

5 Objectives and Policies for the District's Rural Areas

5.1 Introduction

The rural area supports the primary production economic base of the district - farming (mainly dairying), electricity production, production forestry and supporting processing facilities. It is also the location for the network utilities and infrastructure that enable the South Waikato to function and link it to the rest of New Zealand.

Plantation forests cover a sizeable part of the southern portion of the District while the northern part has dairying as the principal land use. Major dairy and timber processing plants operate throughout the district. The eastern part of the district generally defined by the Mamaku plateau contains relatively unmodified indigenous forest ecosystems and indigenous fauna. Large parts of the Mamaku plateau are managed by the Department of Conservation. In the western part of the district ecological values have been substantially reduced, fragmented and disconnected from those in the east. Management of the rural area including the predominant land uses of plantation forestry and farming can play an important role in maintaining indigenous biodiversity.

A large proportion of the district's rural area is located within the catchments of the Waikato River and as such is subject to the policy directions contained within the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River.

The character and level of amenity of the rural area reflects that of a **working environment** – a predominantly primary production pattern of land use with a generally dispersed, low profile pattern of settlement often with multiple dwellings and farm related buildings such as dairy sheds, vehicle and implement sheds, grain and food silos, and effluent fields, generally well set back from roads, and large production forest plantations which are serviced by an extensive network of private roads. A range of other activities are carried out in the rural area including recreation and tourism enterprises, horticulture, intensive farming activities (such as poultry farming and piggeries), mineral exploration, mining and quarry operations, and transport depots.

Most of the major processing industries and key sites are located in the rural area as well; for example the Kinleith Mill and surrounding industrial complex, the Lichfield dairy processing plants, and the hydro-electric power generating facilities and associated infrastructure on the Waikato River at Arapuni, Waipapa, Maraetai, Whakamaru and Atiamuri.

Renewable electricity generation activities require a location at or near the renewable energy resource from which they generate. This inevitably means such activities require a rural location. The district contains several such facilities, and in accordance with the national significance afforded renewable electricity generation facilities in meeting future energy demand, it is likely additional facilities will need to be located in rural areas in the future.

Similarly mineral exploration, mining and quarrying operations activities require a location at or near the mineral resource, and this is almost always located within rural areas. The district contains several mineral exploration, mining and quarrying operations, and in accordance with the on-going demand for mineral resources, it is likely additional and expanded facilities will need to be located in rural areas in the future.

The rural area is expected to receive further primary processing facilities that will operate twenty four hours a day, seven days a week at peak times of the season. Associated facilities include store/loading areas including the bulk storage of hazardous substances for cleaning process plant and equipment, wastewater treatment, tanker reception areas, services buildings and storage silos.

New and sensitive land uses (such as rural-residential development) wishing to establish near these major industrial sites must recognise the scale of these activities and their environmental effects, so restrictions on land use, subdivision and the set back of sensitive activities is necessary to avoid inhibiting the operation of these consented or lawfully-established facilities.

Inappropriate land uses and activities (especially sensitive activities) in close proximity to the Electricity Transmission Network can compromise the operation, maintenance and upgrading and development of the electricity transmission network. In this regard, recognising the Electricity Transmission Network and providing an appropriate buffer is a matter of national importance for Council to consider.

Similar issues arise in association with the operation of Tokoroa airport which is also an important District Council owned and managed asset comprising 35 hectares adjacent to Amisfield. In addition to aviation activities

provided for there is a range of recreational sports clubs that use the facility. Restrictions on land use, subdivision and the set back of sensitive activities are necessary to avoid inhibiting the operation of the airport and any future expansion plans.

Ensuring that there are no unnecessary barriers to papakāinga and marae development is an important issue for Raukawa who have a sizable part of the iwi living in some of the more remote parts of the district. This special relationship that Raukawa have with the district's natural resources must be recognised as part of a holistic approach to the integrated management of these resources.

Subdivision of rural land for lifestyle and other purposes has occurred to a limited extent over the last decade. While limited, demand for rural living is growing and can be provided for but needs to be managed to avoid fragmentation of the rural land resource and the cumulative effects associated with a loss of productive options over time. There are also cumulative effects on the transportation system arising from rural residential/ lifestyle development. Locations have been identified to provide for rural residential living without adversely affecting the transportation system or compromising the production capacity as a result of fragmentation into smaller lots solely for rural living purposes.

The rural land resource is one of the most valued natural and physical resources in the district. As a result, town and country are therefore dependent on each other for the economic, social, and community prosperity that the primary production sector brings to the district.

