

Communities Journeying Towards Sustainability: Case studies from New Zealand, Canada and Ireland

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AIMS

To case study communities in New Zealand and around the world that are attempting to become environmentally sustainable with the goal of:

- Providing guidance and inspiration for Lincoln's own journey to sustainability.
- Unearthing some of the barriers and the strategies that worked for these communities.
- Providing contacts for further research and networking.

INTRODUCTION

Lincoln is a town in Canterbury, New Zealand with a population of 2360.¹ It is one of several towns administered by the Selwyn District Council. Lincoln is a rural community that is home to a University and several Crown Research Institutes.

Extensive subdivision has occurred in recent years around the town's fringes. A survey conducted in 2006 revealed many residents were concerned that the growth of their community was "too extensive, too rapid and unplanned or not carefully adapted to the character of the existing township."²

In 2006 the Lincoln Envirotown Trust was established:

- To promote the long term environmental sustainability of Lincoln Township with the understanding that this is also the basis for social, cultural and economic sustainability in the future.
- To educate about and raise awareness of environmental sustainability issues and to provide information about how to achieve environmental sustainability.
- To provide appropriate opportunities for personal and community decision making to ensure that the environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability of the Lincoln Township is promoted.³

Rather than being overly academic in nature this report seeks to bring together the thoughts and experiences of people involved with community sustainability initiatives. The towns profiled were those recommended to the author for their high level of community involvement in sustainability projects.

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¹ Selwyn District Council: Population projection for Lincoln, 2006.

² Lincoln Envirotown Trust. *State of the Town Report Summary: Lincoln Envirotown Survey Results*. September 2006.

³ Lincoln Envirotown Trust. *Objectives*. Available from www.lincolnenvirotown.org.nz. [Accessed in December 2006.]

WHISTLER

SOME BACKGROUND

Whistler is a resort town in British Columbia, Canada. Although it has a small permanent population of 9,480 it has a huge influx of tourists and seasonal workers every year. The seasonal and part time resident population is 4,558 with an additional daily seasonal population over the winter of 31,351.¹ The town is dominated by hotels and tourist activity providers such as the two main ski fields, rafting companies, souvenir shops, bars and restaurants.

Whistler is similar to Lincoln both in its high percentage of young people (more than 68 % of the population is under 34)² and the transient nature of these young people.

At Lincoln they come to study whereas at Whistler they predominately come to recreate and take on seasonal employment to support themselves. Many companies provide staff accommodation similar, in a way, to Lincoln's student accommodation.

In contrast to Lincoln (whose local authority, the Selwyn District Council, is based in Leeston and administers several different towns including Lincoln) Whistler is the only town administered by the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW).

One of the first major attempts by Whistler to reduce the environmental and social impact of town development was the Official Community Plan (OCP) formulated in 1993. This plan seeks to limit development, particularly encroachment into natural habitats, by placing a cap on 'bed units.' "Bed units represent the number of pillows available in the community to accommodate people overnight". A cap of 52,500 bed units was set by past Resort Municipality Councils of Whistler and has been upheld by subsequent councils"³.

With one exception, the only additional accommodation capacity the council has approved has been to provide affordable housing restricted to Whistler residents.⁴ The Whistler Housing Authority collects tax from businesses that rent out their property (including hotels) and puts this money into affordable housing projects. Companies are exempt from this tax if they can prove they already house their employees.³

Affordable housing continues to be a priority for the community and is reflected in the recent Whistler2020 plan that has the goal of maintaining 75% of Whistler's employees living within the resort community.⁵

The town has been designed well in respect to pedestrian access. The scenic 'Valley Trail' runs between cluster developments. It is wide enough for walkers and cyclists to pass and has a centre line to reduce the likelihood of accidents. The trail winds around small lakes, through groves of trees, alongside houses and sometimes the road. The town centre has extensive pedestrian zones with several 'town squares.'⁶ "All facilities, hotels and apartments have underground parking, so very little surface area in the Village is used for parking lots."⁷

WHISTLER'S JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

In the years since the OCP the RMOW has produced a number of progressive statutory and non statutory planning documents.

A document called “Whistler 2002: Charting a Course for the Future” was created following a “visioning process” involving the community. It listed five priorities for the resort, one of which included “moving toward environmental sustainability”⁸

Later to describe Whistler’s plan for addressing the environmental priority, the RMOW, in conjunction with a community stakeholder advisory group, produced the Whistler Environmental Strategy.⁹

A major breakthrough in Whistler’s sustainability journey came in the year 2000 when they decided to adopt The Natural Step framework (TNS), an environmental framework based on scientific principles. If you are familiar with The Natural Step please skip this next section which gives a brief explanation of TNS.

THE NATURAL STEP ‘BASICS’

The Natural Step is a systems framework for implementing sustainable practices. It was developed by Dr Karl-Henrik Robèrt, a Swedish oncologist, in 1989. The use of the framework is supported by the Natural Step organisation which has offices in 12 countries, including New Zealand. Information about TNS New Zealand is available online at www.naturalstep.org.nz.

TNS staff provide support for organisations wishing to adopt the framework. Their interaction with organisations usually involves the four following elements:

- Promoting a common understanding of sustainability
- Conducting baseline assessments
- Helping organisations create long term visions, strategies and action plans;
- Supporting implementation of the framework.¹⁰

One service TNS provides is ‘train the trainers’. This involves training people within organisations on how to teach other staff members about sustainability and the framework. Participants learn how to facilitate sessions involved in the implementation strategy described below. TNS also supplies learning resources such as an e-learning package.

System Conditions

The Framework is based around the following four systems conditions derived from scientific principles. More detailed definitions are available at the TNS Canada website www.naturalstep.ca.

In the sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust,
2. concentrations of substances produced by society,

3. degradation by physical means

and, in that society. . .

4. people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.¹¹

Implementation Strategy

The Natural Step has developed the following ABCD implementation strategy to integrate sustainability into organisations planning and decision making.

A) Awareness. This involves educating people within the organisation in the systems conditions and the science behind it. This provides a shared definition of sustainability amongst people in an organisation.¹²

b) Baseline mapping. Look at where you are today with respect to the systems conditions. For example asking ‘in what way is the organisation degrading nature by physical means’¹²

c) Brainstorm visions and solutions. This involves envisioning what the organisation or community will look like in a sustainable society.¹² Organisations are encouraged to come up with ambitious goals that are expected to be achieved step by step rather than immediately. These are called ‘stretch goals.’¹¹

d) Create an action plan. Set priorities for action based on questions like; “Does the action go in the direction of all four system conditions simultaneously, does the action create a flexible platform for future actions, or does it create a blind alley, will the action give a good return upon investment?”¹²

A common thread or philosophy is that of Backcasting. Backcasting involves figuring out where you ideally would like to be and working backwards to create strategies for achieving that vision.

The impetus for Whistler’s adoption of this framework seems to have come from a visit in 2000 by Dr Karl-Henrik Robèrt, founder of TNS. While on a snowboarding holiday Dr Robèrt gave three presentations to interest groups, one of which was the Whistler Chamber of Commerce.⁸

These presentations must have had a great effect on people in the community as following them a group got together called the ‘Early Adopters’. This group was made up of major players in the Whistler community such as the largest employers: the municipal government, the Fairmont Chateau Whistler, Intrawest Corporation and Tourism Whistler. These groups came together and signed an agreement to implement changes using the framework called ‘The Early Adopters Agreement.’ Early adopters also made some financial commitment to facilitating the process. A municipal authority staff member was appointed to coordinate the group and its activities.⁸

In November 2000 forty representatives from the Early Adopters group participated in a two day facilitator workshop run by The Natural Step organisation called ‘Train the

Trainers.’ These facilitators learned how to conduct presentations about sustainability and the application of TNS to other members within their organisations. They left with a ‘facilitators tool kit’ to help them.⁸

In December 2000 Whistler hosted a sustainability symposium which included Whistler organisations, representatives from businesses around the world using TNS and representatives from other communities in Canada.⁸

In April 2001 members of the Whistler community participated in an ‘envisioning workshop’. This was contracted out to a private communication company in Vancouver. From this workshop the company produced a ‘storyline’ and a video presentation. From this the town also adopted their sustainability slogan, ‘Whistler. It’s our nature,’ that has been used in promotion.⁸

Community resource toolkits were developed to help the community minimize its impact on the environment. These included practical tips for reducing impacts interspersed with facts about Whistler such as the average quantity of junk mail that ends up in residents’ mailboxes each year and the amount of solid waste going to landfill. These toolkits were mailed out to all local residents in Whistler. This, and the business and school resource kits, is available online at www.whistleritsournature.com.¹³

This website also includes information (available in an interactive format) that explains The Natural Step framework and the science that underlies it.

Whistler produced a Video entitled ‘Whistler. It’s Our Nature’ and a brochure explaining how the town was moving towards sustainability.

