

Developing the Kapiti Coast: Choosing Futures Community Outcomes and Community Plan

.....a chance to dream.....a chance to plan.....

To run a community based process that allowed the Kapiti Coast District Council to engage the community, its staff and politicians in developing a truly democratic vision for the future.

The need for and expected benefits of the project and how it furthers the council's vision and strategic direction.

In June 2003 the Kapiti Coast District Council embarked on a process of identifying community outcomes that was branded 'Choosing Futures'. This approach varied significantly from the way the Council had previously engaged the community which focused on formal consultation through written reports, public meetings and written submissionsthat is Council developed the ideas, the community commented. A key component of 'Choosing Futures' was the focus on listening to community ideas with the 'blank sheet' process lead by the community. The Local Government Act 2002, the requirement for local authorities to develop a Long Term Council Community Plan and a 10 year old Strategic Plan provided the impetus for this approach – but the implementation was strictly Kapiti Coast.



The strategy established was to achieve a consensus vision of the Kapiti Coast's future, one that was practical in fiscal terms, met the legislative criteria, involved maximum input from citizens but did not put the politicians into a straitjacket or present them with an impossible wish list of pie-in-the-sky projects. With a district that includes a number of settlements stretched along the coastline and described as a 'string of pearls', establishing a cohesive vision was a challenge.

Effective project management techniques

This was such a significant project with long term implications for both the Council and the community it was crucial to have a high level team driving the process. The Project Team therefore included the Chief Executive, all Divisional Managers, the District Planner, Strategic Adviser and the Public Relations Adviser. The Corporate Planner and Community Development Coordinator were co Project Managers. Meetings were held weekly to monitor progress. An Elected Members Process Group for Councillors, Community Board members and Iwi was established and worked with staff to identify and set the process. Fortnightly meetings provided a forum for elected members to provide direction for officers and receive updates on progress.

A participatory approach to communicating with and getting buy-in from stakeholders associated with the project.

The aim of the "Kapiti Coast-Choosing Futures" project was to get the widest possible community awareness, involvement and engagement with the processes of developing the Community Plan and its potential outcomes. To ensure that this occurred it was



vital to get staff commitment to the process that the Elected Member Process Group had agreed on.

The initial planning stages of the process were focused on raising the profile of the project within Council encouraging staff 'buy in'. Elected Member workshops and staff forums (Attachment 1) were held which reinforced the role of the elected members as the key driver of the process as well as providing an opportunity to involve staff in the development of the project. Sessions were held at Council workspaces throughout the district and at times to suit the staff. A team of over 20 Elected Members and 45 staff assisted the Project Team with the actual community sessions and another 30+ staff provided specific expert and administrative support.

The Officer Team recognised that spread amongst all staff is the knowledge of what's going on across the community and the process was about valuing everyone's knowledge. Also the process of identifying community outcomes required new ways of engaging with the community. Sessions on skills for engaging the community and encouraging them to debate and discuss their ideas were run for elected members and staff. This supported the shift in focus from 'going to the community with answers and justifications' to 'listening to what people have to say'. This way of operating has begun to change the culture of the organisation.

The team worked alongside local Iwi to provide them with resources related to the process and to run specific sessions. A number of groups were actively involved in providing input into the community sessions and support was also provided to community groups to run their own process. Feedback from these was then fed into the process.



The Elected Member Process Group initially identified key people in the community who would have a useful contribution to make. Many of these had either been facilitators or focus group members during the previous major Strategic Planning exercise in 1992. The Mayor wrote to all these people and invited them to become involved with the process.

Innovation and originality in the specific award category area

Kapiti Coast District Council chose community based sessions as the primary way of engaging with the community to identify outcomes. While this is not unique, going out with a 'blank sheet' and asking people of all ages and stages for their ideas about the future of their area and district, was a move away from the norm. Access to the process was extensive with full day sessions running from 9am until 9pm to allow large number of locals, including commuters, to participate. They were held at local schools where classes became involved with projects based around the Choosing Futures theme. Other venues included community and church halls, local sports clubs, libraries and the Saturday market as well as a 'shop front' for 2 weeks in the local shopping mall. These were located throughout the district - from Paekakariki in the south to Otaki in the north, from Waikanae Beach in the west to Reikorangi in the east. The process was aimed at going to where the residents were rather than holding a meeting in a cold and empty hall with only a few people in attendance.

Before the first session the Council developed a public awareness campaign entitled 'A Chance to Dream – A Chance to Plan' inviting people, via radio and papers, to play



a part in choosing the kinds of futures there should be for various aspects of the Kapiti Coast. A publication was developed which included an article about future planning in the area written by the Chair of a local community board (Attachment 2).

The initial messages and themes in the awareness campaign included:

- Creating a sustainable community
- How to make Kapiti great
- Kapiti - a great place to be
- Are the 'burbs to the beach' what you want?
- Kapiti - the kind of place I want my children and their children to live

A visual identity was an essential requirement and the Chief Executive hit upon the idea of using a painting by local artist Bodhi Vincent "The People and the Land", as a design element. This vibrant work hangs in the Council Chambers. Bodhi agreed to the use not only of the whole picture but also of elements and sections of it. The bright colours and images quickly became the visual "brand" for **Kapiti Coast-Choosing Futures**. A particular "slice" including a nikau palm and a hand, was used consistently in all communication including report backs, posters, vehicles, on signs advertising the workshops and as the main design/visual element in the final LTCCP.

