



Waitomo Housing Strategy

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Mihi and Foreword

As we embark on the journey of shaping our district together, there are many matters that need to secure our attention. One of these is housing. As is repeated later in this document, a house is a fundamental part of our lives. It establishes a place to call home.

A house provides a roof over our head. A home defines the quality of our lifestyle.

A home needs to be a safe environment for our tamariki to develop. It needs to provide space for our rangatahi to grow. It needs to provide a warm place for our kaumatua and kuia to enjoy. And it needs to be a place that whānau love and can afford.

The Waitomo Housing Strategy assembles research to advise how we are doing in our homes. It suggests how we might go about addressing shortcomings, and how to plan for action.

While this is a strategy developed by the Waitomo District Council, it is not one that can be delivered by the Council alone. If it is to succeed, it must be owned and implemented by us all. Council is a player in this task, but it is mostly a facilitator and promoter of many partnerships – of private, public, and philanthropic typologies.

The research indicates many things, including that we need more houses, that we need healthier homes, and that we need a better balance of housing stock.

Council has begun the journey. It now needs others to come on board, including central government, community organisations and the private sector.

Let's get started, together.

Mayor John Robertson



Chief Executive Ben Smit



Introduction

Our vision is every whānau has access to an affordable, suitable, stable, and healthy home.

To achieve this vision, we must have healthy, affordable homes for everyone. We know not all our people have suitable homes, so we need to deliver solutions. In 2022, Council completed a Housing and Business Current State Assessment that confirmed our community is facing some severe housing issues, the big things we as a community need to address are;

- lack of affordable homes across our housing continuum.
- lack of the right types of homes to match the diverse needs of our community.
- homes that are generally old, and costly to maintain a healthy living.

These issues affect the health and well-being of our people now and in the future. We believe access to healthy, affordable homes that meet the needs of our community is the start to building strong and vibrant people, whānau and communities.

We are working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to ensure that every individual and whānau has a home. We are aligning with Waikato Housing Initiative's regional vision of that "Every person and every family in the Waikato region is well-housed living in sustainable, flourishing and connected communities.

This Strategy is the start of connecting with organisations and agencies that can influence positive change to our housing continuum. Working together gives us the greatest chance of success to resolve our housing issues that can be complex and long-term, however, through a well-defined plan of action and commitment to delivery, we aim to improve housing outcomes for our community.

Partners and organisations contributing to the development and delivery of this Strategy include:



We have been able to develop the Waitomo Housing Strategy with the help of Central Government's Water Services Reform Better-Off Fund.

To all the individuals, businesses, and organisations who contributed to the development of this Strategy, we thank you all. Your continued passion for supporting the wellbeing of the people of Waitomo will be crucial in supporting positive change.

Waitomo and its Housing

Te Rohe Pōtae or the King Country is renowned for being a place of refuge, of solace, whereby great leaders such as Tāwhiao and Te Kooti sought shelter, which resulted in the gifting of, arguably, the most famous house of all - Te Tokanganui-a-noho.

A house is a fundamental part of our lives that establishes a place to call home. A home that is affordable, suitable, stable, and healthy creates both growth and development for an individual and whānau. Limited or lack of access to these vital living standards can cause detrimental effects and strain on social living and communities.

Waitomo is a large district in terms of area but has a small population with approximately 9,640 residents. Unlike the surrounding Territorial Authorities, the district has not experienced the same recent growth. Projections undertaken by Infometrics in 2022 predict a slight population increase to reach 10,035 by 2039, followed by a decrease back to 9,640 by 2054. It is worth highlighting that Te Kūiti, the main town in Waitomo, is just an hour's drive from Hamilton City, making it particularly noteworthy that the population is projected to remain the same as it is now in 30 years' time. The district's population is generally characterised by lower household incomes, a higher proportion of renters, and a larger presence of both younger and older individuals, which deviates from the typical demographics found in New Zealand.

Despite experiencing low population growth, the district is currently facing housing pressures like the rest of the country, and property values in the area have recently increased. This rise in values is creating challenges for renters, as there is a severe shortage of available rental properties, leading to intense competition for housing. The limited rental supply is also impacting economic development and contributing to issues such as overcrowding.

