



# Leading Edge Strategy Refresh

## Reflection Document – June 2023

Whanganui District Council's Leading Edge Strategy was adopted in 2014 following an extensive community engagement and consultation process, with further revisions made in 2018 to maintain its relevancy.

In 2023, we are starting a 'Leading Edge Strategy Refresh' to ensure that our vision works for Whanganui and responds to the collective opportunities and challenges to come. This will be achieved by looking through an active partnership lens which establishes a relational approach to engagement with iwi/hapū and, subsequently, the wider community.

This reflection aims to document some of the key achievements and to identify incomplete actions, to help guide us when looking forward. Due to the vast array of activities we undertake in any given year, this document is condensed to offer some significant insights and is not an exhaustive list.



**COMMUNITY**  
A deeply united community



**CONNECTIVITY**  
Connected



**CREATIVITY**  
Innovative and creative



**ENVIRONMENT**  
Safeguarding our place



**ECONOMY**  
Works for everyone



# Community

Working in partnership – shaping a district that celebrates and champions its cultural and social diversity as well as its community spirit.

## Of the actions under the community strand:

### 3

#### have been completed

- International Safer Community Accreditation.
- Welcoming Communities Plan (updated and current).
- Our Sport and Recreation Strategy, subsequently updated to the Open Spaces and Physical Activity Strategy.

### 7

#### are ongoing

- Partnering with Iwi on projects.
- Committing to partnership approaches.
- Restorative Cities.
- Neighbourhood connectedness and suburb revitalisation.
- Health, wellbeing and regulatory functions.
- Engaging with our distinct communities of interest.
- Whole of River Strategic Plan.

### 1

#### has not started

- Development of hapū / marae / community plans.

The development of hapū/marae plans are documents that need to be developed and approved by hapū and/or iwi and supported by the council. This conversation is ongoing. As a step in this conversation, funding from the Better Off Fund is available to marae to address important infrastructure issues.



## Highlights

- Iwi have partnered with the council on multiple projects related to each strand of the Leading Edge Strategy. These will be highlighted in each relevant area.
- A multitude of initiatives have been achieved in conjunction with partners, from our very first Ethkick Futsal Tournament to the establishment of the Great Whanganui Play Trail around key sites in Whanganui.
- The Tākaro Play Trailer has also been rolled out with support from partners. It is widely used at school and community events and has been booked around 200 times, reaching more than 4,000 tamariki since its launch in November 2021.
- Neighbourhood and urban connections have been completed in Tawhero, Whanganui East, Springvale, Aramoho and Upokongaro with upgrades to numerous roading networks that help to revitalise our suburbs.
- Multiple Safe as Houses events have been held, a Housing Advisory Group established and the Housing Strategy progressed to support the welfare of our community.
- An Age-Friendly Strategy was put together and a Youth Council appointed to engage proactively with our distinct communities.
- More recently, the Community Kōrero sessions led by the Mayor have brought the council to the people, welcoming the community to a series of sessions around the district.
- An outdoor fitness park has been opened on the river bank in conjunction with the Rotary Club of Whanganui, with wide-scale use and lots of positive feedback.

Iwi's involvement within this strand has included - partnership on the Open Spaces and Physical Activity Strategy, Housing Strategy, Welcoming Communities Plan and Rural Communities among other projects.



# Connectivity

A dynamic, broadly connected district that is accessible, linked in and known for it.

## Of the actions under the connectivity strand:

### 4 have been completed

- The Digital Strategy which is now being implemented.
- The Mosston Road-Fitzherbert Avenue upgrade and extension of roading networks.
- Improvement in national perceptions of our district as a tourism destination.
- Installation of more bicycle parking, as an alternative to car parking.

### 13 are ongoing

- Supporting Whanganui & Partners with connectedness work (e.g. digital, education, business and tourism).
- Marketing, branding and promotion.
- Reputation management initiatives.
- Promotion as a digital destination of choice.
- Enhancing walk and cyclability.
- Shared service opportunities.
- Growing education and training options.
- Pursuing international accreditation benchmarks.
- Having a greater online presence.
- Improving open space linkages.
- Developing identifiable people, products and proposals.
- Leveraging international relationships.
- Downriver section of the Mountains to Sea Trail.

### Highlights

- Multiple events have been planned for Tech Week each year, offering a taster of current trends.
- The council was presented with the Best Digital Transformation Award at the ALGIM Conference for optimising customer service excellence.
- Urban cycle and pathway connections and open space linkages have been completed in multiple suburbs, including Tawhero, Whanganui East, Springvale, Aramaho and Upokongaro following the successful completion of Te Tuaiwi (The Spine).
- The Mā Ake (Let's Go) programme has encouraged active transportation choices, while funding has supported research to help us understand the digital barriers for our elderly. These are just two examples of training and educational opportunities we have grown.
- A new council website was launched with interactive capability.
- We have also increased our online presence, growing our reach on social media through improved content and the introduction of new channels, including our free mobile app 'Antenno'.
- The council also gained recognition internationally by being named as a 'Smart21 Community' through the 'Intelligent Community Forum' and came runner-up across Australia and New Zealand for best Government participation at the virtual Govhack Awards.
- The 'Tide', a high-frequency bus trial to provide safe, affordable and low emission transport options to residents, was launched as a joint initiative with Horizons Regional Council in 2022. This has led to an 86% increase in public transport trips around the district.