The conservation of the productive capacity of the land is therefore important to the sustainable management of the land resource for present and future generations, along with enhancing the biodiversity value that it has, maintaining or improving the quality of adjoining water bodies and safeguarding the environmental qualities and landscape and amenity values that are appreciated by residents.

European development has resulted in historic heritage dispersed throughout the rural area. The relationship of Tangata Whenua and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, wāhi tapu and other taonga, and later European development, has resulted in historic heritage dispersed throughout the rural area.

Inappropriately managed activities adjacent to or on sites associated with recorded and unrecorded historic heritage can weaken and even destroy these connections to the past. Careful management and informed community decision making is required. In this regard, recognising and providing for the protection of historic heritage is a matter of national importance for the Council to consider under section 6(f) RMA.

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga has a responsibility to maintain a register of the country's most important historic heritage items, under the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. Registration does not in itself confer any legal protection. Appendix B – Built Heritage of this plan fulfils this role, and most of the structures in Appendix B are also listed on the HNZPT Register. It is important for Heritage New Zealand to be involved at an early stage with proposals involving historic sites and buildings. Heritage New Zealand will be an affected party for works associated with any item in Appendix B that is also on the HNZPT Register. The relevant criteria in Appendix F (Criteria for Determining Significance of Heritage Features) will be used in assessing proposals for additional buildings to be listed in Appendix B.

Further, any work that may modify, damage or destroy an archaeological site associated with pre-1900 human activity also requires a separate authority from Heritage New Zealand.

The Rural, Rural Residential, Industrial, Electricity Generation, and Tokoroa Airport zones provide for the sustainable management of the rural land resource (Chapters 27 to 31).

5.2 Objectives for the District's Rural Areas

- 5.2.1** To maintain the productive capabilities of the rural land resource for primary production activities.
- 5.2.2** To provide sufficient capability and opportunities for the District's primary produce to be processed within the District's rural areas.
- 5.2.3** To avoid the establishment of non-rural based activities that do not have a legitimate need for a rural location, or which are potentially incompatible with activities that require such a location, including for reasons of reverse sensitivity.

- 5.2.4** To provide for the maintenance of the ecological values in the rural area and protection of its outstanding landscape values, and to conserve the cultural and heritage values of sites, while enabling primary production and other activities in a rural location.
- 5.2.5** To recognise and provide for the special relationship of Māori with their ancestral lands, water, sites, wāhi tapu and other taonga in rural areas.
- 5.2.6a** To provide for mineral exploration, mining and quarrying (including use of those resources by associated industries) and new network utility and infrastructure developments, that avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on existing neighbouring land uses and amenity values, while recognising that the location of these activities is often fixed and dependent upon the location of the resources.
- 5.2.6b** To provide for intensive farming operations that avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on existing neighbouring land uses and amenity values.
- 5.2.7** To identify and retain historic heritage so as to contribute to the heritage, character and amenity of the rural area.
- 5.2.8** To safeguard people, properties and the environment from the adverse effects of natural hazards.
- 5.2.9** To identify and address possible effects from activities in rural areas in catchments in the district, and on the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River and its catchment during decision making.
- 5.2.10** To minimise the potential for adverse effects in connection with the use, development and subdivision of contaminated and potentially contaminated land, so as to avoid or mitigate the risk of adverse effects on human health and the environment.

5.3 Policies

The objectives will be achieved by the implementation of the following policies:

- 5.3.1** Maintain the availability of the rural land resource to be used for primary production purposes.
- 5.3.2** Promote land management practices that are consistent with:
 - The productive capabilities of the soil/land resource,
 - The natural character of wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins,
 - The protection of significant natural areas, outstanding natural features and landscapes, and
 - The maintenance or enhancement of indigenous biodiversity.
- 5.3.3** Avoid development and land management practices that result in adverse environmental effects from natural hazards such as erosion, flooding, subsidence or landslip.
- 5.3.4** Minimise risks to the health and safety of people by controlling the location and design of subdivision and buildings in areas subject to natural hazards.
- 5.3.5** Facilitate new industries within rural areas for processing primary produce, and the expansion of existing industries.
- 5.3.6** Provide for subdivision for primary production purposes and associated dwellings and ancillary buildings and facilities such as store/loading areas including the bulk store of hazardous substances for cleaning process plant and equipment, fertiliser storage and for wastewater treatment, tanker reception areas, services buildings and storage silos.

