

# PROCESS REVIEW OF KAPITI GATEWAY CENTRE PROJECT

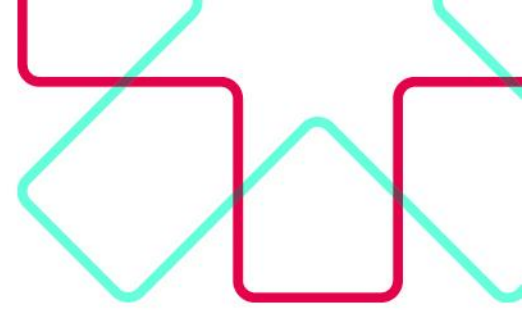
Report

Kapiti Coast District Council

30 August 2021







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# PREFACE

This report has been prepared for Kāpiti Coast District Council by Tom Gott and Renee Burt from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Limited).

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

### Te Uruhi Kāpiti Gateway Project ('Te Uruhi')

On 25 February the Kāpiti Coast District Council (KCDC) voted 'to proceed with the Kāpiti Gateway project, Te Uruhi, and for the project to proceed in accordance with the project plan, noting that the operating model and functions will be confirmed as part of the detailed design phase.' At this meeting the Council also voted 'to approve to provide up to 50% funding for the Kāpiti Gateway project (\$2.23m).'<sup>1</sup>

#### Description and vision

Te Uruhi is described on the KCDC website as "a development on the south bank of Tikotu Stream in Maclean Park, Paraparaumu. It will include innovative displays telling our local stories and history, improvements to the banks and retaining walls of the Tikotu Stream, a new accessible bridge over the stream, and a small biosecurity facility for visitors to Kāpiti Island. The building will be as sustainable, resilient, and accessible as possible."<sup>2</sup>

The vision for Te Uruhi recognises the role the facility is expected to play, including as a gateway to the wider district:

"Te Uruhi (previously known as the Kāpiti Gateway) will provide an iconic visitor experience, a biosecurity facility, and tell the Kāpiti Island conservation story. It will celebrate our district's rich cultural history, and

enhance the Tikotu Stream. [...] Te Uruhi will help promote tourism for the wider district."<sup>3</sup>

The scope of the current review is on lessons learned from the process adopted for the Te Uruhi Kāpiti Gateway project up until the Council meeting of 25 February 2021.

## Context

To inform the review's conclusions on the processes for the development of the Gateway Project it was important to understand the context surrounding the project and the implications of this for the way the project developed.

Three features in the context of the review can be seen to have influenced the processes and perceptions for the project as it progressed. These are:

- the lengthy timeframe across which the project evolved,
- the impact of COVID-19 response requirements on Council, and
- the opportunity that arose for applying for Provincial Growth Fund funding that would contribute up to 50% of the development cost of the project.

### Project evolution over time

The history of the project has been one of a stop-start nature over the past 29 years. Studies have been made, engagement completed, and for various reasons, not the least of which has been access to funding, the project did not gain traction until 2019/ 2020. A large part of this was the

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Council Meeting, 25 February 2021 Note: the remaining 50% to be funded from the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/your-council/projects/kapiti-gateway-centre/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid





opportunity to apply at this time for Provincial Growth Funding (PGF) which would see the Government contributing up to 50% of development costs.

### **1992 TRC Feasibility Study**

The concept of a gateway to Kāpiti goes back as far as an initial feasibility study for KCDC by TRC Tourism Ltd (TRC) in 1992. The concept of a visitor centre for Kāpiti Island was the basis of this draft feasibility study. The idea behind this was to leverage the attraction of Kāpiti Island as a tourist attraction that would drive further economic benefit for the broader community. The study process investigated multiple areas where a visitor centre might be located and how it might work and, after considering all site options, the recommendation was to utilise the Kāpiti Boat Club site.<sup>4</sup>

### **2013 TRC Feasibility Study**

In 2013 TRC Tourism Ltd was commissioned by KCDC and the Department of Conservation (DoC) to once again investigate the viability of a visitor centre for Kāpiti Island. The purpose of this report was to look at opportunities to enhance the visitor experience to those accessing Kāpiti Island, drive growth in visitor numbers to the island whilst ensuring the ongoing protection of the environment, and to increase the profile of the island nationally to stimulate domestic tourism growth.

