

PC50 Rural Focus Group – Meeting 4 Notes

28 JULY 2020, 7-9PM – UPPER HUTT LIBRARY



Introduction and task explanation:

The meeting began with a brief introduction and welcome, which included introducing the new Panning Policy Manager, Emily Thomson, to the group. Emily provided a brief background about herself and her career, as well as her involvement in PC50.

Council Officers offered a brief overview of the work which has been undertaken so far on PC50 to ensure the group understood where PC50 is currently at along its projected timeline, specifically mentioning the Issues and Opportunities consultation which ran from March to May 2020.

It was enquired by a member about other policy work which has been completed during the last meeting which may have an influence on the PC50 project. Officers explained how the Sustainability Strategy also went out for consultation during the same period as the PC50 Issues and Opportunities, and how this Strategy may have an influence on the work of PC50.

Members also enquired about future consultations for PC50, with Officers responding that the next stage of consultation (Strategic Objectives and Policies) will also be a full public consultation.

Officers proceeded to provide context regarding changes to national legislation which have come into force since the last meeting. Members enquired about the amendments to the RMA which would allow for the consideration of climate change emissions, with members querying the role the regional council will play in defining emissions levels in relation to the role that Upper Hutt Council will have in defining emissions levels. Council Officers explained that the Regional Emissions Reduction Plan would need to be developed by GWRC, with likely input from across the Region from Councils and the Public alike, and that UHCC will be required to consider this as part of its District Plan review.

Members also enquired about the current status of the Significant Natural Areas Plan Change (SNAs) and the Greater Wellington Proposed Natural Resources Plan. An update was provided on these projects by Council Officers, and their influence on PC50 was also clarified.

The National Planning Standard for Urban Development (NPS-UD) was also introduced to the group by Officers, including its specific removal of parking restrictions, the enablement of six storey development and greater housing diversity, and the integration of a housing bottom line to the Plan. Officers presented a visualisation of walking distances from rapid transport stops where six storey development would need to be enabled. Council officers explained that 'walking distance' had not yet been defined by the NPS, as well as explaining that the housing bottom line in the NPS would be based on the HBA figure (Wellington Housing and Business Development Capacity Assessment 2019), which reflected development sufficiency over a 30 year period.

Members enquired about the National Biodiversity Strategy and its implications on PC50. Officers explained its limited weighting under RMA considerations and stated how the National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB) instead could affect both the SNA Plan Change and PC50. Officers explained that as the NPS-IB is only in draft form it could not be incorporated into consideration for the SNA plan change, but could be relevant for PC50, depending on the gazettal of the Policy Statement.

Officers went on to inform the group of the consultation response received for the Issues and Opportunities engagement. Although some members commented that the number of responses was low compared to the overall population of Upper Hutt, Officers stated that the response level was substantially higher than what was normally received for a plan change, and was generally high than they had anticipated given the Covid-19 lockdown.

Public response and feedback from specific topics was briefly discussed. Members provided comments on the following feedback topics:

- Members commented that some people did not fully understand the implications of building a second dwelling on a plot without the ability to subdivide, which could result in the inability to sell of the second property. Future controls therefore should consider whether a landowner may wish to subdivide at a later stage.
- The level of support for intensification around Wallaceville Church was enquired about, and Officers confirmed that the idea of development around this area was generally supported.
- Subdivision and intensification areas and the method of controlling these was also discussed. Focusing intensification away from lifestyle blocks was raised as a preferable option by some members. Members noting that those persons who chose to live on a lifestyle block had chosen to do so to avoid greater density.
- Potential special character zones in the rural area were also proposed as a potential option, taking into account ecological, heritage and recreational values in these areas to ensure these were protected through suitable zoning.
- The issue of stormwater control was also raised by members. Discussion included the use of permeable surfaces to control storm water, and how hydraulic neutrality could be used for development.

After this discussion the focus group members split into smaller groups. Groups were asked to provide feedback on draft broad outcome statements for rural areas and the methods on how these outcomes could be achieved, including whether they felt further outcomes should be stated to more clearly define the intended future state of rural areas.

Post-exercise feedback session

After the feedback exercise was completed, members were asked for any additional feedback they wished to provide on the topics. The comments received for each topic are shown below.

Topic 1 - Management of Growth Areas:

- Members highlighted that not all climate change effects may be adverse, and therefore this wording may not be the most appropriate. Therefore the outcome could be more based around flexibility to responding to the effects of climate change, which would account for both positive and negative effects.
- One member commented that they would like to see a biodiversity restoration plan submitted before any development occurred to ensure that the land was left in a 'better' state than when it started, although other members commented that this could result in a burden to developers. Members noted that the principle of seeking improvement on what we currently have, no matter how small, could be an attainable goal.

Topic 2 - Retaining Rural Character:

- Members mentioned that there was a degree of ambiguity over what is considered to be aesthetic and character, with more clarity needed on these subjects. It was mentioned that rural character is changing, and that there is some character which may not be suitable to retain going forward.

Topic 3 – Subdivision Style:

- Members mentioned that there should be a degree of pragmatism with regards to the plot sizes for subdivision, as there needs to be a diversity in sizes to cater for different needs.

Topics 4 and 5 were not discussed due to time constraints.

One final comment was provided by a member, stating that they believed the burden should not be on the rural area to accommodate the shortfall in housing growth, and that the urban area should be a targeted area for growth.

Close & Next Meeting

An overview of how this feedback contributed to future policy development and public engagement was provided. Officers also detailed the intended accelerated timeframe due to the Covid-19 lockdown, stating that they would like to meet again in roughly 3-4 weeks, which members agreed to.