Iwi's involvement within this strand has included partnership on active transport and open space linkages and supporting digital connectivity (especially in rural areas), among other projects.



# Creativity

A knowledge economy driven by innovation and humming with cultural personality.

## Of the actions under the creativity strand:

# 2

### have been completed

- Development of an Arts and Culture Strategy which is now being implemented.
- Establishment of suburban library hubs.

# 12

### are ongoing

- Working with industry on training needs.
- Fostering literacy and learning.
- Encouraging innovation and start-ups through the Innovation Quarter.
- Growing business, investment and innovation through digital technologies.
- Increasing capacity for training.
- Supporting the Sarjeant Gallery as an arts anchor.
- Selling our success stories and looking for new opportunities.
- Entering awards.
- Looking for innovative digital approaches to enhance Council's service delivery.
- Implementing the Public Arts Strategy.
- Delivering events.
- Implementing an interactive arts and heritage walkway.

## Highlights

- Community libraries have been opened in Castlecliff and Hakeke. The most recent addition has been in Aramoho in partnership with Pasifika Vision Forum Trust.
- Whanganui has been awarded the designation of UNESCO City of Design. This award recognises the city's historic and contemporary contributions to design and we are only city in New Zealand to achieve this.
- Through successful funding, three roles focusing on literacy development have been established to enhance learning. LinkedIn learning is now available to library members with over 16,000 video-based courses.
- Through partnership with Massey University, Executive MBA Programmes have been hosted in Whanganui over consecutive years, increasing capacity for training.
- The Sarjeant Gallery te Whare o Rehua Whanganui redevelopment is steadily progressing, with a new wing honouring the memory of Sir Te Atawhai Archie John Tairaroa. The gallery is projected to re-open in 2024.
- The council's Heritage Grant Fund was supported to restore our distinctive heritage. This success story was featured as a case study by Heritage New Zealand in their new national toolkit 'Saving the Town'.
- The Whanganui District Heritage Strategy/Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho was completed in 2021 and received praise for its broad view of heritage.
- Covid-19 presented many challenges, but was also an opportunity for the council to enhance its digital approaches. During this difficult time, the library introduced online story times and activity ideas alongside a summer reading programme for children.
- The Public Art Strategy has been implemented in multiple ways, including funding through the Public Art Fund for four new public art projects, a new waka memorial sculpture which has been installed at Virginia Lake and 'Peaceable Kingdom' which was launched on Drews Avenue.
- From Whanganui Opera Week to community celebrations for Puanga, the council has helped with the facilitation and funding of multiple events and distributed funding through the Creative Communities Scheme.

Iwi's involvement within this strand included - partnership on the Heritage Strategy, the Arts and Culture Strategy, the Sarjeant Gallery redevelopment and Library Hubs among other projects.



# Environment

A district that safeguards its natural resources and provides an environment with a sense of place, identity and vitality.

## Of the actions under the environment strand:

# 1

### has been completed

- Signatory to the urban design protocol.

# 14

### are ongoing

- Developing and implementing a coastal plan.
- Responding to climate change.
- Rural Enterprise Project.
- Town Centre Regeneration.
- Green tech approaches and responsible waste management.
- Working with Iwi on Te Awa Tupua aspirations.
- Revitalising and beautifying the town centre.
- Positive and innovative Earthquake Prone Building approaches.
- Place-based planning approaches for development.
- Innovative partnerships to protect resources and eliminate waste.
- Responsible and sustainable asset management.
- Protecting soil and rural assets/activities through the District Plan.
- Castlecliff rejuvenation efforts.
- Enhancing our risk-based approach to asset management.
- Promoting environmentally sustainable practices.
- The Whole of River Strategic Plan.



The Whole of River Strategic Plan has been superseded by Te Kōpuka nā Te Awa Tupua. A primary task of Te Kōpuka is developing the Te Heke Ngahuru strategy document. This strategy is to address and advance the environmental, social, cultural and economic health and wellbeing of Te Awa Tupua.

