

**Community Focus on  
A High Quality Living Environment –  
Managing Urban Amenity in Waimakariri  
Through the District Plan**

Waimakariri District Council

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# 6 Community Focus on a High Quality Living Environment – Managing Urban Amenity in Waimakariri Through the District Plan

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Objective

In 2000 the Ministry for the Environment commissioned a project to explore the issue of urban amenity. This initiative included a number of case studies.

The purpose of these case studies was to develop tools and templates to:

- Define urban amenity
- Manage urban amenity (through plan provisions)
- Monitor urban amenity (including indicators and reporting)
- Monitor plan effectiveness

The Waimakariri District Council's contribution to this project involved a review of the strategies used to establish the urban amenity values for its Proposed District Plan with a view to ascertaining the value of these methods in establishing urban amenity indicators.

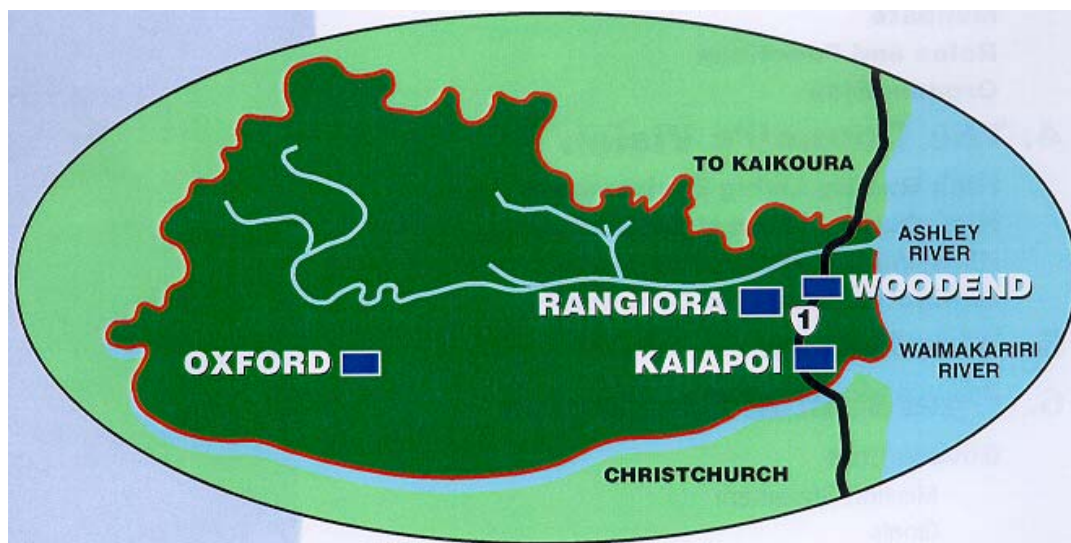
During the preparation of its Proposed District Plan the Waimakariri District Council undertook extensive consultation and, therefore, saw involvement with the Urban Amenity project as an opportunity to assess the possibility of extending further the scope of its consultation process within the framework of the RMA.

### 1.2. The Waimakariri District

#### 1.2.1. The District: its land and people

The Waimakariri District was established in 1989 from the boroughs of Rangiora and Kaiapoi, and the Rangiora, Eyre and Oxford Counties as well as a portion of the Hurunui County.

The District is in North Canterbury, to the north of Christchurch and the Waimakariri River. It occupies 275,000 hectares, and extends from Pegasus Bay in the east to the Puketeraki Range in the west.



Until the early 1970s the areas that now comprise the Waimakariri District had a steadily declining population. Between the mid-1970s and late 1980 there was a modest increase in the District's population. During the last years of the 1980s and the decade of the 1990s the growth rate for the Waimakariri District has been among the highest in New Zealand.

Between 1986 and 2000 the Waimakariri District changed dramatically:

- The population grew from 25,283 to approximately 36,500, an increase of about 44.4%
- The number of dwellings increased from 8,343 to more than 13,450 or by at least 61.3%

Within the District, Ngai Tuahuriri is recognised as tangata whenua. The iwi is represented by Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu.

At the 1996 Census people identifying themselves as of N.Z. Maori ethnicity comprised 6.5% of the Waimakariri District population. Between 1991 and 1996, however, the number of Maori living in the area increased by 636 (42.2%).

The towns of Kaiapoi and Rangiora are the District's major urban areas. The District's other main urban areas are Woodend and Oxford. There are also a number of small villages and beach settlements.

During the period 1986 – 2000 the number of houses in Kaiapoi and Rangiora increased by some 47% from about 5240 to 7700 dwellings. It is estimated that by 2000 the population of Kaiapoi was approximately 9,150, and that of Rangiora some 10,500.

The other main settlements of Woodend and Oxford have also had considerable growth and now have populations of between 1,500 and 2,000 people.