In July 2001 20 members of the Early Adopter’s organisations conducted a ten week ‘Advanced Sustainability Facilitator Training Course.’ In this they learned “...systems thinking; theory and practice in sustainability; The Natural Step framework for sustainability; presentation, facilitation and coaching skills; strategies, tools, and metrics for sustainability; theories and practice of organisational learning and innovation diffusion; and to provide a coaching environment in which they could apply this learning in their own organisations.”⁸

Organisations within the Early Adopters have made many changes to their operations in an attempt to become more sustainable. For information on the variety of actions taken within the individual organisations refer to the book ‘Dancing with the tiger: learning sustainability step by natural step,’⁸ TNS Canada website¹¹ and the ‘LEAD: learning through case studies’ website.⁶

A significant development in the last four years has been the development of Whistler2020. This is a planning document, otherwise known as a ‘Comprehensive Sustainability Plan,’ that the community seems to have genuinely taken ownership of. In 2005 this plan won Whistler an award for best forward planning in the Livable Communities Awards in La Coruna Spain.¹¹

The extensive community participation that was involved in its formation and continued application lead to the awards panel stating it had been ‘participatory to the extent that it became decentralized’¹⁴. The plan is referred to by municipality staff as ‘a vision, a plan and a process.’¹⁵

Whistler2020 was created in 2004 following a community ‘visioning process’ started two years prior called “Whistler. It’s our future.” The extensive community input into the document involved four ‘phases’ and included ‘open houses,’ surveys, kid forums, extensive workshopping and the screening of five projected futures and the production of a ‘blended future. A description of these phases is available on line at www.whistler2020.ca under the ‘Developing the Vision’ section.⁵

The resulting document, Whistler2020, is made up of two parts. Part one is a vision with five priorities that outline how Whistler would like to in the future. Part two describes 16 strategies to achieve the vision. The strategies are quite broad, addressing different ‘focus areas’ within the community. They have headings like ‘Energy’, ‘Learning’, ‘Economic’, ‘Visitor Experience’ and ‘Transport’.⁵

For each strategy the plan shows: a) descriptions of success within the strategy area, b) current realities within the strategy area and c) prioritised action plans for moving forward.⁵

The Natural Step framework was used at all levels of the plan’s development and implementation. For example the ‘current reality’ section is a form of TNS ‘baseline mapping.’ The ‘descriptions of success’ reflect the frameworks recommended identification of a ‘sustainable community vision’. Actions are analysed using ‘Backcasting and the System Conditions.’

Community ownership of the plan has been aided by the establishment of ‘partnership agreements’. Whistler has signed agreements with over 40 ‘implementing organisations’. These organisations agree to “implement Whistler2020 actions where they can and provide data for monitoring and reporting.”⁵

The process is as follows:

a) Community task forces have been created for each of the 16 strategies in the Whistler2020 plan. They consist of between eight to 15 representatives from private companies, the municipality, agencies like BC Hydro and experts in the field the task force addresses.

b) These task forces come up with actions to implement the strategy. Initially they are supplied with the ‘current reality’ by the municipality. For example, the Waste Task Force was provided with information on waste produced in Whistler and current waste management strategies. The task forces create a vision for where they would like Whistler to be in the year 2020 and work backwards from this to come up with a strategy. They formulate action plans for the first three years.¹⁶ These actions are recommended to the appropriate organisation. This group might be the municipality or a private organisation.¹⁵

c) The organisation can either accept, decline or defer the action to the next year. In 2005 over 200 actions were recommended and 144 accepted. By accepting, the organisation agrees to create and implement an action plan. Of the 144 accepted, 79.9% either achieved full outcome (39.6%), partial outcome (13.9%), or are currently in progress (26.4%). While a few actions (15) were moved to the 2006 implementation year, less than 7% were not initiated at all.⁵

“All task force recommended actions have an identified Lead Implementation Organisation that act as project managers. In addition Assisting Organizations contribute to the implementation by providing “direction, input, expertise, staffing, funding or other resources as appropriate.”⁵

d) If the organisation declines to action the recommendations they have to provide a public statement on the Whistler2020 website as to why they choose not to accept it. Those who accept report back about the actions they have achieved in the ‘partner profile’ section on the website.¹⁵

LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons are in no particular order of importance. For a summary of key lessons identified by the creators of the Whistler2020 document visit www.whistler2020.ca.

1. The adoption of The Natural Step framework

The utilisation of an effective framework has been very useful in the progress made in Whistler. The following ‘strengths’ of the Natural Step framework have been communicated to the author by those familiar with the framework and its application in Whistler and New Zealand. It is worth considering whether these principles could be used without adopting the Natural Step framework or through its partial adoption.

a) A shared definition of sustainability

The Natural Step’s definition of sustainability is presented in the form of four System Conditions (refer to earlier section). The systems approach addresses the root cause of problems rather than focussing on addressing the symptoms.

The four system conditions and the science that underlies them are communicated to participants early on in the process so that everyone is on the same playing field.

Ted Battiston, RMOW Sustainability Manager, refers to these System Conditions as ‘defensible, rational and solid’ because of their strong scientific basis. He reflected that having an agreement on a definition that people can refer to when making decisions is as important as the definition itself. That it helps to avoid ongoing conflict over ‘what is sustainability.’¹⁵

b) Visioning and Backcasting

As discussed earlier, the TNS framework involves creating a vision of where you want to be and working backwards to figure out actions to achieve this vision (backcasting). In contrast to this, many planning methods involve making decisions based on projecting current, non- sustainable trends, a process TNS refers to as ‘forecasting.’¹⁷

Even though some sustainability ‘visions’ created in the TNS process may appear unattainable in the current social and economic climate they are an important strategic tool to make sure decisions are in the right direction. It can avoid decisions being made that lead to a blind alley in terms of sustainable development. Allana Hamm,

Sustainability Manager of Whistler/ Blackcomb, describes this as creating ‘flexible platforms’. That is, choosing actions that are flexible enough to go to the next step in fitting with the vision. For example if you have the vision of a centralised composting scheme a purchasing policy that focussed on compostable packaging would allow you to move in that direction.¹⁶

Using backcasting allowed Whistler to make better decisions. An example of this is when the gas company that provides heating for Whistler put in a proposal to construct a pipeline to supply the town with natural gas with a capacity designed to cater for an anticipated 50% increase in energy demand (forecasting). The Whistler community’s response was that this was not in keeping with their vision. The gas company took this vision and, using backcasting, came up with a proposal that involved a smaller pipeline to act as a stepping stone towards renewable energy. They are implementing ground source heating, landfill gas recovery, wastewater heat recovery and small-scale hydropower generation. This has had an interesting ripple effect in that the gas company has now started up a new business division to set up integrated renewable solution in other communities.¹⁴

An investigation into the lessons learnt in the creation of the Whistler 2020 document stated it was important that the vision of success was not too prescriptive, to provide flexibility that will allow changes in technology and values.⁵

c) Easy to communicate to the community and apply

Many people who have been involved with the TNS framework felt that it provided an easy way to communicate with people in the community. For example the former Mayor of Whistler, Hugh O’Reilly, said: “the strategy (Whistler Environmental Strategy) was a complicated plan that was difficult to communicate. The Natural Step framework really provided the mechanism for delivery: simple to understand, something we could communicate”⁸

Lin Roberts of TNS New Zealand believes the implementation strategy and systems conditions are easy to communicate to people and to apply to individual organisations. Roberts says that the sustainability checklist based on the four systems conditions is a simple checklist by which to assess projects of varying scale.¹⁷

Since its creation The Natural Step has been adopted by a large number of organisations. One benefit of using this framework is that there is a lot of information around about its application. Organisations can tap into this network and adopt tools and resource being developed by others. This is advantageous if the organisation has limited time and money to develop their own.¹⁷

d) Works on all levels

The Natural Step framework is applied at five levels; System; Success; Strategy; Action and Tools. At the top is the ‘system’ level. Fundamental scientific principles are used to guide decision-makers. Next is the ‘definition of success’ whereby the organisation utilizes a vision of where they want to be. At the ‘strategy’ level TNS principles are integrated into policy. On another level ‘actions’ are developed that bring the organisation towards sustainability and finally ‘Tools’ are used to assess, manage and monitor actions.¹⁷

Not all environmental management systems work at all these levels. For example, ISO 14001 and Green Globe 21 work more at the actions level. Lin Roberts believes that people try to implement environmental change at the ‘actions’ level and don’t realize they need the others.¹⁷

Ken Hughey, professor in the Environment, Society and Design Division at Lincoln University, reiterates the advantage of working with a framework that is strategic and can be applied at many levels. He commented that it has its limitations in that there are no formal rules and regulations, and no specified levels to achieve. It is possible to say you use TNS and do very little. Hughey recommends using it to compliment a more regulatory system such as Green Globe 21 and ISO 14000.¹⁸

2. Achieving buy-in from influential community members

Having an inspirational speaker introduce the TNS framework to the community seems to have been a key tool in ‘selling’ the concept to influential Whistler residents. For example, following Dr Karl – Henrik Robert’s presentation, the Mayor and the owner of Intrawest (one of Whistler’s largest employers) adopted the framework within their organisations.