This considered four locations and recommended the Kāpiti Boat Club site as preferred, with a new, iconic building to provide Visitor information, briefing, biosecurity functions and to house the Boat and Dive Clubs and Coastguard.<sup>5</sup>

### **2017 Maclean Park Development Plan**

In 2017 the Maclean Park Development Plan includes concepts for the development of a Gateway or Visitor Attraction Centre as a top strategy with aims including to:

- Support a collaboratively developed visitor centre/Kāpiti Island Gateway Building in this project area
- Provide a high quality access over the stream for pedestrians including interpretation of the natural and cultural environment
- Restore the margins of the Tikotu Stream.<sup>6</sup>

This development planning process involved extensive consultation with the community to canvas their views on potential options for the development of Maclean Park.

### **2018-2038 Long Term Plan**

On 28 June 2018 the 2018-2038 Long Term Plan was adopted by the Council. The development of this plan involved an extensive consultation process and included progressing work to investigate a Kāpiti Island Gateway Centre along the lines of previous concept feasibility studies.

### **Late 2019 – March 2020 TRC Final Feasibility Study**

A final feasibility study from TRC Tourism Ltd was progressed through the Kāpiti Coast Toitū Kāpiti 2018-2038 Long Term Plan, and considered the role and function of a visitor facility for Kāpiti as a component of the broader destination experience. It revisited work done previously by TRC on the concept of a 'gateway' facility as a destination for locals and visitors, and assessed the financial sustainability and community acceptance of the development of a visitor facility. As with previous studies, the report

<sup>4</sup> Cited in TRC Kāpiti Coast Gateway Feasibility Report, March 2020

<sup>5</sup> Cited in TRC Kāpiti Coast Gateway Feasibility Report, March 2020

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/media/31223/maclean-park-development-plan-map.pdf>



considered the concept planning for a facility but was neither a master plan for the area nor a design of the facility.

The TRC Final Feasibility Report (3 March 2020) concluded that the focus of the visitor and community facility should be an interpretive experience which highlights the iwi mātauranga of the place, tells cultural and historical stories, and educates visitors about the natural values of the coast and Kāpiti Island. The study looked at three options for the location of the Gateway Centre as being:

- 1 The current Kāpiti Boat Club Building and car park area
- 2 The roundabout located at the junction of Marine Parade, Kāpiti Road and Manly Street
- 3 The space located on the south side of Tikotu stream.

The conclusion from the consultation during the study was option three as the preferable site which would accommodate the needs of the local community and users of the Kāpiti Boat Club Building.<sup>7</sup>

### **Indicative Business Case 5 June 2020**

In early 2020, the decision was made to include the Kāpiti Gateway Project as a possibility for application for Public Growth Fund (PGF) funding. As a part of the application requirements an indicative business case was developed which further articulated the concept for the Gateway Project. This described the proposal being 'to provide a facility (building) on the Kāpiti Coast beachfront at Paraparaumu Beach, which can address a number of identified needs and issues relating to visitation to Kāpiti Island and encourage opportunities relating to the enhancement of the visitor experience to the Kāpiti Coast district.

<sup>7</sup> Kāpiti Coast Gateway Feasibility Project TRC March 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Indicative Business Case Kāpiti Gateway Project 5 June 2020

As well as economic benefits, (including job creation) from tourism, the Gateway will deliver social and cultural benefits by providing a focal point for local history, stories and as a place to welcome people to the district. It will also enhance the environment of the significant site on which it will stand [...]. The Gateway Centre will also provide visitor information space about the Kāpiti Coast and its attractions and encourage visitors to explore what the district has to offer.<sup>8</sup>

### **PGF Application 8 June 2020**

The application for PGF funding reiterated these messages, describing the proposal as 'to build a "Gateway" facility on the Kāpiti Coast beachfront, which can address a number of identified needs and issues relating to visitation to Kāpiti Island and encourage opportunities to enhance the visitor experience to the whole Kāpiti Coast district. It will create a social and cultural focus, enabling story-telling of our local history, whilst also delivering environmental and economic benefits.'<sup>9</sup>

On 8 September 2020 KCDC was formally advised that its application for funding of \$2.23 million was successful.

