Report

Waikato Spatial Plan Outcomes From Council Workshops

Prepared for Local Authority Shared Services (Client)

By Beca Ltd (Beca)

26 August 2013

Revision History

Revision Nº	Prepared By	Description	Date
A	Melissa Slatter	Draft for Client	2 August 2013
B	Melissa Slatter	Final Draft for Client	26 August 2013

Document Acceptance

Action	Name	Signed	Date
Prepared by	Melissa Slatter		26 August 2013
Reviewed by	Amelia Linzey		26 August 2013
Approved by	Amelia Linzey		26 August 2013
on behalf of	Beca Ltd		

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1   Waikato Spatial Plan Workshops

As part of the development of the Waikato Spatial Plan, the Mayoral Forum requested a series of conversations be held with the Waikato region local authorities.

A series of workshops were conducted with Strategic Planning and Senior Management staff members of each territorial local authority and the regional council over the course of 2 weeks in July 2013. These were conducted by way of a 2 hour conversational style workshop focussing on the community outcomes as expressed in councils 2012-2022 Long Term Plans. Workshop packs were distributed between 2-5 days prior to the workshop to enable staff to familiarise themselves with the content of the workshop and if possible/ appropriate, to bring along evidence of how they measure their successes and challenges

Despite the variable size of each Council, the workshops were all very well attended by senior staff and strategic planning representatives where available, and many workshops included attendance by the Chief Executive Officer.

The following provides a summary of the key 'findings' or outcomes from these discussions. In preparing this summary, we note that we have not specified the source of comments where those comments reflect common themes or matters raised in the conversations. However, we have sought to document conflicting views or unresolved issues to reflect the scope of matters covered in conversations.

1.1   Why are we considering a Spatial Plan?

In October 2012, the Waikato Mayoral Forum adopted a position statement for Governance and Planning that noted:

Today there is no collective vision for the Waikato. Current political boundaries within the Waikato are contributing to fragmented and often combative approaches to key Waikato issues (e.g. water quality, land use policy and infrastructure investment). There are significant opportunities to improve planning and collaboration, and provide a consistent, collective approach to central government and community engagement.

The mechanism identified by the Waikato Mayoral Forum to respond to these strategic challenges is a Waikato Spatial Plan. The purpose of the Plan would be to *contribute to the Waikato's social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being through a comprehensive and effective long-term (30-year) strategy for Waikato's growth and development*[1].

In a national and inter-regional context, we understand that that Mayoral Forum is developing a spatial plan because:

- Auckland Council speaks with one voice to Central Government on matters of regional significance. The Waikato is connected to Auckland in a number of ways, but lacks a similar collective voice.

- Waikato is located in the Upper North Island Growth Triangle where over 50% of future economic and population growth is forecasted to occur. This will have significant implications for

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[1] Waikato Mayoral Forum Terms of Reference for a Waikato Spatial Plan, May 2013, Section 79(2) – Local Government (Auckland Council) Amendment Act 2010 – purpose of a Spatial Plan for Auckland.

investment in critical infrastructure, and it is vital that the Waikato region is united on what that investment should achieve.

- Where the Waikato has previously spoken with one voice, the region has achieved good results – e.g. the Government's investment in the Waikato Expressway as a Road of National Significance.

- The Government is the single largest investment partner involved in delivering our community outcomes. It is vital that the region collectively engages with central government on the high priority issues that face the Region's communities.

- The Bay of Plenty Region has commenced a spatial plan. A coordinated spatial planning framework in Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty will assist in telling a united Upper North Island story.

- The infrastructure efficiency task force report (March 2013) identified that:

  …rationalisation and better alignment of legislative and regulatory frameworks would substantially improve infrastructure delivery, especially if duplication of effort and conflicting timeframes are addressed. A clear whole-of-government approach is required to recognise and deal with the issues. Specific recommendations are made about ways to improve individual aspects of the frameworks. The most significant is that spatial planning (similar to the Auckland model) should be mandated for use elsewhere in New Zealand.

