

# Deliberative Democracy Case Study: Hurunui District Council – Amberley Beach Coastal Adaptation Project

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June 2025

A photograph of a coastal landscape. In the foreground, there is a dirt road or path that appears to be eroding or washed away by the sea. The ground is dark and wet, with patches of white foam from the waves. In the background, there are green hills and a body of water under a cloudy sky.

This project is the proud recipient of the  
2024 DIA Award for Excellence in Community Engagement.



## Contact person:

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Note: Figure 1 (cover page): March 2023 – Waves overtopping Amberley beach and bund at the northern end of the settlement. Note the erosion and the proximity of the sea to the road.

## Overview of the project:

In 2020, Hurunui District Council (Council) initiated a project to identify coastal hazards that were impacting our coastal communities, and to gain an understanding on how these hazards will change over the next 100 years.

Amberley Beach is impacted by coastal erosion, coastal inundation, rising groundwater, fluvial and pluvial flooding. An existing man-made bund runs the length of the settlement, protecting the residents from coastal erosion, but it is not a viable long-term solution. For most of its residents, Amberley Beach is their primary place of residence and most important personal asset.



Figure 2 (above): 16 February 2024 – Amberley beach and settlement (looking north) pre-bund-renourishment

The development of a Coastal Adaptation Plan allowed the community to step back and strategically consider long-term solutions to coastal hazards exacerbated

by climate change. Council wanted to engage with the entire community, giving every individual an equal voice in the conversation. It was important to Council that the plan was owned by the community and the role of the project team was to help facilitate the discussion and provide technical planning advice.

The project with Amberley Beach started in 2020 and the plan was finalised and adopted by Council in 2023. We are now implementing the plan.

### **Project goals/objectives:**

Establish a long-term approach for managing the risk of coastal hazards in coastal settlements, in partnership with local communities.

### **Public participation:**

One of the core principles of public participation is the promise/commitment that the public's contribution will influence the decision or outcome. For example:

- Grant funding will be awarded to the groups that get the greatest support through a participatory funding process.
- Council will implement the recommendations of the citizens assembly, unless there is a legal/regulatory reason that prevents this.

### **Did your project make a specific promise/commitment to the community?**

☐ No ☒ Yes

### **If yes, please tell us about the promise/commitment that was made:**

That the community would be at the centre of all discussions and decision-making.

The Council's role was to help inform and facilitate a Coastal Adaptation Plan that belonged to the community.

### **Was that promise/commitment:**

- ☒ One-off – specifically related to this project.
- ☐ Ongoing – part of an ongoing promise/commitment to undertake more participative/deliberative processes.
- ☐ Both, of the above.

### **Was this a:**

- ☐ Deliberative process (add definition)
- ☒ Participative process (add definition)
- ☐ Other – please describe:

### **Process/methodology (in relation to public participation):**

The project followed the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement, and Ministry for the Environment's (MfE) Dynamic Adaptive Pathway Planning (DAPP) approach, which was adapted to suit the local context.

We took a community-centric approach to presenting the information so that the scientific data was accepted easily. The technical team (Jacobs) presented



Figure 3 (above): 16 February 2024 – Amberley beach bund pre-renourishment

information in a clear and engaging way, using visuals such as images, videos, simulations and graphs. The aim was to foster understanding, engagement and empower the community to make decisions founded on science.

Community input was a key part of the process. Local knowledge and suggestions were actively sought and incorporated into the development of solutions and triggers within the plan. At the same time, the project team acknowledged the uncertainties inherent in climate change modelling. By using a range of sea level rise scenarios, we reinforced the importance of flexible planning through multiple pathways, rather than locking in on one solution.

It was important for Council to take the information to the community and provide opportunities for questions. We made sure there were high levels of community engagement and ensuring 'no one was left behind'. Initially we reached out to the community by letterbox drop and local social media (e.g. community Facebook pages). To maintain a safe and focused environment for discussion, we chose not to publicly advertise meetings, avoiding media attention and participation from



those outside the affected community. Residents were later invited to join an email distribution list for ongoing updates directly from Council officers.

We also created the Coastal Conversation webpage on Council's website where all relevant information, including presentation slides from community meetings were made publicly available.

We used a variety of engagement formats, timing and meeting venues to ensure accessibility. This includes community meetings and drop-in sessions, and Officers were available to meet one-on-one if requested.

Light refreshments were provided during meetings, and Council was careful that we didn't overwhelm the meeting participants by keeping Council representatives small.

