

Submission: Thames Coromandel District Council Draft Long Term Plan 2024-2034

5 April 2021

Thames Coromandel District Council
Private Bag
Thames

Attention: Len Salt, Mayor

On behalf of the Hahei Residents and Ratepayers Association (HRRRA), we wish to make the following submission in relation to the draft Long-Term Plan (LTP) 2024 – 2034.

1 Executive Summary

Following Covid 19 and before Cyclone Gabrielle hit New Zealand, Hahei was starting to regain its status as an internationally renowned tourism destination. Last summer's one in 100-year series of weather events hit and everything changed.

Residents, businesses, and visitors had no direct access to the east coast and only the hardest of absentee property owners took the 'lucky loop' to get here. Add to that the closure of Cathedral Cove and its track by DOC and it's fair to say our economy took a massive hit.

How tourism will develop in the future, and what impact an extended closure of the Cathedral Cove track will have is difficult to predict, and so our submission on the draft LTP is based less on tourism and more on building robust infrastructure.

We believe investment in Hahei should focus on preserving our unique coastal village character; the provision of infrastructure to deliver safe drinking water and a progressively expanded sewage treatment system; and resilience. In this regard, we are disappointed that the July 2023 update provided by HRRRA to the Mercury Bay South Community Plan 2020-2030 that is specific to Hahei, has largely been ignored in the development of the draft LTP 2024-2034.

A summary of key issues for Hahei is follows.

- **Access and Egress** – The Mercury Bay South communities between Hot Water Beach and Ferry Landing frequently become fully isolated from SH25 by flooding on Hot Water Beach Road at Newtons Bridge/Dalmeny Corner. This occurs at any time that a heavy rain event coincides with a high tide, which with climate change is becoming noticeably more frequent. When it does occur, the flooding generates social, economic and safety issues for all the communities affected, and for visitors and tourists. We recommend that early priority be given to either raising and/or bridging the approximately 300m of affected road including Newtons Bridge.

- ***Upgrade and Expand Drinking Water Coverage that Complies with Water Regulations*** – This is critical for our community. Council has already started this project and it must continue.
- ***Provide Sewage Collection and Treatment to Properties Adjacent to Wigmore Stream*** – The Harrison Grierson report of 2021 explained that the existing treatment has the capacity to treat sewage from the 79 properties near the Wigmore Stream. Without doubt the unhealthy nature of the Wigmore Stream is partly contributed to by the septic tanks used by the 79 properties located adjacent to the stream. This was prioritised following our 2021 submission, but funding was subsequently withdrawn and redirected elsewhere. Now the draft LTP 2024-2034 seeks to further defer any capex for another two years. This is an unacceptable response given that the unsafe nature of the Wigmore Stream. As a start, we believe that the LTP 2024-2034 should include provision for Council to commence immediately with discussions with the 79 property owners, and to connect them to the reticulated sewage scheme as a matter of priority.
- ***Continued Development of a Walkable Village*** – Walkways that have already been established in Hahei over the past decade have improved the pedestrian experience in Hahei, but more must be done to enable the achievement of a walkable village with all the safety, amenity, environmental and health benefits that will flow from doing so. We request Council work with us to continuously to improve the walkability of Hahei. As an immediate priority, provision should be made to implement a modified speed limit regime for Hahei, and to support this with improved pedestrian and traffic management in the village centre and at the beachfront.
- ***Enhance the usability of our Reserves*** – We want to offer beachfront amenities and recreational facilities that enhance people's experience while visiting the beach, ensuring that their safety, comfort, and enjoyment take precedence over car parking.

2 Access and Egress

Despite numerous Mercury Bay South communities attempting over the decades to highlight to Council their concerns regarding the safety and resilience of Hot Water Beach Road at Dalmeny Corner (as further explained below), it is disappointing that the issue continues to be ignored, including in the Draft LTP 2024-2034.

The SH25 intersection with Hot Water Beach Road (Dalmeny Corner/Newtons Bridge) provides the only road access/egress for all the villages between Hot Water Beach and Ferry Landing. It services over 2,000 properties. The floodplain is approximately 300 metres of road adjoining the Whenuakite River between SH 25 at Dalmeny Corner and Newtons Bridge (one lane bridge).

The frequency and severity of flooding in this area was more than evident in summer 2023, and with global warming is only likely to become more severe. The flooding of this piece of road affects the social and economic life of the communities in Mercury Bay South and leaves the residents vulnerable.

There is also the safety issue associated primarily with unfamiliar drivers who are generally unaware of how deep and swiftly flowing the floodwater flows across the road can become, especially if travelling at night. It is only by good luck that to date there have been no serious or fatal mishaps during a flooding event.