- The Government has signalled that it wishes to reduce regulatory clutter and reduce the cost of doing business. The Improving our Resource Management System discussion document notes the intention that all councils would have a single plan in place within five years (per district or a broader area if agreed by the councils in that area) unless otherwise agreed, given variation in current planning review cycles. The Waikato Region presently has over 640 strategies, policies, plans and bylaws that influence land use or infrastructure investment, and there is room for rationalisation and simplification of the planning and regulatory frameworks.

Additional points raised through the workshops about why a Spatial Plan may be beneficial to the Waikato included:

- Enable the Waikato region to interact with other agencies (government and non-government) to get collective gains, rather than Councils all individually doing this;

- To respond to the increasing impact of Auckland's growth on the region (particularly near the region's northern boundary), in a manner that ensures the Waikato can support Auckland but also benefit from it in a sustainable way.

- When looking at Regional GDP statistics, the Waikato region is representative of the wider NZ economy. If Waikato can succeed on a micro scale, then this success can be rolled out on a national scale.

- A Waikato Spatial Plan would provide leadership on key points of regional significance.

- Our communities and economies are connected and not distinct and therefore they have common interests.

- It is important to recognise the Waikato's diversity and the Waikato Plan should not consider matters that are best dealt with by local decision making.

- The need for a clear definition of a Spatial Plan, to assist in the various expectations of what a Waikato Spatial Plan may deliver.

Challenges to achieving a spatial plan

A number of Councils also raised the concern that the region is more diverse than the Auckland region, and using the Auckland Spatial Plan experience to guide a Waikato Plan would not translate easily given the geographical/social/economic differences across the region.

1.2 Waikato Spatial Plan Process

The following sets out the general process towards developing the Waikato Spatial Plan. We are currently at Stage One of this process – developing a common evidence base.
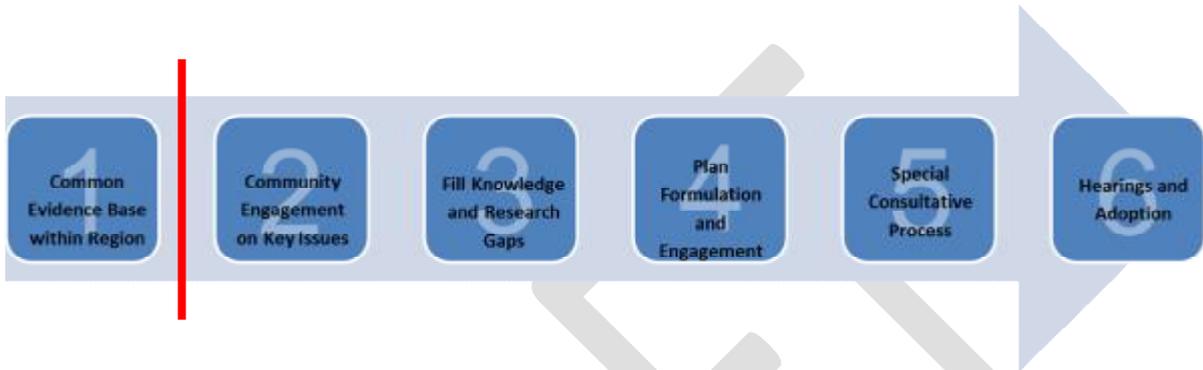
Stage One will be completed by the end of December 2013. The local authority workshop process will help determine the scope of issues and challenges to be addressed in the Spatial Plan development process.

The whole process will be completed by the end of 2014.

1.3 Workshop Purpose

With the setting of the need to speak with one voice and purpose of the workshops was to:

- Raise the profile of the Waikato Spatial Plan project
- Explore the Council's adopted community outcomes to Identify successes/barriers/challenges in meeting the outcomes
- Identify priorities that may be needed to better achieve the outcomes, in an attempt to identify priority areas that a Spatial Plan for the Waikato may assist in addressing.

1.4 Focus on Long Term Plan Community and Council Outcomes

The project team were questioned by some workshop participants about why the workshop series should focus on community outcomes, as reference to the four community well-beings and the process of adopting community outcomes were removed from the Local Government Act in 2010 and 2012. Section 93 of the Local Government Act is reproduced below, in particular reference to section 93(6)(b) states the purpose of the long-term plan is to describe the community outcomes.

