lifestyle choices in a way that does not impact on the productive base

of the District, or over-extend the infrastructure needed to support modern living (roads, footpaths, sewers, water supply, community facilities).

- Advocating the design of better buildings and subdivisions so that resources, energy use and crime are minimised, and amenity and visual appeal are maximised.
- Getting ready for renewable energy options and smarter transportation options.

The review of the district plan is aimed at addressing these and other issues in the context of meeting the foreseeable needs of future generations.

Your view on these and other issues are important in helping guide the development of a new district plan that is South Waikato responsive and capable of managing the many environmental challenges facing the district.

The six key issues highlighted on the previous page are a good starting point to consider.



Significant natural areas inventory

South Waikato District Council has contracted Wildland Consultants Ltd to compile an inventory of significant natural areas in the District as part of the District Plan Review. The sites are initially identified from recent aerial photography and are then viewed by ecologists from roadsides or (with the permission of landowners) from other viewpoints. Information on the boundaries, vegetation type and general condition is recorded. This survey is a continuation of work started by Council some years ago to identify significant ecological sites.

Why are we doing this survey?

The South Waikato District has many natural areas that make a significant contribution to the character and quality of the District. Some of these areas are home to rare plants and animals. Council

has existing information on several natural areas in the District, however some of this information needs updating, and some areas are still undescribed. This information is an important reference point for assessing habitat changes over time and to assist landowners with management of these natural areas.

With an increasing awareness in the value of natural areas, many residents will have updated information describing the District's ecological character and biodiversity values. Landowners can then use this information as a tool to manage natural areas and apply for funding, eg. to the government's Biodiversity Condition and Advice Funds, the Environment Bay of Plenty Environmental Enhancement Fund, or the Environment Waikato Environmental Initiatives Fund.

Landscape Study

As with significant natural areas, we also need to look at the protection of outstanding landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development. So we need as a first step to understand what parts of the District are 'outstanding' and what makes them special.

The Isthmus Group has been engaged by Council to undertake a district-wide landscape study. Fieldwork is almost done and we hope to complete the landscape study by the end of 2009. The outcomes of the study will be discussed with landowners and key stakeholders throughout this work, and will then form part of one of the issues papers prepared in early 2010. The outcomes of discussions on the issues papers will then be used as part of formulating district plan provisions in the preparation of the 'draft' district plan in late 2010.



Areas like the Jim Barnett Reserve hold special significance for the South Waikato District. Residents and visitors alike enjoy the tranquility and beauty of the natural bush.