In addition, some 120 new dwellings have been constructed in the district's small settlements during the past 10 years.

More Rural Residential Zones have been created, some close to existing settlements and others within the District's Rural Zone, which have increased the range of living environments available within the District. At present, these zones have some 620 dwellings with additional lots available for development.

### **1.2.2. Agenda 21, consultation and the Proposed District Plan**

In 1993, the Waimakariri District Council was invited to join an Agenda 21 Pilot Project initiated by the Ministry for the Environment.

In order to make the project both manageable and relevant to the Waimakariri District Council's ongoing programme, it chose to focus on one aspect of Agenda 21 – consultation.

The pilot project yielded significant benefits to the Council in ensuring sound consultation practices were employed during the preparation of the Proposed District Plan. The adoption of a Council consultation policy was a watershed decision establishing the basis for a key relationship with the community.

A major initiative taken by the Waimakariri District Council, as part of its involvement with the Agenda 21 project, was the production of a vision document setting out the long-term goals

for the District. Although the District Council facilitated the development of this document “Vision 2020”, it was seen from the outset as an expression of community opinion. An account of the strategy used to develop “Vision 2020” is included as Appendix 3.

While “Vision 2020” canvassed a wider range of issues than those included in the Resource Management Act, it also provided an important starting point for the development of the Proposed Waimakariri District Plan.

During the preparation of the Proposed District Plan the Waimakariri District Council undertook a considerable number of consultations, involving selected groups within the community. These included:

- Formal surveys of people who had recently moved into the Waimakariri District, and residents living in rural residential zones
- Leaflet type questionnaires that were delivered to all residents of the District’s towns and small settlements
- Workshops with selected groups such as the residents of the District’s beach settlements

In the years immediately after amalgamation, this Council’s Forward Planning Team also as part of the preparation of the Proposed District Plan undertook itself, or commissioned a number of studies. These included studies into aspects of the natural environment, socio/economic characteristics of the District based on Census data, and a major household survey.

This research together with the results of the community consultations provided the framework within which the Proposed District Plan was developed.

### **1.3. This report**

This report sets out the findings of work undertaken to assess the feasibility of extending the use of the consultation techniques employed by Waimakariri District Council when developing its Proposed District Plan to establishing urban amenity indicators, and to evaluate anticipated environmental results for the urban zones.

It includes:

- A discussion of the concept of amenity values, and the use of surveys to identify these values
- A description of the project undertaken to establish the feasibility of extending consultation to the identification of anticipated environmental results, and indicators for urban amenity
- Key conclusions concerning the role of consultation in policy development and in the evaluation of Plan effectiveness, particularly with respect to urban amenity

## **2. CONSULTATION TO ESTABLISH AMENITY VALUES**

### **2.1. Operationalising the concept of amenity values**

#### **2.1.1. “Amenity Values”: a Definition**

For the purpose of the Resource Management Act 1991, “amenity values”: *“means those natural and physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes”*.

When dealing with an abstract concept such as “amenity values” it is important to establish precisely what it means.

The term “amenity values” as used in the Resource Management Act’s definition, presents two problems that need to be understood before proceeding to identify anticipated environmental results for urban amenity, or urban amenity indicators:

- A duality of meaning; and
- Subjectivity

#### **2.1.2. Duality of Meaning**

There are essentially two dimensions to the term “amenity values”. It can apply to the community’s attitudes or ideas about the aspects of the environment which are valued because they contribute to “pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, cultural and recreational attributes”.

Alternatively, the concept can be applied to the bio-physical elements of the environment that are identified and measured as helping to contribute to the pleasantness or character of an area *per se*.

To assist with the development of a more systematic approach to the management of the environment for amenity, the two dimensions of ‘amenity values’ should be clearly separated. The ‘community amenity values’ should be distinguished from the ‘bio-physical amenity values’.

#### **2.1.3. Subjectivity**

The specification of these two dimensions of amenity values may also assist with overcoming the problem of subjectivity.

There is a tendency to label community amenity values as being subjective, thus creating the impression that they are either specific to a single individual, and/or likely to be fleeting, fickle or lacking in substance.

Human value systems need not be viewed in this manner. The attitudes and beliefs of a political party or other social organisation such as a church are not usually referred to as being subjective. The consensus of opinion in a community about the aspects of their

natural and physical environment which contribute to the pleasantness or distinctive character of their area can be seen as similar to other sets of social attitudes.