The Chief Administration Officer of the RMOW, Jim Godfrey, commented “What struck me, sitting there and listening to Dr Robert, was how engaging the people around the table were; they were riveted to the discussion that was taking place. Then we had a second presentation that involved the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber of Commerce was very engaged, more than I’d seen in a lot of other presentations. I thought, this is something that would provide a major vehicle for us to be able to move forward in a very comprehensive way.”⁸

Allana Hamm said bringing in speakers that related to the community was effective in achieving buy-in. For example, to reach the business community invite business people to come in and talk about how implementing sustainable practices into their business worked for them. Ham commented that often the ‘big’ speakers will cost a lot of money but that the payoff is worth it.¹⁶

Lin Roberts commented that it is important early on to decide who the influential people are within an organisation, then figure out who are the right people to pitch the concept to them. It is then helpful to decide what conversations are needed to get these key players to the willing participant phase.¹⁷

Allana Hamm commented it was important to get at least one key person from the community on board and get them to help ‘nab’ the others. She reflected that there is a whole lot of networking going on at this higher level and this is the level you need to reach. It helps if these people can be educated in sustainability and the process to be used.¹⁶

These “senior level officials and community members who lend their endorsement and support for the project” are referred to by TNS Canada as ‘Community Champions.’ (TNS Canada). In Whistler these champions represented some of Whistler’s major employers, which Rhys Taylor, Sustainability Contractor, believes

helped to create a unifying force in that much of the community is dependent on these organisations.¹⁹

When attempting to gain support for the framework from the municipal authority Lin Roberts suggests introducing the concept to all the councillors at the same time, for example, taking a two hour slot in the council agenda.¹⁷

3. Institutionalise a system of sustainable decision making

Many organisations in Whistler have integrated the Natural Step framework into their operations at varying levels. For example the municipal authority have incorporated it at all levels of their operation from policy to operations, aligning their decision-making systems. This seems to help minimize the chances that the whole system will falter and fade away when you lose your ‘champions.’ It is important to mainstream the processes as soon as you can, to integrate it into policy and operations.¹⁷

This was demonstrated in the Christchurch City Council use of TNS framework. The council formally adopted TNS in 1999 and used it in a few of its projects such as in the design and construction of the Christchurch South Library. A checklist, incorporating the systems conditions was at the bottom of reports to council. However, due to restructuring, the framework lost its ‘champions,’ within the council. A new CEO was appointed and the number of councillors was halved in 2004. Scheduled workshops were cancelled and the checklist at the bottom of council reports ‘quietly got dropped.’

Similarly, the Warehouse, one of the initial adopters of TNS in New Zealand, commitment to the framework flailed when a new CEO came on board, again cancelling the scheduled training.

Ken Hughey says it needs to be so engrained in an organisations decision making that it is like a ‘worm in the brain... you use it every time you make a decision. For example when you go to mow the lawn you ask “which petrol should I use based on systems conditions.”¹⁸

4. Extensive community wide education and training

Training is a good way to ensure everyone has a shared definition of sustainability and the ability to implement sustainability concepts into their operations. It has the added bonus of making the concept ripple through the community. That is, dispersing knowledge about sustainability and raising the profile of specific concepts throughout the community.

TNS has a strong focus on education and training. Training with TNS is either ‘in-house’ or shared. Shared training involves staff from different organisations coming together for the training.

One of the key lessons identified in Whistler2020 was the importance of training community members so that they could be useful in the workshops. As well as basic sustainability training they provided more specific training for the groups that were to workshop specific issues. This training was delivered throughout the four to five workshops that were held with each task force.⁵

5. Creating ownership through community participation

Ted Battiston believes the level of support for TNS and Whistler2020 within the community is reflected by the election of a mayor and councillors that support the initiatives. It is also reflected by the number of ‘implementing organisations’ carrying out actions recommended by the task forces. He believes the community has taken ownership of the plan due to the level of community involvement in the development of the vision. Over 700 community members helped create the vision and “every statement in the strategy section is written verbatim by task force members.”¹⁵

As discussed earlier, 75% of actions recommended by community task forces are accepted and roughly 85% of actions accepted are actioned by private companies and the municipal authority. It is satisfying for the person sitting on the task force to feel that what they recommend has a really good chance of happening. This helps to create ownership.¹⁵ Allana Hamm reflected that the task forces are really well facilitated with municipality staff introducing the process to members and providing a lot of support.¹⁶

Dave Walden, Early Adopters coordinator employed by the RMOW, commented on the importance of providing feedback to people who had provided input into processes such as brainstorming, so as to make people aware of when things had happened as per their suggestions and make them feel empowered.¹⁴

6. Non critical of business/ flexible application

People commented that TNS framework does not criticize businesses for what they have done or are doing but rather suggests ways they can change.

Suzanne Denbak, President, Tourism Whistler, commented “It works with root causes and it’s non-prescriptive in nature – there are no lists of dos and don’ts... the TNS framework can be applied successfully to any business circumstance.”⁸

On the other side of the coin this flexible application makes it relatively easy for the organisation to say they have adopted TNS and do very little.

7. Communication vs. information

One of the lessons the Whistler2020 group learnt through this process was the importance of communicating well with the community. For example, initial website information was not packaged well. Research indicates this lack of coordinated communication meant they did not get a high level of awareness.¹⁵

A gap analysis of the process found the biggest opportunity for improvement was to achieve greater buy in through better communication. Obtaining some expertise in social marketing allowed them to identify key messages and producing digestible information.¹⁵

In the key lessons document they suggested “produce final reports that are accessible, concise and engaging to large audiences.”⁵

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19. Rhys Taylor: Sustainability Contractor. Interviewed on the 16th of October 2006.

CONTACTS

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2. Allana Hamm, Environmental Coordinator, Whistler Blackcomb. Ph: (604) 938 7083

3. Dr Lin Roberts: Executive Director of the Natural Step NZ. Email: linrod@es.co.nz. Conversation 30th October.
4. Esther Speck Whistler2020 Project Manager, RMOW. Ph: (604) 935-8178
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KINSALE

SOME BACKGROUND

Kinsale is a small seaside town in Ireland with a population of 7000. It is home to a tertiary institution called the Kinsale Further Education Centre (FEC). In 2001 Rob Hopkins began teaching a two year full time permaculture course out of the centre. In 2004 Hopkins and his students worked on plan to gradually wean the town off fossil fuels.¹ The Kinsale Energy Decent Action Plan has helped to raise the profile of sustainability in the town and lead to some interesting projects discussed in this report.

Kinsale's goals of sustainability are firmly planted in the permaculture and peak oil movements. "Permaculture (permanent agriculture) is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems which have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems. It is the harmonious integration of landscape and people providing their food, energy, shelter, and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way."²

The Peak Oil movement is based on the belief that the earth will reach a peak in global oil production and from then on oil will become more and more costly as its supply is limited. Put another way, Peak Oil is "the point in world oil production at which supply begins to dictate demand, rather than demand driving supply."¹ Peak Oil campaigners are concerned with the implications of this reduced supply on a fossil fuel dependent economy.

Colin Campbell, a retired petroleum geologist, set up the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas, or ASPO, which has helped to define the movement. Campbell and other scientists feature in the documentary "The End of Suburbia." This documentary is often played at Peak Oil meetings to convince people of the reality of Peak Oil and its potential implications, such as a reduction in food security.

'Energy descent' is a term coined by the ecologist Howard Odum for the "transition from a high fossil fuel use economy to a more frugal one." Many believe this transition could be a difficult one. Campaigners hope that its impact may be lessened if communities become more self sufficient or 'relocalised.' This would involve rebuilding the infrastructure and relearning the skills necessary to survive in a 'low energy' world. Rob Hopkins reflected, "The process of dismantling our diverse and complex local economies over the last 50-60 years was a disastrous one – it was easy to do but incredibly hard to rebuild."¹

There are several groups in New Zealand that are concerned with the country's dependence on fossil fuel. In Nelson there is a Peak Oil group called the New Zealand Association of Peak Oil. Their actions so far have included: lobbying the council to plan for a 'low energy future,' raising awareness of Peak Oil and running cooperative working bees to increase local food production.³

A concerned resident of Karamea, Elizabeth Frankish, has organised several 'knowledge swaps' where skills, such as fishing and preserving food, are taught with the aim of making the community less dependent of fossil fuels.⁴

Following this Kinsale case study there is a section describing the efforts of a small community in North Otago who are beginning the process of reducing their dependency on oil.

