

Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre (WCDC) Managing Director: submission on Draft Long Term Plan 2015 –2025

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I am unable to present my written submission to the public Council hearing on 11th May.

Signature:



Date:

11/5/2015

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on Council's Draft Long Term Plan 2015 –2025.

Economic Growth.

The support of Council inclusion of economic development and district and regional promotion within community development is without question. Council should continue with its focus on economic development in a staged but steady manner.

Whichever option (in-house delivery or District Economic Development Board) Council decides upon to deliver their aim of supporting the growth of our local economy by promoting Waitomo District's attractions and supporting local business initiatives and projects; the following points are supported:

- There should be an increased focus on visitor experience through both Waitomo and Te Kuiti i-SITES as they are part of an acknowledged national network with a widely recognised brand, particularly with international tourists. Waitomo i-SITE, who helps in excess of 185,000 people per annum, is a critical resource with regard to district promotion and looking after the needs of visitors before, during and after their arrival;
- It is important that, in addition to monies allocated to the RTO, the funding and marketing of tourism should be seen as a valued part of the economic planning of the District;

- With regard to visitor experience, the basics of providing decent toilet facilities, clearing rubbish from roadsides, recycling services etc. need to be emphasised. Let us embrace our national “100% Pure Branding”.

In addition to the above, if Council does proceed with Option 2, a District Economic Development Board (DEDB):

- Support is somewhat guarded as the make-up of the Board, their responsibilities and remit remain unknown. If Council has geographical representation on the DEDB, it is vital that a strong appointment from the tourism industry sits on the proposed DEDB;
- The relationship between Council and the Hamilton & Waikato Regional Tourism Organisation should remain external to the proposed DEDB;
- It is important that a close relationship exists between the districts i-SITEs and the proposed DEDB.

Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre and i-SITE

Submission - that Council continue to support the Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre by way of a Service Level Agreement – current SLA expires June 30 2015.

The Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre is a not for profit incorporated society and registered charity. Our primary objectives being to operate a museum and advance education in the fields of caves (globally) and social, cultural and natural history (in the Waitomo Caves environ). We are also an official i-SITE and a member of the Visitor Information Network.

The SLA funding is critical for the Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre as a contribution to the costs of the overall provision of high quality museum and collection services, visitor information service, together with provision of toilet and rubbish facilities.

Through financial support and the continuation of a formal arrangement for the services that Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre delivers, Council can contribute to their Community Outcomes (cultural heritage; recreation and social amenities; vibrant and prosperous district, and; preserving the environment as well as education) relevant to Council’s Long Term Plan 2015-2025 vision of: “creating a better future with vibrant communities and thriving business”.

By providing support of this nature, Council can influence and target the outcomes that it wishes to deliver with the aims of promoting strong heritage, visitor information, and public good services for the district through the Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre.

Services Provided:

- custodianship to our district’s heritage;
- promotion of the district’s visitor attractions (not only through i-SITE services but also through high quality education, communication, programme development, promoting and marketing, providing opportunities and resources, supporting regional groups, and; providing Ministry of Education learning experiences outside the classroom);

- provision of quality information and booking services to local, national, and international visitors;
- provision of public good services through the provision of 24 hour toilet and rubbish collection facilities;
- provision of a public meeting room.

New Strategic Plan:

On a broader front, the Waitomo Caves Museum Society is engaged in implementing a new Strategic Plan that will position the Museum as a recognised “National Museum of Caves and Karst”. **This will be the only such entity in Australasia.**

A part of this Plan involves assisting in investigating the potential to create a UNESCO Geopark within the district. To be accepted into the global network, a proposed area must not only demonstrate geological heritage of international significance (which our cave and karst area can) but also foster the exploration, development and celebration of the links between that geological heritage and how people meet their cultural, social and economic needs within the natural landscape.

“Geotourism” is a term that is often linked to a Geopark and, with an internationally recognised brand, this would strengthen the Council’s intention to capitalise on further tourism opportunities in the area and community outcomes of.

Conservation: of treasured natural and cultural resources;

Education: of new generations;

Well-being: by encouraging exploration and walking;

Employment: through increased tourism.

This is a bold initiative that demands a broad-based governance structure with strong community and political support. To succeed, the Council would need to be a part of this group.

Infrastructure Strategy.

Waitomo Village Water and Wastewater Infrastructure:

Submission – that Council allocate funds to continue to seek solutions or alternatives with regards to providing “100% Pure” Water and Waste Water services to Waitomo Caves Village.

Over the past three years the Council has partnered with the Tere Waitomo Community Trust to develop a “Waitomo Caves Village Structure Plan”. This is a very important development as it formally acknowledges the iconic, international profile of the village and its attractions.

The Council acknowledges that the village has its own privately owned and operated Water Supply and Sewerage Scheme. The Council have investigated the transfer of these infrastructure assets

into their ownership and have identified that there are still a number of key issues to be worked through.

At the best, the services provided by the existing infrastructure must be regarded as “tenuous”, especially with consents coming up for renewal. The Council have worked diligently to demonstrate that they can deliver essential infrastructure projects on time and within budget and are busy upgrading services in PioPio, Mokau, Bennydale, Marokopa and Te Waitere.

Given the continued acknowledgement of the “iconic” and the pivotal nature of the Waitomo Caves Village in bringing tourists to the district, it is totally incongruous and unacceptable to have money allocated to outlying areas and no financial provision for seeking a positive outcome to upgrading the services to this village for the next ten years.

The “one bad experience.... ” adage surely cautions that the essential infrastructure services to a tourism icon can potentially affect a far wider region than just a village centre.

In conclusion, “sustainability” is actually an attribute and not a process. The Council’s prudent, steady and staged attitude to its Long Term Plan acknowledges this.