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Report to the Hutt River Floodplain Management Advisory Committee
from Alison Newell, Resource Planner, Flood Protection

Hutt River Floodplain Management Plan : Environmental Strategy

1. Purpose

To introduce to the Advisory Committee the key concepts of a proposed Environmental Strategy for the Hutt River, and to seek endorsement of the purpose, objectives and options for public consultation.

2. Background

A key component of the Hutt River Floodplain Management Plan (HRFMP) is the development of an Environmental Strategy. The objectives of the HRFMP¹ relevant to this are:

- There is no reduction in the quality of public access to and along the river, and opportunities are taken to enhance public access.
- An Environmental Strategy that identifies measures necessary to maintain and enhance the environmental quality of the river and its corridor is an essential component of the [Floodplain Management] Plan.

2.1 A Unique Resource

With over one million people visiting each year², the Hutt River has more visitors than any of our Regional Parks. Given its close proximity to major population centres, the Hutt River is a unique resource of tremendous value to the local community. Whilst the river and its banks are well used at present, there are still plenty of opportunities for further enhancement of both the recreational experience and other amenity values.

¹ Advisory Committee Report 99.231, 26 May 1999

² HRFMP Phase 1 Summary Report "Living with the River"

2.2 The Need for a Joint Strategy

The Regional Council, Hutt City Council and Upper Hutt City Council are primarily responsible for the management of the river and its corridor. There are also a number of groups and individuals interested and involved in what happens around the river, for example Iwi, recreational clubs, Rotary and community boards.

Each of these parties has its own objectives for managing, protecting and enhancing the river environment. Currently, this is undertaken in an ad-hoc manner, with no overall “vision” for the river. The preparation of a joint Environmental Strategy will enable all involved to agree on a blueprint for the co-ordinated future environmental management and enhancement of the river corridor area, in both the short and long term.

The proposed Strategy is to be a joint document between the Regional Council, Hutt City Council and Upper Hutt City Council. Existing obligations and management responsibilities will be taken into account. Funding of the Environmental Strategy will be determined through its development. There is the potential for other agencies and interest groups to contribute to implementation of the selected option.

3. The Environmental Strategy

The Environmental Strategy will prescribe the community’s long term vision for the Hutt River and its corridor. It will also describe the means for achieving that vision. The proposed Strategy will provide:

- guidance to ensure that any activities that take place within the river and its corridor are consistent with and do not compromise the long-term vision
- recommendations as to the services and capital requirements necessary for specific reaches of the river, to provide the physical reality of the vision

The purpose of the Environmental Strategy is to ensure that the Hutt River and its corridor are managed in a way that, whilst maintaining the agreed standard of flood protection:

- maintains and enhances the river environment
- provides for a range of recreational uses
- contributes positively to the community’s spiritual, mental and physical well-being

