

Submission to: Hutt City Council, Long Term Plan 2021-2031

From: Friends of Waiwhetu Stream/Nga Hoa O Waiwhetu

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We would like the opportunity to verbally present our to the Council.

The Friends of Waiwhetu Stream are a community group that undertakes restoration activity and advocacy that protects the Waiwhetu Stream. Over the past decade we have removed rubbish, done riparian planting and monitored and reported on pollution events. Our goal is for Waiwhetu Stream to be a healthy, functioning ecosystem that is treasured and enjoyed by the Community.

The Waiwhetu Stream remains a heavily polluted waterway, with evidence of pollutants being introduced to the stream obvious on most days. Having reviewed the proposed Long Term Plan, the Friends have the following observations:

1. The current plan has water infrastructure and sustainability in different sections. This is a serious error in approach as Council should embed environmental, social and economic sustainability into the way it undertakes its activities. We agree with the LTPs statements that seek to reduce potable water consumption, ensure infrastructure exists for wastewater, and to manage storm water. A sustainable approach is needed to avoid ratepayers incurring additional costs as interventions in natural systems inevitably leads to additional interventions being needed.

Council should also be looking to spend on soft infrastructure that will retain water closer to where it falls, ideally letting to soak into the ground and filter down to the aquifer. This will also prevent pollutants from entering waterways. An example of such soft infrastructure is the rain gardens in the new parking area in Waterloo Station.



Soft infrastructure will save Ratepayers more in the long run by reducing flow to waterways and therefore lower flood risks.

The need to improve quality of our streams and provide resilience for communities the suggested approach of including sustainable considerations in planning will contribute to better outcomes at lower cost over the long term.

2. We note that there is an increase in funding for managing and replacing assets related to the three waters. The Friends is supportive of this work being undertaken, however note that the detail of what work will be done is not provided in the plan.

The need for replacing old and broken pipes, detecting cross-connections and remediating leaks is obvious, however not quantified. The only measure found is in the Wellington Water briefing to Council that notes leaks have dramatically increased in the last 4 years – which coincides with the Kaikoura Earthquake of 2016. However, the locations of these leaks appears to be unknown as this is only a system wide measure and leaks are only discovered when a serious problem manifests.

We are aware that smoke testing was completed in the Waterloo area a decade ago to identify these issues. This testing involves smoke being introduced to the infrastructure and escaping smoke identifying leaks and illegal cross connections. Including funding for this will allow Council to prioritise remediation to ensure the worst problems are fixed first.



The left picture shows a smoke test detecting a broken pipe, with smoke escaping from the break. The right picture shows a cross connection, where the stormwater collected from the house is being piped to a sewerage pipe.

Smoke testing does not enter houses as all pipes connected to the sewerage system will have an S-bend filled with water that blocks entry.

By detecting these problems, Council will be able to detect issues that allow sewerage to leak into streams and ingress from storm water in its own pipes. Fixing these issues as a priority will provide the best economic and environmental outcomes.

In addition, Council will be able advise property owners of issues with cross connections and broken pipes on their properties. When smoke testing was undertaken 10 years ago the Council offered the option of arranging for an approved contractor to fix issues with Council directly paying the recouping the cost through the cost an additional charge on Rates Payments.

By detecting these issues this will reduce the infiltration of stormwater to sewerage mains and reduce the load on the system,

3. The plan also is written to give an impression that the Council will continue with the current approach for managing water – using pipes to move storm water directly to streams and rivers. By doing this, the City Council is increasing the risk of flooding by adding water to waterways such as Waiwhetu Stream as quickly as possible. This is noted in the Wellington Water advice to the Council which rated local flooding and earthquake resilience as low priorities.

While more a District Plan issue (which we note is under review) a move to storm water storage to be built into properties would assist with retaining water on site. Smart tanks are now available that monitor weather forecasts and will drain automatically before rainfall so that water is retained where it fell in heavy rain events, instead of being piped to a stream or river.



Conclusion

Overall, the Friends of Waiwhetu are supportive of the Long Term Plan including more spending on Three Water Infrastructure. We would expect that the Council will be careful in its approach to dealing with the infrastructure and fund systematic testing to find the highest priority repairs to undertake.