## Highlights

- A roadmap response proposal was drafted for water quality management in urban areas and consulted on with Iwi/Hapu partners and Ngā Tangata Tiaki. Additionally, in conjunction with Tamaupoko, a recycling trailer and bins were established for River Road communities.
- Based on environmental, community and beautification initiatives, Whanganui was named New Zealand's most Beautiful City for two years running and finalist.
- Whanganui District Council won the Minister of Local Government's Innovation in Asset Management Award for introducing a new model for risk based asset management.
- Beyond the council declaration of a Climate Emergency, a District Carbon Footprint Report was prepared. The Climate Change Strategy (Te Rautaki Huringa Ahuarangi) was subsequently adopted and an implementation plan developed in collaboration with the community.
- In 2022, the council launched its Community Climate Action Fund, which in its first year provided seed-funding for eight local climate action projects.
- In 2023, the council delivered 600 EcoBulb home energy assessments to help low-income households save on their power bills and reduce emissions from energy use.



# Environment

A district that safeguards its natural resources and provides an environment with a sense of place, identity and vitality.

## Highlights continued

- A partnership between Whanganui & Partners with rural leaders was established and work has been undertaken to build rural leadership in Whanganui.
- The Coastal Action Plan has progressed through development with Iwi, coastal communities, local environment groups and the wider community.
- An earthquake strengthening fund of \$388,733 was granted to 10 buildings in recent years, with potential earthquake prone buildings more recently identified and a timeframe established for repairs.
- A Waste Management and Minimisation Plan was adopted, setting a clear direction for six years including the introduction of kerbside recycling. Waste levy funding was also distributed for local initiatives, such as the 'Pilot Construction Waste Recovery Project'.
- The Waka Kotahi NZTA Innovating Streets fund allowed for infrastructure and asset enhancements. Bulk water supply filling stations have also been introduced.
- The council adopted a Town Centre Regeneration Strategy and with the successful application of funding, multiple improvements are underway. \$1.26m, for example, is being used to help create more vibrant, better-connected streetscapes along Guyton and lower St Hill streets.
- The council has started landscape design work for Pukenua Queen's Park following an integrated approach to develop the architectural landscape plan with Roopū Kaitiaki.
- A Kokohia Wetland Development Master Plan has been developed to improve water quality and flood attenuation performance that will guide activity up to 2030 as part of the Healthy Streams initiative. A community riparian planting day was held at the Port Bowen Reserve attracting many residents.

Iwi's involvement within this strand included - partnership on the Climate Change Strategy, Coastal Action Plan development, the Waste Management plan, the Heritage Strategy, and Town Centre Regeneration, among other projects.



# Economy

An easy-living place of choice for all – flourishing with employment and development opportunities.

## Of the actions under the economy strand:

### 1 has been completed

- Economic Development Strategy.

### 9 are ongoing

- Redevelopment of Whanganui's port.
- Recognition of Māori economic aspirations.
- Promotion of education options to international students.
- Partnering with social support and health agencies.
- Change of land use opportunities.
- Accelerate 25 opportunities.
- 100% SWEET initiative.
- Opportunities through the Provincial Growth Fund (now bundled under Kānoa).
- Cluster opportunities in our industrial precinct.

### Highlights

- Te Pūwaha, the port revitalisation project, is on track and was recently awarded the top prize in the 'Best Practice Collaboration' category at the Economic Development NZ Awards.
- 100% SWEET ensures that rangatahi engage with employment, education or training after school and, with the support of the council, a growing number of businesses endorse this initiative with over 100 businesses now involved.
- An International Student Employability Framework was developed and delivered in partnership with CEDA and Venture Taranaki.
- Two industrial subdivisions were lodged to create 33 new industrial lots helping to encourage further expansion. New opportunities were also sought with the launch of a 2-year banana plant research project in partnership with AgResearch.
- Through successful funding, an innovation programme was developed and launched in collaboration with The Factory to equip entrepreneurs with the skill and networks they need to succeed. Further, a collaboration with Venture Taranaki and CEDA is ongoing with a focus on joint initiatives that will encourage visitors to the region.
- Recognition of Māori economic aspirations resulted in the successful delivery of the Whenua Māori Summit in partnership with Te Mana Atatū. Whanganui and Partners continue to work alongside Whanganui Maori Regional Tourism to help develop a Whanganui River Road Tourism route.
- Council planning applications have moved online to ease the process, with continued growth in subdivision and infill applications. More recently, \$1.9m was announced for Whanganui Housing Infrastructure that will enable 340 additional homes.
- A Business, Innovation, Training and Talent Strategy was put together by Whanganui & Partners alongside stakeholder engagement for the Destination Management Plan. Tourism spend has gone up and Whanganui topped the list of regional tourism organisations (RTOs) in New Zealand with the highest recorded growth in 2021.
- 800 metres of new piping were installed to complete the Cobham Bridge water supply upgrade. This was the final stage of a three-part process to ensure adequate supply and improve resilience for the airport, the southern part of Whanganui East, and critical assets like the wastewater treatment plant.

Iwi's involvement within this strand included partnership on the Housing Strategy, Te Pūwaha, water services, economic development and tourism work programmes (through Whanganui & Partners) among other projects.