> **93 Long-term plan**
>
> *(1) A local authority must, at all times, have a long-term plan under this section.*
>
> *(2) A local authority must use the special consultative procedure in adopting a long-term plan.*

(3) A long-term plan must be adopted before the commencement of the first year to which it relates, and continues in force until the close of the third consecutive year to which it relates.

(4) A local authority may amend a long-term plan at any time.

(5) A local authority must use the special consultative procedure in making any amendment to a long-term plan.

(6) The purpose of a long-term plan is to—

(a) describe the activities of the local authority; and

(b) describe the community outcomes of the local authority's district or region; and

(c) provide integrated decision-making and co-ordination of the resources of the local authority; and

(d) provide a long-term focus for the decisions and activities of the local authority; and

(e) provide a basis for accountability of the local authority to the community; and

(f) provide an opportunity for participation by the public in decision-making processes on activities to be undertaken by the local authority.

The workshops took on a conversational style and focused on community outcomes as these are one of the only forward looking mechanisms provided in local government legislation that all Councils must adopt and consult on with communities.

It was apparent that some Councils have a high degree of ownership of their outcomes, and they guide significant decision making. On the other hand, some Councils have adopted a range of corporate mission statements, strategies and strategic priorities that guide decision making and investment - and it was typically those Councils who raised concerns about the use of community outcomes in the workshop/conversation series.

The broad conclusion is that, whilst Councils are trying to achieve similar things (e.g. economic prosperity) the legislative toolkit provided to local authorities is fragmented with limited connection between the significant pieces of legislation used by local government (being the Local Government Act 2002, Land Transport Management Act 2003, and the Resource Management Act 1991).

Auckland Council has been enabled through the Local Government Auckland Council Act 2009 to proactively plan for a 30-year vision and development strategy in its' Auckland Spatial Plan (Section 79). The remaining local authorities in New Zealand are provided no statutory mechanisms for leadership on issues and opportunities of a sub-regional and regional nature. It is therefore up to Councils within the Waikato region to proactively identify and engage on these matters.

Success Factors	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Thames Coromandel	Taupō District	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
Fair economic resilience in current climate (Local/regional facilities, good quality amenity, resilient and growing industry)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strong community partnerships (political engagement with community, strong governance, stakeholder collaboration)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Provision of Critical Infrastructure (upgrades of water, wastewater, waste facilities, roading)		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Recognition of environmental values (Enhancement and restoration projects, areas of significance					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Workshop material in progress

valued)											
Increasing social responsibility (youth opportunities and programmes, public safety)		✓		✓	✓						✓
More engagement in cultural heritage and identity (JMA's/MoUs, strong and engaged iwi relationships)		✓			✓				✓	✓	

Table 1: Successful Community Outcomes

Barriers and Challenge Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
Infrastructure constraints (affordability to access, extend, upgrade or maintain residual capacity, dispersed, increasing cost, communication of function while managing rates and still operating effectively, access to Ultrafast Broadband, dealing with peak seasonal capacity)	Workshop material in progress	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regulatory systems and environmental policy are potential barriers to economic growth (increasing cost of compliance e.g. Waikato River water quality, Air discharge, NZTA, Contact Energy encumbrances, RMA decision framework, disconnection between LGA/RMA/LTMA, coastal erosion & weather events)		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

Barriers and Challenge Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
De-population of rural areas (long term vibrancy of CBD, ageing population and decline of labour pool)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Difficulty in attracting and retaining Human Capital (Skilled labourforce, rural sector creates wealth, economic activity in urban areas, opportunities for spouses)		✓	✓		✓	✓					✓
Difficulty accessing governmental agencies, central govt generally (silo's across/within agencies, centralisation of services, strong MP representation and Waikato advocacy)		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	
Increased ageing population				✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Common understanding of Spatial Planning issues			✓			✓			✓	✓	