Furthermore, the quality and suitability of homes are problematic. The existing housing stock primarily consists of older houses on large sections, reminiscent of the historic quarter-acre sections. Additionally, CoreLogic data shows a significant portion of the district's housing are considerably old, with most homes constructed before 1959, making them over 60 years old now.



A Snapshot of Waitomo and its Housing in 2022

9,670

people live in the Waitomo District

45%

of our people live in Te Kūiti

27%

of our community are under 20 years old compared to 25% in NZ

32%

of our community are over 55 years old compared to 28% in NZ

Residentially Zoned Property in Waitomo			
Settlement	Number of Residentially Zoned Properties	Median Section Size (m ²)	Percentage of Residential Properties in the District
Taharoa	26	1,543	1%
Te Waitere	32	1,008	1%
Marokopa	89	842	4%
Waitomo	39	3,750	2%
Mōkau	166	996	7%
Aria	47	1,020	2%
Maniaiti / Benneydale	131	913	6%
Piopio	186	1,120	8%
Te Kūiti	1660	925	70%
	2,376	1,684	100%



900m²

is the typical property size



85%

of our homes are three bedroom



88%

of our homes are over 40 years old



62%

of our homes are primarily heated with wood burners - twice the national average



damp

our homes are damper and more likely to have mould than the typical home in NZ

\$34K

is our per capita income which is 23% less than the New Zealand median

\$400

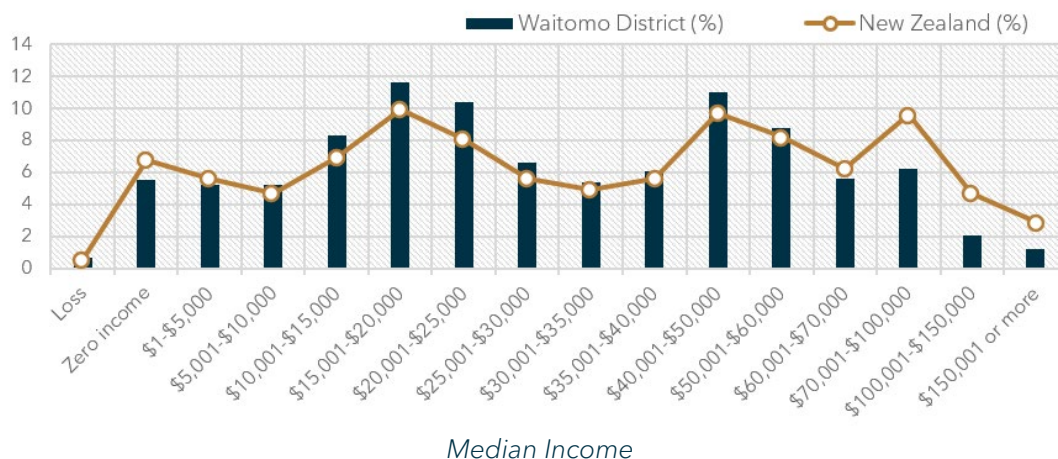
is our median rent
3 years ago = \$367
5 years ago = \$217

\$342K

is our median sale price
3 years ago = \$320K
5 years ago = \$195K

66%

of our homes are rentals



Our Key Areas of Focus

There are four main interlinking issues regarding our homes to be addressed.



These issues arise because:

Living costs are demanding for everyone.

- The community has low median incomes, and the majority are renters.
- In recent times, the cost of living has increased rapidly, which has resulted in additional financial pressure on whānau.
- Low incomes also means that some landlords struggle to invest in improving the quality of their rental houses as they can't lift the rent to recuperate that cost.

Our homes are old and there are simply not enough of houses to meet the demand.

- Despite being home to nearly half of our district's population, only 5% (67) of the new homes built across Waitomo have been built in Te Kūiti since 1990.
- Approximately half of the homes in our main centre, Te Kūiti, are over 60 years old.
- Homes in Te Kūiti are typically three bedroom and occupy about a tenth of large 900m² sections.
- Over 60% of our homes rely on wood burners to stay warm, this is twice the national average.
- Due to extremely constrained rental availability, and lack of return, landlords are not compelled or often financially able to improve the quality of their properties.

Building is not economically viable.

