

Waimakariri District Council Best Practice Example

Source of further information

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Description of Best Practice Example

While being left largely to private landowners to seek the rezoning of land for residential or business development, the Waimakariri District Council has taken a pro-active stance in the detailed investigatory work required to determine whether areas might indeed be suitable to accommodate urban growth. This pro-active stance involves not only the input of Council staff time and resources through the Project Advisory Group (as detailed in another best practice example) but also through the joint funding of other inputs required from parties outside of Council.

Method

There has been significant population growth in the Waimakariri District over the past decade and this looks set to continue in the near future. The Council has identified preferred growth areas through its District Development Strategy to help give some direction to where growth might best occur. For the most part it has left it to private landowners and the market to decide whether growth will actually occur in any particular area.

Where new urban growth proposals (typically by way of plan changes) are put forward to the Council within those areas which have been identified by Council as preferred urban growth areas, the Council will consider the joint funding of the investigations required to determine the development issues, outline servicing proposals, and the specific design, layout and servicing of the development. A recent example of this is the East Rangiora outline development plan project.

Lessons Learned

The Waimakariri Council has realised that it will not always know where are the most appropriate areas for urban growth and what form that growth should take. At the same time it realises that the planning process that any rezoning proposal must go through is most often expensive and lengthy. Taking a pro-active stance towards the district's growth pressures the Council decided that cost sharing arrangements in some cases with private landowners would help to ensure that credible and well considered proposals would be tested through the RMA planning process.

The Council has also found over the past decade that many excellent development themes and innovative concepts were being promoted by applicants that the Council may have never considered.

Benefits

The practice of the Council jointly funding investigations into possible urban growth proposals provides greater opportunities for well considered proposals to be tested through the RMA process. If the

Council did not contribute towards the costs, the investigations may not be undertaken in the first instance or may be much more limited.

There are community benefits to be gained through better considered urban development proposals. In most cases these proposals would be linked with or follow earlier community engagement of growth options considered in the District Development Strategy.

More complete plan change requests are prepared and lodged, thus providing for less delays in the processing of the request by Council.

The Council has some ownership of the planning work undertaken and can significantly influence the quality of the work, the processes used, and the documentation assembled.

Costs

Financial costs are incurred by the Council that might have otherwise been met by the applicant. Future costs are avoided or minimised by the involvement of the Council in the formative stages of growth proposals in relation to design, servicing and the provision of facilities and amenities.

Other comments

The above is a best practice example of a Council that realises that not all the knowledge of what will generate a successful urban development project is held by the Council. It is also an example of a Council realistic of the hurdles that are faced by proponents of private plan changes and in instances where there are wider community benefits to be gained the Council wants to ensure that a well considered proposal is put forward to be tested against the relevant statutory criteria.