KINSALE'S JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

Kinsale's journey to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels began at the Further Education Centre. Here, Rob Hopkins, having been exposed to the concept of Peak oil, started to work with his students to create a plan to reduce the town's dependency.¹

To obtain community input, Hopkins and his students organised a one day event called "Kinsale 2021 – Towards a prosperous, sustainable future together." Thirty five people attended the event that was opened by the Mayor. Following a screening of the documentary the "End of Suburbia" a community 'think tank' was held. Here the community discussed issues raised by the film and brainstormed what the town could do to address these issues. This was facilitated using 'Open Space' technology, a technique for community participation facilitated by the FEC's tutor of community leadership.¹

"Open Space is based on the idea that the most productive discussion and idea sharing at any event happens during the tea breaks. Open Space is, in essence, a long tea break, where groups are formed to discuss certain issues, and everyone is free to move between discussion groups, based on the four principles of Open Space, whoever comes are the right people, whatever happens is the only thing that could have, whenever it starts is the right time, and when it's over it's over."¹

"People were invited to identify the specific problems and issues that the film raised for them. These were then collated into subject areas, and each of these became the basis for a discussion group. The groups covered the following subjects: food, rebuilding communities, youth group/education, business & technology, tourism and renewable energy."¹

After the event students broke off into groups and selected different subject areas. Students completed their own research in these areas and listened to guest speakers Hopkins's invited to the Centre. The result was the production of "Kinsale 2021: an Energy Decent Action Plan."

The plan is separated into different sections similar to those topic areas listed above. Each section contains:

- 1) The current situation in Kinsale in context of oil dependency
- 2) A vision of what a lower energy future would look like if the steps they suggest were taken
- 3) Recommendations in chronological order⁵

Recommendations included: Kinsale becoming a 'Slow Food Town,' community gardens, a community trading network and introducing permaculture studies as part of school curriculum.⁵

On the KEDAP Hopkins reflected:

“I don’t feel it is realistic to imagine that anything approaching a majority of the population will start growing food without a massive crises to force them into doing so. However, what we can do is start putting in place the infrastructure that will be needed (seed saving clubs, excluding a certain proportion of land in urban areas from development, preserving skills and knowledge, teaching skills to younger people, creating community compost schemes so we have a resource for growers.” “We can begin to build systems around people.”¹

In June 2005 Kinsale hosted a conference called “Fuelling the Future – the Challenge of Peak Oil.’ Well known personalities in the field of permaculture and Peak Oil such as David Holmgren, Dr Colin Campbell and Richard Heinberg spoke at the event. Peak Oil and the potential for localisation in Kinsale were discussed followed by the release of the KEDAP.¹

“The response was amazing. We ended the conference on the Sunday, with a feedback session; which was really an extraordinary experience. People were so moved in themselves, that they were - it was actually a highly emotive experience, listening to people. We asked people to share, what one thing that they were taking away, that they didn't have when they came to the conference.”⁶

In 2006 Hopkins left Kinsale and moved to the town of Totnes in Devon. There he is working on an Energy Descent Action Plan based on the KEDAP.

One of Hopkins ex-students Louise Rooney continued on with the aim of making Kinsale a more sustainable town. In December 2005 Rooney spoke at the Kinsale Town Council meeting about her desire for Kinsale to become less dependent on fossil fuels. The council “unanimously passed a motion to support her initiative to act as process leader in Kinsale’s transition to a lower- energy future.”¹ However so far their involvement has been limited to providing funding for practical sustainability education in schools.⁷

Following the Town Council meeting Rooney spent a lot of time visiting the different groups in Kinsale, chatting to them informally about the Transition Town concept and asking them if they would like to become involved. She focussed mostly on sustainability issues, attempting to move away from what she called ‘the negative doom and gloom of the Peak Oil movement’. Her goal was to build relationships and involve residents of a wide demographic.⁷

In February 2006 Rooney started a monthly column in the town newsletter. Through this she let people know what was happening with the Transition Town concept. She included practical steps people could take to become more sustainable. Each column had a ‘Smiley Award’ to the best sustainability initiative and a ‘Big Frown’ award to unsustainable activity in the town. She was careful to be less specific with the ‘Big Frown’ to avoid alienating people in the town. Rooney commented that the awards attracted a lot of interest.

In an attempt to spread the workload Rooney announced a meeting to create a steering group. Although she had attained funding for resources she was unable to receive funding to subsidize the large amount of time she was spending on the effort. At the

first meeting of the steering group in July 2006, Rooney inquired as to people's area of interest and placed them in groups accordingly. The five sub-groups that evolved from this were energy, transport, waste, education and food. Examples of group projects are a composting scheme for the local housing estates and a roving community garden in which FEC students teach skills in food production. Residents of Kinsale are also involved in the Global Action Plan program where groups get together to discuss modules on how they can reduce their impact on the environment.⁷

Although Louise has recently left Kinsale the steering group continues to implement projects. This year the FEC's permaculture course is creating a local food plan. It will cover issues like composting, community gardens, home gardens and the local products available in shops and restaurants. They hope to instigate a 100 mile diet, similar to that in used in the town of Willits in California.⁸

The Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan, although undoubtedly an inspiration to many, is also viewed as being impractical. This is partly due to the limited research that went in to it. Although the basic goals of the plan are still the key focus of the movement in Kinsale the plan itself is now referred to less frequently. Very few of the actions in the timeline for 2005 or 2006 have occurred. The planned KEDAP version two has not eventuated.⁷

In spite of this the plan has received a lot of attention. The concept of an 'Energy Descent Action Plan' and 'Transition Town' certainly seems to have captured peoples' imagination. The plan has been downloaded by thousands of people around the world and has received a lot of press on the Peak Oil and localisation websites. This is partly due to its promotion on Rob Hopkins's website www.transitionculture.org.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Exposure to information on Peak Oil

Although there has been a raised awareness of the finite nature of fossil fuel resources it appears few people have considered the affect that this reduced availability could have on their lives. The realisation that there may be a lack of infrastructure in place to enable the transition to alternative energy to be a smooth one seems to have a significant effect on people. Many who have been exposed to the concept of Peak Oil report feeling 'woken up.'

The Peak Oil movement highlights the affect limited oil supply may have on peoples' lives. This appears to contrast with other environmental movements which stress the effects of human's actions on the physical environment and other species.

Films such as 'The End of Suburbia' and 'The Future of Food' are played at Peak Oil gatherings around the world to 'convert' people to this new way of thinking. Rob Hopkins commented that he had never thought of the affect of a peak in oil production until he saw 'The End of Suburbia'. He commented that after seeing it "everything was tipped on its head."¹ Many people report a similar response to viewing the film.

Graham Strouts, Tutor of permaculture at the Kinsale FEC and member of the Steering Group, reflected that unless people have a reason to change, they will not. He believes that this desire for a smooth transition from fossil fuel dependency is one such reason.⁸

Embedded in the Peak Oil movement is a sense of urgency. More specifically, the need to begin re-localising and developing infrastructure to make this transition before it is too late to do it smoothly. Rob Hopkins commented it was effective to have discussions following ‘The End of Suburbia’ as it creates the feeling of urgency in peoples’ minds.¹

“The co-founder of permaculture, David Holmgren, likens our situation to being the top of the mountain, from where we have views that no one has ever seen before, but where the storm clouds are gathering. We have to navigate a way down the mountain while we still can, while we still have favourable weather and daylight. If we just allow the peak to happen, without planning for it, we will be in for a very rough ride.”¹

Many people are against using this negative image or doomsday attitude. Within the Kinsale group there has been much opposition to using the Peak Oil concept as a way to bring about change.⁸ Group’s promoting Peak Oil risk coming across as fanatical or extreme, potentially alienating others in the community. It appears to be a concept that works for some members of the community and not others.

2. Create interest in a ‘better future’

Rob Hopkins identified one of the lessons he had learned from the Kinsale process as the importance of painting a fossil free future as one that could be a more satisfying than our current reality.¹

“The basic idea that life with less oil could, if properly planned for and designed, be far preferable to the present. It is a simple idea, yet hugely powerful, and seems to have really engaged peoples’ imaginations.”¹

This future, Hopkins perceives, is one in which people are more at one with the community and live healthier lives. Similarly, he believes in promoting the idea that the transition from fossil fuel dependency does not have to be negative, that it could be an opportunity for greater ‘inventiveness and abundance.’¹ Howard T Odum , a well know ecologist, used the phrase ‘a prosperous way down,’ to describe a potential transition from fossil fuel dependence.⁹

Hopkins believes that the failings of environmental movements in the past have been partly due to a lack of making this alternate future real to people.¹ The future painted in the KEDAP appears to have appealed to many people.