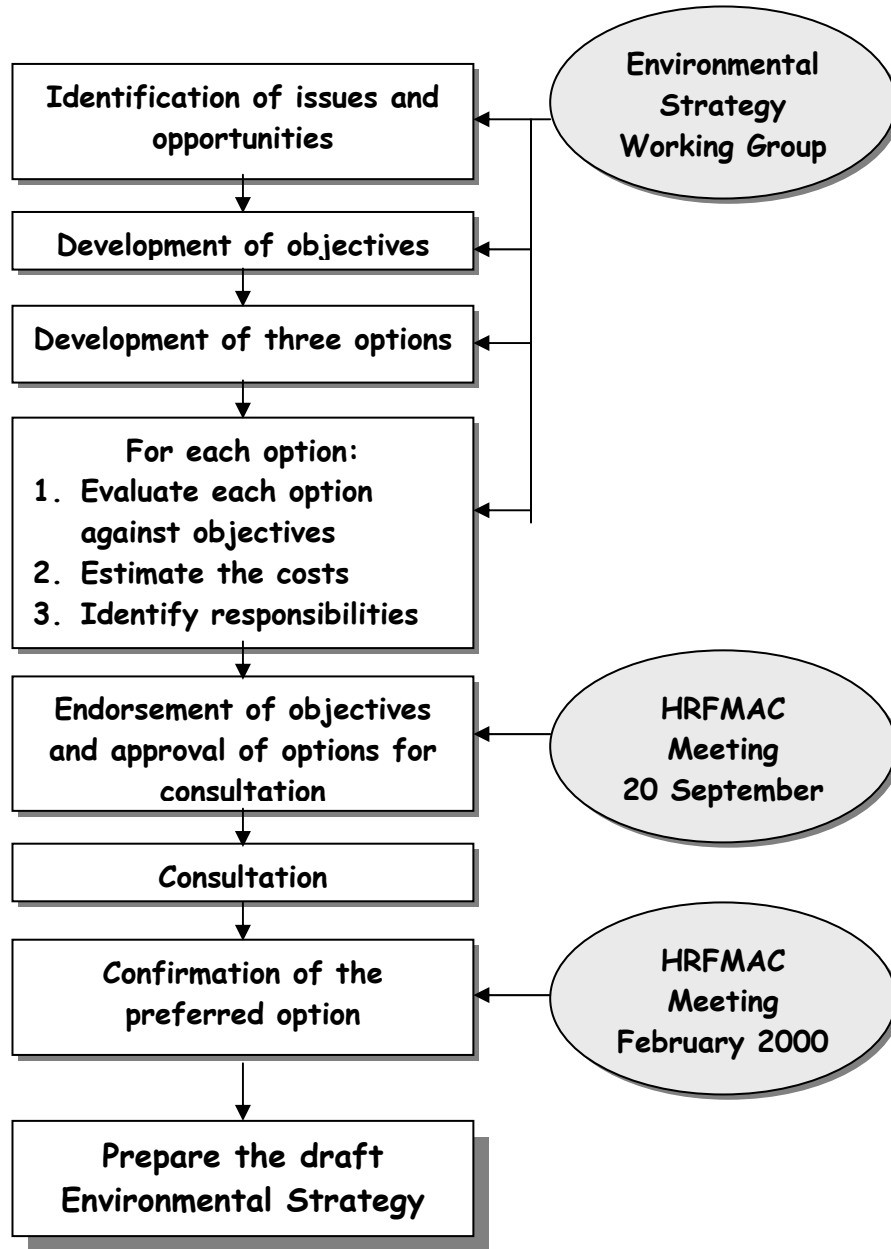
3.1 The Working Group

A working group has been established, made up of officers from Regional Parks, Environment Division and Flood Protection Group (Wellington Regional Council), Upper Hutt City Council and Hutt City Council, Iwi and Department of Conservation. Together they have identified the issues and objectives for the Environmental Strategy.

Many of these issues were identified during the public consultation undertaken during the Phase 1 Environmental Assessment of the HRFMP. The issues are described in **Attachment 1**.

3.2 Process and Programme

The following diagram illustrates the process to date and proposed to select the preferred option. Once this has been confirmed, the Environmental Strategy will be drafted for completion by June 2000. The final outcomes are to be incorporated into the HRFMP.



The process for approving the Strategy is being developed. This and a detailed programme will be presented at the December Advisory Committee meeting.

4. Objectives

The following objectives have been developed to guide the drafting of the Environmental Strategy:

Ecology

- The ecological values of the Hutt River and its margins are protected and enhanced.
- The adverse effects of any activities carried out on the bed or banks of the Hutt River which affect water quality, aquatic habitats, and freshwater ecosystems, are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
- Soil erosion in the Hutt catchment is minimised.

Landscape

- The visual quality of the Hutt River and its corridor are protected and enhanced.
- The “natural” character of the river is maintained and enhanced.

Recreation

- The quality of access to and along the Hutt River is maintained and enhanced.
- The river and its immediate environs are consciously upgraded to provide a varied environment suitable for a wide range of appropriate recreational activity types.

Cultural and Heritage Values

- The historic and cultural values of the Hutt River and its corridor are protected.
- The exercise of Kaitiakitanga³ by tangata whenua is recognised and provided for.
- Ongoing tangata whenua and community involvement in the management and development of the Hutt River and its corridor is promoted.

