

SECTION 2: Key decisions | Ngā take Matua

Public consultation | He whakawhitiwhitinga kōrero ā-tūmatanui

The 2021-2031 Long Term Plan Consultation Document was adopted for consultation on 24 March 2021, with the formal consultation period taking place from 1 to 30 April 2021. The consultation document and supporting documents were publicly available on Waikato Regional Council's website from 1 April 2021. Copies of the consultation document were made available at public libraries throughout the region as well as being posted to key stakeholders and those who requested a copy. We raised awareness of the consultation through print and digital media channels, as well as on radio and in person. This included ads in local newspapers and on social media, public meetings, and sponsored stories on news websites. Personalised letters were also sent to consent holders and those impacted by the Lake Taupō Protection Project and Te Aroha outlet drain changes.

The public were invited to provide feedback in a variety of ways, including via post, an online submission form, email and in-person delivery to any regional council office. A total of 1499 submissions were received on the eight consultation topics. Submitters were invited to speak to councillors about their feedback during hearings held in Hamilton from 10 to 12 May 2021.

Hearings and deliberations on the Lake Taupō Protection Project were conducted separately, with a specifically convened hearings committee made up of councillors from both Taupō District Council and Waikato Regional Council. The committee provided a recommendation to both councils which was subsequently adopted.

The council deliberated on all other feedback provided by submitters during its meetings on 25 May 2021 and made decisions on the options under consultation. Community feedback and the council's responses to key consultation topics are outlined in the following section.

Key decisions

Proposal 1 – Protecting our biodiversity



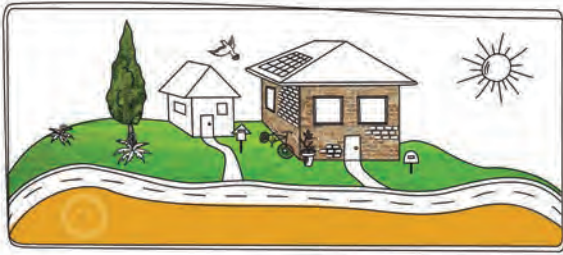
To meet the requirements of the new National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity and to improve on the gains we are making to protect our unique biodiversity, the council proposed a significant change to the way we undertake biodiversity work.

A wide range of new work was proposed, including: the development of a biodiversity accord, better monitoring, regional policy reform, better information gathering and sharing, and increasing restoration advice and funding. This work requires additional funding but – with more pressing priorities in year one like responding to the Government's direction on fresh water – it was proposed that this would start in year two.

As part of the consultation, we asked the community if the enhanced programme should begin in year two of our LTP or whether it should be brought forward to year one, meaning we'd start the work immediately.

Out of the 241 submissions received on this proposal, 68 per cent were in favour of bringing the work forward to year one of the LTP, with submitters saying biodiversity is an important issue and that delaying the work will make the task harder. Through deliberations, the council decided to keep the commencement of the planned work at year two, however. In arriving at this decision, the council was particularly mindful of overall rates impact of the eight proposals and the more pressing priority of responding to the Government's direction on fresh water in year one.

Proposal 2 – Sustainable homes scheme



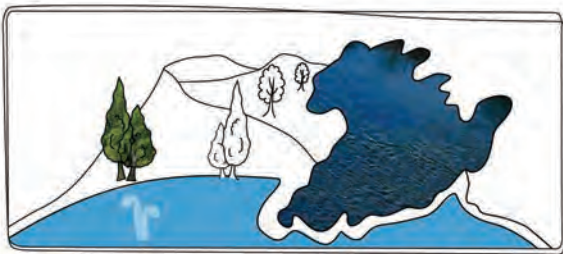
Everyone in the Waikato should have a healthy home, so the council has been investigating whether we should make a sustainable homes programme available throughout the region. The scheme would assist homeowners with loans to make sustainable home improvements like water tank installations, insulation, double-glazing, heating, ventilation, solar power and septic tank upgrades.

We asked the community if they would be supportive of the council borrowing money to help households install sustainable home improvements. Most submitters (78 per cent) were in favour of this option, noting the health benefits, cost savings and increased household resilience it would bring.