- The increasing cost of land and construction combined with our community's lower incomes means that the development economics, to build new homes or improve existing ones, are challenging for private investors and developers.
- Historically low growth combined with low population forecasts makes Waitomo less attractive to invest to private property investors and developers.

Collectively these issues are leading to:

- Overcrowding with multiple whānau or extended family living on one property.
- Whānau and individuals leaving the community as there is nowhere to live.
- Local employers unable to attract and keep a suitable workforce due to housing shortages.
- Almost half of renters are financially stressed or stretched meaning there is not enough household income to support their wellbeing.
- Long waiting lists for housing assistance and support.
- People not able to save a deposit to purchase their own homes or get ahead.
- Insufficient investment in new housing developments.
- Old and aging housing stock which is generally unhealthy and costly to heat.
- Lack of diversity in housing types and homes do not always meet the needs of our community.
- Underutilised land within Waitomo towns.



Marokopa - Photograph supplied by Te Reo Irirangi ō Maniapoto

Mana Whenua

Mana whenua are crucial in the prosperity of the Waitomo District. The Council is committed to upholding a positive relationship with tangata whenua that is founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles. As such, Council recognises mana whenua as key partners in this Strategy. Mana whenua have ancestral connections to Waitomo and are kaitiaki in the region having a unique perspective and deep understanding of the land, its history, and its cultural significance.

As part of the Strategy, Council has commenced engagement with Māori and whānau regarding their housing needs and aspirations. Ongoing regular and honest kōrero is needed between Council, iwi, hapū, and communities, as the Strategy is implemented and evaluated. Work is required to involve Iwi and hapū early to shape policy and inform decision making.

Further work is also needed to understand:

1. The aspirations of iwi, mana whenua, and hapū regarding housing and Māori land.
2. The infrastructure necessary to enable Māori housing development.
3. How Council and other government entities can support Māori housing outcomes wherever appropriate.
4. The fundamental differences between traditional Māori housing in comparison to urban or western housing.



Tracey Tangihaere: *Our Te Kūiti Blocks have remained unoccupied since 1909. Successive policies prevented housing development for our whānau and created disadvantages. Many of our whānau live away from Te Kūiti but want to return to their Tūrangawaewae. Our whānau trust will own the property and rent to whānau however, we need to do a lot of mahi, building our capacity and financial resources. We must be self-reliant, resourceful, and persistent to get through the myriad of challenges. It's a marathon, not a sprint, but we are determined to reach our housing aspiration. Photograph supplied by Tracey Tangihaere.*

Working Together

Housing is not just about providing a suitable and healthy place to live, it also involves a wide range of social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors that overlap and interact with each other.

As acknowledged earlier, strong collaboration is required because no single entity can solve housing challenges alone. Working together allows stakeholders to bring their unique perspectives and expertise to the table and work towards a common goal. This enables the sharing of resources and knowledge to address housing issues more effectively. This also promotes transparency, accountability, and community engagement in the decision-making process, which can lead to more equitable and sustainable housing solutions.

To support this collaboration, Council will establish and support the on-going delivery of the 'Waitomo Housing Taskforce'.

The purpose of establishing a local housing taskforce is to address the challenges related to housing affordability, availability, and quality. The Taskforce will bring together stakeholders from various sectors, including government, iwi and hapū, non-profit organisations, and the private sector, to guide and implement the Strategy and ensure local housing issues are addressed.

To ensure the success of the Taskforce, there must be:

- Strong and respected leadership.
- Clear objectives.
- Broad representation.
- An approach and environment where everyone is listened to.
- Adequate resourcing.



Community Health and Wellbeing

Housing and community wellbeing are strongly connected. Te Whare Tapa Whā is a holistic health model that is developed by Sir Mason Durie. Waitomo intends to adopt this model to guide decision making and emphasise that housing and the land are intrinsic to our community wellbeing.

Te Whare Tapa Whā describes how all aspects of our lives are interconnected. The model presents wellbeing (hauora) as four connected strands (the four walls of the house) with the land (natural environment) being its foundation:

- physical health/taha tinana
- spiritual health/taha wairua (sense of meaning and purpose)
- mental or emotional health/taha hinengaro
- family/taha whānau (social wellbeing).