#### **2.1.4. Community amenity values and bio-physical amenity values**

The advantages of identifying two dimensions to amenity values and being aware of the relationship between them include:

- Establishing the legitimacy of the community's role in identifying the key resource management issues and objectives, and formulating policies to maintain or enhance the bio-physical amenity values of their area. This has the added advantage of being consistent with Agenda 21.
- Providing a basis for accepting that bio-physical amenity values may differ from place to place, which is particularly important given the diversity of "urban" areas in New Zealand.
- Defining the respective roles that the community and professionals should perform in the management of amenity under the RMA.
- Helping to direct environmental monitoring for amenity by highlighting the fact that there are two separate matters that must be addressed: i.e. the "community's amenity values" and the "bio-physical amenity values".

## **2.2. Urban amenity values and the Waimakariri District**

### **2.2.1. Proposed District Plan perspective**

A consensus developed within the community during the early stages of the consultation for the Proposed Waimakariri District Plan that:

- Change *per se* was not necessarily 'bad'
- The maintenance of high quality living environments was a key objective
- It could be difficult to maintain these positions in the face of the rapid population growth that was occurring in the District

The Proposed District Plan, therefore, aimed to manage the District's various living environments in a manner consistent with the aspirations of the community, i.e. the community amenity values.

While drafting the Proposed District Plan it also was necessary for the Waimakariri District Council's Forward Planning Team to develop a strategy for identifying the area's community amenity values.

### **2.2.2. Research methods – formal surveys and leaflet questionnaires**

While a range of consultation methods were used, formal surveys and leaflet questionnaires proved to be the most effective means of identifying the community's views about the aspects of the living environment that were valued for Proposed Plan purposes.

These research methods offered the advantage of enabling the Council to reach a relatively large number of people in the community at large, or in a target group at one time. They also allowed both quantitative and qualitative analysis to be undertaken together, which is necessary when trying to establish the extent of any community consensus.

Emphasis was placed on taking a number of readings from the community rather than relying on the results of a single piece of research. This strategy overcame the risks associated with a single survey being unreliable.

This survey work was undertaken in house, by people who were thoroughly familiar with the district. These people were also aware of the key issues being debated by the community at any particular time. As a result the members of the Waimakariri District Council's Forward Planning Team have developed a close relationship with their community.

There has also been extensive involvement by social scientists with general experience in attitude research.

Considerable care has been taken to ensure high standards of quantitative and qualitative analysis has been maintained. The research has been designed to capture both the number of respondents adopting a particular position, and the intensity of the comments about the various issues.

A feature of the questionnaires for both the formal surveys and the less formal leaflets was the use of open-ended questions which have invited members of the community to express their views in their own words.

All these questionnaires after 1994 have included four core questions:

What do members of your household **like most** about living here?

What do members of your household **like least** about living here?

What changes would members of your household **most like** to see occur here?

What changes would members of your household **least like** to see occur here?

These questions were developed with the assistance of a psychologist who advised that some people find it easier to address an issue from a negative rather than a positive perspective.

Consultation concerning development issues was conducted on a District-wide basis as well as for each of the towns and small settlements. This was because there is a close relationship between the urban and rural areas in the Waimakariri District, with changes in one have significant implications for the other.

At no stage did the Forward Planning Team introduce the concept of, or use the terms amenity or urban amenity in its questionnaires.

The responses to the questionnaires were filtered for the views that were relevant to the various parts of the Proposed District Plan, including amenity. It was the responsibility of the members of the planning team to translate the concerns expressed, about such things as the changing character of parts of the District, into s.75 RMA issues, objectives and environmental outcomes.

### **3. WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT AMENITY INDICATORS PROJECT**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The Waimakariri District Council's Forward Planning Team selected the town of Rangiora, which has approximately 10,500 people as the focus for its case study for the Ministry for the Environment's urban amenity indicators project.

The research project involved the establishment of two groups:

- A group involving members of the Resource Management and Regulation Committee of the Waimakariri District Council including people who had comprised the hearings panel for the Proposed District Plan, and for resource consents.
- A group involving members of community organisations with an interest in environmental issues and regular participants in Council consultations.

The research involved:

- The modification of the standard set of the four questions set out in 2.2.2
- The circulation of these questions to participants prior to a workshop
- The discussion of participants' responses to these questions in a workshop setting
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of the new questions and the use of discussion or focus groups

#### **3.2. The research**

##### **3.2.1. Review of standard questions**

A research team reworked the core questions with a view to making them more suitable for eliciting respondents' views concerning amenity indicators.

The term "urban amenity" was also introduced to find out whether there were any advantages in introducing members of the community to planning terminology, when probing for views about a specific issue.

The research team's key concern was to ascertain whether leading respondents in this way would bring out similar or a different range of responses to those found in Proposed District Plan surveys.

##### **3.2.2. The modified questions**

A questionnaire was sent to each of the people who agreed to participate in the workshops prior to these meetings, and they were asked to fill them in and bring the workshop.

