

Submitter: Roger Bray

Ashburton District Council Long-Term Plan 2021-31.

I am saddened that I feel the need to comment on the long term plan and the direction taken by council. Without trying to be demeaning to Councillors there are a number of challenges and pressures on Society at present that financial prudence should be foremost in the minds of council. I am sorry, I have not fully devoted the time to understanding the document that the council has provided.

Rates

I respect the election process where the residents select representatives to conduct the business of providing and maintaining community assets. I feel the time has come where there needs to be a realisation that there is a divide in NZ with an ever widening gap between the haves and the have nots. Those that produce value and those that are living off others with grants and 'handouts'. Council find themselves in the middle of a process to extract funds as best they can from the community to fund their projects. It is becoming increasingly apparent the modern rating system based on perceived value of land and assets is flawed. To maintain a rating system that is based somewhat on increasing debt levels as reflected in 'property values' bears no relationship to productivity and the ability for people to pay that it is considered 'fair' by council. I suggest the council investigate some more equitable method of funding council infrastructure bases on the extent of use. As an example Everybody contributes to the amount of sewage council has to process. Currently those that live in affluent houses and areas pay more for council to dispose of their waste products than those that may have larger families and live in poorer areas, noting as well a number of people do not actually contribute at all. Whilst there needs to be a system that copes with the fortunate having compassion for the less fortunate and contributing a little more, society has now provided a section of the community that has an expectation that they will not need to make any effort themselves as others in society will provide for their lifestyle.

It has become apparent with the disruptions caused by covid restrictions that all is not well with the world socially. Regardless how it is pitched there are many primary producers of goods in NZ that are unable to attract labour to produce, harvest and process produce. At the same time it appears there are a number of people that despite not having a permanent income producing job are content to accept community handouts for their existence. As time progresses and the community (Council) has an increasing appetite for money, while some in the community are struggling to keep financially buoyant, I think the time has come that the community needs its representatives to show constraint on their spending. I am proud of our town and its facilities but at a time when families are tightening their belts I see some of the town beautification process an extravagance and for what – aesthetic pleasure? Wellbeing is all important, but if pockets are being drained to enhance 'wellbeing', how will the balance be determined?

The Civic development is an example where ratepayers accepted the bigger, best option and it was understood at the time that this would provide the community with all its needs, inclusive of 'wellbeing' aspects. Whilst I am unsure of the exact dollar changes, the Govt provided 'shovel ready' funds for progression. The Community had been consulted, hearings held and a decision made only to find it is supposedly going to now cost us more? From the document provided it is unclear if some of this Civic project has already been financially progressed prior to the LTP2021-31 thus figures presented are not fully reflective of the complete project costs... One could have expected a discount in rates from the Government funds provided.

Town planning?

The town is in the process of developing a 'shopping precinct' where people can park a vehicle and conduct shopping on foot in a variety of shops serviced by a food court. For a number of years property developers have adopted a piecemeal approach, along with the planning rules of council and developed a Hodge podge of retail and service businesses encompassing a wider area of central Ashburton. To me it is disappointing to see development of the 'retail' section of town develop in such a way there is a dependence on a roading network for shoppers to transition between the shops such as Warehouse, Harvey Norman, Farmers, Electraserve, and K Mart (proposed separate new retail area development) . Ashburton seems to have lost the ability to provide for a more 'community shopping' area that involves some community spirit similar to those larger shopping malls both in NZ and overseas. Noting a doctors surgery in a prime location in the central area that could be developed as a central shopping hub.

My concern is the proposed large increases in rates when the community is now becoming more financially strained.

Thank you
Roger Bray.