



Waimakariri Way: Community Engagement in Kaiapoi Town Centre Plan

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ABSTRACT

Waimakariri District Council's Kaiapoi Town Centre Plan (KTCP) is part of a broader recovery - and now regeneration - process for Kaiapoi following the 2010 earthquakes. The Council employed a number of innovative and interactive tools and engagement strategies in order to facilitate public participation in the process. Importantly, these tools and strategies reflect a 'community-based' logic that, combined, enact a distinctive methodology often referred to as the 'Waimakariri Way'.

Keywords: community engagement, community development, disaster recovery, regeneration

1. BACKGROUND

The 2010 earthquake resulted in extensive damage to Kaiapoi, Pines Beach and Kairaki in the Waimakariri District. Though affecting a smaller area, proportionally, Kaiapoi was as badly affected as the city of Christchurch. In the aftermath, over 5, 000 people lost water and sewer services (Vallance, 2013). Almost 1,200 homes (a third of all housing stock in Kaiapoi) and most homes in Pines Beach and Kairaki - were severely damaged (Vallance, 2013). A quarter of Kaiapoi businesses were immediately closed, and there was widespread damage to local infrastructure.

In 2011, the Council began work on the Kaiapoi Town Centre plan based on the understanding that land prone to liquefaction would be remediated and the housing stock and damaged businesses rebuilt. A comprehensive and integrated rebuild was developed and machinery was on-site to begin when the first of a series of Red Zone decisions were made by the then- Minister for Earthquake Recovery, Hon. Gerry Brownlee. In

these zones, the cost of remediation and rebuild was considered too costly, thus, in Kaiapoi 1,048 houses (almost 90 hectares of land) surrounding the Town Centre were red-zoned and the homes on that land were subsequently demolished.

Post-earthquake, Waimakariri District Council (WMK) have won a number of accolades and awards for the high level of public participation they managed to achieve during the preparation of their various recovery and now regeneration plans and strategies. This overview is part of a larger project undertaken by the National Science Challenge 'Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities' which is aimed at identifying and analysing the organisational practises and process tools that made the Residential Red Zone Recovery Plan's, 2016 (RRZRP) collaboration process so effective and compares these with the current Kaiapoi Town Centre Plan - 2028 and Beyond (KTCP). Data for this project has been collected by reviewing secondary sources describing the processes of

both the RRZRP and KTCP. This has included official documents from the council's website, journal articles, reports and newspaper clips¹. Primary data was collected by interviewing a selection of current and past senior management staff from the WMK and a selection of community members who made submissions on the plans. In order to target participants who were involved in both the RRZRP and KTCP, the snowball sampling technique was employed².



Figure 1: Waimakariri Residential Red Zone Recovery Plan Report on 3D Model – Community Sessions

Post-disaster, government organisations face the difficult task of creating recovery plans that are both inclusive as well as speedy (Olshansky, 2006). For life to normalise, essential services and infrastructure needs to be fixed as soon as possible. Inclusive community-based plans require some sort of consensus to be achieved across the affected community (Chandrasekhar, 2012). Regardless of the methods employed, deliberation and consensus building tend to be time intensive. Hence, speed and inclusiveness tend to be at odds with each other in any recovery planning scenario.

WMK's KTCP is an extension of an initial 'community-based' response, recovery and now regeneration process for Kaiapoi. The process has revolved around the need to engage and work with the affected community. This was not an easy task as, WMK staff were trying to engage with people who were traumatised by the earthquake and its ongoing aftershocks (Waimakariri District Council, 2017). Added to this complexity was

the fact people had to deal with the stressful legal and insurance related procedures. This context distinguishes recovery planning from business-as-usual.

To achieve high levels of public participation the WMK employed a number of innovative and interactive tools and engagement strategies. The aim was not just to achieve high levels of public participation (quantitatively), but to ensure that ideas for future land use of the red zone areas came from a wide cross-section of a well-informed public. This article provides a brief insight into the way in which WMK operate by examining their initial response to the disaster, the recovery planning procedure of the RRZRP and the regeneration planning process of the KTCP. More research is required to determine the effects that inclusive community-based decision making can have over long-term recovery and regeneration. Nevertheless, certain key points have been picked up from the way in which WMK operate.

