



KĀPITI COAST
DISTRICT
PLAN
REVIEW

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT
FOOD & RURAL
PRODUCTIVITY

The Council is reviewing the District Plan and invites you to
have your say.

Be involved and help shape Kāpiti for future generations.

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INTRODUCTION

This discussion paper is one of a set of papers which look at a range of sustainability issues that are important to consider during the District Plan Review process. The District Plan is Council's main regulatory tool for managing development, subdivision and land use.

By law, each provision of a District Plan has to be reviewed every 10 years. Much of the current District Plan hasn't been changed since it was completed in 1999.

Some of the thinking in the current Plan is now 15 years old, so it is also important to respond to new issues, opportunities and community direction.

Some of the principles underlying the Plan may remain the same but we also need to think about new pressures on the environment that have arisen or increased in the past decade.

It's also important to respond to "community vision" as expressed in the Community Plan and in Local Outcome Statements from communities such as Greater Ōtaki, Waikanae North, Otaihanga, Paraparaumu Beach, Paraparaumu Town Centre, Raumati Beach, Raumati South, and Paekākāriki.

The Review is carried out as one of Council's obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), which has a focus on the sustainable management of natural and physical resources, and management of the effects of activities on the environment.

The intention of these papers is to ensure that the District Plan Review successfully converts a range of concerns and directions into RMA 'speak' without losing integrity.

The Council aims to have a District Plan Review that:

- Addresses implications of significant global issues (including climate change)
- Increases the ability of the community to deal with change, through resilience and innovation
- Reduces pressures on the natural environment and resources
- Increases the ability of people to work and live locally in a sustainable way
- Reduces pressure on people's day to day lives (e.g. cost of travel, noise); and
- Respects Kāpiti Coast culture

We have written this round of Discussion Papers to provide a sustainability framework for discussion and consultation on various aspects of the District Plan Review, and to stimulate discussion and feedback on some of the initial ideas being considered. Topics we have dealt with in this phase include:

1. Global Change: Issues and Pressures
2. Biodiversity
3. Natural Hazards and Managed Retreat
4. Food and Rural Productivity
5. Landscape, Character and Heritage
6. Infrastructure and Essential Systems
7. Urban Form and Transport

Readers are invited to complete the submission form at the end of the paper, supporting conclusions they agree with, as well as offering additional ideas and constructive feedback.

After feedback is received on these discussion documents the next steps in the District Plan Review process will be as follows:

- Publication of additional discussion documents including potential objectives and policies
- Production of the Draft District Plan for consultation, based on community feedback
- Notification of Proposed District Plan provisions for formal public submissions
- Submissions and Further Submissions under the RMA
- Hearings
- Council Decisions (providing some legal effect)
- Appeals to the Environment Court (if any)
- The new District Plan Provisions become Operative (with full legal effect)

For more information on the District Plan Review visit: www.kapiticoast.govt.nz, particularly www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/DistrictPlanReview, where you can find the Scoping Discussion Document (March 2010).



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper summarises the issues relating to food production and rural land productivity in Kāpiti, and considers the role of the District Plan in promoting local production of food (urban or rural). It considers all types of food production from fruits and vegetables, through dairy and sheep, to honey, egg and poultry operations. While the paper focuses on food, it also considers other productive uses of rural land such as fibres, fuels and forestry.

Parts of Kāpiti, especially around Ōtaki, have both the conditions and the quality soils necessary for growing high quality food not only for export but also for national and local consumption. There is also a considerable amount of land in the wider District suitable for animal-based food production as well as other productive uses. This land is a resource that can provide resilience for the community in the event of a gradual or sudden shock to supply systems.

At the same time, this land is coming under pressure for other uses such as urban or rural residential development, or even competing rural uses such as forestry or infrastructure projects (transport, water, energy).

In its objectives and policies, the current District Plan makes some mention of the productive potential of rural land, and it seeks to protect this potential primarily through the use of minimum lot sizes in areas with high soil quality. More recent changes to the Plan have promoted the concept of clustered residential development in rural areas to allow for larger and potentially more balanced productive lots. The environmental effects of food production and other rural activities are also managed through provisions relating to noise, dust and odour, as well as regional and national policy documents and standards.

In order to promote a diverse network of food-producing activities in Kāpiti, this paper presents a number of new ideas for consideration and discussion as part of the District Plan Review. These include:

- Strengthening and clarifying the Plan's objectives and policies relating to food and soil capacity
- Further promotion of residential clustering in rural areas
- Limiting the size of clusters or other residential development on the most productive/versatile soil through the retention or expansion of large lot sizes
- Allowing some farm worker housing in rural areas to support the productive sector
- Addressing reverse sensitivity issues through clustering and buffer zones
- Allowing a range of residential lot sizes as well as community gardens in urban areas
- Streamlining the process for the keeping of bees and poultry in urban areas
- Allowing reserves contributions to be spent on community gardens, food forests and other food-producing reserves, in concert with promotion of fruit, nut and vegetable production on existing reserves
- Allowing and/or promoting the use of rooftop gardens
- Allowing and/or promoting farmers' markets or other food-oriented markets throughout the District
- Eliminating any unnecessary barriers to food production in the rural zone



The global picture: a need for resilience

The accompanying discussion paper “Global Change: Issues and Pressures” describes how an insecure global energy supply and an increasing global population are putting pressure on the security of the global food supply, with potential implications for Kāpiti.

On the demand side, the populations of the world, New Zealand and Kāpiti are growing, with particularly high growth in developing nations. More people mean more food is needed. Globally more people are turning to a meat-based diet, which increases demand for land due to requirements for animal feed crops.

On the supply side, the amount of land on Earth is finite and, if anything, sea level rises are probably reducing it. Climate change is making some existing land more suitable for agriculture. However, as urban development and the effects of escalating population increase pollution and deplete soil and water supplies, other land is losing its natural capacity to provide food and other resources.

The supply of land available for producing food is also under pressure from demand for energy crops or ‘biofuels’ that will be used to feed motor vehicles and other machines rather than people.

Regardless of the amount and quality of land for food production, the current global food system means that food consumption in Kāpiti, New Zealand and elsewhere in the world is highly dependent on trade – that is, movement of food from potentially distant places. This means our food supply is vulnerable to political disruptions like wars and trade blockades, as well as to fuel price shocks, which increase the cost of imported food.