- 5.3.7** Avoid subdivision, use and development in the rural area that does not have an operational or other legitimate requirement for a rural location.
- 5.3.8** Provide for the operation, maintenance and development of quarrying and other mineral extraction activities, intensive farming operations, and new energy and infrastructure developments within the rural area and where potential adverse effects on rural land uses, and landscape, ecological, cultural and heritage values are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
- 5.3.9** Provide for the subdivision, use and development of land for rural residential activities in specifically-zoned locations.
- 5.3.10** Encourage the restoration, conservation and adaptive re-use of buildings that contribute to the historic heritage of the rural area wherever possible, with any alterations and additions being of a scale, detailing, style and character consistent with their heritage values.
- 5.3.11** Avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse effects of activities on the existing character and amenity of the surrounding rural area and avoid those activities that would cause reverse sensitivity concerns for established rural based activities (including existing network utilities and infrastructure).
- 5.3.12** Ensure that development minimises risks to people, properties and the environment from natural hazards and the use of hazardous substances.
- 5.3.13** Avoid establishing activities that could limit the legitimate/authorised operation of existing rural based activities such as intensive farming operations, mineral exploration, mining and quarrying operations, network utilities and infrastructure.
- 5.3.14** Promote rural residential development only in zoned locations which:
- Achieve cluster development, and avoids the layout of lots in a lineal pattern along roads
 - Separates access and through-traffic functions in an effective manner
 - Requires adequate separation distance from the Waikato River and hydro electric power operating easements
 - Requires adequate separation distance between the national electricity transmission lines and new rural residential development
 - Safeguards the landscape character, visual amenity and biodiversity values of the Waikato River valley by encouraging development to be sited and designed to be sympathetic with the landform and landscape, and existing vegetation, and the building materials and cladding of structures do not dominate the outlook visually or physically from or to the locality.
 - Avoids, remedies or mitigates reverse sensitivity effects, including by imposing appropriate standards and conditions on development.
- 5.3.15** Safeguard the operational performance, maintenance and minor upgrade of the National Grid and other network utilities and infrastructure in the rural area by managing the adverse effects of neighbouring activities.
- 5.3.16** Maintain Tokoroa Airport to ensure that the effects of other activities on the site, in the vicinity of the site, and site development, on operations and safety are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
- 5.3.17** Enable Māori to develop ancestral lands for marae, papakāinga and recognised customary activities to enhance the cultural, spiritual, economic, social and archaeological values and associations of these sites.
- 5.3.18** To minimise the potential for adverse effects of rural residential subdivision, use and development at the interface of the Rural and Rural Residential zones with other zones.

- 5.3.19** Conserve the historic values of rural areas through ensuring that any subdivision, use and development of sites containing historic places and areas is compatible with those values.
- 5.3.20** Manage the adverse effects of land use change or intensification, upon wetlands, waterways and indigenous biodiversity.
- 5.3.21** To achieve the Objectives of the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River by managing subdivision and land use within rural areas located within the River catchment in a way that restores and protects the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River, including by;
- a) Limiting rural residential development to specific zoned areas
 - b) controlling hazardous substances use and storage
 - c) requiring setbacks from waterways
 - d) including standards for vegetation disturbance, earthworks, silt and stormwater control
 - e) managing the effects of large scale land use change
 - f) maintaining significant indigenous biodiversity associated with the River
 - g) managing activities on the surface of waterways
 - h) creation of new esplanade reserves or strips.
- 5.3.22** Where the National Environmental Standards for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health Regulations 2011 are relevant, manage the activity to ensure that any contamination is appropriate to any proposed future use of the piece of land and avoids, remedies or mitigates potential adverse effect on human health.
- 5.3.23** To encourage existing rural activities to maintain or enhance indigenous biodiversity, and to consider the effects of new activities upon the values of the District's biodiversity in resource consent decision-making.

5.4 Methods to Achieve Objectives and Policies

The above objectives and policies in 5.1 and 5.2 will be implemented through the following methods:

5.4.1 District Plan Methods

- Rural Zone that provides for primary production activities and related processing facilities, and other rural based activities (Chapter 28)
- Rural Residential Zone in selected locations adjacent to the main settlements and a limited number of locations adjacent to the Waikato River (Chapter 29)
- Rules (including 28.4.2 and 28.4.8) to minimise the impacts of land use change on the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River
- Tokoroa Airport Zone to recognise and provide for the existing aerodrome facility and its operation for a variety of aviation and compatible activities (Chapter 31)
- Industrial Zone provisions (Chapter 27) and Electricity Generation Zone provisions (Chapter 30) for key industrial sites
- Rules on hazardous substance use and storage in Appendix G
- Provision for network utilities throughout the District in Chapter 13
- Provisions for temporary activities in Chapter 12 within rural areas such as provision for renewable energy testing and related temporary structures