2. WAIMAKARIRI WAY

2.1 The Initial response to the Earthquake:

WMK head office and most of its staff are situated in Rangiora but, soon after the earthquake, the council set up a base in Kaiapoi called the Hub (Vallance, 2015). As a result of the extensive damage caused to the town, it was deemed necessary to have representatives on the ground talking to affected people and both coordinating and enabling response and recovery efforts. The Hub acted as an integrated centre where people could air their grievances and receive the help/advice they needed to move forward. Infrastructure and social recovery managers, an earthquake communications manager, representatives from the Inland Revenue Department, Work and Income New Zealand and an authorised building company were some of the people based at the Hub. Additionally, local NGOs providing a range of support services and representatives from Waimakariri Earthquake Support Service were

¹ The appendix contains a sample of some of the resources which were examined.

² Further details – including information about the methodology and primary data collection – are available from Dr. Vallance, Suzanne.vallance@lincoln.ac.nz .

also housed at the Hub. This integrated presence resulted in a good flow of information between affected people, WMK staff and other organisations involved in the recovery process. Response efforts were informed by the affected community and the affected public received information and expertise (for example engineering expertise) in a timely and well-organised manner.

2.2 Red Zone Recovery Plan:

Initially, the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority conducted a campaign called *Canvas (2014)*, which was aimed at identifying community ideas for future red zone land use (Waimakariri District Council, 2016). Subsequently, the Minister directed WMK to prepare the red zone recovery plan founded on the ideas highlighted by the Canvas campaign. Once prepared, the draft plan went through a *Let's Discuss (2015)* phase aimed at procuring community feedback on the prepared draft. However, the draft received a very low number of submissions. This was interpreted by council staff as indicating a lack of engagement and some level of 'consultation fatigue' caused by the extended recovery sequence.

WMK decided to employ a number of different techniques in the hope of better engaging the community. Information surrounding the plan was shared through websites, emails, advertisements, local newspapers, flyover videos and social media (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube). Face to face interactions occurred during workshops, meetings and update sessions.

Another innovative technique was the use of 3D models depicting potential land use for the red zone areas. Colour coded models were printed on foam boards and taken to a variety of locations. Children from local schools created miniature buildings and trees to bring the representations to life (Waimakariri District Council, 2016). As the models were displayed at different locations, people were able to share their thoughts on potential land uses with council staff. Moving colour coded flags around the displays helped facilitate conversations about the strengths and weaknesses of different options. Blue flags

allowed people to highlight what they liked, orange flags indicated areas of concern and



Figure 2: Areas of Kaiapoi that were Red Zoned within the KTC circled

pink flags were used to propose new ideas. These sessions gave WMK staff a chance to interact with participants, answer queries and explain the specifics of the plan. This hands-on active participation technique seemed to appeal to a wide cross-section of society as everyone from small children to the elderly participated in the 3D model community sessions. Over 400 people visited the various sessions and about 197 flags were attached to the displays. As a result, the Council managed to achieve a higher level of engagement when compared to the low number of submissions received during the previous *Let's Discuss* phase of the plan.

In 2016 the RRZRP was approved and this resulted in red zone land becoming areas of regeneration. The plan outlines proposed land uses and activities for the five regeneration areas of Kairaki, The Pines beach, Kaiapoi East, Kaiapoi West and Kaiapoi South. Given the context, the plan initially focussed on non-built and non-residential options such as a dog park, reserves, walking and cycling links, new parks, a BMX track, mahinga kai activities, rural applications, roads and infrastructure sites, as well as some 'mixed-use business areas' (MUBAs) for those parts of the Red Zone immediately adjacent to the town centre (Waimakariri District Council, n.d.). These MUBAs comprise the areas that are now the focus of the KTCP.

