

## THE 2005 NEW ZEALAND POST MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

# Amberley Concept Development Plan

COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP AWARD  
NAOMI WOODHAM, HURUNUI DISTRICT COUNCIL

## INTRODUCTION

The Amberley Concept Plan is a community owned and developed document describing how Amberley's residents and ratepayers would like to see their community in the future.

The Plan provides an indicative vision of how they would like to see Amberley grow and develop over the next ten to twenty years and identifies key aspects to be preserved and developed, and the priorities for achieving that, based on community support and benefit. As such, it is considered an integral part of the 2006-16 Long Term Council Community Plan planning process.

The Amberley Concept Development Plan will allow initiatives supported by the community to be carried out in a co-ordinated manner.

The Plan is a "living document" that will be refined over time given the changing priorities of the community, the Amberley Ward Committee and the Council.

The terrific support and high levels of participation that went into achieving this document are a source of pride to the many people involved in its creation.

## CRITERIA (1)

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

In late 2002, the Amberley Ward Councillors, in response to community requests, raised with the Hurunui District Council the growing need to implement a Concept Development Planning process for Amberley Village. This need was further reinforced when the Amberley Leithfield Promotion Group presented a formal 2003 Annual Plan submission requesting that funding be allocated for such a project.

The reasons behind the proposals were mostly out of concern for Amberley's rapid growth, and the potential of this to impact on those aspects of the town that were highly valued by both residents and visitors.

These included:

- a changing 'town feel' - the need to 'stay rural' but to 'get up with the programme'
- infrastructural and amenity demands
- increased traffic causing safety concerns
- a perceived lack of strategic town planning
  - *Business dissatisfaction with limited options for development (commercial/ industrial zoning issues)*



- Resident dissatisfaction that most new subdivisions are being zoned at the 2000sqm+ 'rural-residential' size.
- "Haphazard" and "reactive" growth management

The advocates for the project felt strongly that it would be the participatory **process** as much as the resulting plan that would achieve its success:

*"...that the process, in which the Plan will be developed, is critical to its success. Our ward's present position in terms of social, cultural, economic, and infrastructural aspects must be assessed to allow the platform for effective planning"*

*Amberley Leithfield Promotion Association*

The Hurunui District Council prides itself in listening to its communities. As the ultimate "guardian" of the district it recognizes the importance of public participation in effective decision making and planning.

At that time the council had not adopted a long-term strategic plan, but had adopted a vision statement:

*"Working together to build a better community"*

The proposed project was consistent with the vision statement and also with the intentions of the (new) Local Government Act's underlying collaborative principles, and stated purpose of recognizing the diversity of communities, providing for community wellbeing and taking a sustainable development approach.

It was also identified that the project would also be valuable by dovetailing into future Community Outcome identification processes.

Thus with the support, including financial commitment (\$10,000) from the Amberley Ward Committee, the council agreed to commence the project in 2004.

## CRITERIA (2)

Effective Project Management techniques:

Five key processes were used for effective project management ensuring we were able to meet the expectations of our stakeholders on time and within budget.

**(A) INITIATING PROCESS** - *Identifying the project objectives and requirements*

It was important from the outset that the project was clear about what it intended to achieve. Initial work with key stakeholders ensured that the project goal was reasonable and that all participants were clear about the scope of the project; what would be involved, how long it would take, what resources would be necessary etc.

This was to prove extremely important at gaining 'buy-in' especially given the (initially) differing expectations of community, elected members, business groups and staff.

A **collaborative** approach (based on IAP2 standards) was identified as the best public engagement model: *"To partner with the public in each aspect of the plan development including the identification of preferred options, alternatives and priorities."* As part of this we promised that we would: *"look to the project participants for direction and innovation in formulating the plan and incorporate their advice and recommendations."*

The Pre-Planning exercises covered the following:

- **Background** – *What had lead to this?*
- **Values** - *Project values explained*
- **Project Outline** - *Why? What? How? Where? \$\$\$? Vision? Technical?*
- **The Rationale** - *Why we were initiating this project?*
- **The Objectives** - *What we hoped to achieve with this project*
- **SWOT Analysis**
- **The Issues** - *What could derail this project?*
  - financially
  - operationally
  - politically
  - technically
  - PR
  - Privacy implications



**(B) PLANNING PROCESS** - *Devising and maintaining a workable project plan to ensure that the project attained its objectives*

The detailed *Project Plan* was created as a result of the pre-planning workshops, and included:

- **Model Detail**
  - *Terms of Reference*
  - *Project Team*
  - *Timeframes to match the aspirations of the stakeholders as closely as possible*
- **Budget allocations**
- **Key Messages** - Of the project
- **Key Audiences**
  - Internal and external
- **Communication Goals** – *What we wanted to achieve with our Communication/Consultation Plan*
- **The Consultation Requirements**
  - *Informal*
  - *Formal - Local Government Act*
- **Communication Tools** - *identified*
  - *Advertisements, feedback forms, suggestion boxes, public meetings & workshops, media kit,*
- **Consultation Process**- *identified*
  - Informal – feedback
  - Formal - LTCCP / Annual Plan submissions
- **Monitoring procedures**
  - Checks to ensure we were doing what we said we would do, achieving what we said we would achieve, on time and on budget.
- **An Action Plan**
- **Sign Off** – *Ward Committee & Council*

**(C) EXECUTING PROCESS** - *Coordinate and mobilise resources to implement the Project Plan*

The “execution” of the project was a natural progression from the planning and pre-planning exercises, with all stakeholders committed to the process as well as the project.