This questionnaire asked participants to identify the things they liked most about Rangiora Town, and then to indicate the changes that would make the situation worse and what would make it better.

They were also asked to consider the things that liked least about this town, and the changes that would improve the situation and the ones that would make it worse.

A copy of the Urban Amenity Case Study questionnaire is included as Appendix 1.

### **3.2.3. The discussion groups**

Members of the Waimakariri District Council's Forward Planning Team led these workshops.

While there were significant differences between the membership of the two workshops, and the duration of each, the discussions in each had four segments:

- An evaluation of the questionnaire
- The identification of 'likes' and 'dislikes' about the town
- An assessment of participants' definitions of 'urban amenity'
- A discussion designed to probe for indicators for the aspects of the town's amenity identified through participants' views about the 'likes' and 'dislikes'

## **3.3. Assessment of research**

### **3.3.1. The modified questions**

#### The introduction of the term 'things'

The term "things" was introduced into the questions for this research project to encourage respondents to focus on aspects of the bio-physical environment that they liked or disliked, rather than on social or other aspects of life in Rangiora.

Participants reported that they found the word 'things' acceptable. One member of the community group, however, observed that the question would have been just as acceptable if the word had been omitted. The other members of this group did not challenge the suggestion that the work could easily have been omitted.

The workshop discussion led the research team to conclude that very little had been gained from the inclusion of the word 'things' in the questions. The change in the wording of the question did not influence the basic orientation of the people responding.

#### The use of new 'follow-up' questions

The new questions were introduced in an attempt to probe for indicators for the aspects of the bio-physical likes and dislikes, i.e. the aspects identified as having amenity value.

Some members of the focus groups indicated that they found the additional questions unnecessary, as their answers tended to involve the 'opposite sides of the same coin'.

Others commented that they found it easier to indicate what they thought would make the situation worse or better, but not both. This observation confirmed the original advice from a psychologist, that some people find it easier to view a situation from a positive perspective while others see things more easily in negative terms.

A review of the questionnaires showed that there was a tendency for the answers to the questions concerning the factors that would make a situation better or worse to be repetitive. In addition, the answers concerning the factors that would make a situation better or worse were almost always logical and thus predictable.

As a result of participants' comments and a review of the completed questionnaires' the research team concluded that:

- a) the new questions did not provide significant assistance in developing indicators for urban amenity, nor
- b) did they materially affect the type/range of responses compared to the original set of questions.

### **3.3.2. Participants' understanding of the term 'urban amenity'**

The Councillors' interpretations of this term were similar and reflected their familiarity with the definition of 'amenity values' in the RMA.

Members of the community group offered a range of definitions.

The most comprehensive answer, based on the Webster's Dictionary definition of 'amenity' was:

*'Something that makes town life, as opposed to rural, more pleasant, comfortable, convenient. Something that increases the "delightfulness" of the place.'*

Other members of the community group adopted more restricted definitions, with some seeing 'urban amenity' as being restricted to public buildings and other community facilities.

The different interpretation of the term 'urban amenity' highlight the fact that statutory definitions can differ significantly from some meanings commonly attached to the same words. Also, that there can be a range of meanings in common use.

The research team concluded that the issue of the different meanings for a term such as 'urban amenity' has important implications for consultation and that there are two main strategies available to overcome this problem. When conducting community consultations care should be taken to either:

- Ensure that all involved have a similar understanding of key terms

or

- Develop a strategy that effectively 'by-passes' the issue of definitions and allows members of the community the freedom to range around a topic unconstrained by the need to pay attention to a definition that may be entirely foreign to them,

and

Have confidence in the technical ability of staff to sieve responses and sort them into s.75 RMA "boxes".

### **3.3.3. The performance of discussion groups**

By bringing together two different groups the researchers were able to draw comparisons between the results of them, as well as to assess the value of discussion groups *per se*.

The Councillors had worked together regularly on resource management matters, but the members of the community group knew each other less well. Also the people attending the community workshop were unlikely to have previously discussed resource management issues with each other.

The key differences in the perspectives adopted in the two groups were that:

- The Councillors focused most attention on the things that they ‘disliked’, while members of the community group were more comfortable discussing what they ‘liked’ about Rangiora.
- The Councillors adopted a relatively narrow but structured problem-solving approach, while the members of the community group took a relatively broad-spectrum discursive approach to reaching a consensus about things that they ‘disliked’, or those that would jeopardise the features of the town that they liked.
- The members of the community group were more willing to extend the discussion to issues associated with the relationship of the town to its rural setting.

Apart from the willingness of the members of community group to consider the issue of the relationship between urban and rural, the two groups essentially liked the same things about Rangiora, i.e. identified the same aspects of the bio-physical environment as having amenity value.