2.3 Who was involved in the KTCP?

The Council used various tools and methods of engagement to inform both the RRZRP and the KTCP, including multi-criteria assessment of uses and activities reviewed by a range of experts, street corner meetings for those affected by decisions, drop-in sessions, regular meetings with the Regeneration Committee that included representation from both Councillors and Community Board members and was attended by representatives from NgaTuahuriri, ENC, WBNC and other stakeholders. There were also a number of larger town meetings where the Mayor, CE, senior managers and technical staff were present to ask and answer questions. For the KTCP specifically, three Inquiry by Design sessions were undertaken with the business community by an independent consultant (Boffa Miskell), along with two larger public meetings (one more for commercial interests to test the findings of the IBDs, and one for the general public).

Importantly, these 'tools' or 'methods' reflect a distinctive logic that, combined, enact a distinctive engagement methodology often referred to as the 'Waimakariri Way'. For the council this is articulated in Tā Mātou Mauri (Our Values):

- Act with integrity, honesty and trust;
- Work with you and each other;
- Keep you informed;
- Do better every day;
- Take responsibility.

What this looks like in practice is evident in a story from a senior manager describing the Council's early earthquake response:

"Traditionally TLAs do not step across the home-owner's boundary and any infrastructure issues between the house and the front boundary is the home-owner's problem. But post-earthquake it would have been impossible to just call a plumber to get the issue fixed. So we [Waimakariri District Council] made a decision fairly early on to liaise with EQC and coordinate repairs across the boundary because there's no point us fixing our side of the sewer and people still not being able

to use [the toilet] because the pipe between the house and the boundary is broken"(as reported by Vallance, 2013)

3. KEY MESSAGES

Six key points emerged from our analysis of how WMK operates:

- The planning process – irrespective of the plan that comes out of it – plays an important role in recovery: Recovery and regeneration planning does two things. First – and very traditionally - the focus is on the way the public informs plans. The second, less well-understood outcome of recovery planning concerns the way these processes build or compromise relationships between the council and the community, and between community members. As we heard during our research, some people who made submissions on plans 'didn't get what [they] wanted but [they] felt heard and respected'.
- It is important for all council staff to have good interpersonal skills: A council ambition – implicit in Tā Mātou Mauri – is that all council staff members are engagement officers all the time. The people writing the plan should be at the head of the process and be a part of the communication team that goes out and engages with the community. Even 'technical staff' are encouraged to see themselves and their role in this way. As we were told by one staff member, if your budget is limited and you don't think you can afford a prolonged community engagement process, "don't hide, be a face, be out there".
- Information sharing is key: It was also emphasised that it is important to empower both communities and elected members with good information and advice. This can mean having staff who can answer technical questions in an easy-to-understand way present at community meetings.
- Open to experimentation: We were also told that it is essential to have a good communication team who are open to

experiment and who are not afraid to engage. It is important to try new things, employ innovative techniques and engage people using different forms of social media such as YouTube clips.

- Meaningful engagement: Spending time engaging well, through drop-ins, one on one interactions, integrated assessments, 3Dmodel sessions, IBDs are all examples where council staff could speak with those making the comments. Such interactions in-situ provide a different understanding of the context and generates outcomes that reading a submission in a formal setting does not.
- Post-disaster - Important to create a one-stop shop to coordinate relief and recovery efforts: An integrated hub could also be used to share information and provide a number of support services. A two-way flow of information could be used to ensure that relief and recovery efforts are directed towards providing support to the most affected/vulnerable sections of the community.

While we know that not everyone is wholly satisfied with the processes or the plans, our research thus far does demonstrate the importance of seeing the process of planning as have implications and effects. Being satisfied with the process – feeling heard and respected, understanding why the request was denied - can mitigate the negative consequences of not necessarily getting what is wanted. Doing engagement well places unique demands on the organisation - across budgets, human resources, personal relationships, ‘thinking outside the box’ and so on – thus the key messages presented here will likely depend on developing an institutional culture that enables this kind of approach. More research is required to establish how and why innovative and engaging cultures can be developed within local government and other organisations with a public remit.

Acknowledgements:

We gratefully acknowledge funding support for this research from the *Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities National Science Challenge*.

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5. APPENDIX

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