3. Creating a buzz of interest

Hopkins reflected that one of the key strategies for success was creating a buzz early on or a ‘sense that something is happening.’ He believes the FEC “developed a reputation in the town for being a place where unusual yet fascinating things are occurring.” Stating that people often commented they loved the ‘buzz’ around the town created by the actions of the permaculture course. The cob building and amphitheatre were projects that Hopkins identified as capturing peoples interest.¹

“The college’s combination of interesting courses and groundbreaking practical projects has done much to make the community well disposed to the Action Plan process when it began.” “I feel that creating this atmosphere is like the oil that lubricates the engine of your energy descent process. The more you can create a

feeling that something important, positive and dynamic is underway, the less friction and resistance your work will encounter.”¹

In a similar fashion the Fuelling the Future conference, with its internationally renowned speakers, helped create interest for the project.

Louise Rooney reflected that projects appealed to people’s natural curiosity. “People will ask questions, this is better than trying to sell it to people”. She commented that people don’t appreciate ‘missionaries.’⁷

4. Relationship building

Louise Rooney felt that the KEDAP group did not work hard enough to build relationships with the community and to facilitate communities’ input into the vision. She felt it was unrealistic to have one open day event and then say that the community had been consulted.⁷

Rooney attempted to build relationships within the community by visiting groups personally and introducing the group and its goals. Rooney believes this informal style was very effective.⁷

5. Formal adoption by the council

Having the council formally adopt the concept of a Transition Town seems to have helped raise the profile of sustainability initiatives in the town. Rooney commented it had been helpful to be able to say to groups that she approached that she had backing from the Town Council. The Council support making their cause appear respectable.⁷

Hopkins identified the importance avoiding painting the Council as villains because they were not doing anything about reducing the town’s dependence on fossil fuels. He commented that the KEDAP “strenuously avoided setting up this dynamic.” Council representatives and private business people were invited to the Open Space day and the conference.¹

6. Tap into the human resources of the town

A strength of the process in Kinsale has been the effective use of human resources. For example, a lot of work has been done by students at the FEC. Having students available to research the Energy Descent Action Plan and help with projects such as the community gardens has been an asset to the project. Similarly Louise Rooney found the retired community and stay-at-home parents to be a valuable resource.⁷

Rooney found that it was easier to get people involved through practical projects of interest to them. Once involved in these projects, such as the roving community garden, volunteers had the opportunity to learn about the ideals of the group.⁷

7. A practical flexible non-prescriptive plan

The move away from the Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan has largely been due to frustration over its lack of practicality. Many believe insufficient research went into the plan to make sure the actions it recommended were feasible for the town.⁷ However, it should be mentioned that the plan was created as a student project and always meant to be reviewed and revised.

Many also felt the plan was overly prescriptive. Having a less prescriptive plan may have allowed flexibility in its application to deal with obstacles as they arose. The ambitious nature of the plan also has the potential to leave community members frustrated when the timeline outlined in the plan is unable to be met.

Rob Hopkins identified this need for a flexible plan. He originally wanted an annual revision of the plan which never occurred. Hopkins had hoped that “once the first plan is done, it is taken out into the community and ‘tested’ through a series of specific Open Space events, say, one on food and one on housing. This would take the chapter on that area and explore its feasibility and desirability through Open Space. One could then produce specific publications on an area such as food or education, but which links back to the original Plan.”¹

A strength of the KEDAP is that it has steps that lead towards the ultimate vision i.e. it is transitional. Unfortunately the steps appear to have been too ambitious for the current platform and social context the group was operating in.

8. Establish out how the town works

Louise Rooney commented that it was important to get a good understanding of how the town functioned. For example, by finding out what the best avenues are to reach people and who are the key players.

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2. Louise Rooney. Email: louiserooney@hotmail.com
3. Elizabeth Frankish Ph. 03 782 6040. Email: peakoilaware@globe.net.nz
4. Annabelle Sutton – Member of the Kinsale Town Council and the Transition Town Steering Group. Email: isabellesutton@eircom.net
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HAMPDEN- MOERAKI- WAIANAKARUA ENERGY FUTURE FORUM

This forum, which has yet to confirm a name, is made up of representatives from several small towns in close proximity on the North Otago Coast.

Their vision is “a more secure, self-reliant and vibrant community, better prepared to sustain the effects of a decline in fossil fuel availability and meet the essential needs of future generations.”¹

The area the group represents contains roughly 350 residents. When formulating a boundary for the project the group chose to include land within a 12 km radius, which they thought would have been the extent of most social interaction before transport energy was so cheaply and freely available. To decide they asked themselves who the community would include if raised oil prices meant transport was limited.²

Dugald MacTavish, the instigator of the process, said “The aim was to get all the people in that area involved and raise the awareness of the whole community concurrently so we could make decisions as an entire community”. Thus far scientists from three different disciplines; geology, physics and engineering have educated wide cross section of the community on future energy issues. MacTavish was keen to inform himself and the community on the facts before they decided what, if any, actions should be taken to address the issue. The response from the community has been a desire to reduce their dependency on fossil fuel.²

In the beginning of the process MacTavish approached people in the community and discussed with them the increase in fuel prices and whether they thought the community could do anything to buffer themselves against future price increases. He approached individuals affiliated to different groups (Lions, Rural Woman, Fisherman’s Association, farmers, the tennis club etc) with the intent of including a broad range of representatives from the community.

Those who were interested met and discussed an article on the oil crisis by a local academic (Professor Rick Sibson a Geologist of Otago University) and agreed to ask him if he would be willing to talk to the community. A major concern was attracting enough people to a talk that might be perceived as a dry and possibly depressing subject. This was addressed in two ways. They sold tickets for the first two meetings with the purchase of a ticket for the first meeting being contingent on the purchase of a ticket for the second. Secondly, they invited a celebrity. The first forum, which attracted 100 people, had two speakers: Anton Oliver, the All Black, and Professor Rick Sibson.

Professor Sibson explained the finite nature of oil and the fact that peak abstraction could be expected in the near future. Anton (who turned out to have a deep environmental awareness) gave a personal assessment of major global ecological issues.

The second forum focused on alternatives to fossil fuels. Bob Lloyd, a professor of Physics, conveyed his belief that there was no energy source that would adequately replace fossil fuels.³

The documentary ‘The End of Suburbia’ was also played at this forum.

The third forum focussed on what the community could do to reduce its dependency of fossil fuels. Canterbury University Mechanical Engineering Lecturer, Dr Susan Krumdieck, spoke about change and how to understand the process better. She discussed a project that she had been involved in where they used the Burnside School zone in Christchurch to model a community run on low energy.

The speakers were followed by a facilitated workshop where people were divided into groups and asked three questions:

1. How will we experience Peak Oil in our community?
2. What does our community have that will work for us in a future with less oil?
3. What (realistically) can we do as a community to prepare and respond? ⁴

The first two questions were intended to prepare participants for third, which is effectively a wish list for community action. MacTavish believes it is important to have experienced facilitators run the process, but suspected that letting people know facilitators would be there might have scared some people off. ²

Energy and climate change issues Minister, David Parker, spoke at the fourth forum meeting. Following this, community members were able to vote on the project ideas from the third forum they saw as most urgent.

While formal risk analysis was considered to help prioritise the long list of actions suggested, there was a feeling within the group that it was time to “do something”. Work groups were formed to facilitate the top four actions listed below:

1. Improving skills and knowledge base through education.
2. Production of a sign or symbol that identifies the town as an energy aware community.
3. Investigating bulk purchase of solar panels.
4. Setting up a local market.

Next year the group proposes to continue to work through the list of projects it has identified. Future possibilities include a targeted fossil fuel ‘diet’ plan and the community being part of research into the effect on wellbeing of reduced energy use. It is anticipated that this plan will provide a framework for prioritising actions.

In addition to the formal group actions, individuals in the community are responding already in their own ways. For example, one person has contracted the growing of beet and is building a small still to begin experiments with biofuel production. A pork farmer has been exploring the use of effluent as a fuel source for his operation. A couple with a neglected block of land have been clearing it of gorse, fencing, tree planting and getting water storage and reticulation in order to establish an expanded commercial organic vegetable operation. There have been a number of enquires from elsewhere in New Zealand as to the nature of the Hampden initiative with a view to similar local ones.

In addition, the community had their vision formally adopted as part of the Waitaki District Council’s Long Term Council Community Plan process, which provides a legal basis for plan implementation.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Although it is still early days in Hampden's journey to sustainability, Dugald MacTavish, reflected on what he had learnt so far in the process:

1. Let the community set the agenda

MacTavish was careful to communicate to the community that he had no agenda going into the process other than to provide an opportunity to hear experts discuss the subject. The purpose of this was to ensure that when the community could make their own decisions. The steering group found this was important when selling tickets to the first forums as it also meant politics could be avoided.

2. Objective speakers

Aside from David Parker, the politician, MacTavish invited speakers that were objective. He believed the academics would provide this objectivity.

One of the speakers, Susan Krumdieck, believes it is important to let people know that there are no quick fixes to the problem. She commented that people are less likely to change their behaviour if they think there will be technology that will save the day.⁵ Providing the community with information and then asking for a rational response rather than providing a prepared check list has enable people to develop there own responses for their circumstances.