### **PWC Review Report 29 Jan' 2021**

Following the successful funding application, PwC was commissioned to complete a final assessment of the project prior to a Council meeting in February 2021 for a final vote on adopting the concept and agreeing to Council funding of the project.

In this report PwC reviewed the project to date, including documentation, design and analysis completed, identified potential space uses and key operating model options, and assessed the identified options to create a

<sup>9</sup> Kāpiti Gateway PGF Application Final 2020





shortlist of preferred options. This review described three key functional components to the Gateway proposal:

- 1 A terminus for accessing Kāpiti Island for ecological and commercial benefit
- 2 A tourism gateway for the Kāpiti region, and
- 3 The provision of facilities that benefit the local community.

'A gateway facility would be well sited to help protect Kāpiti Island, support growth of visitation to the island and engage visitors in the district to increase tourism spend. A gateway facility would promote and enhance Kāpiti Island as a tourist activity, provide a focus for Kāpiti as a tourist destination, and promote other attractions and activities in the region.'<sup>10</sup>

#### **Council decision on 25 February 2021**

At this meeting Kāpiti District Council voted to proceed with the Kāpiti Gateway project, Te Uruhi.

### **New Zealand Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

#### **Effects of lockdown**

The New Zealand response to the COVID-19 Pandemic involved two significant periods of lockdown (levels 3 and 4) during 2020. Level 4 was in place for the period 25 March – 27 April 2020, and Level 3 for 27 April – 13 May 2020. These lockdowns restricted movements, gatherings and meetings, and created considerable additional work for organisations as they adjusted to the demands of the lockdowns and developed systems and processes to respond to emergencies and conduct business-as-usual.

The impacts and restrictions of these lockdowns had significant implications for Council members, management and staff, as they did for all New Zealanders, including:

- Establishing arrangements for all Council offices and buildings to be closed and all staff working from home – no on-site or external off-site meetings
- Organising and conducting virtual meetings only with Council Chambers and all meeting rooms closed
- Continuing essential service work, e.g. drinking water and wastewater treatment plant operations, and essential repairs, with additional PPE requirements, hygiene protocols and staff welfare checks in place – with restrictions on numbers of staff able to travel in vehicles, and vehicle cleansing required after each use
- Activating an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) virtually with numbers of staff working in shifts to coordinate Council's community response and link in to regional and national communications and planning, and
- Pausing/ reorganising some work to enable staff to fulfil EOC roles.

#### **Opportunity for Provincial Growth Fund funding**

In February 2018 the New Zealand Government allocated three billion dollars over a three-year term to invest in regional economic development through the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF).

In September 2018 the Kāpiti region became eligible for funding from the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) after a change in government policy which had earlier ruled Kāpiti projects as ineligible. A Regional Advisory Group and a District Leaders Group were formed to assess priorities for PGF

<sup>10</sup> Kāpiti Gateway Options, Kāpiti Coast District Council, January 2020.



funding. Following this assessment over the course of 2019, it was decided in early 2020 that the Kāpiti Gateway Project was a prime candidate for a funding application which would contribute 50% of development costs.

PGF funding was tagged for 'shovel ready' projects that could be up and running in 2-6 months from the receipt of funding. This presented some urgency for developing a more specific design to support an application.

In January 2020 a Project Manager was appointed to build on work to date, lead the process for final design of the facility and lead the development of the application for PGF funding which was due by May of that year. A Governance Group was also established in early March 2020 to provide oversight over the project.

Building on previous studies and further design work, an indicative business case was developed by 5 June 2020, with an application for PGF funding submitted on 8 June 2020.