The Council went to the community with a 'can do' philosophy and had a range of resources available for people to look at. 1:2000 AO aerial photography maps were produced covering all the urban areas. These were laid out at the sessions and this encouraged people to talk – moving from "my house to my street, my community, my district". Fluoro coloured 'Post-It Notes™' were available so that everyone, kids included, could write down their thoughts about the area and stick them on the laminated maps. Many 'conversations' were developed on the maps with the stickies. While these sessions were based on a geographical location other sessions were focused on a theme such as 'arts', 'sport, recreation and leisure', 'economic development', 'youth' and 'older people'.

Display boards with demographic information provided people with the broader community context. A full length map of the Kapiti Coast District as well as one of the Greater Wellington Region got people talking about the inter-connections of communities and the sustainability of the district.



All the ideas were recorded at the sessions and those attending received a copy of the information recorded. The team believe that the process was one of 'hearing community ideas', encouraging people to talk together and engaging normally quiet members of the community and this helped to validate people's sense of place.

The first venue received more than 100 visits, the second dropped to about 10. Subsequent venues for the first week had varying levels of attendance. Had we got it wrong? But then we produced the next step in the process, the *Reportback* (Attachment 3) to the community. These consisted of two to four pages in the local paper with information from the previous weeks sessions. The response was almost immediate. The *Reportbacks* made it clear that ideas were recorded and not judged. Input was wanted and valued.....and people responded.

Alongside the workshops Council decided to stimulate thinking and ran a Winter Lecture Series where experts, local and from outside the District, contributed their ideas on burning issues. (Attachment 4).



By the end of the workshop sessions, 45 in all, more than 4,500 adults and 1,000 children including students from primary, intermediate and secondary levels had been involved. The resident population of the Kapiti Coast District is just over 43,000 so more than 10% of the district's population engaged with the process.

Staff analysed the information gathered at the sessions dividing the ideas into subjects and themes. A mind mapping programme was used and produced more interesting visual approaches (Attachment 5). These were reviewed by Councillors to identify gaps and issues that had not been covered by the public. We then went out 'On the Road Again' (Attachment 6) with more sessions where people identified priorities for action. Summaries of the information and mind maps were also sent to the people on our database.

A series of workshops, open to media and public, was held with elected members and a set of seven community outcomes developed. A 24-page newspaper **Kapiti Coast - Choosing Futures Community Outcomes** (Attachment 7) identifying the community outcomes and vision was distributed to all households throughout the district and the community was asked to comment.

Council then prepared the **Kapiti Coast Choosing Futures draft Community Plan** outlining the parts of the community long term vision they would work to deliver. This 46 page document was delivered to all households. Submissions were called for and 735 submissions covering more than 1,800 issues were received. Once the submissions process was completed Council adopted the document.

The programme of meetings, publications, communication, consultation and dialogue covered far exceeded expectations in terms of the quality of the public input and involvement. Clearly residents have become involved - a clear sign of success for the "Kapiti Coast-Choosing Futures" project.

Successful results, in both financial and non-financial terms

As a result of the process a number of things have occurred within the community and the Council.

- The process was run totally 'in-house'.
- Although swamped with activity process completed within existing budget.
- Result of the process is a clear priority listing for all major projects over next 20 years which has been tested by the community.
- The affordability debate is not now about need, but a timing issue around delivery of facilities.
- A residents group established; participated in process; held Council supported session; surveyed their community; established what it is that makes their area special; submitted this information for inclusion in Community Outcomes and Community Plan; made submissions to the draft plan; developed a vision for their community.
- An environmental 'vision' group was established to 'make sure Council got it right'; submitted to the initial part of process but, as group members got more involved in the community based process, the need for the group diminished.
- A 46 page Kapiti Coast - Choosing Futures draft Community Plan was delivered to all residents and ratepayers (Attachment 8).



- Council staff worked with a small seaside community on water concerns related to bores and septic tanks; paid for testing of water supplies to ensure householders had knowledge regarding contamination of their supplies.
- Council staff now work across divisions on a range of projects.
- Community based Urban Design projects have begun with community based workshops to explore options for town centres and beach settlements. Local mall owners, landowners and community actively involved.
- A Design Review Team of planners, resource consent, parks, recreation, engineers and community development staff has been set-up to review new developments and meet with developers throughout the process.
- Council staff have been given opportunities use their skills to work in areas which are outside their normal work parameters
- Footpath replacement programme is now to be completed in 6 years rather than over 20+ years.
- The Cycleway/Walkway/Bridleway Strategy has had significant funding included in the LTCCP.
- Additional resources provided to work with the community on green corridors.
- The "string of pearls" theme has been emphasised and separate documents will be prepared to show the lists of ideas and options for each of the villages - many of these will be capable of development by the communities themselves.

That the project was a 'good, sensible and right thing to do'

The incredible support of Elected Member and staff dealt with the main problem of keeping up the programme of meetings, ensuring there were people to answer questions and guide participants through the process.

Many times people arrived with a combative attitude "*What are you going to do about the water, the roads, the footpaths? The Council won't listen. The Council never does anything!*" It is to the credit of the elected members and staff that these people mostly left having made a contribution of some sort. Other people arrived with a real problem. "How do I get this or that done?" A 'Parking Lot' system was set up to deal with problems that could be quickly and readily addressed. While not always possible, in many cases niggling problems were solved while the consultation was going on.

The response from the public to the workshops and the initial programme, while starting slowly, nearly overwhelmed the ability of staff to manage the information flows. Media and public response to Council's open attitude were very favourable and have continued that way.

Response to the Community Outcomes document was very favourable. The Community Plan document received a high level of community involvement through the submission process. The Council has now adopted the LTCCP and is able to embark on the work programme outlined which has been fully tested by the community.