### **Project promotion:**

**Was your project promoted?**

☐ No ☒ Yes

**If yes, how did you promote it/encourage people to take part?** As above.

### **Roles:**

**Describe the roles that the following people played in the project or process:**

Please see the diagram attached at the end of this case study which illustrates the project team and others who supported the process.

We are unable to provide the exact number of hours committed to Amberley Beach specifically as this was a project involving five beach settlements along the coast.

### **External consultants/advisors:**

**Did you use external consultants or advisors for any part/s of the process?**

☐ No ☒ Yes

**If yes, who did you use, and for what? (e.g. facilitators, [sortition](#) experts, research companies, academic advisors, community groups/panels etc.)**

Jacobs as technical experts to support the process:

- carry out an assessment of the hazards that were affecting the community and how the hazards will change in the next 100 years
- present information in a friendly and inclusive way to the community
- develop options to mitigate risks presented by the hazards, taking into account feedback and views from the community

- from the list of options developed, worked through the cost and benefits with the community, using a tool (Coastal Adaptation Explorer) developed by Jacobs in a facilitated session
- Develop suitable 'trigger points' together with the community to determine different pathways to be taken to adapt to change.

**Would you recommend them for a similar process?**

☐ No ☒ Yes

**If yes, please provide their contact details in case other councils would like to engage them for similar work:**

Derek Todd (derek.todd@jacobs.com)

Note: If you are unsure whether the external consultants or advisors would be interested in working with other councils on similar projects/processes, please check with them first.

**Challenges:**

**How did you get your elected members on board with the approach?**

Before starting the project, we showed them the DAPP process and took them through the MfE guidance. We also got Jacobs to present the risk assessment. We explained what the elected members' role would be, and emphasised that this is a community-led process, rather than a Council-led process.

Once community meetings began, the Mayor typically opened the sessions with a welcome. Relevant elected members might attend the community meetings, however, we were mindful to ensure the process remained community-led rather than politically driven – particularly during election cycles. We consistently reinforced that this initiative was guided by the community, not led by Council.

**Were there any barriers/challenges to this approach? If yes, how did you overcome them?**

There have been instances post- plan development, where elected members have attended community committee meetings without Council officers present. This has occasionally created challenges in managing the flow of information and aligning expectations.

**Costs:**

**What was the total cost of the project (please share a breakdown where possible)?**

Apologies, we are unable to get this information in an easy way.

**What were the largest costs involved?**

The largest cost was the engagement of a consultant (Jacobs) to identify the coastal hazards, the development of a cost-benefit analysis tool (Coastal Explorer), the development of options/solutions (including indicative costings) for the relevant community, and the consultants' attendance at community meetings.

The Council paid for the development of the Coastal Adaptation Plan (and similarly for the other beach communities) through District ratepayer funding. However, any of the agreed options within the plan need to be agreed on and funded by the community through amenity rates.

**Did you pay participants in any way?**

☒ No ☐ Yes

**If yes, please share how they were paid (where possible):** Not applicable

**Evaluation:****Project results:**

The output of the process was the Amberley Beach Coastal Adaptation Plan, which was finalised and adopted by Council in 2023.

Council and the residents are currently implementing the actions that were discussed and agreed on in the plan.

**How were recommendations/results from the project reported to elected members?**

The Councillors were kept abreast of the progress during Council meetings.

Some Councillors also went to the community meetings and consultations, so they were able to gain a deeper understanding of the process and community sentiments first hand.

**Is there an ongoing role for participants?**

☐ No ☒ Yes

**If yes, what is it?**

All the options laid out in the plan were discussed with and agreed on by the community. This was done by walking them through a cost-benefit analysis using the Coastal Explorer tool. The community also came up with triggers, as a measure to know when to implement a new pathway. Council is working closely with the community to monitor the triggers.

Here are some of the actions that the Amberley Beach community are heavily involved in, as part of the plan.

## 1. Bund

A manmade bund was first constructed in 1993 in response to coastal flooding in 1992 and extended the full length of the settlement in 2003. The bund has been very successful at preventing coastal inundation and has helped to reduce coastal erosion.

The bund will be progressively relocated inland for it to remain effective. The relocation will occur until such time when the backslope of the bund is at or about 5m from the nearest property boundary.

Renourishment works for the bund were recently completed in March 2025, and the community was heavily involved in the bund design. The bund is currently funded by the community through a Beach Erosion Protection Rate.