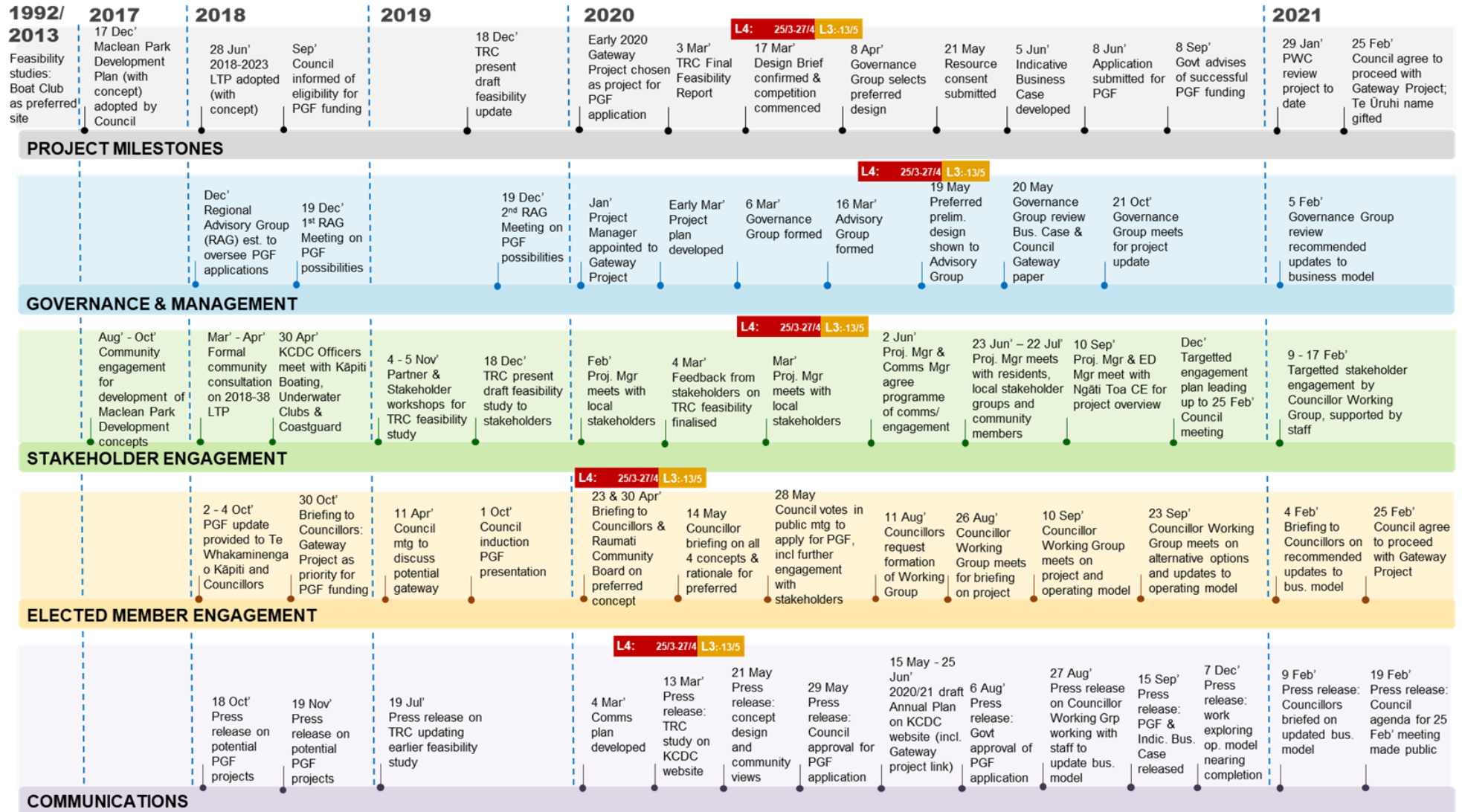
On 8 September 2020 KCDC was formally advised that its application for funding of \$2.23 million was successful.

## Timeline

The following page presents a summarised timeline commencing from the early feasibility studies through to the Council meeting on 25 February 2021. It shows key points for project milestones, governance and management, stakeholder engagement, elected member engagement and communications.



# Timeline



# SCOPE AND APPROACH

## Scope

### Objectives of the review

Kāpiti Coast District Council (KCDC) sought an independent process review of the Kāpiti Gateway Centre Project (Te Uruhi), for the period from 2018 (following approval of the Maclean Park Management Plan in December 2017) to the end of February 2021. The objective was to identify lessons learned that could be applied both to the Kāpiti Gateway Centre Project going forward and to future projects of a similar nature.

### Scope of the review

The scope of the review was to include an examination of project processes, including:

- How key decisions were made and how they were communicated.
- Appropriateness of project phasing and timeframes.
- Whether KCDC followed its guidance for good practice in terms of what was communicated and when.
- The impact of external circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on the project (such as changes to central government funding as a result of COVID, and how this might have affected council processes or engagement).