In short, globalisation and global trends mean that Kāpiti’s food supply is potentially vulnerable – at risk. Neither New Zealand, nor Kāpiti, nor most households within Kāpiti, are able to produce the range of things they eat every day. If all trade across New Zealand borders or across Kāpiti’s borders were to cease instantly, how long could individual households survive, and if they did survive how much suffering would be experienced in the transition?

In the context of vulnerability, the concept of “resilience” is important. Resilience is most simply defined as “being able to adapt to change,” but it goes beyond being adaptable – it means not just changing but essentially retaining the same function as beforehand. If Kāpiti people suddenly had to meet more of their food needs, could they adapt – not just by eating less food or by switching to an unhealthy unvaried diet like 50 percent turnips – but by bouncing back to a relatively healthy diet?

Being a resilient community in terms of food means being able to produce more food locally and to be able to transport it within the area at a reasonable cost when it can’t be produced at the point of consumption. It’s not about being totally self-sufficient right now, but about becoming more self-reliant in the event that increased self-sufficiency becomes necessary, either gradually or suddenly.

This concept of resilience is not only important for food, but for many of the other things that Kāpiti families need like clothing, housing, energy, and health care. Some of these, such as fibres or animal skins and furs for clothing, wood for housing or fuel, or plants for medicinal purposes, could also be produced locally – primarily in rural parts of the district but potentially in urban areas as well. Rural and urban areas can also provide land for trees to be planted as ‘carbon sinks’ to sequester carbon and prevent it from contributing to climate change.

Other drivers for local food production

The reasons for producing more food locally are not limited to the need to increase resilience. Other potential benefits include:

Economic opportunities

- Where are the jobs of the future? Even if international trade and trade within New Zealand continues unabated, could Kāpiti position itself as a centre for food production, and for associated food processing to ‘add value’ to the primary products?
- A 2005 study¹ on the northern part of the Kāpiti Coast District estimated that a 50% increase in horticultural land use from 672 to 1010 hectares, could increase gross output by \$9.3 million, creating an additional 135 jobs.

¹ “A Study of the Rural Productive Potential in the Northern part of the Kāpiti Coast District,” September 2005, by Sustainable Land Use Research Initiative (SLURI), a consortium of researchers from AgResearch, Hort Research, Landcare Research, Crop and Food Research, and PGG Wrightson Consulting.

Reducing contribution to climate change.

- The transportation of food and other goods to New Zealand and to Kāpiti currently contribute to climate change by requiring the burning of fossil fuels. Producing food closer to home could help New Zealand meet its commitment to reducing global warming.
- Food-producing and non-food-producing trees can serve as 'carbon sinks' to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and lessen climate change.

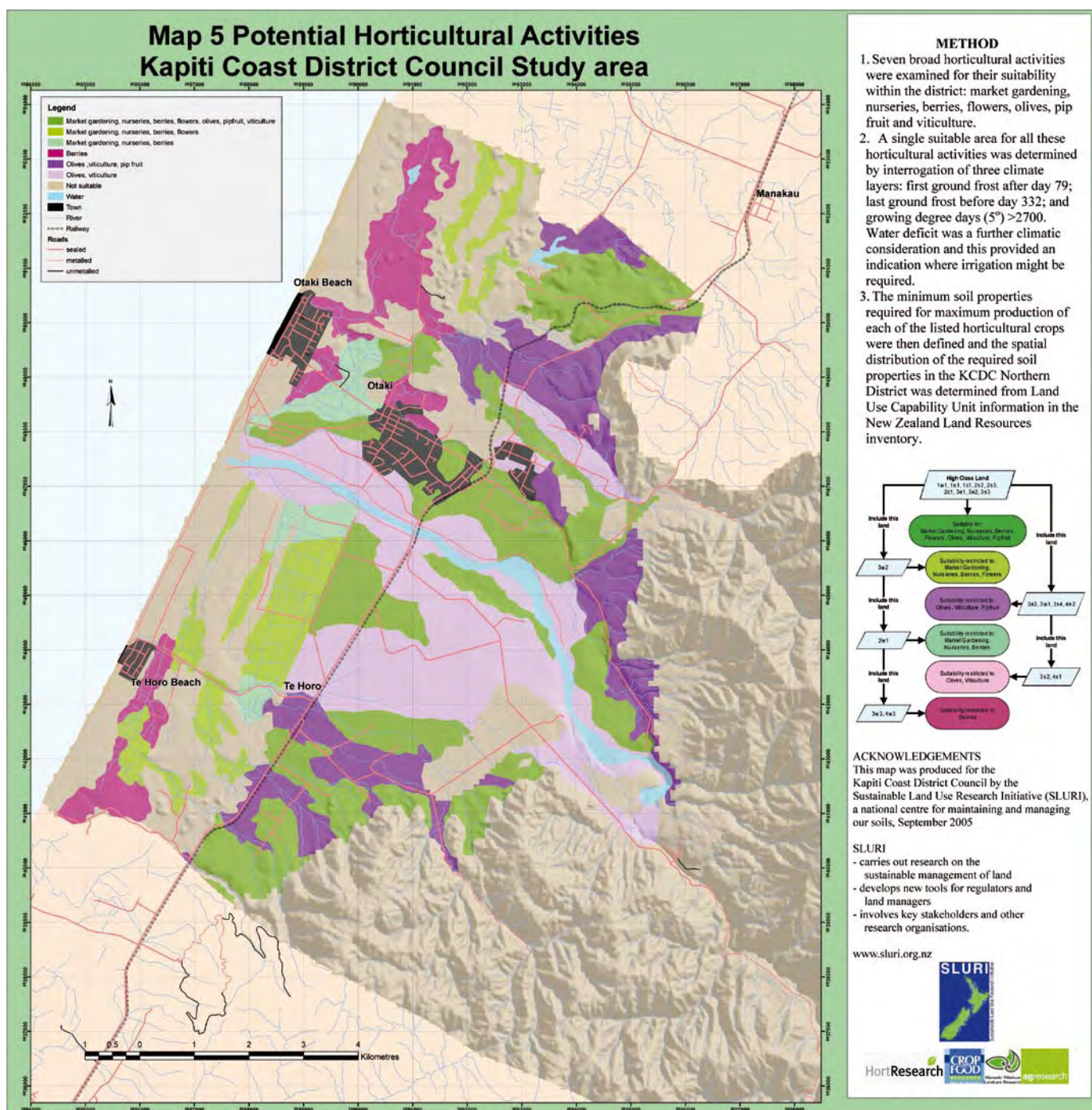
Freshness, nutrition and taste.

