

BY ALAN BENSON, SECRETARY, MEDLANDS BEACH CARE GROUP

COOPERATIVE STYLE

COMMUNITY-LED
CONSULTATION,
DEVELOPMENT AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
MEDLANDS BEACH
LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT
PLAN, GREAT BARRIER
ISLAND.



Local community has hands on involvement.

Successful local authority planning is built on a foundation of effective community consultation and requires a two-way sharing of information, opinion, reaction and response which trickles both up and down! Such consultation has to be established as a process and implemented at the earliest possible stage of a project to ensure that: relevant and accurate information is shared; trust is engendered between a wide variety of parties; views and responses are seen to be valued; and to enable conclusions which accurately reflect the community's views and concerns.

MEDLANDS BEACH, GREAT BARRIER ISLAND

Medlands Beach is a two-kilometre long white sandy beach on the lower East Coast of Great Barrier Island. The Hauraki Gulf Islands' section of Auckland City Council's District Plan was proposed in 1992, became operative in 1996 and provides for Medlands Beach as a "policy area" with a set of objectives, policies and rules written specifically for the Medlands Beach settlement area. A number of resource management issues remained unresolved when the Plan became operative, and these issues were addressed in the Medlands Development Strategy - 1998 - a document prepared after extensive local community consultation.

MEDLANDS BEACH CARE GROUP

A Medlands Beach ratepayers' group (the Group) was established during the period in which the District Plan and the Medlands Development Strategy were developed. During the late 1990's as land and beach care groups were being established around New Zealand, the ratepayers' group reformed into the Medlands Beach Care Group with the encouragement of local participation, holiday

home interest, and with the support of the officers of Auckland City and Auckland Regional Council.

THE MEDLANDS BEACH LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Medlands Development Strategy - 1998 made 15 Recommendations, and Recommendation 13 asked:

"That a comprehensive landscape management plan be developed and implemented for Medlands Beach area to address all issues including beach, dune and stream protection, roadside management and enhancement, beach access, vehicle parking and reserve development, management and signage."

As Secretary of the Group, I stated at the time the Group was reformed, that, "I believe Recommendation 13 is major because it touches upon most aspects of the management of Medlands". Through the consultation process and work of the Group, we have already begun implementing some of the detail of this recommendation, including:

- Planning and implementing a car park
- Reserve area plantings
- Road design
- Beach access and construction of boardwalks
- Walkways
- Establishing picnic areas and picnic furniture
- Sand dune care
- Beach clean ups
- Gathering of seeds from dune plants and growing the seeds
- Signage
- Pressing for a bridge over the river at the southern end of the beach

What is missing from the overall plan is the detail. The District Plan gives the "big picture" and now the Group has the resources and the time to "paint in" the detail through consultation. The Group sought from local government the opportunity for full community consultation with those who have the local knowledge, resources and skills.

Landscape Consultants, contracted by Auckland City to develop the Medlands Landscape Management Plan (LMP) saw the consultation process as "being led by the Medlands Beach community, since it evolves from the ideas and issues that they have brought up during the workshop meetings and subsequent submissions. The people of Medlands are also seen as one of the main drivers in ensuring that the LMP visions are steadily achieved. Medlands Beach Care Group has been an effective voice and co-ordinator in initiating the LMP from a local level, with the assistance of a representative of the Great Barrier Island Community Board."

Community input was achieved through: meetings; newsletters; working parties; fax; email; web sites; snail mail; phone; voice mail; working bees; submissions; and coffee sessions. The Great Barrier Community Board has facilitated implementation of the Medlands Beach LMP with the provision of SLIP's (small local improvement projects) funds. The running costs and consultation expenses of the Beach Care Group are covered by the Beach Care division of Auckland Regional Council, and together with Auckland City's parks department, both Councils provide the Group with practical assistance and expert advice.

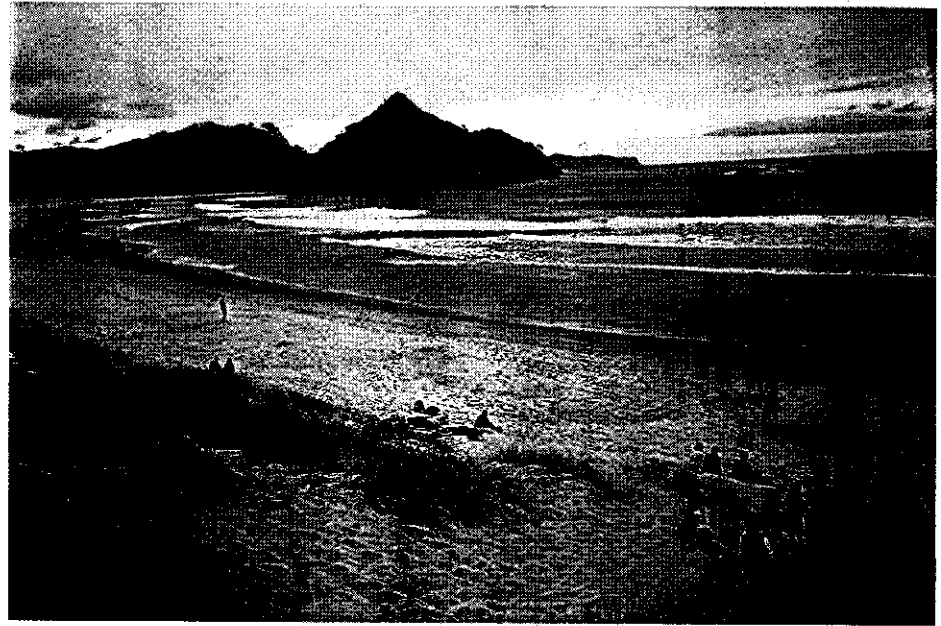
SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Certain elements of the process through which we developed our Landscape Management Plan have stood out as clear sign posts of successful and effective consultation between community and local government:

1. Getting the detail

- It is important to seek amplification from community members when generalised concerns are raised - seek detail and encourage the community to outline problems and possible solutions.