While it is acknowledged that addressing the effects of the flooding will not be an easy fix, the problem has persisted for too long already, and with the increased frequency of flooding that is inevitable with climate change, it must be addressed sooner rather than later either by raising and/or bridging the approximately 300m of affected road including Newtons Bridge.

3 Upgrade and Expand Drinking Water Coverage

3.1 Background

Currently, Hahei is served by the following potable water providers:

- Council operated water system, managed by Veolia, supplying approx. 150 properties.
- Hahei Water Supply Association (HWSA) – a voluntary group that supplies water to 171 properties.
- Grange Road Water Association (GRWA) - a voluntary group that supplies water to 79 properties GRWA water complies with current water regulations.
- Hahei Holidays Resort - provide water their clients.
- Approximately 150 properties rely on rainwater systems.
- An unknown number of private wells.
- Approximately 80 new properties may wish to access potable water, as covered in Structure Plan covering the entrance to Hahei.

Water consumption has been rising due to more permanent residents and tourists renting properties.

The HWSA is facing a number of issues that are going to affect its short to medium term viability. Although since our last submission Council has agreed to supply bulk treated water to HWSA from later this year to make operating the supply more straight-forward, it is going to be very difficult to continue to operate this system into the future. The HWSA are a voluntary organisation, and they find it increasingly difficult to attract volunteers onto the committee that runs the water system.

HWSA want Council to take over their water supply assets and operate their supply in conjunction with its own reticulated Hahei supply. Over time, and consistent with the Council Infrastructure Strategy principles, the HWSA would be upgraded to meet Council engineering standards, and also meet fire-fighting requirements given that Hahei is gazetted as an urban fire district.

The feasibility mahi that commenced in 2020 needs to be expanded on, and concept designs and costing for several options for the community to consider and provide

feedback on needs to take place with some urgency as currently 180 properties, are potentially using non-compliant potable water.

We note that the draft LTP has \$3.3M allocated for 24/25 and notes part of this allocation is for the Hahei extension, but there are no specific details. An additional \$5.6m is allocated for drinking water standards upgrades across the District in 24/25 to 25/26 but again no specific details have been provided.

All reticulated water systems take water from aquifers that may be interconnected. While the bores have been able to provide the required amount of water for most of the year, there have been water rationing measures in summer for the last few years.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 Compliance with NZ Potable Water Standards

The Havelock North Inquiry raised the importance of compliance with relevant water standards, issued by the NZ Health Dept. We understand the Council water supply has implemented the necessary upgrades, as have the Grange Road Water Association but these two entities only provide water to roughly a third of Hahei's residents. So potentially, 66% of Hahei's ratepayers may be using non-compliant water.

3.2.2 Harrison Grierson Report

We acknowledge and thank Council for procuring the Harrison Grierson Feasibility Study for Water in Hahei. The report provides a good basis for expanding potable water coverage in Hahei. Now Council needs to engage with the community to reach a consensus on its recommendations.

3.2.3 Three Water Review

We recognise the Government is repealing the Three Water Review, and there is considerable uncertainty. We request that Council makes clear in any discussions with central Government that Hahei is a particularly important village in the Coromandel and should be given top priority in any future investment plans.

3.3 Recommendations

We believe this investment is critical for Hahei and request that this investment is prioritised.

4 Upgrade Hahei Sewage Collection and Treatment Systems

4.1 Background

Currently, 180 properties in Hahei are served by a Council owned and operated sewage system. Sewage from connected properties flows to a treatment plant from which it is discharged in the Wigmore Stream. But there are approximately 550 properties in Hahei and so a relatively small proportion of Hahei Village has reticulated sewage collection.

The community has expressed great concern over the state of the Wigmore Stream which discharges into the Hahei Bay. Children often play in this stream.

In 2020, Council arranged for Harrison and Grierson to prepare Wastewater Expansion Feasibility Study. This study recommended in Section 6.0 Interim Options, that the 79 properties adjacent to the Wigmore Stream are connected to the existing treatment. The existing plant has sufficient capacity and so the interim upgrade would only involve installation of collection sewers.

4.2 Issues

4.2.1 Condition of Wigmore and Tutaritari Streams

It is well documented that the Wigmore Stream is unsafe for swimming. The community wish to improve the quality to bring it up to swimming water quality. We recognise we must address the entire Hahei catchment area, with the quality of the water of the Tutaritari Stream which exits at the north end of the beach also being of concern.

We realise that this includes rural and residential areas. To implement the total clean-up strategy, we will need funding from Council for wastewater and storm water discharges. In addition, we will need continued support from WRC to help adjacent farmers fence streams etc.