3. Attract interest with a famous speaker

MacTavish commented that Anton Oliver's presence at the first forum was a really big draw card. This meeting, which attracted 100 people, also brought in the media, including TVNZ. This set the series up for good attendance and publicity.

Having a big turnout at the first couple of meetings was a coup for the group. As well as attracting the press MacTavish believes it helped people feel that this was an acceptable cause to be involved with. That is, that the issue was sufficiently mainstream.

4. The use of tickets

MacTavish felt that selling tickets was essential in the small community to ensure that there were the numbers to justify bringing in a speaker and that selling tickets to the first two meetings together encouraged people to come to both of the meetings. By the end of the second meeting he feels people had a stronger awareness of the issues and enough information to decide if they wanted to become more involved.

Committee members each took seven tickets to sell. MacTavish commented that having these tickets to sell forced them to go out and talk to others about the issue. In a way he felt it encouraged advocacy and quickly created a committed group.

5. New group

Starting with an entirely new group rather than building out of an existing one had the advantage of avoiding any past political or other associations. Personal politics have been steadfastly avoided.

6. Social capital

MacTavish commented that a key element in creating a less vulnerable community is the strength of the relationships within the community. He believes having community members work together on this project has helped to strengthen relationships.

“Providing a good supper after meetings and an opportunity to mix has been really important in this respect. Presenting thank you gifts to speakers made up of local produce also built on the local focus and made many surprised and proud.”²

Many people new to the area attended the meetings which provided a means of introducing them to the community.

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2. Susan Krumdieck, Lecturer of Mechanical Engineer at the University of Canterbury. Email: susan.krumdieck@canterbury.ac.nz

WAITAKERE CITY

SOME BACKGROUND

Waitakere City has a diverse mix of land use including urban centres, farmland, coastal townships and natural vegetation. The land area of Waitakere City is 39,134 hectares. This includes 17,149 hectares of park areas and the Waitakere Ranges. In the last twenty years there has been much expansion out from the urban centres such as Glen Eden, New Lynn and Henderson.¹

With 168,750 residents Waitakere City is considerably larger than the township of Lincoln. More than half of the city's workforce commutes out of the city each day, mainly to jobs in Auckland City.¹ As a result Waitakere City is often referred to as a 'dormitory suburb' of Auckland.

Following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Waitakere City declared itself an 'Eco-city'. The Waitakere City Council, under the progressive leadership of Mayor Bob Harvey, committed itself to implementing the goals proposed in the Agenda 21 document. They created a document known as the 'Greenprint' which was Waitakere's version of Agenda 21.¹ Although the Greenprint is now an old document many of its philosophies and goals have been incorporated into the Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) and district plans. The council is currently working on an environmental strategy and a 'plan for the city.'²

Waitakere City has several proactive community environmental groups, many in partnership with the council. These include EcoMatters and Keep Waitakere Beautiful (KWB) as discussed later in this document. The council has been very supportive of these groups.

This case study will discuss two of the Eco City initiatives of relevance to Lincoln township: the Green Network and Urban Centre Revitalisation. It will discuss the work of community groups initiating sustainability projects and some lessons that have been learnt so far in Waitakere's journey to sustainability.

WAITAKERE CITY'S JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

Waitakere City Council's Green Network Project

The Green Network is a collection of natural resources within the city. It includes areas of natural and modified vegetation such as remnants of bush, riparian margins, parks, open spaces and waterways.¹

The initial focus of the program was to protect and link areas of natural vegetation that had become fragmented and isolated. It has since expanded to include other components. For example it includes the management of mixed use areas such as green space lawns, street berms and sports grounds to increase their biodiversity and habitat value. The network includes spaces dedicated to ecosystem service provision such as swales and rain gardens. Some projects attempt to influence people's day to day decisions that affect the health of these environments.³

The council contracts some of the management of Green Network Projects out to the environmental trusts KWB and Weedfree Waitakere. They also run their own projects including a Green Network Community Assistance Program.

The Green Network Community Assistance program helps community groups to look after and restore natural areas. Council support staff meet with community groups to discuss ideas they have for projects and ascertain what resources they have available to them. The council provides many of the resources that the group may be missing. Establishing requirements beforehand helps to prevent an overlap in resourcing. For example, some groups have their own nurseries so may only need resources such as potting mix and weed control work, whereas other groups may not have the time to grow their own plants. The council works with these community groups to format annual work plans and provides technical expertise to help them achieve their goals.³

Private landowners with significant natural areas are encouraged to put a covenant on their land to protect it from future modifications. This can be done through either the QE11 Trust or Waitakere City's own 'Conservation Covenants.' All Conservation Covenants include management plans made with the help of the council that are reviewed every two years. The management plans include the management requirements of the landowner and how the council will assist them. Landowners receive rates relief if they keep to their management plans. In the three years that this system has been operating 50 landowners have signed on. Demand is such that there is a waiting list of people wishing to begin the process.³ The council pay surveying and legal costs and provide skills, advice and some resources to help the landowners improve the natural areas on their land.¹

Waitakere City has its own 'Eco Sourced' label that appears on eco sourced plants sold at plant outlets and used on Green Network planting projects. In addition, the council specifies eco sourced plants must use as part of resource consent conditions.¹

Through the Green Network Community Assistance program community members can also be provided with free drop off and collection of weed bins, subsidies for weed contractor work and free herbicide to control ginger.¹

Waitakere City Council's Urban Centre Revitalisation

An ongoing Eco City directive has been to revitalise some of the region's urban centres. This has attempted to address concerns over urban sprawl and the number of residents traveling outside of the city to work.

The city council's urban redevelopment strategy sought to intensify urban development around the town centres.

The redevelopment was based around the following principles:

1. Compact: Stopping continued sprawl through density zoning.
2. Connected: Through existing transport links (bus and rail), as well as developing new footpaths and walkways. Through green network linkages by enhancing urban space and urban tree planting.
3. Community: Through encouraging mixed-use development.⁴

According to the council's website "Compact cities are more sustainable, because they are more efficient in the use of land, transport and infrastructure. Living in a compact city makes it easier for communities to access a range of employment opportunities and community facilities with less travel, and also supports the development of passenger transport systems."¹

Projects such as improved streetscapes, art installations and the upgrading of community facilities seek to make urban centres more appealing places to live, work and recreate. The council has several housing projects that showcase sustainable housing and medium density housing.¹

Urban centre revitalisation has been focussed on three urban centres: New Lynn, Henderson and Westgate. Other smaller centres were also selected for more limited redevelopment.⁴

Planning for the revitalisation of New Lynn's Town centre in 1996 used a planning process called a Charette. The Charette proved very effective and has since been used in the planning phase of many council projects.⁵

THE CHARETTE PLANNING PROCESS

A charette is a planning tool that combines intense work sessions with public workshops and open houses. Charette is a French word that means 'cart' and is often used to describe the final, intense work effort expended by art and architecture students to meet project deadlines.⁶

Day one of the planning process typically includes briefings from the different agencies involved, for example the council and government agencies like Transit New Zealand and the Ministry for the Environment. Each group gives a five to ten minute briefing outlining their point of view on the project. This is made into an information booklet that is used for reference throughout the rest of the charette.⁵

Site visits are commonly included to familiarise participants with specific areas. There is typically a public meeting on the first night, where the public is given an overview of the project. Over the next two or three days design groups work on specific aspects. They may meet with other specialist groups such as land owners and businesspeople. Members of the public are able to come in at set times and sit down with the designers to discuss issues.⁵

At the end of the process there is a presentation back to the public and other design groups. Typically several alternative designs or plans are presented. A booklet outlining the designs formulated at the charette is sent out to people to give them more time to consider the plans. In addition a display is created for people to view the designs.⁵

The output of the charette is not a definitive plan. Individuals and interest groups provide feedback on the designs in the booklet and further negotiations occur.

EcoMatters Environmental Trust

Ecomatters is a relatively new organisation established in 2002 to act as an umbrella organisation to the other environmental trusts Keep Waitakere Beautiful, Weedfree Waitakere and Tag Out. They also run their own sustainability projects. In the few years since they have been running their staffing has increased from four to 22 full timers. EcoMatters has strong ties with the Waitakere City Council and many of their projects are aimed at implementing the 'Eco City' visions. They also work with other government agencies to implement environmental projects.⁷ Some of the EcoMatters projects are described below:

The Sustainable Living Centre (SLC) is an environmental resource centre that showcases sustainable technologies such as composting systems, rainwater collection and PV panels. The SLC hosts inexpensive workshops and seminars in sustainable urban living. Records show visitor numbers are increasing monthly.