### **3.3.4. Discussion groups identify urban amenity indicators**

While the discussion of ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ by the community group was lively, those leading the discussion found it a good deal more difficult to promote discussion about what could be measured to provide an indication of change.

The more detailed problem-solving approach adopted by the Councillors, however, could be seen as a more useful contribution to the quest for urban amenity indicators.

The general conclusion drawn by the research team was, however, that while group discussions may be useful in helping to define community amenity values they are not helpful in determining urban amenity indicators.

## 4. CONCLUSION

### 4.1. Discussion group or surveys

While workshops can be seen as being able to assist with the identification of community amenity values, the issue of the effectiveness of discussion groups for this purpose when compared with the use of formal surveys and leaflet questionnaires also warrants consideration.

In mid-2000 the Waimakariri District Council also conducted a formal District wide survey 'Future Waimakariri Survey', which included the standard set of open questions concerning likes, dislikes, and the changes wanted and not wanted.

The responses to these open questions from Rangiora are analysed in the following table to illustrate how urban amenity values can be identified from respondents' comments.

Response	No. of Responses	Percentage of respondents	Urban amenity value
<i>Liked</i> – a small town environment, and/or <i>Change liked least</i> - increase in size of town or similar comment	45	49.5	<b>Small urban area/compact area</b>
<i>Disliked</i> – parking arrangements in town centre and/or <i>Change liked most</i> – an alternative to the present arrangements for parking in the town centre	31	34.2	<b>Ease of parking</b>
<i>Disliked</i> – traffic congestion, difficulty of access to main road at peak times, heavy traffic travelling through town and/or <i>Change liked most</i> – roundabouts at key intersections	21	23.1	<b>High levels of accessibility/ good traffic management</b>
<i>Liked</i> – clean air, and/or <i>Disliked</i> – smoke from chimneys <i>Change liked most</i> – controls on log burners, clean air zone	16	17.6	<b>Clean air</b>
<i>Liked</i> – large size of section, and/or <i>Disliked</i> – 'infill', the subdivision of large sections, allowing small sections	11	12.1	<b>Spaciousness</b>
<i>Liked</i> – proximity to the outdoors, close to rivers beaches and hills	10	10.9	<b>Access to recreation opportunities outside town</b>
<i>Liked</i> – quietness and/or <i>Disliked</i> – neighbourhood noise, noise of heavy vehicles <i>Change liked most</i> – improved noise control	8	8.8	<b>Quietness</b>

The amenity values identified by analysing the Rangiora responses to the "Future Waimakariri Survey" were similar to those identified by the workshops.

A survey, however, offers some important advantages.

The responses to a survey are those of a randomly selected group of residents not the views of people invited to participate in workshops, and which may import bias into the process.

When conducting consultations via focus groups or workshops there is always the risk that only a limited range of views will be canvassed because the range of interests of the people who participate. A few outspoken participants can unduly influence the results of a discussion group. The role of the facilitator is also crucial, as there is always the possibility that the exchange of views within the group may be skewed by the relationship of the facilitator with the group.

A written questionnaire, either for a formal survey or in leaflet form provides the researchers with a direct and permanent record of the views of members of the community for analysis. In addition, there is the opportunity for quantitative analysis, which provides information about the extent to which an aspect of the bio-physical environment is valued by the community, or the extent to which values are shared.

The interpretation of the percentages recorded, however, must be tempered by the recognition that these have been obtained from open questions. The percentages obtained from open questions will never be as high as those obtained from questions that provide respondents with a set of options and a box to tick.

While there is always the risk of a 'rogue poll' or a formal survey that falls outside of the range indicated by the sampling error at 95% probability, this can be overcome by taking regular readings.

If the results of a number of formal surveys and/or leaflet questionnaires are similar, those conducting the consultations can be confident that the amenity values identified are generally shared by members of the community. In the same way, it is possible to identify values that are persistent, not just associated with a specific issue that may give the value temporary currency.

#### **4.2. From community amenity values to amenity indicators**

The Waimakariri District Council's amenity indicators research project found that the use of open questions in association with community workshops did not assist with the establishment of 'indicators' to assist the management of amenity under the RMA.

Instead, it suggested that indicator development is a technical step, likely to be beyond the capacity of most members of the community when working in a focus group or workshop environment.

This research, therefore, also highlighted the limits of consultation and helped to define the responsibilities of the professionals when working under the RMA.

The consultation already undertaken had allowed the Waimakariri District's Forward Planning Team to establish the community amenity values, which provided the framework for plan development. Having established the aspects of the urban environment that were valued by the community, the professionals could proceed with the various stages of the plan process confident that they were reflecting the aspirations of their community.

This consultation also confirmed that there would be significant differences between the community values for Rangiora, and those to which people living in other urban areas subscribe.