- Many 'locavores' prefer local food because it's fresh, and doesn't lose its flavour and nutritional value, travelling long distances to get here. They also like "knowing where it comes from," sometimes being on a first-name basis with the farmer or grower.

Current productive capacity

So how well is Kāpiti placed for a resilient future in terms of food production?

The starting point is that Kāpiti has a significant amount of rural land with quality soils suitable for growing a variety of crops, particularly in the northern part of the district around Te Horo and Ōtaki. For example, the 'alluvial plains' on both sides of the Ōtaki River are areas where quality soils have built up over a number of centuries through eroded soils, further into the hills, being transported by waterways like the Ōtaki River and its tributaries and distributed across the land through floods and meanders.



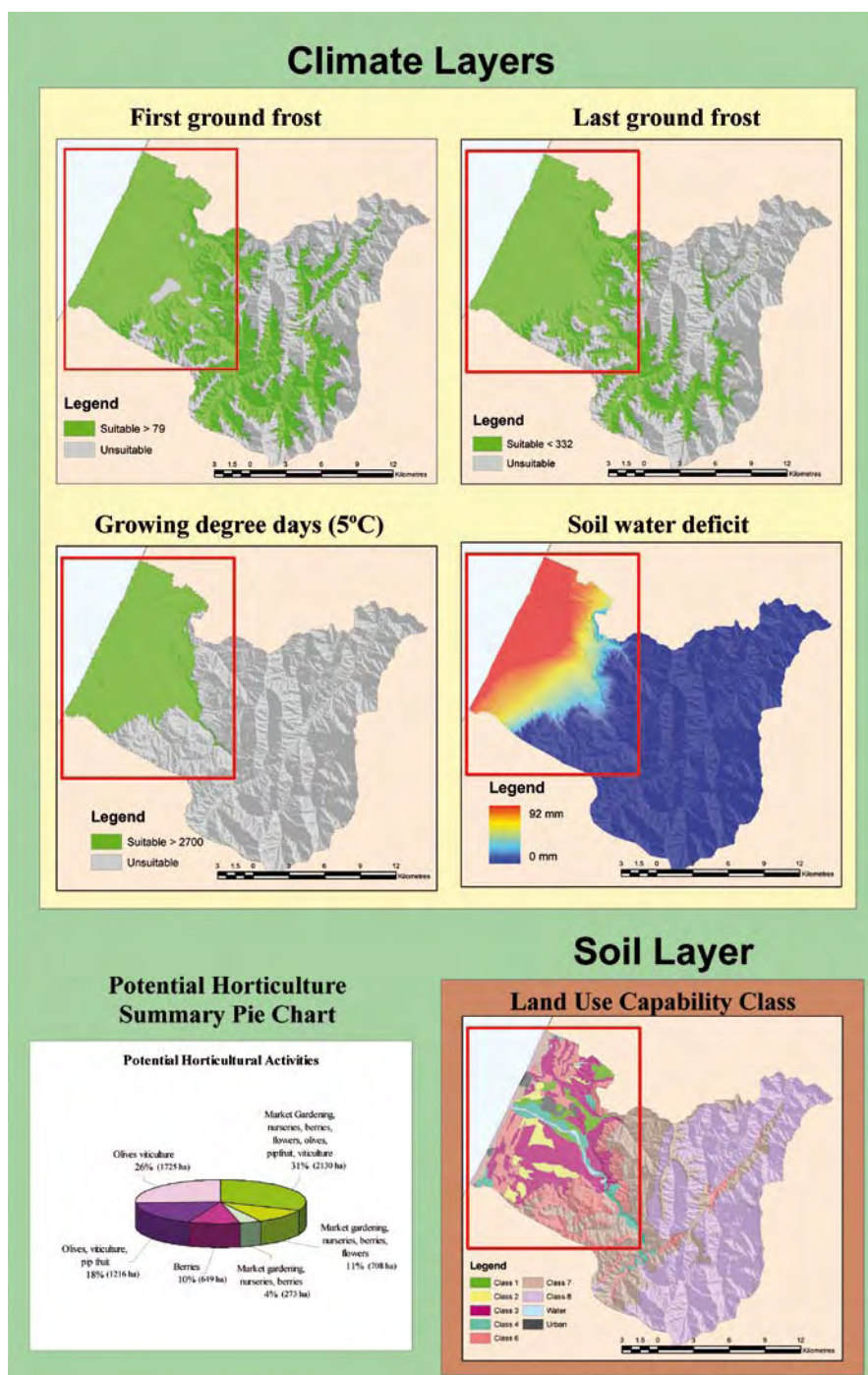
The 2005 study referred to above points out that the climate and water supply are generally not limiting factors for growing crops on the flatter lands in the northern part of the district. The same study also highlights the large number of Class 1, 2 and 3 soils in that area, suitable for growing a range of crops – from vegetables on Class 1 soils, to berries, olives and grapes on Class 3 soils.

This map on the previous page shows the potential horticultural uses in the northern part of the District according to this assessment.

The productive potential of the northern part of the District is much higher than its current use. The 2005 study estimated that 671 hectares in this area were in horticultural production - only 10% of the at least 6700 hectares in that area that could be used for some form of horticulture. While the researchers pointed out that