### Out of scope

The scope did not include:

- Assessment of individual competencies

- Assessment of the concepts and design of Te Uruhi Gateway Project.

## Approach

The review involved a four-stage approach, summarised as follows:

- 1 **Planning and discovery:** Project planning and initial document review to better understand the context.
- 2 **Stakeholder engagement:** Interviews and focus groups with various internal and external stakeholders.
- 3 **Assessment and analysis:** Triangulating findings from interviews, assessing themes and undertaking detailed document review to test findings and ensure an objective view.
- 4 **Reporting:** Collating findings into a report to KCDC management.

## Interviews

A total of 36 stakeholders (internal and external to Council) were engaged in interviews and focus groups. These included KCDC staff, Councillors, members of the Governance Group, members of the Advisory Group and a number of stakeholders in the local community.

## Document review

The documentation review spanned the following:

- **Core project documentation**, including the Gateway project Terms of Reference, project plan, communications plan and targeted engagement plan.
- **Formal reports**, including the Independent Review and Economic Impact Assessment, Review of the Gateway Project against Reserve



Management Planning Documents, TRC Feasibility Report, Indicative Business Case, PGF Application, and MacLean Park Management Plan.

- **Meeting agendas and minutes** for the governance group meetings and relevant SLT meetings.
- **Project presentations and briefing materials** for internal and external stakeholders.
- **File notes and email correspondence** including meeting notes and emails for liaison between the project team and governance and advisory group members, and file notes such as the 'Summary of Gateway Consultation'.

## Disclaimer

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We have not been required, or sought, to independently verify the accuracy of information provided to us. Accordingly, we express no opinion on the reliability, accuracy, or completeness of the information provided to us and upon which we have relied.

The statements and opinions expressed herein have been made in good faith, and on the basis that all information relied upon is true and accurate in all material respects, and not misleading by reason of omission or otherwise. We reserve the right, but will be under no obligation, to review or amend this Report if any additional information, which was in existence

on the date of this Report, was not brought to our attention, or subsequently comes to light.



# FINDINGS

## Introduction

A final decision to proceed with the Te Uruhi Gateway Project was made by Council on 25 February 2021, but not without some wins and turbulence along the way.

This section of the report looks at what has been achieved and what have been some of the lessons to be learned from the project development process.

## Project wins

### Achievements

#### Gifting of the name 'Te Uruhi'

One significant achievement from the process for the development of the project was the gifting of the name Te Uruhi to the Gateway Project from local iwi. Iwi representatives were involved through the Council's formal forum Te Whakameninga o Kāpiti and the participation of representatives from Te Āti Awa and Ngāti Toa in the governance group which was set up to oversee the project.

The name 'Te Uruhi' was formally gifted at the Council meeting of 25 February 2021.

#### Gaining of PGF funding for the project

The successful application for PGF funding was due in no small measure to the efficient project management and support from Council staff over a period of COVID-19 levels 3 and 4 lockdowns.

#### Project feasibility results

While they did play out over time, the series of project feasibility studies that had been completed provided a good base for the development of the application for PGF funding, and they helped refine the concepts and costings for the project.

#### Strong engagement in the early stages of the MacLean Park Management Plan

The concepts for the Gateway Project were included in the consultation of development of the wider MacLean Park area. The Council conducted quite extensive consultation with the local community on this. The quality of the Maclean Park Refresh consultation process was recognised by the New Zealand Recreation Association (now called Recreation Aotearoa) with the 2018 Award for Outstanding Research, Planning and Policy.

#### Council approval for funding and to proceed with the project

At the meeting on 25 February 2021, Kāpiti Coast District Council voted to approve funding of \$2.23m and to proceed with the Kāpiti Gateway project, Te Uruhi.





## Project issues and lessons learned

### The extended timeline and associated evolution of project concepts had an impact for engagement and levels of community interest

As the timeline indicates the project concepts spanned a period of 29 years (1992-2021). The timeline for project concept planning and associated development had an impact for the nature of the project and levels of community interest over this period of time.

