

PC50 Rural Focus Group – Meeting 5 Notes

25 AUGUST 2020, 7-9PM – ROTARY LOUNGE, UPPER HUTT LIBRARY



Introduction

There was a brief discussion at the beginning of the meeting about the status of the Plan Change. The group enquired about the timeframe of the Plan Change process, with Council Officers providing a brief explanation of the current timeframes.

Clarification was sought on the role of the focus group from Members, and it was confirmed by Officers that the groups purpose is to provide their opinion on the information Council Officers provide based on their experience living within the rural environment. Although the focus group do not represent the entire rural community, they will provide a general opinion based on their opinions. This information is invaluable for the Plan Change process, as it allows Council to understand if the information, issues, and further direction are suitably addressing those needs of the local communities.

The Group requested information on the previous large scale development attempts in the Maymorn area, and the reason why these failed. One member mentioned that the previous attempt known as the Maymorn Structure Plan was Council led and that was part of the fault. Council Officers explained that the reason the Structure Plan was not widely accepted by the community was the essence of the change being from rural to full urban. It was explained by Council Officers that the next Focus Group meeting would allow for further discussion on Maymorn, should there not be enough time in this session.

There was a brief discussion on the scale of the District Plan, with Members stating that the Plan needs be considering at least 30-50 years into the future, Officers explained that although the Plan is required to be reviewed every 10 years, it does need to consider beyond 10 years.

The discussion progressed to topics which Officers wished to gather further feedback on after the previous session's feedback session on propose Objectives and how to achieve those outcomes.

Renewable and Alternative Energy

Members believed the use of the word "mandate" in the draft wording should be changed, with a potential for the word to be replaced with "facilitate".

Officers were keen to understand how the Members believed the use of renewables could be incentivised.

Members replied that it is important that the existing power network has infrastructure that can support the use and production of renewable energy, also mentioning the loss of power through the grid. Members made it clear that residents in the rural community can and should be self-sustaining, and should be able to manage their own resources.

Members were keen that energy created could be sent back to the grid, potentially via input/export metres. Officers stated that through denser development, properties could act as a cluster to provide renewable energy, rather than individual renewable sources on each lot. There was some questioning on how dense development would have to be to enable this, with Members stating the existing rural density could work. Officers noted that provisions would need to change to allow for communal energy production via shared services, rather than individual utility connections, which would be different to how utilities are currently managed in the Plan.

Members highlighted that the existing rural areas do have constraints with regards to communications technology, including trouble getting internet and mobile phone reception, with satellite connections being too expensive to be viable. Officers suggested whether community co-funding could be a solution to this problem, extending reticulated networks to within rural areas, however members still felt that cost was an impedance.

The use of water tanks was also suggested for all sites, and that these should be larger than the existing tank size used by Council.

Members mentioned that the wording of “easily provided for” in the water policy is not suitable as it will vary on a case by case basis. Officers explained that the Policy is worded to ensure that services are available for new lots and that prospective owners are easily able to utilise these, with Members stating that wording needed to be updated to better reflect this outcome.

Rural character and aesthetics:

Officers wanted to understand what aspects of rural character and aesthetics members highly valued, and why they enjoyed living in the rural areas. Members mentioned that they enjoyed the following aspects of the rural area:

- Open spaces and vistas
- The undeveloped form
- Natural character and vegetation
- The privacy provided by not having direct neighbours
- The sense of stewardship over the land
- Proximity to nature

Members mentioned that the use of the word “rural” may be misleading as they believe it refers predominantly to commercial land production as an enterprise. Instead of rural, “countryside” was suggested as an alternative term which more accurately reflects the character of the area, given the low level of commercial production activity within rural areas.

Members also stated that there are some aspects of living in the rural area which may not be classified as benefits. These include:

- The increased financial cost of living in the rural area
- Being self-reliant and self-dependent
- The time cost (including travel)
- Fly-tipping is an increasing problem post-Covid (likely as a result of increased dump fees)
- Should not expect the level of service provision as the urban area, which can affect the demographic of people living in the rural area

Members mentioned that the rural area is actually very diverse and that there are different sub characteristics within it.

Members mentioned that the existing subdivision standards need to be more flexible. Most people do not believe the 4ha lots are a suitable size for lifestyle, as they are too large, with people not able to manage such land. Therefore the existing provisions need to be reviewed. However Members have had positive experiences with subdividing their land.

Rural enterprise:

Officers asked members to provide further information on the scale of rural enterprise suitable in the rural area, given the intent to allow for the sale of locally produced goods on site.

Members mentioned how rural businesses can further develop community spirit through creating a place where communities can interact.

Members were keen to enable farmers markets within the rural area, mentioning that the Sustainability Strategy encourages food production at a local level. Members also mentioned the potential for a farm/destination park, but that constraints including parking, noise and size of site will determine how economically viable such an enterprise would be.

Members wanted to ensure that the District Plan has the ability to enable these things to happen, and that it may be Councils role to provide facilities to enable these activities.

Workshop exercise

Members were asked to undertake an exercise where they would consider the different type of rural land users, how these users make use of the land, sensitivities and dependencies associated with that and use, and the required utility/density/area for that use. The group was split into two groups to undertake this activity.

Post-exercise discussion

The group then came back together and presented their thoughts on the land users they had considered through the exercise.

Next meeting

The final exercise relating to the Maymorn area was not able to be undertaken due to time constraints. However, Officers stated that the Group could meet on the 8th September to undertake this task, which the Group agreed to. The agenda for that meeting will be limited to the proposed exercise.

Some members indicated that they would like further information on the previous development plans for Maymorn, and said that the history associated with the area could be an issue when discussing the area further in the next session. One Member asked for a Maymorn resident to attend the next meeting, which officers stated would not be suitable and would not fulfil the purpose of focus group meetings.

Officers agreed to produce a summary of information on the Maymorn area. This would detail both historic development proposals and current analysis, which would detail why the area is being considered in the forthcoming exercise.