4.2.2 Health of our Tourist – Our reputation as one of NZ's top destinations

If Hahei and Cathedral Cove are to remain world class tourist destinations, we must take care of our environment. Tourists come to Hahei to experience the pristine ocean and enjoy marine life at the marine reserve.

4.2.3 Property Connections

The most difficult aspect of implementation the expanded sewage system will be connecting properties to the sewers. As we saw in the Emma Place expansion, not all property owners wished to connect. Council needs to work closely with the community to develop generally acceptable protocols.

4.3 Recommendations

We believe that extension of reticulation to the 79 Wigmore Stream properties should have a higher priority than it has been given - it is disappointing in this regard that the Draft LTP 2024-2034 appears to have kicked the can down the road for a further two years. Rather, we see this investment as being critical for Hahei and request that this investment is **prioritised** once again.

Furthermore, until the Wigmore property owners are consulted, and a definitive implementation plan agreed, there can be no more connections to the Hahei Waste treatment plant. Any spare capacity must be reserved for Wigmore property owners as they have the most effect on the quality of the Wigmore Stream.

Following that in order of priority, is the addition of the properties on Hahei Beach Road and Tutaritari Road which adjoin the Tutaritari Stream and lead to the lower level of the stream.

The Hahei Residents & Ratepayers Association take samples from Tutaritari Estuary on a regular basis over summer and the results make the stream unsafe for swimming.

5 Walkable Village

As Hahei has changed from being a quiet seaside village to one of New Zealand's top tourist destinations, we have looked for a strategy that creates a sustainable balance between tourism and lifestyle expectations of Hahei property owners and residents.

We need to have a long-term solution that will work for everyone.

With the closure last year, and ongoing uncertainty of what will happen with Cathedral Cove, many of the excellent solutions implemented over the last 5+ years have been let slide. The Hahei Village Entrance Visitor carpark (Visitor Carpark) has seen limited use over the last 12 months and the park and ride service which solved many of our congestion problems is no longer operating.

Regardless of the closure of the Cathedral Cove track we have observed increasing numbers of visitors electing to walk from the Visitor Carpark. Feedback from these walkers, both visitor and residents, has led us to develop the concept of a Walkable Village. This will offer the best solution for our community and could well be an appropriate model for other Coromandel Communities.

The key aspects for the Walkable Village are

- A reduced speed limit for the whole of Hahei (40 km/h)
- Shared Space streets
- Integration of pedestrian crossing locations with traffic calming measures
- Connected, attractive, and safe walkways and foot paths.
- Visitors encouraged to park at the Visitor Carpark

The Walkable Village concept has general community support and now we must develop a plan that enables our community to understand exactly what it would involve. We need to address important issues such as pedestrian amenity and safety, effect on businesses, parking along verges, access to properties etc. This summer, day visitors to Hahei have reverted to parking on Hahei Beach Road and not using the Visitor Carpark.

We have supplied concept plans to Council of how we see the walkable village working.

In Hahei we have professionally qualified residents to lead the development, but they require support for Council staff to develop the concept to the next stage.

5.1 Recommendations

We recommend the LTP include the following:

- Immediate priority: implement a modified speed limit regime for Hahei and support it through strategically located 'slow points' that are designed to be appropriately sympathetic to the coastal village environment of Hahei.
- Immediate priority: Extend the footpath on the western side of Hahei Beach from 40 Hahei Beach Road (opposite Dawn Avenue) to the beach; and upgrade the interface between the northern end of Hahei Beach Road, the beach, and the beachfront reserve to give priority to the safety, connectivity and amenity of pedestrians.

- Immediate priority: improve traffic and pedestrian management on Hahei Beach Road between the fire station and Grange Road.
- Medium-term priority: extend the Pa Road footpath to the driveway at No1 Wigmore Crescent in order to improve safety at that point.

6 Reserves

The integration of the walkable village initiative with the revitalization of the beachfront reserve and beachfront carpark forms a key part of our vision for the Hahei community.

We want to offer beachfront amenities and recreational facilities that enhance people's experience while visiting the beach, ensuring their safety, comfort, and enjoyment take precedence over car parking considerations.

6.1 Recommendations

We recommend the LTP include the following:

- In the medium term, development of the beachfront reserve, including the renewal of beachfront toilets and an upgrade to effluent systems.
- Focus on enhancing both passive and active recreational amenities and facilities. This enhancement aims to broaden access and utilization of the Kotare Reserve, making it more accessible and enjoyable for a wider spectrum of the community.
- Additionally, the development of a walkway alongside Wigmore Stream connecting Pa Road to the beach. This walkway will not only improve accessibility but also promote a healthier and more active lifestyle among residents and visitors alike.

Yours faithfully

John Jonassen

Chair

Hahei Residents & Ratepayers Association