Governance

- The aspirations and responsibilities of individuals, groups and authorities involved in the administration and management of the Hutt River are provided for and not compromised by any environmental enhancement proposed under the Environmental Strategy.

³ Kaitiakitanga means the exercise of guardianship by the tangata whenua of an area in accordance with tikanga maori in relation to natural and physical resources; and includes the ethic of stewardship.

5. Options

The working group has come up with three options for the Hutt River corridor. Each option varies in the extent to which the objectives are met and provides a different vision for the river and its corridor for the medium to long term.

The options range from the status quo to a high maintenance recreational park. Preliminary and indicative costs for implementing each option have been estimated by the working group. Detailed cost estimates will be prepared once a preferred option has been confirmed and detailed design undertaken.

5.1 Option 1 : Floodway

Vision: Accept that the river and its corridor are heavily modified, with willows and mown grass dominating. There are some "premier" areas, but other areas are neglected and unappealing. Many areas are visually and physically separated from the river. There are conflicts between users. Vandalism and littering are escalating problems.

Guiding principles	<p>There is no reduction in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of public access to and along the river • the visual quality of the river and its corridor • the ecological values of the river and its corridor • the cultural and historic values of the river and its corridor
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This is basically the status quo option. The Regional Council, Hutt City Council and Upper Hutt City Council continue with current commitments. Although the river and its corridor are primarily managed to provide a channel that allows floodwaters to pass to the sea as quickly and safely as possible, some limited environmental enhancement is also done. Opportunities will be taken to enhance the river and its corridor as a mitigation measure for new flood protection works (provision has been included for this in the design standard estimates).

The Hutt River Trail and existing sporting facilities, such as soccer and rugby fields, are maintained. Existing staff try to keep on top of policing, berm patrols and vandalism as best they can, but support is needed to undertake such duties.

This option will provide limited enhancement of the ecological, landscape, recreational or cultural/heritage values of the Hutt River and its corridor. It aims to maintain the current values, but does not specifically address the escalating problems of littering, vandalism and conflicts between users. This option does not fully meet the objectives noted earlier, of the Environmental Strategy, but requires less investment.

The current costs for maintaining the floodway, existing facilities and sports grounds are \$489,717/year. **Attachment 2** gives a breakdown of costs.

5.2 Option 2 : Linear Park

Vision: The river and its corridor are developed as a linear park that provides a tranquil environment where people can go to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life, and enjoy the natural character of the river environment.

Guiding principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive recreational facilities are improved and extended wherever appropriate. • The visual quality of the river and its corridor are protected and enhanced. • The ecological values of the river and its corridor are protected and enhanced. • The cultural and historic values of the river and its corridor are protected and enhanced. • Continuing community and Iwi input are provided for.
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Recognising that the community places high value on the perceived “natural” character of the Hutt River⁴, a Linear Park will provide a place accessible to the urban populations of the floodplain, where they can go and walk their dogs, picnic by the side of the river, swim in pools and simply enjoy “getting closer to nature” almost in their backyard.

The Hutt River Trail and footpath/cycle networks are already immensely popular, and improving and extending access to and along the river is a key component of the linear park option. Ensuring that conflicts between users are dealt with is critical to this. Existing sporting facilities will be retained, but the focus will be on enhancing the natural character of the river rather than on providing more facilities.

Significant opportunities exist within the linear park option for providing information about existing cultural and historic sites within the river corridor, and for providing for species of cultural importance in native planting programmes.

This option is achievable without compromising the flood-carrying capacity of the river channel. Of the three options outlined, the linear park best meets the proposed objectives for the Environmental Strategy.

Achieving this vision will involve significant investment both in terms of staff and capital expenditure. For example:

⁴ Phase 1 Summary Report “Living with the River”

- bollards, barrier gates and car parks will be needed to exclude motorised recreational vehicles from parkland areas
- street furniture and landscaping will be needed to enhance degraded areas and to provide more “premier” sites
- tracks will need to be upgraded and extended
- native and exotic trees and shrubs will be needed to increase the diversity of vegetation and to enhance the natural character
- a river ranger to police the park, provide information, monitor litter and vandalism, etc.