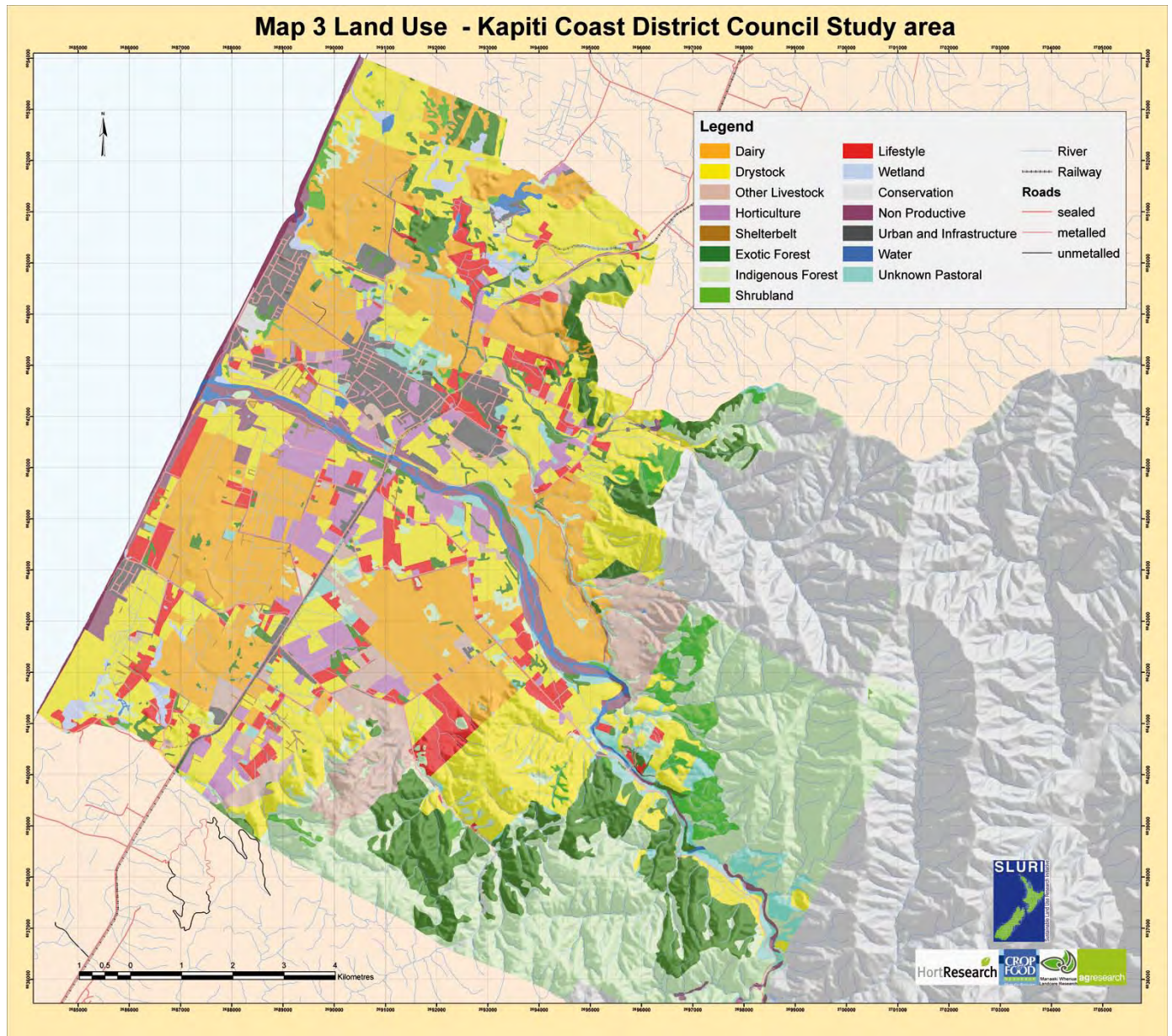
market factors and labour supply/skills would be limiting factors in reaching capacity, a 50% increase in the amount of land devoted to horticulture would increase revenue (gross output at the farm gate) by \$9.3 million and increase employment by 135 full-time jobs.

The researchers also acknowledged the role of pastoral and dairy farming in the District, reflected in the amount of land currently used for grazing sheep and cattle. In fact, more than half the land in the Kāpiti Coast District is categorised as “grassland” according to an interim report from Landcare Research². The 2005 research team estimated that pastoral and dairy farming could increase its productivity to some degree without limiting the expansion of horticulture. However, horticulture is more dependent than grazing on the protection of quality soils, so horticulture is more threatened by any loss of the productive potential of soils.



² “Assessment of Rural Productivity Potential in the Greater Ōtaki Area: Scenarios and Options for a Sustainable Food Future – First Interim Report,” August 2010, Landcare Research: Manaaki Whenua.

The following map shows land uses in the northern part of the District as of 2005.



Emerging trends and issues

A number of trends are negatively impacting on Kāpiti reaching its potential in terms of food production.

These have been reflected in the results of community consultation through the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP), and the development of districtwide Community Outcomes as well as specific Local Outcome Statements for different parts of the District. Relevant community feedback from these processes include:

- Concern about loss of rural land suitable for food production, including land between existing settlements
- Concern about rising food costs
- Concern about uncontrolled infill across all residential areas limiting the potential for backyard vegetable growing
- Potential for community gardens and ‘allotments’

These community concerns are based on the following trends that are reducing Kāpiti’s ability to produce more of its own food.

Urbanisation of rural land

More rural land is being converted to urban land throughout the district, through the development of ‘greenfield’ sites to housing developments. The Council’s Development Management Strategy (2007) proposes to limit further rezonings for greenfield development to the low-impact residential development area of Waikanae North, south of a defined urban edge. However, while this limits the extent of new rezonings, there is still existing land zoned residential throughout the district, including in the Ōtaki area, that is currently vacant and ‘green’ but allowed by the District Plan for residential development.

People live in houses, and houses need land, so more people in Kāpiti will result in more need for land unless all development goes upward. This is not likely given the community’s desire to protect its low-rise character in most areas. There is also a need for land for businesses to employ and/or service Kāpiti residents. While urbanisation is perhaps inevitable, it does reduce the food-producing ability of the land considerably.

Urban land is divided into smaller lots than rural land, in many cases big enough for small vegetable gardens and/or fruit trees (given proper shade and sun), but not big enough to offer the ‘economies of scale’ that make each quarter-acre of land as productive in food terms as it could have been under a larger farming operation. Some housing development at higher than usual densities, like row houses, apartments and other ‘medium density housing,’ may have no yards for growing food, aside from occasional balconies or patios for potted herbs or veges.

Concern about the urbanisation of rural land is growing throughout New Zealand. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment recently warned:

“I worry about soil and soil quality. We’re losing A-league soils through erosion and flooding and we’re concreting them over. I’m interested in how much that’s considered when planning decisions and consents are given for developments. Think about the Hutt Valley – it was where we grew food for Wellington. Once those soils are developed on, they’re gone. You’re not going to dig them up again. That strikes me as something we’re forgetting about.”³

³ Dr Jan Wright, NZ Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, quoted in the Dominion Post, 14 August 2010, p. A27.