The extended timeline of plans, assessments and consultation for the Te Uruhi Kāpiti Gateway Centre, and the development of the concept over this time has given the project a reasonably high degree of exposure in the community.

#### Effects of extended timeline

What might have seemed a relatively straightforward project (in terms of concept and cost) of building a gateway facility to Kāpiti Island to attract visitors and improve their experience developed over time into a project of potential significance as a gateway to the whole Kāpiti region, sparking the interests of far more community stakeholders than those who might be immediately involved within the vicinity of the building.

While some of the early feasibility studies referred to 'wider economic impacts' of the project, the opportunities for the project to enhance the visitor experience to the whole Kāpiti Coast district and tell the stories of the region came through most strongly in the updated feasibility study of late 2019/ early 2020 and in the application for PGF funding in mid 2020.

There was a high degree of broad stakeholder engagement in the development of the earlier Maclean Park Management Plan (2017) but this was not the case two years later when the plan changed into the ideas for the Gateway Project, which involved changes to location, buildings, and focus. Engagement at this point focused on stakeholders in the immediate vicinity of the project location, including local interest groups which might be affected. The public were not brought into this process, leading to opposition from some quarters as people drew their own conclusions on the nature and impact of the project.

#### Understandings of the project

Some stakeholders we spoke with expressed a clear idea of their understanding of the project, and these spanned a range of possibilities. It was either a gateway to Kāpiti Island, a biosecurity facility or a gateway to the Kāpiti District. Others were unclear as to the vision for the project.

Given the lengthy way in which the vision developed and the lack of understanding of the rationale for this, some tended to 'make up their own story' which added to the complexity of managing communications and stakeholder expectations.



## COVID-19 response requirements had a material effect for staff and leadership contributions and the capacity for direct engagement with stakeholders

The timeline shows the timing of the COVID-19 level 4 and level 3 lockdown periods as spanning the period from early development of the design brief for the PGF funding application through almost to the point of submitting the application for funding.

### Impacts of COVID-19

The requirements of the Council COVID-19 response at this time and beyond had a material impact for the project engagement and levels of staff involvement.

The two areas of main impact were:

- The ability to meet and engage with people during the course of 2020, at a time of further development of the Gateway concept, the opportunity to submit an application for PGF application and the requirement for Council decision-making on the project.

It was a challenge to engage directly with the community during lockdown and at a time when community members were no doubt preoccupied with dealing with their own situations.

This also impacted the times and types of governance and management meetings for the project itself.

- The challenges for KCDC management and staff to find time to apply to the leadership and development of the project.

Preoccupations with EOC roles and the increased demand from changed business-as-usual work at times monopolised the attention and time of KCDC managers and staff who might otherwise have contributed more to the project, in particular leadership and communications.

## The decision to apply for PGF funding in early 2020 increased pressure on staff and the process to deliver

The Council was informed of its eligibility for PGF funding in September 2018. The decision to include the Gateway Project as one for an application for PGF funding was made only in early 2020. 2019 saw some preliminary work done on PGF application decision-making through the work of the Regional Advisory Group and District Leaders Groups. The fact that 2019 was an election year may have had an impact on the progress of a PGF application over this period.

This decision to apply for PGF funding in early 2020 (with a May 2020 deadline) placed some pressure on people and the process particularly at a time of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

### Focus on the funding application delivery

The opportunity for PGF funding acted as a catalyst for action for the Council to take previous work from broad concepts to more specific design and costings to support an application for the project. While there was some further work on concept development (TRC update) during 2019, the work on the funding application did not commence in earnest until January 2020.



This meant a more intensive and structured focus of resourcing to develop the project to the standards required for the application, putting some pressure on staff, the project process, and Council decision-making, particularly at a time of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on working and engagement.

The final project plan provides detail of key milestones to be achieved over the period 6 March 2020 to submission of the PGF application on 8 June 2020 and beyond.<sup>11</sup> The plan does not refer to stage gates for review of progress along the way, possibly due to the focus on getting the job done in the time required.

### **Time pressures and COVID-19**

Time pressures, together with COVID-19 effects, appear to have affected the degree of involvement and input of some of the engagement groups established to support the project (see below).

With the benefit of hindsight, more work might have been done towards the PGF funding application during 2019 which would have allowed more to have been done prior to lockdown, and for a less pressured project process as a result.