Barriers and Challenge Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
(Support to identify and prioritise regionally significant infrastructure, natural heritage/environment, climate change response. Understand scope of community needs, sport facilities, preserve district identity, remove conflicting messaging from central govt. about local govt. role, integration of function TLA/Reg Council/Iwi, political tension across the region)											
Poor regional perception and profile (Poor perception of the region as a whole, individual townships/settlements)					✓			✓	✓		
Difficulty in engaging with youth (training opportunities, retention of skilled youth)					✓		✓				✓
Maximising transport connections			✓				✓				✓

Barriers and Challenge Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
(maintaining & maximising strategic inter-regional transports routes, geographic isolation)											
Preserving our rural sector and industry (biosecurity risk, sustainable use of prime agricultural land & forestry)			✓				✓			✓	
Alignment and effect of policy with adjacent TLAs (planning and responding to growth)						✓		✓			
Difficulty in achieving successful tangata whenua relationships (appropriate level of engagement, economic opportunities/constraints)						✓					✓
Meaningful community engagement (effect of lobby groups, interest			✓						✓		

Barriers and Challenge Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
in immediate issues only)											
Lack of legislative prescription to achieve outcomes (tension between RMA and private property rights, absence of national guidance e.g. SNAs)							✓		✓		
Achieving public safety (dog control, drink driving, liquor outlets)				✓							
Loss of Natural Heritage (remnant bush, peat lakes)										✓	

Table 2: Challenges and Barriers to achieving Community Outcomes

Priority Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
Governance											
Collaboration to develop a strategic vision and action to go forward on

(regional interaction with other govt. agencies for collective gain, have conversations on difficult issues, improve our external perception & develop a consistent approach to our regional contribution to NZ Inc, support to regionally significant infrastructure/facilities, integrated catchment based view of natural/cultural/ heritage issues, priorities outside core business) | Workshop material in progress | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Develop a national/regionally consistent approach to legislation and delivery of 4 well-beings

(emerging role of Iwi, climate change, infrastructure, natural environment, disconnection of RMA/LGA/LTMA, | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Priority Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
implementation focus - lacks strategic vision, better planning framework and better quality thinking in decision making for local govt, clarity over local govt. mandate to deliver 'fringe' services)											
Identify our role in and proactively responding to sustainably supporting growth in the upper North Island (human capital, environmental resource, positively manage the effects)								✓	✓		
A need for stronger Central Government advocacy of the Region (through our MPs)									✓	✓	
Economic Growth											
Open and encouraging approach to economic growth (promotion of available land,	✓			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓

Priority Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
infrastructure capacity and skilled workforce)											
Increasing compliance cost (council and industry) with piecemeal legislative changes and engaging in RMA processes (water quality, air quality, water allocation, national standards)		✓	✓	✓		✓					✓
Sustainable use of prime agricultural land and the rural sector industry		✓	✓							✓	
Social Issues											
Demographic Change – how do we plan/respond (ageing population, depopulation of rural areas, urban growth pressures, positively engaging youth)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
Collaboration with central government agencies as a		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓

Priority Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
result of centralisation of services (youth, justice, health, education, communications)											
Disparate communities and ability to pay for infrastructure and services			✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
Attraction of Human Capital (effect of commuter workforce, attraction and retention of skilled labour and resident senior level management, improve perception)			✓	✓	✓						✓
Cultural											
Successful and emerging role of iwi (in 4 well-beings), their strong relationship with the Crown, and the economic effect of Treaty of Waitangi settlements		✓	✓		✓			✓			✓
Understanding tribal structures		✓	✓		✓			✓			✓

Priority Areas	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
and how to effectively engage, the need for Iwi to up-skill in RMA decision making, positive and meaningful use of JMA's and MoUs											
Environmental Quality											
Promote sustainability and efficiency of resource use in the Region					✓				✓		

Table 3: Priority Areas for Consideration

2012-2022 Community Outcomes	Hamilton City	Hauraki District	Matamata Piako District	Otorohanga District	South Waikato	Taupō District	Thames Coromandel	Waikato District	Waikato Regional	Waipa District	Waitomo District
Governance is led by LTP Community Outcomes	Workshop material in progress	✓	✓		✓			✓			✓
Governance is led by other strategic direction documents				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Table 4: Governance relationship to 2012-2022 Community Outcomes

2   Observations

The workshop conversations provided a valuable opportunity for the project team to hear a wide variety of responses in the way councils across the Waikato region engage with their communities, and measure their district's current successes and challenges against their current 2012-2022 Long Term Plan Outcomes.