Figure 4 (above): March 2025 – Renourishment of the bund

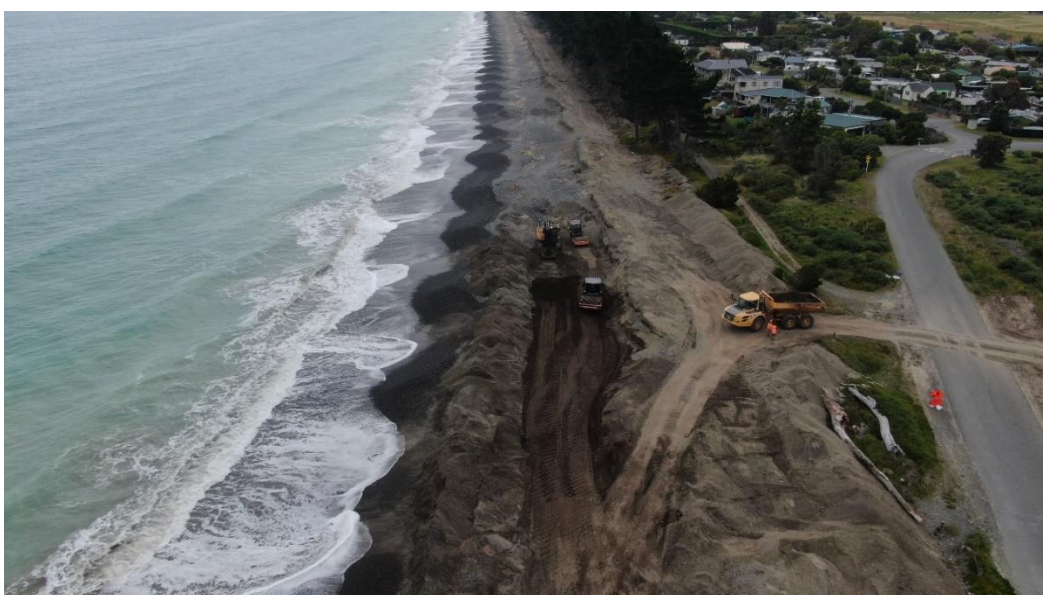


Figure 5 (above): March 2025 – Starting point of the bund renourishment



## 2. Land-banking and proactive relocation

Proactive relocation was one of the options discussed with the community to address the increasing hazard risks. Land swap or land-banking, has been developed as a mechanism to facilitate proactive relocation.

The concept of land-banking is where Hurunui District Council will purchase land nearby the original beach settlement to develop 200 residential lots—109 reserved for the current Amberley Beach property owners and 91 sold at market rate to fund the development.

Property owners can opt into a land swap agreement, contributing a targeted rate of \$1 per day for 30 years (or a one-off payment of \$11,000) in exchange for a fully serviced, mortgage-free section in the new subdivision. This plan allows residents to relocate gradually, with lots allocated via ballot, and ensures they retain equity in their current property as risk increases.

The aim of Council's approach on this is to reduce the future financial and social burden of relocation. It protects property owners' equity, provides a known relocation pathway, and creates a funding stream for future adaptation—whether that be proactive relocation or hard protection. The proposal is designed to be flexible, equitable, and community-driven, allowing residents to plan for the future on their own terms while maintaining the option to stay, sell, or relocate. The Council aims to support a structured, affordable transition that preserves community cohesion and resilience.

Land purchase has recently been made at a location nearby Amberley Beach, and Council is undergoing preparations for next steps.

### **Did you measure satisfaction with the process?**

☒ No ☐ Yes

### **If yes, please share the results for the following:**

- Participants:
- Elected members:
- Staff:

### **What do you consider the successes of your project?**

- High level of participation from the community due to the use of a range of engagement approaches – public sessions were always well attended and over 50% of property owners provided written feedback throughout the project.
- Improved trust and confidence in the Council to put community at the centre of any decision-making.
- Council adopted the Amberley Beach Coastal Adaptation Plan.
- The Coastal Adaptation Explorer tool was developed in collaboration with Jacobs. This is a tool that allowed the community to look at costs, benefits

and effectiveness of each option that was proposed. This was in turn used with our other coastal community engagement, and by Jacobs with other coastal communities in NZ.

- This project established a blueprint with Council's conversations with our other coastal communities.

