

District Plan Review – Discussion papers

Meeting: Council Briefing
Date of meeting: 02 September 2020
Reporting officer: Paula Hansen, Senior Policy Analyst

Purpose/Ngā whāinga

To provide an update on the District Plan review process and to seek direction on using discussion papers in order to gain initial feedback from the community.

Context/Horopaki

The ten year review of the District Plan is a significant project which will help plan for the future of the Kaipara District. Given its importance it is necessary to educate, inform and keep Elected Members up to date on the District Plan review progress.

The Spatial Planning exercise is just about to be completed in the coming months, so staff have started to consider how we progress the next step of the District Plan review, in particular, how we engage with our communities in a way that supports community feedback.

The District Plan is a large document that covers a high number of different topics. In order to help the community gain some understanding of these different topics, Council needs to consider different ways to convey information in a form that is easier to understand and in bite sized chunks.

This is to help enable our communities to provide meaningful feedback. This in turn will help Council gain an understanding of the current thoughts and views of the community on a particular matter.

Discussion papers are an informal way to achieve the above. They will also help flush out any areas of contention that would need to be addressed or identify further direction that will be required from Council. This feedback can then feed into the District Plan section 32 Evaluation reports that will support chapters

Discussion/Ngā kōrerorero

What have staff been working on

Staff have been progressing the spatial planning for Mangawhai and the sub-regional plan. A draft is due to be presented to Council at the October briefing for feedback before being adopted at the October Council meeting. Some additional communities have requested for Council to come and talk to them, pending the Covid-19 situation this may happen in mid-September. This will form the strategic direction within the District Plan and support plan development on how Kaipara is to grow over the next ten years.

Staff have been progressing the Northland Regional Policy Statement topics, being Outstanding Natural Features, Outstanding Natural Landscapes, Coastal Environment and Natural Character, Significant Natural Areas. Technical reports to support all of these topics are just about completed, and staff are looking to how we engage with both landowners and the wider community. This is being undertaken within current budgets. Discussion papers are in the process of being drafted to help support this engagement and will be presented to Council in the next couple of months, pending any effects from Covid-19.

Heritage is the next topic that will be covered next with a paper coming to the October Council briefing. This will be seeking direction on a preferred approach for the District Plan review to help guide where resources are to be directed and to determine if more budget is required for this matter. Elected Members will need to consider how they wish to encourage and support protection of Kaipara's Heritage and how they wish to celebrate Kaipara's Heritage through the District Plan.

Discussion Papers

One of the key ways Staff are promoting district plan matters, in order to educate, inform and gain feedback from our communities is the use of discussion papers. These will be a cost effective method using existing resources and budgets to gain community feedback.

What is a discussion paper?

A discussion paper aims to engage Kaipara communities by introducing a District Plan topic for comments and feedback. Some community members may be familiar with the topic, but others may not. The discussion paper is a concise document outlining the existing Operative Plan provision and suggested potential changes to inform the new District Plan. A technical report may also accompany a discussion paper so people can gain a better understanding of what it may mean to them.

Other information is provided to explain, the current resource management and/or social issues, alongside local government legal obligations, and KDC's organisational vision for the district. Most importantly, the paper provides a set of key questions for community members to answer. This will help inform the Council on what the appetite is for the suggested changes. Responses may also identify where more analysis or research is needed to ensure future District Plan provisions are technically robust. Any actual proposed changes will undergo more formal consultation utilising the discussion paper findings.

Purpose of discussion papers

To introduce a District Plan topic to the community and to gain initial feedback from our communities to help staff and Elected Members to understand community thinking and to help set direction on the topic. This information can then be feed into the s32 RMA evaluation on options for that topic. It also signals to our communities that we are starting work on a topic and how they can be involved.

When would we release a discussion paper?