- Some of Rangiora’s community amenity values identified by Rangiora people are ones that many people living in urban areas in New Zealand could be expected to recognise, e.g. noise, and clean air.
- Some values such as spaciousness are a product of historical development and patterns of subdivision. Where these are identified they will require an appreciation of scale, geography, and urban context for the value to have meaning in a RMA context.
- Issues concerning the edge of town and the relationship between the town and its rural setting will be of especial concern to people living in small towns, most probably in peri-urban areas experiencing development.

Among the community amenity values likely to be common to most urban areas, however, differences in threshold for the matching bio-physical value can be expected. For example, quietness is likely to be valued by many people living in different urban environments, but the threshold for acceptable noise will differ significantly from place to place.

Differences in the threshold for the bio-physical amenity values that are held in common across New Zealand have important implications for monitoring.

#### **4.3. Monitoring urban amenity**

Once the amenity values for an area have been established, a bench-mark for the indicators should also be established.

This will involve deciding what should be measured. This choice will to be governed by the standard criteria for measurement, and also the aspects of the urban environment seen as being most likely to change for better or worst for each community.

It will also be necessary to ensure that the methods used for reporting measurements are sufficiently sensitive to capture changes in the bio-physical environment that are of significance to the people living in the area.

For example, international standards for identifying the point at which the deterioration in air quality becomes a matter for concern may not be sufficiently rigorous to register changes in the air quality that matter to the people living in a small town, where air pollution has never been a problem before.

The monitoring for urban amenity should focus on both the community amenity values and the bio-physical amenity values. Taking regular readings for the bio-physical amenity indicators will give information about the state of the urban environment *per se*. It will also be necessary to monitor the community amenity values to ascertain the community’s response to any changes occurring in the bio-physical environment.

Those responsible for the management of urban amenity should not try to anticipate the reaction of the members of the community to change. It is possible that in some instance the community may be very sensitive to changes in the bio-physical environment while in other cases there could be a relatively high level of tolerance.

Monitoring for urban amenity values under the RMA, therefore, should include regular consultation to:

- Confirm the community values already identified

- Obtain community views about changes that have occurred in the established bio-physical values
- Identify any new concerns that members of the community have about changes in the urban environment.

The primary conclusion of the Waimakariri District Council's urban amenity indicators research project, is that formal surveys or leaflet questionnaires appear to represent the best method of consultation for monitoring urban amenity. The experience of this Council would also suggest that a combination of open-ended questions and closed questions that invite respondents to tick one or more of a set of predetermined options would offer the best style of questionnaire for this purpose.

While closed questions will yield satisfactory information concerning community views about changes with respect to established bio-physical amenity values, open questions such as those focusing on 'likes', 'dislikes', changes wanted and not wanted should also be used to identify additional matters of concern.

It is considered very important to retain open-ended questions for the monitoring of community amenity values and well as the identification of these values at the beginning of the process of managing urban amenity under the RMA. This will avoid the possibility that the professions will attempt to lead rather than follow community opinion.

5. **APPENDIX 1**

File: 548-024-043



**Waimakariri District Council  
Urban Amenity Case Study  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. What are the things **you like most** about Rangiora Town?

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2. What **changes** would make this/these things **worse**?

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3. What **changes** would make this/these things **better**?

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4. What are the things **you like least** about Rangiora Town?

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5. What **changes** would make this/these things **better**?

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6. What **changes** would make this/these things **worse**?

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7. What do you understand by the term “urban amenity”?

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**PLEASE FILL IN AND BRING TO THE WORKSHOP ON 28<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2000**

## 6. APPENDIX 2

### SURVEYING FOR 'COMMUNITY AMENITY VALUES: KEY 'DO'S' AND 'DON'TS'

#### **Simplicity**

A successful questionnaire is a simple one. This simplicity is somewhat misleading. There are some basic skills needed to conduct a successful survey, and this needs to be appreciated before commencing a survey.

If there is no one with experience of doing surveys in your organisation it is probably advisable to find a social scientist with this experience to do the technical work for you.

#### **Careful Preparation**

It is important to work out exactly what information is required before beginning to draw up questions. In some instances, this may involve directing the survey to a specific group.

For example, when the Waimakariri District Council undertook its first survey for its Proposed District Plan, it approached people who had been in the district for 5 years or less. These people were surveyed because they were seen as being most likely to have considered views about the aspects of the district that made it an attractive place to live, because they had recently chosen to move to the area.

#### **“Open” and “Closed” Questions in Survey Questionnaires**

The surveys conducted by the Waimakariri District Council have canvassed a wider range of issues than the flyers. In these instances, more detailed information about respondent's views has been sought using a combination of closed and open questions.

When using closed questions the Waimakariri District Council takes care to ensure that they do not prompt respondents.