**What other learnings were there/what would you do differently next time?**

Key learnings are:

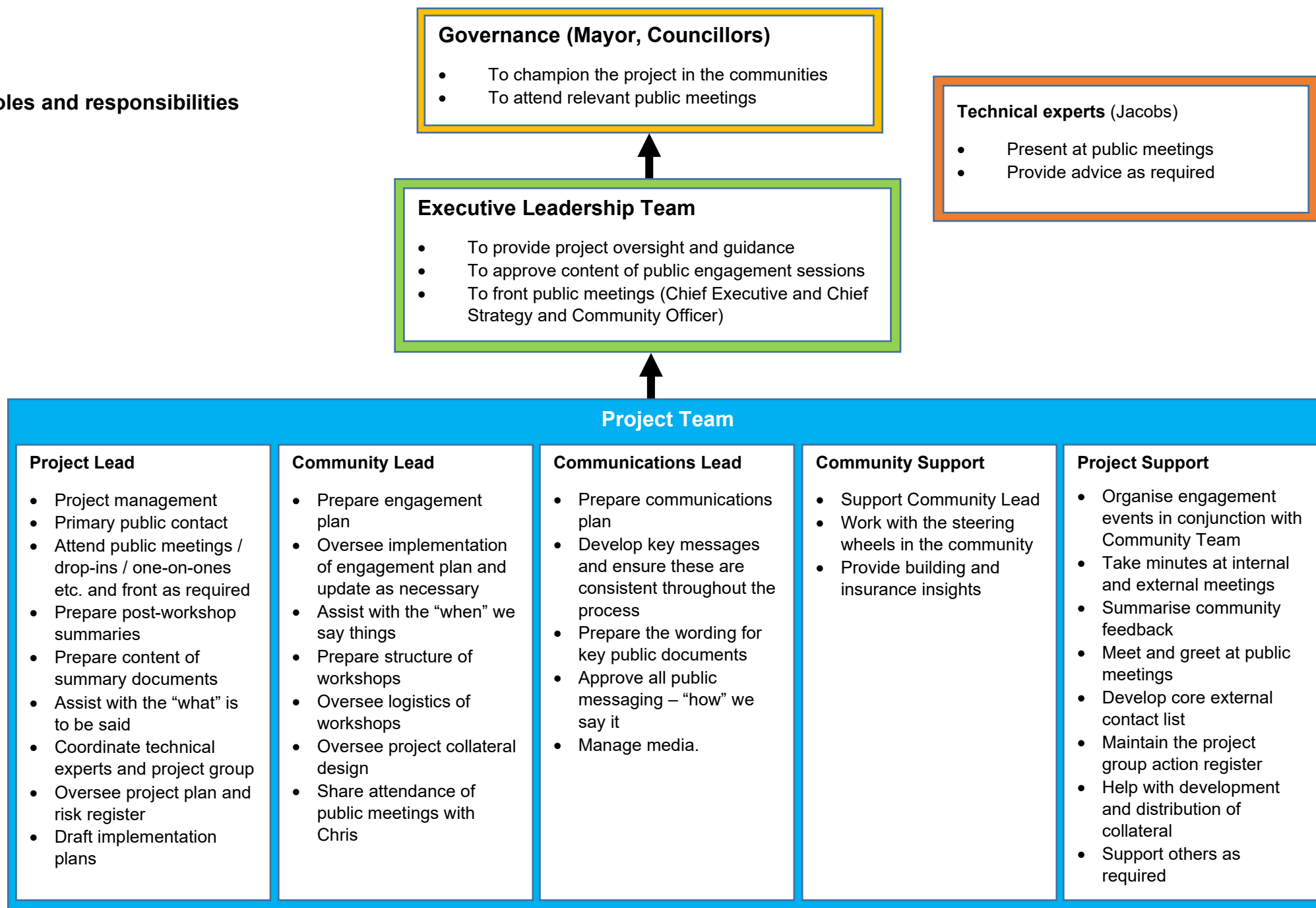
- Putting community at the heart of the project
- Work at communities' pace
- Use different tools of engagement
- Apply a multidisciplinary team approach to the project – technical experts, planning, community engagement
- Keep Councillors informed and involved, including their constituents
- Be prepared for unexpected challenges and work together to work through them
- Being a small council does not present a barrier, rather an advantage in us being closer to our community and able to work in partnership with them.

**Please share photos from your project (if you have permission to do so):**

Here is a link to the video we created for the Taituarā awards

[https://youtu.be/lnPxvZMAcJk?si=uK0fQWXrOh1P4\\_ZU](https://youtu.be/lnPxvZMAcJk?si=uK0fQWXrOh1P4_ZU)

## Roles and responsibilities







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