Increase in 'Lifestyle Blocks' and other rural-residential development

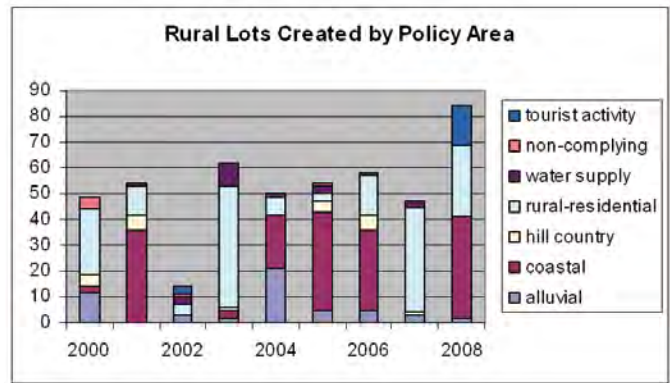
More rural land is being subdivided into smaller lots to allow for 'lifestyle blocks' or what planners call 'rural-residential' development. While typically not provided with urban services like town water and sewerage, these rural residential areas can have lot sizes as small as 4000m² with a 1-hectare average, compared with the typical 4-hectare minimum and 6-hectare average lot sizes required in the alluvial plains area.

These smaller lots in rural settings are in demand for a variety of reasons, including the frequent desire to live near towns but with more land for privacy and 'elbow room', raising animals or growing food. These lots are certainly large enough to allow some productive capacity, but as with urban-scale lots, they do not offer the economies of scale of larger lots that allow food production to be a profitable activity nor do they achieve the maximum food output from each hectare of land.

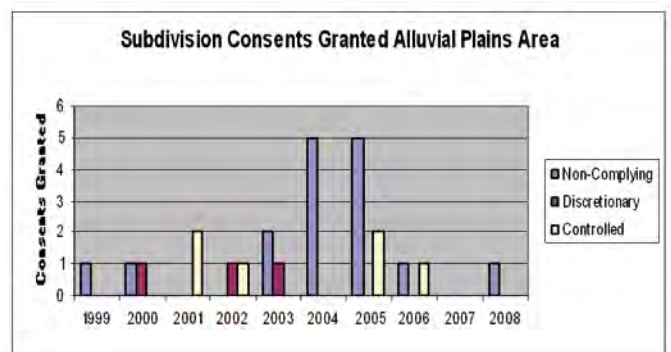
If residents on these lifestyle blocks were using the land to produce food, the lower potential productivity of these subdivided lots might not be an issue, but a 2008 survey of rural residents on 4ha or smaller lots showed that the food-producing capacity of the land is not central to why residents had moved to larger lots. When asked to rank the importance of various factors in their choice to move to a rural residential property, respondents scored "possibility to grow vegetables/fruits" and "possibility to have animals" as only "moderately important" and below the "very important" factors of: "space," "peace and quiet," "privacy," the ability to have a "coastal or rural outlook" and "escaping the urban 'rat race'".

In terms of how they actually used the land, just under two-thirds of the 311 respondents said that they use their land to grow or raise food or other products for household use, and only 8.4% used the land to generate income in some way, while nearly all (95.5%) used the land for "amenity, recreation or beautification." Of the 266 respondents who gave more detail on their land use, 38.7% said they used the land for grazing (sheep or beef), and about a third used the land for market gardens/vegetables or growing fruit (with some overlap across these groups).⁴

Trends on actual rural subdivision in Kāpiti Coast District are shown at right, based on statistics from 2000 to 2008. The graph shows over 400 new lots were created in the rural zone during this time period. It also shows that the number of lots in the alluvial plains are generally low compared to the coastal environment and rural-residential areas.



The number of consents granted per year in the alluvial plains area has been low, with the greatest number being in 2004 and 2005. District Plan change No 48, which became operative in February 2004, made any subdivision within the alluvial plains area not meeting the controlled activity standards for subdivision a non-complying activity, instead of a discretionary activity. Trends in this area are shown in the graph below.



Changes in uses of rural land

Land that is not residential or rural-residential is not necessarily exempt from the trend of decreasing use for food production.

One trend is that rural land is becoming more 'monocultural,' and being used for only one thing. While this is good from the perspective of achieving economies of scale and competing in global markets, it isn't great from the perspective of self-sufficiency. A household or a District can only eat so much lamb, or pumpkin, or cabbage.

As long as the soil and water quality is preserved, the fact that this land remains rural (and presumably unpaved) is a positive factor compared to land converted to urban uses (which is presumably largely built upon or paved over). In other words, if the soil and water quality is preserved, a monoculture can be replaced with a diversity of food-growing activities if the need arises, as long as the community has the skills to do this.

⁴ "Rural Residential Living in the Kāpiti Coast District," January 2009, for Kāpiti Coast District Council by researcher Laure Isnard.

The problem is that the soil and water quality is increasingly depleted by monoculture in conjunction with modern agribusiness practices, particularly by the use of pesticides and fertilisers and continual irrigation to boost productivity as the soil's natural capacity declines. Intensive dairying and other animal-based agriculture can also lead to declining water quality in waterways, leading to downstream negative impacts on aquaculture opportunities as well as on recreational and cultural opportunities for fishing and harvesting.

There is also increasing demand for rural land to be used for non-farming activities such as infrastructure projects that involve buildings, roads and other non-permeable covering of soils. These include wind farms and hydro dams for energy supply, dams for water supply, or new expressways as part of the national transport network. Rural areas are often chosen for these activities because of their distance from potentially affected residential properties, and this may conflict with the food-producing potential of these zones.

While rural land suitable for growing or raising food is sometimes put to use for non-food purposes, rural land that is not suitable for food production can also sometimes be unwisely used for agriculture. This 'marginal' land may have: steep slopes which lead to frequent erosion of soils and decreasing water quality, high biodiversity values like native forest or wetlands that are removed to make way for crops or grazing, or poor soils that require inordinate amounts of fertiliser to generate viable crops. All rural land is not created equally from the perspective of food production, so it is not just a matter of how much rural land is available, but its quality and suitability for food production.

There are of course other productive uses of rural land that don't involve building or paving over soils, but which can still compete with food production. These uses include the production of other plant and animal products for:

- medicine (e.g. Māori rongoa)
- fibres, furs and skins for clothing, weaving and other uses
- bio fuels (including wood) for fuel
- forestry for paper, timber or carbon capture / sequestration to reduce climate change

These uses, while not food-producing themselves, do not necessarily destroy or form a barrier to the life-supporting capacity of the soil and water they use. While this discussion paper recognises that there are many legitimate productive uses of rural land, it has a particular concern for soil quality, because quality soils are a finite resource.