Closed questions that offer substantive choices such as a list of reasons for choosing to live in an area are just as likely to create opinion as to measure existing opinion.

The use of closed questions by the Waimakariri District Council is restricted to ones that ascertain:

- The level of importance attached to a particular matter;
- The level of agreement for a statement asserting a particular policy position; and
- The assessment of a standard or level of satisfaction with a service or facility.

Sets of closed questions are always followed by an invitation for respondents to offer comments about the issues canvassed, and these provide valuable assistance with the interpretation of the quantitative results.

## **Attention to Detail**

The wording of questions is crucial. If a mistake is found after a questionnaire is printed it is very difficult to overcome the problem.

Pretesting is one of the most important stages in questionnaire development. This involves asking people to answer the questionnaire, and also to give feedback about any problems they encountered. It is possible that a second pretest will be needed to address comments received from the first pretest.

The development of a questionnaire takes quite a high proportion of the total time involved with running a survey. It should not be rushed. Also, great care is required when considering whether to introduce a change at the last minute. Many mistakes are made at this stage.

Those involved with the final stages of the development of a questionnaire should always check with the lead researcher if they think that they have found a mistake. A change in wording can lead to a change in meaning which frustrates the purpose of the question.

## **User Friendly**

The questionnaire must be user-friendly. The language should be simple and straightforward. The first question should be easy to answer, to help the respondent get started. Questions should be organised in a logical fashion so the respondent feels that the survey as a whole has a sense of purpose.

Intimidating layouts should be avoided. The Waimakariri District Council's questionnaires usually only have the Council's logo on the front page, and do not have footers. Also, questionnaires **do not carry any coding columns** of the type frequently found on ones drawn up by commercial firms. To achieve a user-friendly questionnaire it may even be desirable to get special dispensation, if the use of footers is normally required.

The aim should be to present the person, who has little time to spare, with a task that they can do in about 10 - 15 minutes, but one that a person who has the time and inclination can take much longer.

Under these conditions, the respondent who is in a hurry is likely to answer most of the closed questions, and make brief comments in response to some of the open questions. The respondent who has the time and is interested in the issues canvassed will most probably provide extensive comments at every opportunity.

## **Administration – a Matter of Cost/Benefit**

The experience of the Waimakariri District Council is that there is a direct relationship between the amount of effort put into the administration of a survey and the response rate.

The Waimakariri District Council has obtained very high response rates when questionnaires have been distributed to respondent's homes by hand, and then followed up individually when not returned within the time allowed. Response rates have been significantly lower

when questionnaires have been posted to respondents with return 'freepost' envelopes, and followed up with reminder letters.

Extensive use is usually made of news releases to the District's community newspapers to alert the community to the imminent release of formal questionnaires or leaflets. The local newspapers are also likely to carry reminder messages from the Council concerning the closing dates and/or extensions for the return for these.

When deciding how many questionnaires to send out and how much effort to put into administration, it is important to have regard to the overall purpose of the survey.

If the information being sought is pivotal, then it is probably advisable to select a relatively small sample of 200 – 250 respondents, and devote a good deal of effort to contacting the people selected for the sample and following up the questionnaires that are not returned.

If the survey is one of a series of surveys it is reasonable to send out a larger number of questionnaires, and be prepared to accept a lower response rate.

### **Consultation – Part of the Democratic Process**

When using a formal survey or leaflet as a method of consultation, it is important to recognise that the evaluation of responses should not only be viewed in terms of the established standards for survey research. A council also has a democratic obligation to listen to the people who choose to participate in a survey or fill in a leaflet irrespective of the number of forms returned.

The formal surveys and leaflets may also generate a considerable amount of feedback from the community that is not immediately relevant to resource management. It is advisable for those processing the data to ensure that other sections within the organisation are informed about the views of the community concerning issues that are relevant to them.

## **7. APPENDIX 3**

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT “VISION 2020”**

The development of the original “Vision 2020” was an important initiative for the Waimakariri District Council. It can even be seen as a ‘watershed’ in the early life of this Council.

In the years immediately after amalgamation, this Council’s Forward Planning Team as part of the preparation of the Proposed District Plan undertook itself, or commissioned, a number of studies. These included studies into aspects of the natural environment, socio/economic characteristics of the District based on Census data, and a major household survey.

In 1993 the Ministry for the Environment invited the Waimakariri District Council to become involved in its pilot Agenda 21 project. The Council chose to adopt ‘consultation’ as its contribution to this Ministry initiative. The Council’s main contribution involved conducting an intensive audit of one of its major consultation exercises, measuring it against established consultation principles, and ‘good practice’ guidelines. The emphasis on community consultation for “Vision 2020” can also be seen as part of the Council’s commitment to this Agenda 21 project.