The four walls of our Strategy are our outcomes outlined in the next section.

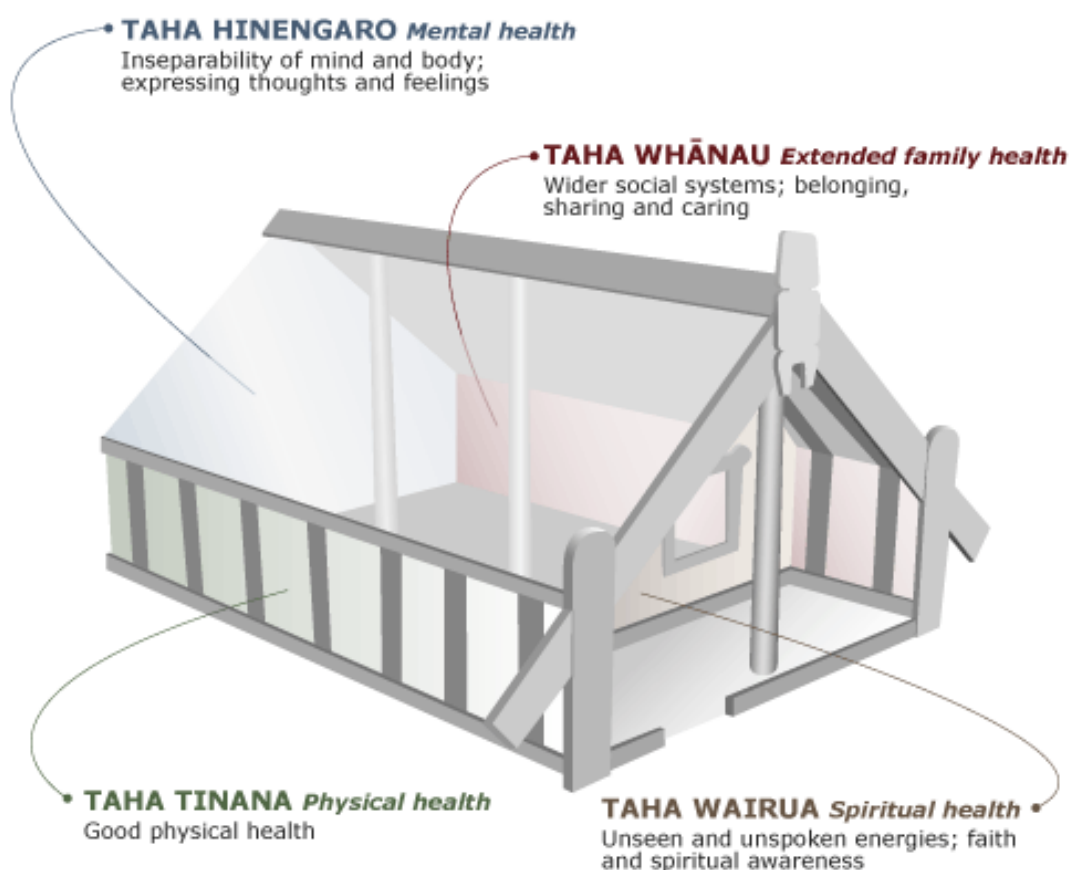


FIGURE 1: TE WHARE TAPA WHĀ MODEL - PUBLIC HEALTH - TE ARA ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF NEW ZEALAND

Housing Outcomes

Council has identified four key outcomes for housing in Waitomo which collectively address housing issues and will improve wellbeing across the community.

Outcome 1: Everyone has access to adequate, suitable housing.

It is crucial that rent and home ownership are affordable for the community, ensuring that households have sufficient funds to thrive and support their needs and wellbeing. We aim to avoid situations where multiple individuals and whānau are forced to share one dwelling when they would prefer to live separately. Our goal is to promote the appropriate variety and quantity of housing tenures that meet the diverse needs of our community. This entails ensuring an adequate supply of emergency, public, and social housing to support those in need.

Outcome 2: Everyone lives in a healthy home.

Our aim in Waitomo is to provide affordable, healthy homes that improve the well-being of our community. These homes are cost-effective to maintain, free from dampness and mould, and support good health. We believe that the quality of homes directly impacts personal health, and we strive to ensure the highest level of well-being for our residents.