Having said that, no-one would have predicted in 2019 that 2020 would be such a disruptive year.

## **KCDC leadership involvement in the project could have been stronger**

A Gateway Governance Group was established on 6 March 2020. This was very close to the date where New Zealand went into COVID-19 level 4

lockdown. This group comprised representatives and experts external to the Council, together with a project sponsor from KCDC leadership.

### **Governance Group and KCDC leadership**

The governance group was seen to be working well, but required stronger connection with KCDC leadership to be even more effective in guiding the focus and activity of the project.

During 2020 there were several changes of KCDC leadership representation on the project governance group as people were redirected for managing the Council's Covid-19 response activity. Covid-19 put additional strains on leadership through this period as it diverted them to responding to the urgent issues and extraordinary challenges that Covid-19 presented.

However, Covid-19 also heightened the need for greater leadership on the project as, with staff working remotely, communications channels were weakened, there was a greater risk of staff becoming isolated, and there was increased potential for issues arising with engagement with the community.

A stronger and more consistent connection between the Council leadership and the governance group would have assisted with the opportunity for this group to challenge issues of communication and community engagement that arose in the project and better bring these to leadership attention.

<sup>11</sup> Programme Gateway Project 080620 Final Project plan (6813732)



## Engagement structures to support project development were not fully leveraged

### Project support groups

In 2020 there were two groups established to support the project:

- a Governance Group (formed on 6 March), comprised of individuals with expertise to assess design proposals and the business plan, and
- a community Advisory/ Working Group (formed on 16 March 2020), comprised of individuals to represent a range of stakeholder views on the project design.

While the project terms of reference (ToR) set out the authority and responsibilities of the Governance and Advisory Groups, there seems to have been a lack of clarity around the full scope of each group's role, their responsibilities, and delegations. Several stakeholders interviewed felt that the authorities set out in the ToR were not supported in practice, with the Advisory Group not given the opportunity to provide feedback on the concepts before they went to the selection panel and the Governance Group being focused mainly on assessment of business case and design concepts.

Time pressures of the PGF application process, and the effects of lockdowns appear to have limited the ability the Advisory Group to meet more regularly and participate in the development process. The limited engagement that did occur left some feeling that they didn't have the opportunity to make as meaningful a contribution as they would have liked.

### Elected members

This dynamic also appears to have affected the opportunity for elected member engagement. We heard from Councillors that they were asked to make decisions on the project progress sometimes with very little time for

deliberation. In addition, Councillors had become concerned about some misinformation that was circulating in the community and felt they needed to become more engaged to deal with this.

This led to a request for formation of a Councillor Working group on 11 August 2020, which was duly formed with the first meeting on 26 August for a briefing on the project.

This group was established as a connector between Council and staff, and to provide opportunity for the elected members' voice to be included in the process. The group reviewed the business plan, looked at what engagement should look like for the project, and contributed to engagement opportunities. This group identified a need for increased communication with the community on the challenges facing the project regarding the spread of misinformation and were frustrated by the Council's seeming inability to counter this.

The group was formed more than two months after the submission of the application for PGF funding on the project design concept and estimated costings (8 June 2020). We heard that the Elected Members Working Group was limited in what they could do. There did not appear to be any formal terms of reference for this group to guide the group or those interacting with it.

Consequently the focus of the Councillor Working Group at this stage was more on the operating model and operational aspects of the project, which took them into the realm of operational management, when their role is more properly one of strategy, policy and governance.



## Communications on project progress and process were planned but there were challenges with the execution of plans

### Public communications

As the timeline for the project indicates there were regular public communications in the form of press releases (in physical and digital media) including on the progress of the Gateway Project feasibility studies, the process for the application for PGF funding, the Draft Annual Plan 2020/21 (KCDC website), the indicative business case, work on the operating model and the agenda and minutes of key meetings for decisions.

### Communications planning and activity

On the 4 March 2020 a detailed communications plan was developed which included contextual information on the project, stakeholders for direct engagement, key messages and approaches to communication. The plan recognised that with such limited timeframes, mass communication to socialise the recommendations of the feasibility study and Council's next steps is a priority. Mass communications will leverage existing Council channels including a media release, social media and website content.<sup>12</sup>

There was some local stakeholder engagement in March 2020, which was confined to those located in close proximity to the proposed location and who might be affected. Then lockdown levels 3 and 4 hit and presumably took their toll on the ability to engage further.