It also provided a useful platform from which to introduce the Spatial Plan Project and to invite commentary from Council officers.

Certain councils expressed concerns of the use of outcomes, as it was considered that these were of limited relevance to their long term strategic planning framework. Reasons for this concern included the mixed relevance of these outcomes to different councils and uncertainty in the validity of the outcomes or whether they are being achieved. We are of the opinion that some of this concern rests with the fact that some Council's do not formally monitor or have formal internal reporting mechanisms against how they are tracking against these visionary statements (other than the Annual Plan process).

Some councils have very strong/regular engagement with their community and groups. This is often however very dependent on personalities and level of commitment/energy of individuals, both within Council and the community.

While others are less focussed on social issues, and more on the efficient and effective delivery of core services, it was clear that most councils found creative ways to resource internal or external support for social services in light of the centralisation of many central government services.

2.1   Common Successes

Table 1 groups the various successes across the 12 council's, grouped under 6 key themes. The three successes that stand out across almost all of the Councils were the strength of their community partnerships, economic resilience, and provision of critical infrastructure.

Strong **community partnerships** and the level of engagement between elected representatives and members of the community were common amongst almost all of the regions Councils. Small rural councils were typically more engaged with their community groups, which seemed to be reflected in the activity of councillors in the community, and successful youth and education pilot programmes being run from a number of the settlements within these areas.

Individual performance, relationship to others and commitment were often cited as key success factors in successful community partnerships, and the ability for this success to endure beyond these individuals was considered a potential challenge.

Economic resilience and the strength of local industries despite the global financial crisis was also a common success across the region. Very few council's had witnessed wholesale redundancies and down-sizing of primary industries in their districts. Most of them have established local businesses that serve a local or wider catchment demand. A number of iwi groups are successfully managing Treaty of Waitangi settlements and operating significant business enterprises (Tainui Group Holdings, Ngati Tuwharetoa), coupled with an emergence of smaller cottage/boutique industries. All of these are seen as positively contributing across all four well-beings as Iwi establishments start to invest and expand their asset base.

Many of the council's saw their good quality rural amenity as a key asset from which to promote their district for various lifestyle choices and attract human capital, however other councils struggled

to attract resident based skilled staff due to often limited work opportunities for spouses, facilities for youth and community services that typically attract families to bigger centres.

The third area of common success was **the provision of critical infrastructure**, particularly the extent to which almost all of the Councils have recently completed or near completed upgrades to their water supply and wastewater treatment plants. While this was seen as a success, it was also revealed to be a significant challenge going forward, particularly around the ongoing cost of compliance to upgrade these plants to meet legislative changes. This was particularly highlighted by the ageing demographic most of the settlements are experiencing and affordability and ability to pay for maintaining/upgrading these services in the future.

2.2   Common Challenges

Table 2 groups the various barriers and challenges that councils were facing in the delivery of the community outcomes. Three common challenges facing over half of the regions council's relate to the affordability of infrastructure, the effect of regulatory systems and environmental policy on economic growth, and the loss of human capital arising from depopulation and ageing populations.

While **infrastructure upgrades** have largely been completed around the region, almost all Councils identified the future affordability of providing, maintaining, upgrading or enhancing critical infrastructure as a key challenge. The nature of dispersed settlements (therefore many individual infrastructure schemes), coupled with the fixed income of ratepayers in these areas meant that affordability for the communities was of immediate concern for one or two councils and recognised as a medium to long term issue by others.

The need to provide critical infrastructure was seen as essential to the on-going viability of these townships, however the ability to levy rates commensurate with the cost of infrastructure improvements is becoming increasingly difficult. This has been seen in a number of Councils with the elected members focus on 'rates control'.