- People are important and there will be more of them in Greater Auckland over the next 50 years. Great Barrier Island does and will continue to provide tourism, holiday and recreational opportunities for many people. Very effective consultation occurs when all possible sources are contacted and explored. It is important to spread the net widely to get responses from as many community



Above: Coastal land, Great Barrier Island.

representative groups and individuals as possible.

- All the significant people involved should exercise their knowledge of the community in seeking out involvement - it should not be left to others as it is everyone's job!

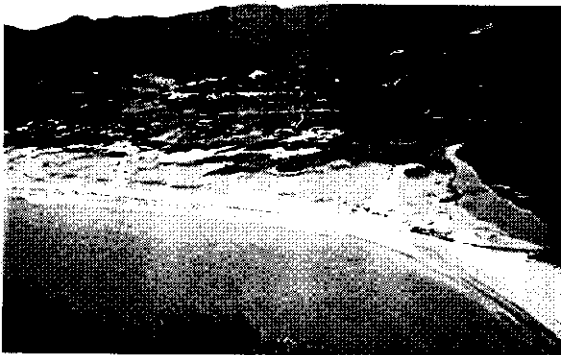
2. Majority view

- Meetings encourage the expression and recording of individual viewpoints.
- No vote is taken as each idea is valued and considered on its merits. Ideas are reacted to, initially, only in the sense of seeking amplification.

- Most often, a majority vote is the expression of a coalition of minorities and in itself creates other minorities.

3. Gaining validity and recognition

- Groups involved in community consultation need a vision and a process which encourages a sense of trust, responsibility and establishes among the participants a validity for the activity.
- Some organisations need to be approached by



an appropriate authority before they will participate. Some need a direct invitation by councils as they will not respond to newsletters, advertising, notice boards and the like. The risk is that the process might get lost in the bowels of bureaucracy!

- It can be claimed, for example, that informal local groups consulting with Auckland City and the local community board gets things done. Except of course, for those groups which don't get involved because they have not been formally invited to do so - and it is important that they are involved.

4. Parallel Consultation

- Sometimes, it seems a parallel set of consultations may be needed and the issues developed can then be rationalised at the final stages. Particularly this is true of iwi consultation.
- It is recommended by iwi consultation

authorities that Tangata Whenua should be consulted on its own and not as part of another group. The Treaty of Waitangi, Article 2 gives the Tangata Whenua special rights and therefore they should be treated accordingly.

- That is not to deny that wherever possible informal exchanges between Tangata Whenua and local communities should be conducted to try and sort out sensitive issues before a more formal stage is reached.

5. The Role of Planners

- In the consultation process, planners are first seen as "providers of information" and "outliners of the process". When the time comes for gathering ideas and responses they should present themselves as operating from a "blank sheet" and avoid saying, "I think the issues are.". Planners should empower the group being consulted and acknowledge all the ideas generated from the group as important and, generally, only raise an idea with the group if something is being glaringly overlooked. And, if the group being consulted doesn't support an idea proposed by the planner, then the planner's role should not be to pursue it!
- The Medlands Beach Landscape Management Plan is a plan which reflects our community's ideas on how we want our settlement to be looked after and managed - to be "improved". The Plan

is seen as a dynamic, living document - subject to further development and change during the years of its implementation. The LMP has been written with the intention that the implementation of ideas will require further consultation with the parties directly affected.

- It is the view of one of the council officers we worked with that "It is a mistake to sweep into a community and try and tell them that you know everything about the ecology and history of the area, etc. We can research this stuff and be experts from documents if we want - but I think it is much better that the knowledge of the local community is valued and when and if they decided they want some expert, technical knowledge on what is there then they will have it!"
- It is not an imperative to prepare a perfect document! It is more helpful if planners outline in the project, wherever possible, the ideas and information which have been presented by the community.
- The project can become more comprehensive as it is implemented and further developed - with new groups and individuals, if and when the Group thinks this is important.
- Planners should avoid the temptation to go off on tangents which are not supported by the community they are consulting with. It is certainly very important that the person chairing consultation meetings refrains from putting forward their own ideas. They should either step down from the Chair when pressing their personal view or use a written submission procedure. They should certainly declare their viewpoint, and make it plain that other views will not be hindered.
- The formal process, while not dominant in the process, is always available should consensus fail.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION

The Medlands Beach community has experienced some consultation difficulties and many successes. The process of consultation which has been established between this community and its local authority is robust and clearly marks the way forward in a practical way.

There is a sense of community ownership when a community is involved in developing its own future. This is certainly true for the Medlands Beach community and its Landscape Management Plan.