Post lockdowns, in June of 2020 there was a refresh of the plan for communications and engagement, which resulted in a series of meetings with local residents, local stakeholder groups and community members.

### Communications and project management

Despite the planning, there seems to have been a disconnect between communications and project management on the Project. A detailed Project Plan developed in early March 2020 makes no mention of communications activity other than an early press release presumably to signal the start of the process for application for PGF funding. There were challenges in providing communications resource to the project due to pressures from COVID-19 communication demands, and as a result there was no communications resource firmly embedded in the project at a time when this was needed to inform the community of project updates, the rationale for any changes and to counter the misinformation that was being spread by some in the community who were opposed to the project.

Having said this, there were some attempts to meet with disaffected parties to discuss issues and communicate project information, but these were not enough to address all concerns.

## The rationale behind decisions and process was not explained adequately and people filled the gaps with their own perceptions and narrative

Information and briefings alone would not have resolved community concerns and misunderstandings. Rationale about 'the why' is critical to growing shared understanding. For example, a conversation with key

<sup>12</sup> Communications Plan – Kāpiti Island Gateway Centre 4 March 2020.



stakeholders up front about why the time frames were tight and why the PGF funding was a priority would have given stakeholders a chance to respond and make informed decisions about their priorities and how they would like to be involved.

### Information sharing

Despite the regular press releases on the KCDC website, stakeholders we interviewed felt that there was a lack of transparency, with information either absent or shared too late, particularly over the COVID-19 lockdown periods. This created space for misinformation to spread as stakeholders were not provided with sufficient information to counter misinformed messaging, or the time to be able to engage fully and share their feedback.

This allowed a small group of strong community voices to become a primary source of information, even when the information shared (particularly on social media) was misunderstood and sometimes incorrect or untrue.

The Council project communications plan included the use of press releases, the Everything Kapiti newsletter, and Facebook. Our understanding is that while the Council did engage through the KCDC website and press, and on its own Facebook page, it did not engage on community Facebook pages where much of the negative conversation was happening. This constrained the ability of the Council to counter the misinformation that was being spread about the project.

The Council might have considered the possibility to provide these community forums with factual information and links to factual information on the KCDC website and its own Facebook page but this did not eventuate.

## Conclusions

### Lessons learned

- A project which had a lengthy timeline and multiple touchpoints for development of concepts and design required some additional attention to communication and engagement to bring the community along with the changes.
- The project failed to recognise the significance of, and the level of community interest in, the project itself, and the types of resourcing needed to address this early on.
- Through 2020 the project focus on achieving the key milestones for meeting the deadline for submitting a credible application for PGF (and in a period of COVID lockdowns) meant little time was given to project review activity and reporting, taking stock and adjusting resourcing and communications accordingly.
- There needed to be a timely flow of information into the community at the various points of change within the project, and on platforms that the community use to engage with each other.
- This does not mean the Council should have engaged in argument with the those who were spreading misinformation, but it needed to keep up a steady beat of factual information to counter this and enable people to draw more balanced conclusions on the project.
- While project efficiency in terms of rigorous project management was important, particularly when there were time pressures involved, project effectiveness also needed to be addressed through ensuring that adequate support was provided for communication and engagement activity.





- Capacity constraints imposed by the COVID-19 Emergency Operations Centre duties significantly reduced the contribution of the communications function for supporting the project, particularly at a time when some dissatisfied stakeholders were taking hold of the narrative and spreading misinformation in the community.
- The effects of the COVID-19 response requirements had a material effect on the ability of the KCDC leadership to engage as closely as it needed to with the governance group and project team, particularly when the project began to adopt a higher profile in the local community.
- While the KCDC website might be regarded by Council as the single source of truth, the community does not necessarily use the website as a vehicle for communication, preferring to use social media platforms such as community Facebook pages for connecting and communication.
- While the Council does use some social media through its own Facebook page, it might need to look at what it communicates here and how often, so that it can provide links to its own story in Facebook notifications to the community pages.