Many Councils are facing the prospect of having surplus infrastructure capacity yet struggling with attracting resident populations and new business to the district, whilst other Councils were finding it difficult to upgrade infrastructure in response to economic growth.

On-going changes to national and regional **regulatory systems and environmental policy** and legislation across a range of services was also cited as driving up the cost of compliance for these water and waste water schemes, requiring councils to carry out various upgrades within their useable life (e.g. plant life of 30 years, with a discharge consent to be renewed every 10 years to current standard).

One Council raised concerns that environmental compliance was having perverse landuse outcomes for them, with industries locating outside of airsheds to avoid being caught by legislative compliance, which was then affecting Council's investment in infrastructure and structure planning outcomes.

A strong message that came through was the disconnection between the 3 key pieces of legislation that local government operates under (being the Resource Management Act 1991, Local Government Act 2002, and the Land Transport Management Act 2003). Many councils are looking for a framework from which they can be more strategic in their thinking and adopt a district approach that supports a regional perspective, however they consider that the legislation does not enable long term planning and is very implementation focussed (e.g. effects based).

Attraction and retention of **Human Capital** for most of the region's councils was identified as the third key challenge area. Most of the smaller districts and townships have difficulty attracting and retaining a resident skilled labour force. Difficulties associated with this included;

- The need to commute into or out of the district for work, opportunities for spouses and families,
- Connection to the community after work hours (including volunteer positions on schools, community groups, support networks).

Urban migration is a reality for most of the rural communities (and has been for the past 15 years), leading to a reduced number of youth in rural communities and an increase in the average age of the population, and those on fixed incomes. This has social and economic implications for these communities and affects a wide spectrum of settlements ranging in size from Bennydale to Taupo.

2.3   Common Priorities

Table 3 is a combination of the synthesis of the analysis of the councils outcomes and provided a summary of priority areas for councils in achieving their outcomes. These were couched in terms of issues which the council might seek to discuss with central government. In some instances, the scope of priorities captured was widened to matters a spatial plan may address.

Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 describes the purpose of local government, which includes both districts and regional councils. Under the Resource Management Act 1991, there is a legislated difference in function between the regional council and the district councils within the Region[2], which have been reflected by the priorities identified by the different parties. It is well established that the region has diverse social and economic issues and the challenge posed by many councils was how these may or may not be represented in a Spatial Plan (i.e. planning for growth in some areas and decline in others, whilst managing the effects of growth on the natural environment). Different issues were identified as the workshops progressed, and significant matters that were raised in the later workshops were unable to be tested with previous councils.

Regardless of whether or not these are matters to be considered in a Spatial Plan, matters identified in the workshops that could possibly benefit from a regional approach include;

2.3.1   Collaboration to develop a strategic vision, with an agreed action plan to advocate our vision from

Concern has been raised over the lack of a regional strategic vision. This is highly desirable to enable the region to speak with one voice and to communicate its position on nationally, inter-regionally and regionally significant issues. It will help the Waikato region to understand the extent to which it can support growth in the upper North Island, but also benefit from it. While sustaining and supporting growth in the upper North Island, adverse impacts on the region are mitigated and the Waikato's communities will continue to be provided for.

It is considered a strategic vision will assist the Waikato's regional interaction with other government agencies, to enable collective gains rather than piecemeal/individual conversations at a district wide level. The existing legislative framework makes no provision for strategic planning, and is heavily implementation focussed. The development of the vision and action plan may help to improve our regional identity and perception externally, and enable a co-ordinated approach to our regional contribution to 'New Zealand Inc.' There is a need to identify and thereby galvanise support to

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[2] Sections 30 and 31 of the RMA make the distinction between the functions of the Regional Council – which is the integrated management of natural and physical resources (soil, water, air, natural hazards) with that of district councils (which are broadly active in the management of land use, economic activity and community/cultural wellbeing).

regionally significant infrastructure and facilities. This may also assist to develop an integrated catchment based view of natural/cultural/heritage issues.