A final issue arising with land that remains rural (as opposed to residential or rural-residential) is that it is increasing split or bordered by smaller residential or rural-residential properties. In addition to the potential loss of productive use within the residential or rural-residential lots themselves, an unfocused intrusion of these lots into the productive rural landscape can lead to 'reverse sensitivity' issues.

Examples are when newcomers to the rural setting complain about noise, odour or dust arising from farming operations, sometimes leading to otherwise unnecessary restrictions on the rural productive sector. These rural residential lots can also directly create hassles for the rural productive sector; for example, by increasing traffic on rural roads.

Rural skills base

It should be noted that the viability of the rural productive sector is not solely dependent on land availability and quality, but on the skills and availability of the labour force as well. In New Zealand as in most developed countries, the percentage of people who make their living from growing or raising food has decreased, with a considerable number of those in the rural workforce moving into urban occupations like manufacturing or office work.

Even within urban settings, vege gardens have only recently seen a resurgence in interest after a long period of decline. There is a resilience indicator used elsewhere that measures the percentage of 16-year-olds who can successfully grow 10 types of vegetable. The question can be asked here in Kāpiti: who still knows how to grow or raise food?

This doesn't mean that everyone needs to become a farmer, but we need to make sure that skills exist to varying degrees throughout the community so that most people have a basic idea of how to create food from the earth, and at least some people know how to do this very well and can teach others.

From an economic development perspective, the additional value that services such as food processing can bring to food production in the District is worth considering. If Kāpiti is not only able to produce raw food but also able to turn it into chutneys, meatballs, vege chips and other things that households like to eat, this could increase the number and variety of jobs available locally, while at the same time providing greater resiliency in the event that processed foods become more difficult to get from elsewhere in the world.

4

INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

This paper is a response to concerns that have been raised by the community in recent years, as well as global issues highlighted in the “Global Change: Issues and Pressures” paper. The 2009 Long Term Council Community Plan (“Community Plan”) includes the following relevant desired Community Outcome:

“the community makes use of local resources and people have the ability to act in a sustainable way on a day-to-day basis.”

The Community Plan also includes the following as two of Council’s 16 “leadership areas”:

- “Exploring the Local Food Economy” and
- “Neighbourhood and Street Action for Change: Energy, Waste, Water, Gardens and Food.”

The Council also has a mandate for action through national and regional policy documents, which reinforce the need for districts like ours to consider food production in the context of the District Plan Review.

The Resource Management Act, which provides the legislative framework for District Plans, Regional Plans and National Policy Statements, as well as the resource consent process within these policy frameworks, has the stated purpose to: promote sustainable management of natural and physical resources. It defines “sustainable management” as:

“Managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well-being and for their health and safety while—

(a) Sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and

(b) Safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems; and

(c) Avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.”

The importance of safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of soil is particularly relevant to this discussion paper, as is the reference to future generations. The issue is not only about land that’s being made unavailable to current residents for food production, but also about the capacity of the soil to meet the needs of future generations of people and other living things. While some argue that the life-supporting capacity of soil may not be harmed by building houses on top of it, access to the capacity of the land is removed for a significant period of time when this is done.

The Regional Policy Statement proposed by Greater Wellington Regional Council now directs Councils to consider present and future food production as part of their District Plans. The May 2010 version, amended in response to public submissions, sets out the following policy on rural productivity:

Policy 55: Managing development in rural areas – Consideration

When considering an application for a resource consent or a change, variation or review of a district plan, in rural areas (as at March 2009), particular regard shall be given to whether:

(a) the proposal will result in a loss of productivity of the rural area, including cumulative impacts that would reduce the potential for food and other primary production and reverse sensitivity issues for existing production activities;

It also includes the following policy on soil quality:

Policy 59: Retaining highly productive agricultural land (Class I and II land) – consideration

When considering an application for a resource consent, notice of requirement, or a change, variation or review of a district plan, particular regard shall be given to retaining the productive capability for agriculture of Class I and II land.

The document goes on to explain this Policy as follows:

“Resource management decision-making needs to consider the irreversible effects of losing Class I and II land, which is highly productive agricultural land, suitable for multiple uses such as for growing a wide range of crops, pasture and forest, and for supporting grazing animals. It is important to retain the productive capability of this land for future generations. The use of high quality soils for some activities – such as residential development and roading projects – will result in what is effectively permanent loss of these soils from productive use.”



The proposed Regional Policy Statement quoted above is currently in the appeals process but has some weight alongside the operative Regional Policy Statement from 1995. The operative Regional Policy Statement from 1995 includes a similar policy to Policy 59 above, which talks about net benefits rather than explicitly retaining the productive capability of high quality soils:

“Policy 9:

To ensure, when planning for and making decisions on new subdivision, use and development on Class I and Class II land (as defined by the Land Use Capability Survey), that there is a net benefit to the local community, which includes consideration of environmental standards, the needs of future generations, and any matters of significance for the Region.”



Role of District Plans

Given the legislative framework described above, and the issues presented thus far on food production and rural productivity in general, what is the potential role of the District Plan?

Nearly all District Plans specify lot sizes in different parts of a District, as well as the types of activity permitted, controlled, discretionary, non-complying or prohibited in those zones. Hence, an obvious thing a District Plan can do is to protect land in the right size in the right places from uses that reduce that its productive potential, either permanently or semi-permanently. The “right size” could be seen as land big enough to generate economies of scale, either individually or collectively with other parcels, so that production is efficient and worthwhile, if not profitable. The “right places” could be seen as those with suitable soils and climates for a range of uses, with a good solar aspect and wind shelter if required, but not areas with high biodiversity values or unstable slopes. Ideally, these places would be near enough to settlement areas to reduce transport costs so workers can travel to and from the rural lands, getting supplies and products back and forth as well.

Protecting the “right land in the right place” includes resolving tensions between minimising the expansion of the urban footprint into outlying rural areas, and allowing some capacity for food production at a household or community level for urban residents. The smaller the yards, the more dwellings can be accommodated within an urban area before rural land is encroached on.

Shouldn't some land within urban areas also be available for small-scale agriculture?