Preliminary estimates of establishing such a park are in the order \$12.3 million and an additional \$292,000/year over existing maintenance costs to maintain it (see **Attachment 2** for breakdown of indicative costs). The linear park concept can be developed to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the community’s desires and willingness to fund them. The cost estimates have been based on the level of maintenance and provision of facilities at Hikoikoi Reserve.

The Linear Park option could be handled in stages but would ideally be developed over a period of approximately 10–20 years.

5.3 Option 3 : Recreational Park

Vision: The river and its corridor are developed as a recreational park where a wide range of formal and informal recreational facilities and activities are provided for and maintained. The facilities are linked by a series of well-maintained parks.

Guiding principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diverse range of sports and recreational facilities and opportunities are provided. • The visual quality of the river and its corridor are protected. • The ecological values of the river and its corridor are protected. • The cultural and historic values of the river and its corridor are protected. • Continuing community and Iwi input are provided for.
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Here, the recreational value of the Hutt River and its corridor will be maximised. The river corridor will be more manicured in appearance, and will require a higher level of maintenance and policing. There will be less emphasis on retaining and enhancing the “natural” feel of the river corridor, and the cultural/heritage values have a lower priority.

To achieve this vision will again involve significant investment. As with the linear park option, bollards, gates and car parks will be required to control vehicles. More access tracks and to a higher standard will be needed. As the focus will be on recreation rather than the natural character of the river environment, less planting will be needed.

The intention will be for Hutt City Council, Upper Hutt City Council and the Regional Council to share responsibilities to provide high-maintenance parks, similar to Avalon Park, along the length of the river, and to encourage others to provide the recreational facilities on a commercial basis. Expressions of interest will be called for to provide the facilities considered appropriate (listed in **Attachment 3**) and the necessary land will be made available. This approach works well with the regional parks at present.

The preliminary estimates as to cost indicate that this option could involve less establishment costs than the linear park option as areas would be left up to commercial operators to develop, but that the annual maintenance would be more. The indicative costs for this option are \$11.5 million to establish and an additional \$710,000/year over existing maintenance costs to maintain (see **Attachment 2** for breakdown of costs). The Recreational Park option could be handled in stages and developed over a period of approximately 10–20 years.

There would have to be strong restrictions on the recreational facilities provided so that the security and flood-carrying capacity of the flood protection system is not compromised.

This option does not meet the objectives as satisfactorily as Option 2. It places far more importance on the recreational value of the river and its corridor, but does not address the ecological, landscape and cultural/heritage values as well as the linear park option does.

6. **Public Consultation**

To ensure that the Environmental Strategy reflects the aspirations and visions for the Hutt River of the local community it is necessary to seek feedback on the purpose, proposed objectives and options discussed above. This is paramount to the success of the Environmental Strategy.

Flood Protection staff will hold meetings with particular interest and user groups, prepare press releases and newsletters to publicise that the Regional Council, Upper Hutt City Council and Hutt City Council are preparing an Environmental Strategy and are seeking feedback from the community. The proposed timeframe is as follows:

- Issue press release to local newspapers, introducing the Environmental Strategy and describing the purpose, objectives and the three options – October 1999.
- Prepare and distribute the newsletter (no.4) introducing the Environmental Strategy and describing the purpose, objectives and the three options – October 1999.
- Contact specific interest groups and users directly and arrange meetings as appropriate – October to November 1999.

Results of this public consultation will be reported to the Advisory Committee in February 2000.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- (1) Receive this report and note its contents.*
- (2) Endorse the purpose and objectives of the Environmental Strategy for public consultation.*
- (3) Endorse the three options for public consultation.*

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Attachment 1 : Issues

Attachment 2 : Costings for Each Option

Attachment 3 : Recreational uses considered appropriate for the Recreational Park Option