

# Waimakariri District Council Best Practice Example II

Project Advisory Group - Waimakariri District Council

## Source of further information

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## Source of Example

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## Description of Best Practice Example

The Waimakariri District Council has, since soon after the introduction of the Resource Management Act, received numerous private plan change requests (most likely more than any other Council in New Zealand). In developing procedures for the processing of private plan changes the Council established a Project Advisory Group. This Group consists of senior Council staff and is available for applicants of private plan changes (and now also other significant development proposals) to meet with prior to formally lodging any plan change request.

## Method

The Project Advisory Group consists of senior Council officers with responsibilities in the areas of planning policy, planning administration, reserves, roading, utility services, and community development. At the request of any party considering a plan change request or significant development proposal the group would meet on a without prejudice basis to discuss the proposal being promoted.

The party proposing the plan change would bring to the meeting an outline of what is being considered and the purpose of the meeting is to allow issues to be raised by both parties (Council and applicant) and for an exchange of ideas and advice to flow. The intent is to ensure a 'no surprises' processing and decision context for the applicant and the Council. A record of each meeting is kept and the record of decisions and actions are made available to all who attend. The Council ensures confidentiality of discussions.

Those Council officers attending the meeting will include those responsible for processing the plan change request once formally lodged with Council. They will also be those staff holding knowledge about Council facilities, services, Code of Engineering Practice, and other Council standards of which applicants need to have an understanding.

At the height of plan change requests (and other significant developments) being promoted this group was meeting fortnightly.

## Lessons Learned

It was found by the Council that prior to the establishment of the Project Advisory Group the following problems were occurring:

- Incomplete plan change requests were being lodged, resulting in Council having to request substantial amounts of further information;

- As a result of the above the processing of plan change requests were in some cases taking significant periods of time;
- Applicants were experiencing difficulties in being able to see and gain information from the necessary Council staff in a timely manner and there were instances of conflicting advice as different staff were approached for advice;
- Poor co-ordination between units of the Council over private developments, and poor linkage with tactical/strategic planning exercises;
- Environmental outcomes being achieved were in some cases not as good as they might have otherwise been had an opportunity existed to work through matters outside of the formal plan change process.

The establishment of the Project Advisory Group has for the most part overcome the above matters and is a resource of the Council that is very well utilised.

### **Benefits**

Applicants are able to access all the Council staff they need to at one time to discuss their proposal and receive feedback necessary to allow progress to be made. The process builds good working relationships and effectively reins in any excesses in which either party may wish to indulge.

Applicants, often from outside the District, get a wealth of site/location specific information that would be difficult to otherwise access. Council information in the form of maps, plans, data, and contacts is freely made available.

The feedback received invariably allows for a more complete plan change request to be prepared and lodged, thus providing for less delays in the processing of the request by Council.

The process helps the Council pro-actively engage in development and helps secure better outcomes from a community/economic development perspective.

### **Costs**

The costs for the time of Council officers is met out of the operations budgets of each unit, and there are no costs to those promoting the development.

### **Other comments**

Given that through the Plan Change process all District Plan provisions can be sought to be changed, there is a greater need for a wide range of Council staff to be consulted and/or made aware of such proposals. At Waimakariri District Council the Project Advisory Group is the vehicle through which the Council and applicant alike are able to understand the ambitions, goals, timeframes and priorities of each other.