European cities have historically addressed this need through ‘allotments’ on the urban fringe, which provide communal gardening space while also acting as a greenbelt between settlements or an urban growth boundary. Another alternative is to ensure community gardens are allowed within urban areas, not just at the urban fringe, and that decent lot sizes are allowed or encouraged within urban residential areas.

In addition to their role in protecting agricultural land from non-agricultural uses, District Plans and their regional and national counterparts clearly have a role in controlling agriculture by regulating environmental effects like discharges to soil, water and air (Regional Plans) and noise, dust and odour (District Plans). Therefore, one way the food-producing capacity of rural lands can be protected is by avoiding unduly heavy-handed regulation on this sector, particularly in response

to ‘reverse sensitivity’ issues where problems only arise when residents move into a rural area for peace and quiet, soon to discover that a working rural landscape doesn't totally match their expectations.

District Plans can also work in tandem with Regional Plans to ensure any residential activities allowed in the rural zones (say, clustered hamlet-style housing or workers' accommodation) do not create any adverse environmental effects on the soil or water of the adjacent agricultural land – through, for example, inadequate sewage systems, extensive earthworks or impermeable surfaces leading to runoff.

Current District Plan provisions

Objectives and policies

The current District Plan was made operative in 1999. Its objectives and policies don't deal explicitly with food production but are relevant to rural productivity more generally. The one objective in the Rural Zone is:

“Objective 1.0 – General: Ensure that any adverse effects of activities on the natural and physical environment of rural areas and of rural based activities beyond this environment are avoided, remedied or mitigated with particular regard to sustaining the life supporting capacity of the resources of the land to meet the needs of future generations.”

The explanatory text covers some of the negative environmental effects that productive uses such as forestry and horticulture can have on land, water and surrounding areas. It also specifically mentions the value of soils, as follows:

“The development of non-productive land uses, such as dwellings on land with good soils can result in this finite resource being reduced or damaged or unavailable to meet the foreseeable economic needs of future generations of the District's communities.”

The policies relating to this objective are not specifically about soil, though the following policy hints at the need to protect soil quality:

Policy 4: Extractive Activities, Intensive Farming, Rural Industry, Shelter Belts and Plantations, Tourism Activities and Settlements Based On Community Facilities: Control the adverse effects of intensive farming, shelter belts and plantations, home occupations and non rural activities on the physical and natural environment of rural areas and adjacent residential areas and amenity values of these areas.”

The explanation to this policy cites adverse effects as including “effects of land use activities on finite resources.”

Section C.7.2 “Rural Subdivision and Development” has a similar objective to that of the Rural Zone:

“Objective 1.0 – General: Ensure that Subdivision and consequent development maintains and enhances the environmental character and associated amenity values of rural areas, life supporting capacity of resources to meet the needs of future generations and avoids, remedies or mitigates adverse effects on the natural and physical environment, particularly, the coastal environment.”

Supporting this objective are policies relating to the Coastal Dune environment and the Alluvial Plains, for example:

“Policy 1: Ensure the open space and rural character of the Alluvial Plains is not compromised by more intensive and sprawling development and associated adverse environmental effects, including cumulative effects.”

It should be noted that this policy mentions open space and rural character but not the productive capacity of soil. The explanation for the policy says: “The land contains the district’s most versatile soils and supports much of the district’s horticulture and intensive agriculture activities,” but it then refers to the need to protect open space character and groundwater.

Rules and standards: lot sizes:

The current District Plan has four subdivision policy areas with different minimum and average lot size requirements. The maps of the areas can be found in the current District Plan on-line or in hard copy. Following is a summary of the lot size provisions.

Coastal Dune Policy area

- 2 types achieving 4ha average
- Hamlet-clustered small lots with a large balance lot (start with 20ha or more)
- Farmlet-equal sized lots spread across site (start with less than 20ha)

Hill Country

- 20ha minimum

Alluvial Plains

- generally high quality soils
- 4ha minimum with 6ha average

Rural Residential

- 1ha average or minimum lots
 - In some areas minimum is 4000m² but average 1ha
- There are also two rural precincts with site-specific rules.

Tourist Activity Precinct

- Activities defined (tourist activities, facilities and services)
- Subdivision down to 1000m²

Peka Peka North Development Area

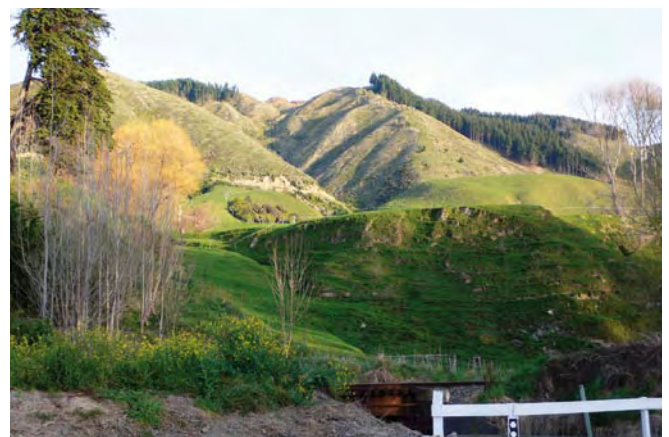
- Structure planned development of approx 38 lots (2000m² to 1.1ha) surrounded by reserve land
- Site specific rules

A recent addition to the District Plan through “Plan Change 79: Waikanae North Urban Edge, Low Impact Urban Development and Eco Hamlet Areas” extends the concept of clustering from the Coastal Dune Policy Area to the new Eco Hamlet Area, where clusters of dwellings are encouraged so that balance lots can be retained for productive uses.

Though outside the District Plan, the recent Rural Subdivision Guide references the productive capacity of rural land and suggests ways that this can be maintained. The earlier Best Practice Subdivision Guide for urban areas also considers urban gardening and the need for solar access.

The District Plan also controls production forestry and intensive farming activities, including intensive pig farming activities, though a range of standards. It also has a range of standards for the Rural Zone generally in terms of noise, dust and odour, earthworks, flood hazards, etc.

The District Plan currently overlaps with the newly passed Bylaw on Animals, Bees and Poultry in Urban Areas. The Bylaw currently allows the keeping of bees and poultry in urban areas provided Council permission is granted and they do not create a nuisance or health risk, but the District Plan also requires a separate resource consent for bees and for poultry coops in some situations.