EcoMatters run a program called **EcoWise Energy** that is funded by the EECA, the city council and central government.⁸ As part of this program Energy Efficiency Advisors visit homes, schools and small businesses and complete energy audits. The client receives a personalised energy efficiency plan and five energy efficient light bulbs from Phillips. Initially the Trust charged \$39 for the audit but found this to be a barrier to some households. Now low income households receive the service for free. EcoWise Energy has completed over 300 energy audits.⁹

EcoWise West is a project that involves heavily subsidised retrofitting of homes with a variety of insulation. Low income households pay \$225 towards the insulation, which, for a 100 sq metre house can cost up to \$2000.¹⁰ This project is jointly funded by a number of organisations such as the Waitemata District Health Board, the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority and the Ministry of Social Development. The project helps to create employment by training people who were previously unemployed to do the retrofitting. In addition EcoWise has a contract to retrofit Housing New Zealand owned and tenanted homes.

Gretchen Schubeck, the Executive Director of EcoMatters, says this project has been very popular from a community perspective and recommends it to community organisations looking at doing something local to raise awareness.⁹

The EcoMatters **Water Wise Up program** seeks to reduce water consumption by households, businesses and schools. 6200 households were surveyed to ascertain per capita use and how water was being wasted. The households were then given information packs on how to make reductions. The Trust found it hard to judge how effective the uptake of information was in terms of behavioral change and have since decided to target their efforts on high users. Water advisors plan to work with the top 60 household water users to educate them and provide incentives to reduce water use. The incentive approach will focus on both educating people on the money they can save through making changes and rewarding reductions in water use. They plan to work with 75 schools to run activities and set up water conservation projects.¹¹

The Keep Waitakere Beautiful Trust (KWB)

The Keep Waitakere Beautiful programme was established in 1993, initially as a partnership between the council and the community. Within this program different “focus points began to emerge and the Weedfree Waitakere Trust and the Tag Out Trust were developed and eventually broke away to focus on their own issues”.⁸

Several years ago KWB separated from the city council and became a charitable trust. The mayor of Waitakere City, Bob Harvey, is the Trust’s patron. Many of the projects run by KWB contribute to Waitakere City Council’s Green Network Project described above.

Some of the KWB projects are described below:

KWB have been running a **Community Street Tree Planting Program** for 12 years resulting in over 4000 trees being planted in urban streets. Communities nominate streets they want planted and, providing the street meets the selection criteria they are provided with resources such as trees, mulch, stakes and fertilizer. In turn the neighborhood provides the labour.

Trees for babies is a family tree planting event that has been running for 11 years in over 50 parks in the Waitakere region.¹² Entertainment is provided at the event and each baby registered on the day receives a “Young Citizen” certificate. The trees are supplied for free to the new parents. KWB uses a Plunket database to send out invitations to new babies.

In partnership with Waitakere City Council, the Auckland Regional Council and Weedfree Waitakere Trust, KWB run a project to rid the Waitakere area of weeds called ‘**War on Weeds.**’ Eleven public bins are set up around the city for free weed disposal. Those not located close to the bins are provided with weed bags that are collected free of charge. They are also about to launch a new system whereby residents can apply to receive 10 free specially printed weed bags per year. The bags are collected for no cost from their gates once a month and taken to the green waste-recycling centre.¹³

Other programs run by KWB include the donation of trees and shrubs to local schools, ‘Adopt a Stream’, ‘Adopt a Spot’, ‘Operation Spring Clean’, ‘Trash to Fashion’ and ‘Wasteblasters – Rhythm of recycling’ (a primary schools musical event utilizing instruments made out of waste.) More information on these is available at www.waitakere.govt.nz.¹

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Fostering partnerships

The success of the sustainability initiatives in Waitakere City owes a lot to the symbiotic relationship between the organisations involved in promoting sustainability in the region. For example there is a strong relationship between the Waitakere City Council and the environmental trusts EcoMatters and KWB.

In a way these trusts are more like private contractors implementing strategies of the local council and other government agencies. Although this reflects a certain lack of autonomy for these environmental groups the partnerships seem mutually beneficial. Being perceived as independent grassroots organisations allows the environmental trusts to achieve buy-in from the community. They are also eligible for external funding such as grants from government organisations.¹⁴

The Waitakere City Council in particular provides a lot of funding for the trusts. They also supply resources like trees and weed bins. In return the trusts implements projects away from the bureaucratic structure of the council. Moira Kennedy, Program Manager of KWB, believes that better results can be achieved away from this bureaucracy and for less cost. Kennedy commented that without a hugely supportive council their level of achievement would have been impossible. She said KWB fosters this relationship by consistently delivering on projects and keeping partners informed.¹⁵

Gretchen Schubeck of EcoMatters, commented it was a “hard slog to build strategic relationships” but felt that it was easier if seen as apolitical. She reflected on the benefit of having open days where partners can familiarise themselves with projects.⁹ EcoMatters have hosted councilors and members of the Sustainable Business Network at the SLC. At these open days groups were invited to listen to a presentation on the Trust’s programs.

KWB and EcoMatters are both run by previous Waitakere City Council staff. This pre-existing relationship between managers and the council seems to be have been beneficial for the trust.

On the downside, relying on a partnership has its challenges particularly with respect to funding. Meg Liptrot, manager of the SLC, said it was hard to get things done quickly due to their reliance on outside funding. In addition she said it was hard not knowing from year to year if money would be available for certain projects. For example, the first year the SLC received funding from the Environmental Centre Fund but none for the next two years.¹⁶

Keeping a good relationship with the community is also important. Moira Kennedy commented that KWB make an effort to thank people for volunteering. For example people registered with Operation Spring Clean receive a certificate personally signed by the Mayor. The EcoWise awards are another way of showing appreciation. In this ceremony community members receive awards such as ‘best individual volunteer, ‘best urban residential vegetable garden.’¹⁵

In the time that the Green Network Assistance program has been up and running the number of community groups working with the council has grown significantly. Chris Ferkins, manager of the program, said that, when it started nine years ago, there were seven environmentally focused community groups operating in the region. This has now grown to more than seventy. Ferkins believes that neighborhood groups are spurred on by the knowledge that the council would support them by providing resources and technical advice.³

2. Encourage community ownership of projects

Keep Waitakere Beautiful has focused on projects that are personal and relevant to community members. For example, getting people to look after an area of stream, plant trees in their own street or plant a tree for their baby. Moira Kennedy commented that these very 'local' projects have been successful because people are more willing to take ownership of them.¹⁵

3. Put energy into promoting projects

The groups involved with EcoMatters put a lot of effort into getting information about their projects and events out into the community.

Meg Lipton commented that the SLC has increased in popularity largely due to the Centre building an extensive community database. She commented that for the first few years the SLC was operating many workshops had to be canceled due to low numbers, yet now this rarely happens. She believes this change has resulted from the development of a larger contacts database.¹⁶ At the SLC they have a visitor's book that they encourage every visitor to sign. These visitors are then either emailed or sent the SLC programme that is produced monthly.

KWB send out a newsletter asking people to tell them what programs they would like to be involved in. They have a very big database and send out hardcopy newsletters to over 1500 people.¹⁵ The Trust also puts a big emphasis on press releases.

4. Regularly critique of performance

Gretchen of EcoMatters reflected that one of the lessons she has learnt is the importance of critiquing the performance of projects and making improvements. Some of their adjustments to projects have included removing financial barriers and targeting specific groups for projects.⁹

5. Make it easy for people to participate

A common theme expressed by those involved in community projects in Waitakere City was the advantage of making it easy for people in the community to participate. For example, by making it convenient for people to participate by delivering resources directly and removing financial constraints.

Moira Kennedy commented on the benefit of tapping into the huge resource base of the retired community. She found there were many retired people looking for things to get involved with and that many particularly enjoy participating in projects that are garden orientated such as the War on Weeds project. They make it easy for this group to participate by actions such as picking up weed bags from driveways and delivering trees.¹⁵

Moira also commented that getting kids involved helps to draw out the parents. "If you can get the kids to hang around for a while often parents will come out and help."¹⁵

6. Social Marketing

One of the disappointments expressed by Gretchen Schubeck was the apathy of the public on big issues. To address this EcoMatters will increase their knowledge of social marketing. They have participated in brainstorming sessions on the subject and staff will shortly attend a workshop on social marketing entitled "fostering sustainable behaviour."⁹

7. Formal recognition of the importance of ecosystem protection

Chris Ferkins of the Green Network Assistance program, believes the tighter rules to protect riparian zones in the Green Network have helped to raise the profile of these important areas. He said it was not just the rules themselves but their presence that had led the community to have an increased respect for riparian zones. Ferkins believes these regulations have helped to get the message across and made people more proactive.³

8. The use of a comprehensive planning process

The intensive charette planning process has been effective in reducing the time taken to create plans. The variety of government agencies and specialists involved in the process appears to reduce the likelihood of unfeasible actions being incorporated within plans.