This involved:

- Initial advertising in the local paper, library display, posters and a mail-drop.
- Attending meetings of local organisations to outline the planning process and goals.
- “Suggestion Boxes” placed prominently in local businesses to obtain ideas.
- Amberley School Extension Group project.
- Youth (teenage) meetings facilitated by youth leaders to look at issues and generate ideas.
- Two public meetings where key issues were identified, ideas, and goals developed, projects which would contribute towards the desired development were identified and priorities were established.
- Ideas and priorities were collated and a preliminary draft plan was prepared and circulated.
- A third public meeting where the community reviewed and considered the matters, items and options and their cost implications and re-prioritised projects accordingly.
- Feedback / submissions were called for on the re-prioritised document.
- The production of the final Plan
- The setting up of Project Groups

However... one of the features of this process was that it was oriented to building relationships, taking advantage of strategic opportunities as they arose and remaining fluid and responsive (and unplanned).

We recognized from the outset that when planning occurs in a situation of shared power it is less likely to follow the standard model of progression from problem definition to development of alternative solutions to implementation so we were prepared to adapt and change to the needs of the community through the process.

**(D) CONTROLLING PROCESS** - *Monitoring, measuring and managing the project through its life cycle*

Six-weekly reports were provided to the Ward Committee for the duration of the project, these included expenditure as well as progress and key outcome achievement.



The project process provided many feedback loops and mechanisms for both the general public as well as stakeholder groups. All feedback was collated and included as part of the reports.

The measuring of community satisfaction with the project has been by way of the responses to requests for feedback, the high levels of attendance and participation at public workshops, the letters to both the local newspaper and to council offering thanks and congratulations, and also to the large number of people who have volunteered to play a role in furthering the 'mini-projects' that have fallen out of the plan.

**(E) CLOSE-OUT PROCESS** - *Ensuring the systematic completion of the project when the objectives have been met*

The 'hand-over' process has been as important as the initial planning and development. This has been integral for two reasons; firstly to ensure that although the Plan is a "living document" there must still be an 'ending' in order to obtain a sense of achievement and to prevent the 'never ending story' trap that such projects can fall into.

The second reason that the hand-over has been so important is because the project provides on-going 'sub-projects' for implementation. The completion of the Plan means the end of the staff facilitator/coordinator position, however measures have been put in place throughout the project process preparing the Ward Committee to take their new role as the Managers (Guardians, Implementors...) of the Plan.

This was vital for unless there is continued momentum towards the vision, the community will 'go cold' and the achievements of project could be lost.

## CRITERIA (3)

***Participatory approach to communicating with and getting 'buy-in' from stakeholders associated with the project***

The purpose of the Amberley Concept Development Plan was agreed to by those involved in the process: to create a community based vision and to provide an opportunity for individuals to have a direct input into shaping the future of their town.

The entire process was tailored to meet the needs of the of the community: individuals, families, organisations, businesses, the young,

the elderly as well as the elected representatives (the Ward Councillors even changed during the process, but the new ones came on board committed and ready to continue the ideals that went before).

Only positive feedback has been received on both the process and the resulting document. Some individuals have even made the point that although they may personally disagree with an identified priority, they do however totally support the Plan - simply because they have been fully involved and informed throughout the project.

## CRITERIA (4)

***Innovation and originality in the specific award category***

Many Councils around the country have been developing some fantastic new ways of working with their communities. What makes this project stand out from the others is the level in which the community have been involved - initiating the project, working through the planning and pre-planning processes, attending several meetings (meetings where numbers attending grew in size as they went along rather than diminish!)

And it is the community that continue to drive the sub-projects that have been identified in the Plan to achieve their vision.

Most community development projects are based on a model from another country - this project was designed by the people who it was ultimately going to affect: the people of Amberley. They developed it, they believe in it, they own it. It is genuinely a project by the people and for the people.

This project has proven that the people, the ordinary old Jo & Jean Bloggs, know what works and doesn't work in the places that they live... and if you give them the opportunity and a little encouragement they will come up with some incredibly innovative and feasible ideas.

## CRITERIA (5)

***Successful results, in both financial and non-financial terms***

Since the Plan was published and distributed in June, momentum has been building instead of waning. The plan identified serious zoning / town planning concerns and the Ward Committee requested that this be addressed by the end of this calendar year. The Council Planning Department provided have since provided options



to council on how this could be achieved, and it was decided that funding would be provided to employ an additional staff member in order to complete this analysis through to proposed District Plan change stage.

Transit New Zealand and a project team have come up with an affordable and achievable “solution” based on submissions to the community’s road safety concerns. These concerns have been aired for years but only through a coordinated process such as this have people been able to find a way to talk through the issues and potential solutions and get some action!

There are several other priority projects under way, but probably the most successful result area of the project is the fully functioning communication infrastructure that has been developed and the relationships that this created.

## CRITERIA (6)

***That the project was a ‘good, sensible and the right thing to do’.***

Over many years successive central governments have effected many changes to rural New Zealand - changes to the very heart of their social fabric; closing schools, hospitals, post offices... Imposing new, often contentious, rules - particularly with regard to what is seen as private property ‘interference’. And it has usually been Local Authorities by virtue of delegation that ‘cops the brunt’ of backlash from these developments.

Over time this has created politically divided communities, with little perceived control over their external environment. They react by going for symbolic victories, and focus on political, rather than substantive gains.

Providing a Concept Development Planning process gives people an effective voice. No one participant’s ideas or issues are allowed to dominate; the process ensures that everyone is important and valued.

It is a process that has empowered the community, built respect and trust and achieved real results.

How could the project have been anything but good, sensible and the right thing to do?