Outcome 3: Homes meet the diverse and changing needs of the community.

We recognise the importance of providing diverse types of homes and properties that cater to the specific needs of our community. Our goal is to ensure that homes align with the desired house and section size, location, and accessibility to essential services, amenities, and employment. By offering the right housing options that meet people's needs, we can reduce the demand for housing assistance, alleviate overcrowding, and enhance access, health, and overall wellbeing.

Outcome 4: There is a home for everyone who wants to live in Waitomo.

To alleviate affordability pressures, support employers, and facilitate growth, it is essential to increase the availability of homes. We need an adequate number of homes strategically located throughout our district to support the well-being of our community and promote the growth of our district. This will enable people to remain in Waitomo and ensure sufficient housing options across all sectors for those looking to relocate here. Our aim is to ensure that anyone who wishes to reside in Waitomo has access to suitable housing.

Objectives

This Strategy is action focussed with workstreams that will achieve our objectives. There are four objectives that underpin the Strategy.

Objective 1: Make Informed Decisions

Council will work with the community and partners to examine and understand the housing situation and community's needs. This objective involves building evidence so that all partners can make robust and informed decisions.

Objective 2: Enable and Deliver

This objective is all about acting quickly to improve the quality of our homes and increase supply.

Objective 3: Partner and Innovate

This objective is about working in collaboration to deliver on housing objectives. We are a partnership that works together to support housing outcomes.

Objective 4: Strengthen and Support

Council recognises the need to provide more housing assistance to the community. This objective will deliver on that. It aims to provide enhanced information and support to homeowners, investors, and residents to improve the quality and overall health of the homes in Waitomo.



Our Action Plan

Objective 1: Make Informed Decisions

	Action	Description	Timeframe	Lead	Support	Outcomes Met
1	Understand what greenfield can be unlocked	<p>Undertake a detailed analysis of land availability and readiness for housing to identify what infill and greenfield land can be developed for housing in the short, medium, and long term.</p> <p>The assessment should consider mana whenua, landowners aspirations, infrastructure capacity, natural hazards, cultural significance, agricultural productivity as well as other fundamental development factors.</p>	Short (within one year)	Council	Te Nehenehenui	1, 2, 3, & 4
2	Support intensification of housing	Develop asset management plans to improve the current infrastructure capacity at a township level to support housing intensification.	Long (within three years)	Council	Te Nehenehenui	1, 2, 3, & 4
3	Review the Strategy	Review the Strategy to ensure its focus, outcomes, and actions are still relevant to meet the communities housing needs.	Long (within six years)	Council	Waitomo Housing Taskforce	1, 2, 3, & 4

Objective 2: Enable and Deliver

	Action	Description	Timeline	Lead	Support	Outcomes Met
4	Use surplus Council land for housing	Identify all underutilised Council owned land that could be suitable for housing and implement appropriate disposal process.	Immediate (within six months)	Council	Te Nehenehenui	1, 2, 3, & 4
5	Identify quick residential infill opportunities for the private sector	Identify specific residential properties that can be easily and quickly subdivided to support more housing. This should include property owned by Kāinga Ora and other relevant Crown or community entities.	Immediate (within six months)	Council / Kāinga Ora / Maniapoto Marae Pact Trust/ Te Nehenehenui		1, 2, 3, & 4
6	Bring unoccupied dwellings into supply	Complete an audit of the unoccupied homes in Waitomo to understand if there are any opportunities to provide secure housing for our whānau.	Immediate (within six months)	Council	Council / Waitomo Housing Taskforce	2 & 3
7	Support Kāinga Ora to upgrade their existing housing	Complete the healthy homes standards upgrades across the Kāinga Ora portfolio.	Short (within one year)	Kāinga Ora	Council / Waitomo Housing Taskforce	2