At the same time, it became apparent to the Forward Planning Team that if the Waimakariri District Plan was to be the ‘break with the past’ in planning terms required by the Resource Management Act, the community should be involved in establishing the main settings for the Plan.

In addition, the then Mayor, the late Trevor Inch believed very strongly in the wisdom of his community. He considered that the people of the District understood a good deal about their area and its potential, and that it was important for the Council to capture this. As a result, he initiated a dialogue with the community about the kind of future its members favored and ways of achieving the desired outcomes, which was to become “Vision 2020”. This consultation exercise, in effect, led to the production of an Agenda 21 local action plan.

An initial discussion draft was ‘pulled together’ relatively quickly by members of the Forward Planning Team. The process used combined combing through the studies already to hand, workshops with the Council including several ‘visioning’ workshops where tentative proposals were evaluated by staff and outside consultants, searching the burgeoning ‘sustainable development’ literature and lots of coffee and cake!

The first version of “Vision 2020” was formally released with the local runanga at a hui at Tuahiwi Marae in December 1993, with a good deal of publicity. Local newspapers gave its launch excellent coverage, and members of the community were invited to forward comments on it.

This was followed by public workshops to which the people who had forwarded comments on “Vision 2020” were invited. These meetings provided opportunities for the Council and members of the public to debate ideas about the future. From the written comments and workshop proceedings a second draft of “Vision 2020” was compiled.

Between the first and second drafts the Council prepared three further studies:

- A District Profile which contained an analyses of the results of the 1991 Census for the District.

- An indepth survey of a sample of households that had moved into the district during the preceding 5 years.
- A survey of Kaiapoi and Rangiora businesses.

The second draft released for community comment, therefore, built on the first version of “Vision 2020”. It drew heavily on input from the community and the new information collected by the Council.

A similar strategy was adopted for the development of the final version. Further workshops, surveys, discussions with community groups and Council briefings were undertaken. Also as “Vision 2020” moved from its second draft to the final version, the number of people and organisations contributed increased.

In addition the emphasis in the document shifted, between the second and final version. The second draft focused on identifying –

1. How we saw ourselves at present
2. What was important to us
3. What we wanted to achieve by 2020

In the final version the desired outcomes for the year 2020 became the main focus, and general overarching strategies for achieving these objectives were specified. As a result “Vision 2020” became a more concise ‘higher order’ document, and any confusion that there may have been in the minds of some members of the community between it and the yet to be released District Plan was removed.

The Waimakariri District’s “Vision 2020” reached its final form through a process of evolution, and as a result of a partnership between the Council as facilitator and the community as the driving force in determining the substance of the vision. It was not developed from a set of professionally prepared scenarios, between which members of the community were invited to choose. The development of the Waimakariri District’s “Vision 2020” was, therefore, essentially community driven and professional input was limited.

From the outset, the Waimakariri District Council has drawn a clear distinction between “Vision 2020” which is seen as the community’s vision for the future of the District and its own long-range planning documents. The Council’s Strategic Plan identifies “Vision 2020” as a key source of ‘local directions’ in the Council’s policy and planning framework.

The Council acknowledges in its Strategic Plan that:

*‘In initiating the Vision 2020 process ... the Council recognised it could not set its own goals without knowing the community’s goals and aspirations. ... Nevertheless, the Council recognises it has a big part to play in making it happen.’*

In 2000 the Council initiated a review of “Vision 2020”. The objective of this review was –

- To confirm the statements to which the community continues to subscribe
- To identify the issues that warrant revision because of changes that have occurred since the release of the original document and/or the matters about which the community’s views have changed

To ensure that it remained a ‘community document’ this review, while facilitated by the Council has been overseen by a working party of representatives from key organisations in the Waimakariri District. This group included representatives of the Kaiapoi Community

Board, the Advisory Groups for the District's other three Wards, the Waimakariri Environment Society, and the business groups based in Rangiora and Kaiapoi.

As part of this review, the Waimakariri District Council also conducted a household survey, which addressed many of the matters covered by "Vision 2020".

At the outset the working party agreed that the review of "Vision 2020" would not involve a major revision, and that only limited changes were needed to bring the document up to date.

We are about to release a consultation draft of the revised version of "Vision 2020" to the community for comment.

There are, however, relatively few differences between this draft and the original document. We have added one or two new issues that were identified via the survey, and removed or reworded a few of the strategy statements to reflect the changes that have occurred during the last five years.

The members of the working party are also concerned that a way be found to give "Vision 2020" status in Resource Management processes.

At present we are exploring the possibility of having the Waimakariri District Council recognise it as a document drawn up under the Local Government Act s37(k) while maintaining the distinction between "Vision 2020" as a 'community vision' for the future of the District and the Council's own documents.