Megan Courtney of the Waitakere City Council, said charettes were helpful in that they allowed people with specialist knowledge in one area, such as engineers or social scientists, to see the issues and needs from different perspectives. She commented that this cross input into plans was helpful in making sure things were not missed out.¹⁷ Courtney believes these events have the added bonus of bringing parts of the council together. The charette provides opportunities to chat and eat together, helping to build relationships.¹⁷

Yvonne Rust, Group Manager for City Development with the Waitakere City Council, commented that charettes resulted in better thought out solutions because designs are better integrated from the beginning. She commented other planning processes can result in solving one problem only to create another.⁵

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WANAKA

SOME BACKGROUND

Wanaka is a town in Central Otago that has become a popular tourist destination in summer and winter. The town has experienced considerable growth in the last five years, the population growing by 50% to 6900 permanent residents.¹ There is an increasing desire to manage the growing construction and tourism industries in a sustainable manner.

As well as Wanaka, the Queenstown Lakes District Council administers several towns such as Queenstown and Arrowtown.

In 2005 Wanaka was one of six regional tourism organisations (RTO's) to receive funding as part of the Ministry for the Environment and Ministry of Tourism's Sustainable Tourism Project. Lake Wanaka Tourism, the RTO representing 340 businesses in Wanaka, received \$209,000 for the three year project. The money was to go towards the region developing a sustainable tourism charter and providing tourism operators with advice and resources to improve their environmental performance.²

Sustainable Wanaka is the charitable trust that has taken the contract to implement these projects for Lake Wanaka Tourism. They are based in Wanaka and focus on sustainability issues in the Upper Clutha region.³

Although they are dealing with other projects at present the focus of Sustainable Wanaka is on sustainable tourism. In February 2005, they amended their charter to state that they will apply their energies to succeeding with sustainable tourism as a priority, and then apply the skills and experience they gain from dealing with that sector to other areas within the community. Their other main focus is the building and construction sector.⁴

The following sections mainly focus on the efforts of Sustainable Wanaka and what they have learnt so far.

WANAKA'S JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

With funding from the Sustainable Tourism Project, Sustainable Wanaka was able to employ a full time general manager. The manager has been employed since late 2005.

As well as a speaker series, the Trust is using the following initiatives to encourage sustainability in their region:

Column in the *Wanaka Sun*

A fortnightly column in Wanaka's community paper the *Wanaka Sun* provides a forum to debate issues on sustainability and educate locals on sustainable living topics. These are written by the general manager and other contributors. The Chairman of the Trust, John Beattie says "The column has allowed us to profile the events that we run as well as report on achievements made by local businesses who are working towards their own sustainable visions."⁴

The end of each column reads: “We hope it will stimulate debate, celebrate champions and inspire others to make a real difference in creating and maintaining a sustainable lifestyle in the Upper Clutha Basin”³

Sustainable House Day

On September the 9th the Trust ran a Sustainable House Day. 250 people visited eight homes to learn from their various features. Participants were provided with an information kit and had the chance to talk with homeowners about their experiences using sustainable technology.³

Advocating long term planning by local government

Sustainable Wanaka is currently in discussion with the Queenstown Lakes District Council and other surrounding councils to encourage the creation of plan they hope will have a ‘hundred year view.’ Trust members are concerned that current local government planning focuses too much on the short term and that better decisions would be made in the present if a better long term vision was formulated. Currently they are trying to achieve support and funding for the process.⁵

Sustainable tourism project

By the end of 2007 Sustainable Wanaka aims to have taken at least 50 tourism business through the process of assessing the sustainability of their operations and instigating changes to improve their environmental performance. The project was piloted by 11 companies and has since has grow to 30.³

Steve Henry, a sustainability assessor and at the time, a trustee of Sustainable Wanaka, helped establish the programme and now assists periodically. The general manager Megan Williams, and occasional contract staff, work as sustainability assessors in the process. The assessors assist the businesses to:

- establish a shared definition of sustainability throughout the company
- gather data and carry out auditing as part of the sustainability assessment
- create a vision
- create a sustainability action plan which includes practical steps to improve environmental performance

Together the sustainability assessors and the businesses discuss how actions will be implemented and how performance can be monitored. Estimations are made of potential costs and returns. As the company implements the action plan the sustainability assessors help to review progress and ‘identify key lessons, barriers and opportunities.’³

Most of the activity of the project is run in spring and autumn at times of the year when there are fewer tourists and therefore less pressure on businesses.⁴

Individual companies have improved their performance over a number of areas including recycling, purchasing, social contribution, energy and water consumption.

Workshops are held to assist operators involved in the process. For example a workshop, in October 2006, showed tourism operators case studies of what other businesses have done in Wanaka, nationally and internationally. They introduced The Natural Step (TNS) concepts such as the systems conditions, visioning and backcasting.⁶

(N.B. Although some Natural Step concepts have been adopted, the Trust has not officially aligned themselves with the Natural Step organisation or framework. See the Whistler Case Study for a more detailed description of The Natural Step)

Another workshop involved businesses sharing their experiences with each other. Draft action plans were formulated and a visioning process was initiated.⁷

In a workshop planned for early December 2007, businesses will share what they have learnt, how they have benefited and the commitments they have made. They will also have the pilot businesses share what they have learnt, savings they have made and what has not been successful.⁸

Sustainable building web resource

With funding from the Sustainable Management Fund the Trust is preparing a sustainable building web resource.³

One driver of this program was a desire for a site that collated information currently found 'all over the place.' The Trust felt it was time consuming for home builders to scroll the web and books for this information.⁵

Another driver was the need for design information specific to the Wanaka area.⁵ Little data was available on the best design options for Wanaka's climate and social and economic environment.³

Several projects are underway that will act as case studies for the website. In one project a developer is building a series of apartments with one special apartment that utilises sustainable technology such as double glazing and low energy appliances. The performance of this apartment will be measured against the standard ones following their completion early in 2007. Sponsors have donated time and resources to the project.⁵ The data collected will go towards case studies on the website.

Another project involves the retrofitting of rental properties using sustainable technology. The goal being to establish the best, most cost efficient upgrade choices for the region. Data collected pre and post upgrade will be available to help people make choices.⁴ The website will also include a directory of local, environmentally aware companies.³

A questionnaire gauging knowledge of sustainable design was distributed to act as a reference point to judge the Trusts effectiveness in this project. A similar questionnaire will be distributed at the end of the project. They are also planning to investigate the number of sustainable products, such as hot water cylinders, purchased before and after the project as a measurement of success.⁵

Raising awareness within the building trade

Sustainable Wanaka has a regular article in the local Mitre 10 trade publication where they discuss sustainable design and construction. They also run education evenings for people in the building trades.⁴ An effective partnership with Mitre 10 sees the company providing the venue, food and drinks for tradesmen and Sustainable Wanaka delivering advice on sustainable design and building.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Raising awareness

Sustainable Wanaka's General Manager, Megan Williams, says getting the media involved has been really effective in increasing participation of their projects. She commented on the importance of "getting projects done and then talked about."⁵

She has found it useful to target specific audiences, for example the construction industry. "By working with a broad cross section of tourism businesses we are able to educate and influence, not only management, but also staff and clientele in some simple steps towards sustainability."³

2. Creating ownership through individual visions

Sustainable Wanaka choose to create individual visions for each of the tourism companies involved in the sustainable tourism project. Although the mandate from the Ministry of Tourism was for an overarching vision for tourism operators, Steve Henry believed individual visions would create more ownership of the process. He did not feel one set of ideals could be applied to all the individual businesses. Henry said this was the best thing they did in the process, commenting the individual visions "created responsibility and empowerment within the organisations."⁹

3. Use of a holistic framework

As discussed earlier Sustainable Wanaka are using elements of the Natural Step Framework in their Sustainable Tourism Project. Steve Henry has had a lot of involvement with TNS and believes it is a very holistic framework. He believes that without a systems approach it is difficult to make progress in the area of sustainability. Henry commented that TNS was the smartest tool he has seen to help organisations act strategically.⁹

The Trust has not overly publicised their use of the Natural Step framework. For example TNS is not mentioned on their website. When Trust members went to discuss their sustainable tourism plan with central government they discussed the tools and principles of TNS they would be using but did not say 'we are adopting TNS.' Henry says TNS can be viewed as somewhat of a religion and sometimes a better approach is to utilise the concepts without promoting the adoption of the specific framework.

Tourism companies involved in the project have a complimentary system of management, some being affiliated with Green Globe 21 and others using templates for action plans created by Henry.⁹

4. The Challenge of establishing funding and partnership with local authorities

As well as the challenge of attracting funding Sustainable Wanaka are finding it difficult to align themselves with the local council. They are working hard to get the municipality to work with them on a strategic plan for the town.⁹

Henry commented that they are a ‘pressure group without being a pressure group,’ reflecting on the importance of not being perceived as an extreme or hostile environmental organisation.⁹

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