It is intended that discussion documents will be released for most chapters. Where synergies exist between subject matters, more than one discussion paper maybe released at a time. Prior to release of discussion documents for community comments, they will first be presented to Elected Members. This is to ensure Elected Members know what we are doing and understand what we are seeking feedback on. The Council briefing paper will provide some additional information to allow Elected Members further understanding around why we are asking certain questions on a topic.

If the topic affects specific landowners, Council will contact property owners directly by post and where possible also by email. If the topic is more general utilisation of the people panel and or promotion through the Councils newspaper page, face book and contact lists will be used to direct people to Councils website.

Topics that have already been discussed with Elected Members include the Coastal Environment and Coastal Character areas, Outstanding Natural Features, GMO, Significant Natural Areas, Climate Change and the Strategic direction through the Spatial Plans. Discussion papers to aid engagement on these matters will be coming to Council in the next couple of months. Soon Heritage, Outstanding Landscapes and Rural will also be submitted to Council briefings.

Given the current Covid-19 climate, this program may change. The upfront and early community engagement is a key element of this DP program and as such any engagement may be impacted by future changes in Covid-19 response levels.

What would the discussion papers cover?

Each discussion paper will cover only one topic. Most proposed chapters of the District plan will have a discussion paper released for community feedback.

Typically, a discussion paper will:

- introduce a topic,
- provide some information about why we must address the topic,
- targeted questions on how the topic could be addressed within the District Plan.

The format of each discussion paper may change depending on the topic, the level of direction provided through best practice and how much we already know about the views of the community.

Example discussion paper – Notable Trees

The following is an example of the type of information that maybe presented to support a discussion document at a Council briefing. Attached is a draft Notable Tree discussion paper which is what we would put out to the community for feedback. Formatting can be further refined before being released to the community.

Notable Trees will form part of the Heritage Chapter of the District Plan, as they are important to cultural, social and environmental identity. They provide part of the story that forms the history of the District. They are also recognised as being of national importance under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

One of the accepted ways to determine if a tree is notable is to use the Standard Tree Evaluation Method (STEM)¹. This uses a point system, where trees above a certain amount of points by applying certain criteria, currently set at 150, can be included into the district plan. Council has the discretion to decide where the point threshold should be set at. The STEM Method is a common method used by most Councils. Most set their points between 100 and 150.

Council has never undertaken a district wide research to identify notable trees. This is in part because the current district plan provides the protection of notable trees through mutual agreements between Council and private landowners concerned.

This means if a landowner wants to protect a particular tree they can ask Council to assess it and if it meets the current 150points threshold then it can be protected in the District Plan. Currently of the 10 sites with notable trees listed in the District Plan, two no longer exist, five sites are on Council land and three are on private property. An arborist has re-assessed the present listed heritage trees as part of the process. If the criteria changes, in particular the points threshold, and new trees are nominated these will also be assessed by an arborist to determine their ranking.

Not many Councils have a second layer to notable trees. A second layer can recognise upcoming trees that don't quite meet the STEM points but may do in the future or they recognise trees that were planted for a certain purpose, such as commemorating an event. Words to describe the different levels include, first layer - significant value and second layer - high value.

Council needs to consider if they would like to see more notable trees listed and protected within the District Plan. In doing so, council also needs to consider if or how they wish to incentivize people to protect notable trees so they can continue to tell the story of the Kaipara District.

This is a topic that council currently has little to no knowledge on the preferences of the community to help inform the District Plan. Therefore, the basis of the discussion paper is to gain feedback from the community on this topic that can then be reported back to council where formal direction will be sought. Once direction has been received, Council staff may then progress with the District Plan development.

Attachment A contains a copy of the discussion to be released for informal public feedback.

Next steps/E whaiake nei

To progress the District Plan Review as presented.

Attachments/Ngā tapiritanga

	Title
A	Draft discussion paper Notable trees

¹ More information on STEM can be found on the New Zealand Tree Register website:
<https://www.notabletrees.org.nz/stem>