- Proposals in the rural area are subject to assessment against the proximity to landscapes and natural areas (Chapter 14) and the presence of natural hazards (Chapters 28 and 29)
- Rules in Appendix B to preserve the values of important built heritage in rural areas
- Rules that allow for micro-generation at a household or community scale throughout the District. (Rule 13.1)
- Provision for larger-scale new geothermal, wind and hydro development throughout the District as a discretionary activity. (Rules 13.4 and 13.7)
- Setbacks from transmission lines and gas lines (shown on planning maps)
- Buffer areas within rural areas restricting small-lot subdivision around the key industrial sites and Tokoroa Airport
- Use LIMs and consent notices for new small (lifestyle) blocks in the Rural zone to remind new owners that they are in a working environment
- Rules regarding surface water activities in Chapter 16 Activities on the Surface of the Water
- Esplanade reserves and strips created in rural areas at subdivision stage under Rule 10.10
- Imposing consent conditions requiring the payment of a financial contribution in respect of roading, water supply, wastewater, stormwater and reserves for development in rural areas, in accordance with the formulae detailed in Chapter 10.

5.4.2 Other Methods

- Memorandum of Understanding between South Waikato District Council and Raukawa Settlement Trust to ensure the cultural, traditional, economic, social, and spiritual significance of the rural land resource to tangata whenua is understood and safeguarded in Council's resource management decision making
- Working with the Regional Council to improve the understanding of the characteristics and dynamics of the land and water resources of the catchments in the district for sustainable land uses
- Advocacy and education on energy efficient building methods, and the use of micro-generation
- Council initiatives to encourage employment growth via the "Economic Spirit" Strategy
- Local Action Plan on Climate Change, and Council's Energy Policy
- Standards under the Code of Subdivision and Development that promote low-impact environmental design solutions and consider climate change implications for stormwater networks
- South Waikato Environmental Initiatives Fund to support landowners undertaking environmental initiatives
- Promote greater public awareness of heritage comprising archaeological, historical and cultural items in association with Heritage New Zealand
- Facilitate greater public awareness of Tangata Whenua historical and cultural heritage in association with Raukawa
- Support programmes to advance riparian planting in a prioritised manner in the district in conjunction with Tangata Whenua and Waikato Regional Council
- Support workshops and education programmes with key stakeholder groups to progressively encourage land management and behavioural changes, to complement industry-led programmes and initiatives
- Support research programmes aimed at understanding the most sensitive areas of the district susceptible to environmental degradation due to the change in and intensification of land use activities
- Support a prioritised water quality sampling programme along key rivers and streams in the most sensitive parts of the catchments and sub-catchments of the district, in line with Joint Management Agreements and recognising the Regional Council's monitoring activities.

- Providing special heritage incentives in the form of financial assistance, advice, site identification and other appropriate means specified from time to time in the Council's Long-Term Plan.
- Liaising and co-operating with landowners of heritage sites, tangata whenua and other groups and organisations involved in the protection of features of heritage value.

5.5 Reasons

The district plan has an important role protecting the productive potential and the numerous other natural and ecological values of the rural land resource. The use of zoning and activity lists and performance standards aims to ensure sustainable use of the productive potential of the rural area continues. This approach will safeguard the natural and physical resources of the rural area for future generations and maximise the continued significant contribution of land based activities and processing industries to the district's economic progress. This includes the provision of ecosystem services such as food and clean water, flood and disease control, and spiritual and cultural benefits.

The policy framework aims to ensure the conservation of the soil resource, the enablement of primary production processing in the district where the grass and timber resource is well established, and to acknowledge that the rural area is a working environment and accordingly generates some environmental effects for neighbours.

Subdivision and development in the rural area will be managed to avoid unnecessarily constraining established and legitimate primary production activities and other rural-based activities. Subdivision for rural-residential development has been directed to specific locations with the Rural Residential Zone. The subdivision provisions for properties within the Rural Zone also direct new dwellings and other sensitive land uses away from the key industrial sites of the district where they are located in rural areas.

The protection of the district's heritage depends upon the cooperation of landowners to recognise and respond to historic heritage values. The Council will work in conjunction with Heritage New Zealand to enable heritage values to be retained and buildings to be renovated and adaptively re-used for the benefit of the community and landowners.