The council decided to proceed with the scheme, subject to further work being carried out to put it into practice. The launch is expected in the latter half of 2021/22. Initially, \$5 million will be available in total, with each individual application capped at \$15,000. Operational reviews of the scheme are planned after 50, 100 and 200 applications have been approved.

Only those that opt into the scheme will have to pay the voluntary targeted rate. This would be placed on their property and calculated based on the loan being repaid over 10 years, and would commence for first adopters from 1 July 2022.

Proposal 3 – Lake Taupō Protection Project



In the early 2000s, Waikato Regional Council worked with Taupō District Council and the Crown on a plan to reduce the amount of nitrogen entering Lake Taupō. We took a major step towards achieving this ambition with the establishment of the Lake Taupō Protection Trust. The trust's role was to oversee a work programme to reduce the amount of nitrogen entering the lake by 20 per cent. The

reduction target has been met, and now the 27 landowner agreements that were entered into to help achieve it must be managed for the 999-year life span.

Joint consultation took place with Taupō District Council. Two options were presented. The first, and preferred, option was to retain the trust so that it could continue to oversee the landowner agreements. The second, was that either Waikato Regional Council or Taupō District Council would manage the agreements.

The majority of submissions received by both councils were in favour of the preferred option, with submitters commenting that current arrangements were working well and that they wanted to ensure the continued protection of the lake.

A joint hearings committee of councillors from Taupō District Council and Waikato Regional Council heard submissions and deliberated on the options. It recommended that option one be adopted and that the settlers (Waikato Regional Council, Taupō District Council, and the Crown) undertake and complete a review of the arrangement within 24 months. This review would consider whether the new governance and management structures are the most efficient and cost-effective for managing the agreements.

Both councils subsequently endorsed the hearings committee's recommendation.

Proposal 4 – Passenger rail service



Through the last long term plan, the council agreed to a start-up passenger rail service between Waikato and Auckland. In order to make this successful, we need to start planning for future improvements now.

It was proposed that improvements would begin in year three of the LTP. These would include an additional interpeak service and an investigation of opportunities to extend the current service to Papakura further into Auckland. As part of this proposal, we also identified the need for improvements to carriages and locomotives but noted that this would require central government to fully fund these items.

A total of 1240 submissions were received, with an overwhelming majority (95 per cent) agreeing that further improvements are needed, including more services, additional stops and a faster service. Those who were against the proposal thought that the value of the start-up service

should first be demonstrated before adding further improvements. They also noted concern about low patronage.

In response to submitters' overwhelming support for the proposal and their requests for this work to be started now, the council decided an interpeak service will be trialled for 12 months, and this would start in year one of the LTP. The additional service will start no sooner than December 2021 due to the lead times necessary to complete the required work and implement the service, including confirmation of the operating cost, the 75.5 per cent government subsidy and the optimal timetable. In the short term, the additional interpeak service can be funded from operational savings achieved due to the delayed start of the Te Huia service this year.

The council also approved an extension of the Saturday Te Huia services to The Strand in Auckland's CBD for a cost of \$10,000 per annum. A start date for the extended service is to be confirmed, pending completion of the necessary operational requirements.

Proposal 5 – Regional economic development funding



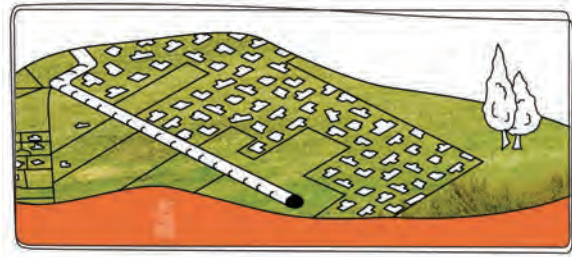
The council proposed to increase funding to our regional economic development agency, Te Waka | Anga Whakamua Waikato. The Waikato has not seen the same level of central government funding as other regions and we believe more support is required to help Te Waka achieve its objectives faster. More funding is also anticipated to attract other funders.

Funding of \$300,000 per annum has historically been provided to Te Waka through the general rate and it was proposed that this amount would be increased to \$750,000 per annum for three years. It was also proposed that the funding would come from investment fund returns, with a consequential reduction in the funding available for the Regional Development Fund.