New ideas and possible improvements

There are numerous possibilities that could be explored as part of the District Plan Review, with the aim of encouraging a diverse, resilient network for food production in Kāpiti. The following are some key ideas:

Strengthening and clarifying objectives and policies relating to food and soil capacity

- As discussed, the current District Plan is not as direct as it could be in terms of promoting the protection of soil quality and food-growing potential in the rural parts of the district.
- The strong policy language in the proposed Regional Policy Statement suggests that an improvement in our District Plan is necessary.
- There could also be stronger and more explicit policy language relating to residential areas to promote a range of lot sizes that would allow urban gardening.

Further clustering of any residential development in rural areas

- This would avoid uniform or “blanket” subdivision rules such as those that were in place in Horowhenua District until 2008, which allowed the subdivision of land that was not Class 1 and 2 soils down to lots as small as 2000m², fragmenting the rural environment.
- The concepts currently in the KCDC District Plan’s Coastal Dune Policy area and Waikanae North Eco Hamlet Area could be evaluated and extended to other parts of the rural area.
- It will be important to ensure that this is done in a way that prevents the contamination of land and/or water by inadequate sewage systems.

Retaining/expanding lot sizes on the most productive and versatile soils

- This recognises that even where houses are clustered to maximise the productive potential of the surrounding land, some soil may be too valuable to have anything approaching cluster-type residential densities on it.
- In some particularly valuable parts of the Alluvial Plans the 4ha minimum with 6ha average could be retained or increased.

Allowing farm worker housing in rural areas to support the productive sector

- This is currently limited but expanded provision could be considered so that seasonal workers are able to travel to and from work without necessitating private vehicle travel.
- This might not be necessary, though, as the District’s flat productive land is quite narrow and workers don’t have to travel the great distances they might have to in places like Central Otago or Hawkes Bay.
- It also has to be balanced by the fact that even seasonal workers need access to shops, parks and other amenities rather than being isolated in a virtual ‘company town.’

Addressing reverse sensitivity issues through clustering and buffer zones

- Clustering any residential development in rural areas reduces ‘edge effects’ and thereby reduces the likelihood of rural activities impacting residences in a perceived negative way.
- Buffer zones of non-productive land such as nature reserves could also ensure that rural residences are close but not too close to rural productive activities.

Allowing a range of residential lot sizes and community gardens in urban areas

- A wide range of residential lot sizes are currently allowed in the District - this is unlikely to change through the District Plan Review.
- The question is whether allowing for smaller lot sizes or medium density housing might unduly impact on the ability of householders to grow at least some of their own food.
- Community gardens are not restricted by the current District Plan if they are on public land, or on land zoned Open Space, but consideration could be given as to whether community gardens on private or non-profit land could also be an explicitly permitted activity subject to certain standards.

Streamlining the process for the keeping of bees and poultry in urban areas

- These activities currently require resource consent despite being allowed by the recent Animals, Bees and Poultry in Urban Areas Bylaw as long as Council permission is granted and they don’t create a nuisance or health risk. Ways to streamline or avoid the resource consent process are being explored now, but there may be supporting changes to the District Plan required.

Allowing reserves contributions to be spent on acquiring land for community gardens, food forests and other food-producing reserves

- Current policies in the District Plan relating to reserves contributions refer to meeting the District’s ecological and passive or active recreation needs, not its food needs. We could consider whether infrastructure for meeting at least some of the food needs of new residents could be met through reserves contributions from new developments.
- Though not subject to District Plan provisions, Council could also continue to promote the planting of fruit and nut trees as well as community vegetable gardens on Council reserves, including road reserves.
- Planting requirements for road verges or reserves in new subdivisions could include fruit and nut trees, where they do not create unreasonable maintenance issues or pose a threat to native biodiversity.

Allowing/promoting the use of rooftop gardens

- Places like New York City and Chicago in the USA, and numerous cities in Europe, have explicitly allowed and even incentivised or mandated “green roofs” – roofs with vegetation.
- These can help with stormwater runoff and treatment, temperature control for the building, carbon capture to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and outdoor amenity for residents or workers where this is otherwise at a premium.
- There is no reason why these green roofs can’t incorporate food production as one of their features.
- The role of the District Plan, in conjunction with any relevant aspects of the Building Act and Building Code, would need to be explored.

Allowing/promoting farmers’ markets or other food-oriented markets throughout the District

- Getting fresh fruit, vegetables and other food products from an urban market is an increasingly attractive feature of world-class cities and districts.
- This is important for people who can’t produce much of their own food on their own land.
- The “temporary events” provisions in the Open Space Zone and other parts of the District Plan could be explored to ensure they pose no particular barriers to this type of activity.

Eliminating any unnecessary barriers to food production in the rural zone

- Every rule and standard in the District Plan is there for a reason, at least for a reason that existed in 1999.
- But the District Plan Review needs to have a thorough look at all the provisions impacting on food production in the Rural Zone, to ensure a balance between protecting the environment including nearby residential areas, and the ability to produce food locally.
- A particular focus would be “win-win” changes that would have no negative effect on the surrounding environment but which could remove unnecessary barriers to food production in the rural zone.



6 CONCLUSION

Food and rural productivity are important issues for the District in view of global challenges including energy supply, climate change and population growth. The District Plan Review could provide more guidance and facilitation of how to provide for local food production and other productive rural uses while protecting other aspects of the environment.

The following table summarises the main ideas for the District Plan Review proposed in the previous section.

	1	2	3	4	5
Possible new concepts	Promoting food production in urban areas	Farm worker housing in rural areas	Incentives for farmers' markets	Incentives for rooftop gardens	Reserves contributions for food-producing reserves
Concepts to continue and/or Strengthen	Range of residential lot sizes and community gardens in urban areas	Strengthen / clarify objectives and policies re: food and soil capacity	Further protection of most productive / versatile soils.	Addressing reverse sensitivity issues	Clustering of rural dwellings with buffer zones
Barriers to Remove	Unnecessary barriers to keeping of bees and poultry in urban areas	Unnecessary barriers to farm worker housing in rural areas	Unnecessary barriers to farmers' markets	Unnecessary barriers to rooftop gardens	Unnecessary barriers to food production in rural zone

REFERENCES

2005 SLURI study:

<http://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/Documents/Rural-Reports/Rural-Productive-Potential-in-the-Northern-part-of-Kapiti-Coast-District.pdf>

2009 Rural Residential Survey report:

<http://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/Documents/Rural-Reports/Rural-Residential-Living-in-the-Kapiti-Coast-District.pdf>