2.3.2 National/regionally consistent approach to legislation and delivery of 4 well-beings

There are two aspects to this issue. The first is the consideration of the increasing compliance costs to business and councils as a result of constant changes to national legislation and regional policy. The second aspect relates to the legislative 'tinkering' and messaging from central government around the delivery of services to contribute to the 4 well-beings.

The message from almost all of the Councils around the increasing cost of compliance was very clear. Regional and Central government continue to make changes to environmental legislation (through the imposition of national standards and regional policy) that is driving up infrastructure compliance costs for both councils and industry. There was a clear desire to look at ways this can be streamlined and minimised. In the water treatment business, suggestions around a catchment wide approach (e.g. riparian planting/biodiversity benefits), rather than point source discharge improvements were cited as a potential example of this.

The workshops identified on-going concern over the inconsistent messaging from central government around local government's core business. On the one hand Councils are expected to increase economic growth to contribute to the national GDP, but on the other hand they are focussing on reducing debt and the cost effective delivery of essential infrastructure.

A spatial plan may help to regionally identify priority for the delivery of services that are not being met by other agencies, which may be defined as being outside of core council business, but are being creatively resourced by Councils on a daily basis.

There is an acknowledgement that Waikato Iwi have a closer relationship to the crown than most local authorities. The recent Treaty of Waitangi settlements are resulting in Iwi being better resourced to engage in conversations around supporting their people and the four well-beings. Contrary to this has been the centralisation of many government agencies which has put the additional cost of accessing these regionally based services onto individuals, and Councils through the provision of public transport.

2.3.3 Demographic Change – how do we plan/respond

All of the Councils were experiencing some degree of demographic change, ranging from the pressures of accommodating over-flow growth from Auckland (residential and industrial), static population growth with an increasing ageing population, or population decline as people sought employment in larger urban centres, leaving small rural communities with ageing populations and fixed incomes.

The challenge posed by all of the participants was how a spatial plan could attempt to address this issue at a regional level. There was clear feedback from the smaller rural councils that planning for population decline was needed and many of these councils were willing to start the difficult conversations about identifying a regional response to this. This was particularly highlighted with the affordability of maintaining and upgrading surplus infrastructure in these areas.

2.3.4 Open and encouraging approach to economic growth

Each of the Councils identified a 'point of difference' (from access to natural resources, preservation of the natural environment, catchment of human capital to surplus capacity in existing infrastructure), and were keen to understand how the region could work better to proactively

'distribute the wealth' and take a more balanced approach to growth to potentially offset the decline in other areas.

Many councils felt there was little to be gained from continuing to compete with each other in the areas of economic development/community facilities/ tourism/ regionally significant infrastructure, and were keen to see more regional co-ordination to identify where combined effort could be invested and have positive outcomes for the region.

3 Conclusions

The opportunity to hold spatial plan conversations was welcomed by all of the council's in the region. While the methodology of basing these conversations around community outcomes was not supported by all of the Councils, the ability to discuss each council's success and challenges around the delivery of the four well beings provided a high level picture of commonality of issues across the region.

The top three common successes across the region were:

- the strength of their community partnerships,
- district level economic resilience despite the global financial crisis
- efficient and effective provision of critical infrastructure

The top three common challenges across the region were:

- affordability of infrastructure,
- the effect of regulatory systems and environmental policy on economic growth,
- and the loss of human capital arising from depopulation and ageing populations

The key priority areas for regional collaboration as identified by the majority of the Councils were:

- Collaboration to develop a strategic vision, with an agreed action plan to advocate our vision from – this is particularly important to help the region speak with one voice and advocate a strong position in relation to the Waikato Region's role in sustainably supporting growth in the upper north island.
- National/regionally consistent approach to legislation and delivery of 4 well-beings
- Demographic change – how do we plan/respond
- Develop a regional development strategy to reduce the current level of competition amongst the districts for economic development, infrastructure and facilities.

A spatial plan framework may enable a conversation between the focus on the natural environment which drives the regional councils with land use and economic development drivers advanced by district councils.

All of the councils acknowledged that as they were entering local government elections in October 2013. There was a clear message that the new term of councillors will need to be briefed on the spatial plan objectives and programme, with the opportunity for early input into the process in the next phase of the project.