We received 140 submissions with 57 per cent in favour of this proposal, 40 per cent preferring to keep our level of funding as it is, and 3 per cent not indicating a preferred option.

The council agreed, through its deliberations, to increase the funding to Te Waka, which will be subject to an accountability framework to ensure agreed outcomes are achieved for the funding provided.

Proposal 6 – Te Aroha suburban outlet drain transfer



Increasing urbanisation west of Stanley Avenue in Te Aroha has resulted in more water runoff and made it more difficult for council staff to access the suburban outlet drain for maintenance. There are also inconsistencies with drainage and stormwater rates paid by properties in this area, with most paying Waikato Regional Council drainage rates and Matamata-Piako District Council (MPDC) urban stormwater rates.

Both councils, therefore, believed it would be more logical for Waikato Regional Council to transfer responsibility for a portion of the drain to MPDC, as they would be better placed to manage runoff and drain access issues. Landowners would also pay the correct drainage and stormwater rates based on the benefits received.

In total, 53 submissions were received, with 89 per cent in favour of the proposed transfer. The council subsequently agreed to transfer the urban portion of the suburban outlet drain to MPDC.

Proposal 7 – Rates remission and postponement policies



The council is required to review its rates remission and postponement policies every six years and to consult on any changes. We took the opportunity to review our policies as part of our LTP and consulted on three proposed changes.

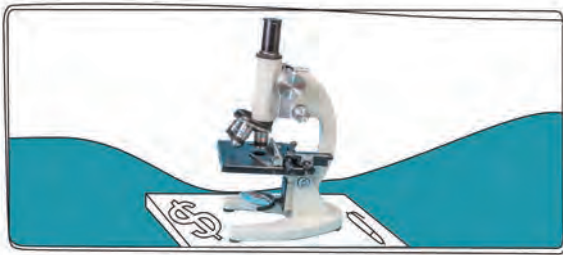
- Remission of the Hamilton city public transport rate – it was proposed the maximum value against which an indirect benefit rate is assessed would increase from \$2.5 million to \$5 million to reflect the increase in property prices over the last five years.
- Financial hardship – it was proposed that a new policy be adopted to provide additional support through rates

remissions to ratepayers who are experiencing financial hardship.

- Remission of rates to help landowners protect land-based biodiversity – amendments and better promotion were proposed to increase uptake of the existing remission.

A total of 85 submissions were received on this proposal, with the majority (67 per cent) in support of the changes. The council subsequently adopted the proposed changes.

Proposal 8 – Cost recovery changes for consent holders



The council has a responsibility to manage the region’s natural resources. Consents are one of the main tools we have to do this. We monitor the state of our environment to continually assess the impact of these consents and recover a portion of the cost of our monitoring and science investigations where the need for the work is caused by consent holders’ activities.

As the focus of our work changes over time, we need to reassess how much of it is funded by general ratepayers and how much is funded by consent holders. Based on our latest assessment, the total contribution from all consent holders will decrease slightly compared to last year.

However, the council proposed the following changes for some individual consent types.

- Increase the cost of dam consents, as we haven’t been fully recovering our state of the environment monitoring costs associated with them.
- Increase the cost of agricultural discharge consents, as the collective impact of this activity has created additional monitoring requirements.

- Increase the cost of air discharge consents, as total project costs are increasing in order to comply with central government requirements.
- Decrease the cost of marine farming consents, as we will be doing less work over the next three years on the impacts of this type of activity than we have done in the past.
- Increase the cost of consents for other coastal activities, as the work we will be doing over the next three years will tell us more about the impacts of these consent types.
- Introduce a new charge for moorings, as they contribute to the marine biosecurity work we have to do.
- Increase process discharge consent cost to cover the costs of the extra work we need to do on water quality monitoring and meeting central government expectations.
- Make some category changes for geothermal consents, moving to a uniform charge for all consent types.

The council received 116 submissions in relation to the proposed changes, and the majority (66 per cent) were in favour of the changes. The council subsequently approved these changes, which will come into effect in 2021/22.