Objective 3: Partner and Innovate

	Action	Description	Timeline	Lead	Support	Outcomes Met
8	Establish the Waitomo Housing Taskforce	Establish the local Waitomo Housing Taskforce, reporting to WDC, which includes Council, Kāinga Ora, Iwi and Mana Whenua, CHPs, MHUD, Waikato Housing Initiative and local developers. Establish regular meetings and resource sufficiently.	Immediate (within six months) and ongoing	Council	Iwi/Mana Whenua / MHUD / Kāinga Ora / MSD / CHPs / Developers / Waikato Housing Initiative	1, 2, 3, & 4
9	Listen to and support iwi / mana whenua	Listen and understand Iwi and mana whenua aspirations for their whenua so that Council and other Crown entities can support development and housing opportunities.	Immediate (within six months) and ongoing	Council / Waitomo Housing Taskforce		1, 2, 3, & 4
10	Foster regional housing relationships	Participate in regional housing forums, for example the Waikato Housing Initiative, Property Council, etc. to ensure access to knowledge and opportunities.	Immediate and ongoing	Waikato Housing Initiative	Waitomo Housing Taskforce	1, 2, 3, & 4
11	Connect development and housing opportunities	Connect land opportunities with developers, investors, CHPs, and house builders.	Short and ongoing	Council	Te Nehenehenui	1, 2, 3, & 4
12	Engage with the local housing industry	Hold an annual local housing forum that connects the sector, including local builders and developers. This provides the opportunity to monitor the actions of this Strategy and understand opportunities and barriers regarding the quality and quantity of housing.	Short (within one year)	Council	Waitomo Housing Taskforce	1, 2, 3, & 4

13	Incentivise healthy homes	Investigate and secure funding to enable the implementation of a scheme(s) which incentivises and supports landlords and homeowners to improve the quality of their homes – particularly clean heat and insulation.	Medium (within three years)	Council / Regional Council	Habitat for Humanity and Other CHPs	2
14	Establish a funding initiative to deliver affordable homes	Investigate the viability of implementing an affordable housing funding initiative. If viable, implement a Community Land Trust or similar community-led funding initiative to deliver affordable housing. This should include local businesses who are motivated to support housing development to attract and retain valued workers.	Medium (within three years)	Council / Waitomo Housing Taskforce	Momentum Waikato / Local Businesses / Other Community Funding Organisations	1, 2, 3, & 4
15	Central, accessible information resource	Identify, communicate potential ownership and funding models and sources. Have a central source of information for all stakeholder to use.	Immediate and ongoing	Council	Waikato Housing Initiative	1, 2, 3, & 4

Objective 4: Support and Help

	Action	Description	Timeline	Lead	Support	Outcomes Met
16	Fill and grow the Community Housing Providers gap.	Support locally based Community Housing Providers and encourage new ones.	Short and Ongoing	Council	Waitomo Housing Taskforce / Momentum Waikato / MHUD	1, 2, 3, & 4
17	Support the rental community to improve their living environment	Establish a housing knowledge hub or similar which provides a central location of knowledge and resources to support tenants. This includes supporting tenants with information and support around their rental rights, healthy home requirements, finance and budgeting advice, avenues of funding support, and organisations providing housing-related assistance.	Immediate (within six months) and ongoing	Council	MSD / Kāinga Ora / MBIE / Citizens Advice Bureau	1 & 2
18	Support landlords to create healthier homes	Provide accessible information to landlords to encourage and support them to improve their properties. This includes connecting landlords to funding providers and other opportunities which support improvements for healthy homes.	Immediate (within six months) and ongoing	Council	Regional Council / MBIE / Other Funding Vehicles	2
19	Communicate and facilitate change	Implement a communications plan that raises awareness across the community of Waitomo's housing issues and of everyone's role in responding to these issues.	Short (within one year)	Council		1, 2, 3, & 4

Monitoring and Review

To ensure decision making is robust, Council will undertake an ongoing programme to monitor the effectiveness and relevance of the Strategy. Regular review ensures the Strategy is a living document that continues to meet the housing needs of Waitomo.

The Strategy will formally be reviewed at least once every six years and whenever required.

Acknowledgement

To all the individuals, businesses, and organisations who contributed to the development of this Strategy, we thank you all. Your continued passion for supporting the wellbeing of the people of Waitomo will be crucial in supporting positive change.

In 1985, Council designed and constructed the Redwood Flats to provide affordable rentals for our aged community members living in the Waitomo District. Today, Council continues to support kaumatua and our elderly residents by maintaining the Redwood Flats and keeping the rent low.



