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**Sent:** Friday, 17 May 2024 12:48 pm  
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**Cc:** Helen Beever; Sarah McElroy; Steve Dalgety; Robbie Matthews; Shane Brodie  
**Subject:** Sport Waikato Submission - Waitomo District Council LTP  
**Attachments:** Waitomo District Council (2024 LTP) - Sport Waikato Submission.pdf

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Kia ora,

Please find attached Sport Waikato's submission to your Council's LTP consultation process – thank you for the opportunity to share our feedback and for all that Waitomo District Council does to support play, active recreation and sport in the district.

If possible, it would be great to be able to speak to our submission at Council's upcoming hearing/s. All the best for your deliberations.

Ngaa mihi | kind regards  
Matthew

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**SPORT WAIKATO'S SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE  
WAITOMO DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Long Term Plan 2024-34**

**17 May 2024**

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## 1. ABOUT SPORT WAIKATO

Sport Waikato is one of 14 Regional Sports Trusts in Aotearoa/New Zealand, responsible for supporting Central Government and Sport New Zealand’s focus on getting more New Zealanders physically active. There is widespread and global evidence that physical activity enhances people’s physical, social, emotional, and mental health, educational outcomes and general wellbeing as well as making for a more cohesive society.

Founded in 1986, Sport Waikato’s vision is to have **“everyone out there and active”** so as to achieve a healthy, vibrant, physically active region through play, active recreation and sport.

### OUR APPROACH

Sport Waikato is guided by Moving Waikato – the region’s unified strategy for physical activity through play, active recreation and sport. The strategy seeks to prioritise partnerships with other key agencies to influence key outcomes, including to increase the provision of opportunities for both participation and quality experiences for the people of the region. We believe that by working together we can achieve the ultimate goal of 75% of all Waikato adults and young people meeting the physical activity guidelines by 2030, and therefore, a more healthy, well and physically active region.

Moving Waikato is guided by a Strategic Advisory Group comprising representation from Health, Education (primary, secondary and tertiary), Local Government, Iwi, Sport NZ and Sport Waikato. The strategy has three key pillars each providing a lens that gives direction on how we work: **Our People**, **Building Communities**, and **Regional Leadership**



We are now into Horizon 2 of Moving Waikato, following its launch in 2016 and subsequent successes, including significant developments in the collection of key insights, sector capability work, the Waikato Regional Sports Facilities Plan (now the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan, which is in its 4th iteration), targeting participation among women and girls and the development of a regional cycle strategy. This next period (2024-2027) will see a focus on Rangatahi (12-17 years) and Tamariki (5-11 years) alongside specific commitment and attention to enabling participation among targeted populations, including: Maaori; deprived communities; women and girls; disabled people and those with low participation levels and/or those who tend to miss out.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNCILS TO OUR APPROACH**

Councils play a key role in the work that Sport Waikato does and are an important partner and investor in enabling play, active recreation and sport to happen for people and communities. We wish to take a moment to thank Waitomo District Council for their support of the work of Sport Waikato, whilst also acknowledging the immense fiscal pressure you are facing to both provide community infrastructure while keeping costs for communities affordable.

Sport Waikato is excited to work alongside you to continue to ensure a range of opportunities for people to engage in physical activity exists across Waitomo. In particular, we look forward to providing support for the planning, investment, and operation of the facilities and open spaces which enable play, active recreation and sport, as well as increasing collaborative and cross-sectorial partnerships that open up opportunities for increased levels of movement.

## **2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

The Waitomo district has a usual resident population of 9,303 people made up of over 3,411 households (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). This population figure is up 11% from the last census in 2013, which shows growth in the number of New Zealanders calling Waitomo their home. Waitomo is expecting slow growth across its towns (in the district) with more people/family exiting the town and more demand in Piopio. There is a change in different types of housing by 2048, as the district expects more over the age of 65 years old. There is still a predicted demand for the “rural” living lifestyle in the future so a “protected” zone is set in the Town Concept plans for the townships of Te Kuiti and Mokau. NIDEA shows a slow drop off until reaching 2038 before we see population increase again and it reflects the district plans of the aging population.

People identifying as Maaori in the Waitomo district comprise 45% of the district population, which is significantly higher than the Waikato regional average of 24% and national average of 17%. Overall, Waitomo has a median income of \$27,300 p/a with 63% of its population living in areas of high deprivation (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). Waitomo districts have 52% of the population living rurally.

A growing and aging population, with a vast number of residents living in deprivation and/or rurally presents challenges when thinking about providing for play, active recreation, and sport, particularly when considering access and provision that meets the needs of a growing, changing and often rurally distanced community.

### **THE VALUE OF PLAY, ACTIVE RECREATION AND SPORT**

In a 2018 study by Sport NZ, it was revealed that 92% of people believe being active keeps them physically fit and healthy, and helps relieve stress. A further 88% of people believed that sport and other physical activities provided them with opportunities to achieve and help build confidence, and 84% felt that sport brings people together while creating a sense of belonging. The vast majority of people (74%) also believed that sport helps to build vibrant and stimulating communities.

Of course, the benefits of physical activity through play, active recreation and sport are well documented and wide-reaching from physical health, to social, emotional and mental wellbeing. Indeed, a report on the *Social Return on Investment (SROI) of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Sport NZ, October 2022) showed that recreational physical activity generates significant value for society

across multiple wellbeing domains and outcomes. For every \$1 spent, there was a social return of \$2.12 to New Zealand, meaning that the value of the wellbeing outcomes for New Zealand is greater than the costs of providing these opportunities. While health outcomes are the most significant wellbeing domain for measuring the impact of sport and physical activity benefits to society, broader benefits were also clear across several domains of wellbeing, including subjective wellbeing; income consumption and wealth; work, care and volunteering; family and friends; and safety<sup>1</sup>.

### CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF PARTICIPATION IN WAITOMO

Recent figures from Active NZ (2021) suggest that 52% of young people (5-17 years) and 53% of adults in the Waitomo District do enough physical activity to positively impact their wellbeing, with 70% of young people and 73% of adults suggesting they would like to do more physical activity than they currently do (Active NZ 2021).

Active recreation and play are the preferred modes of physical activity for Waitomo residents with activities such as running/jogging, games (e.g., four square, tag, bullrush, dodgeball), playing on playgrounds, cycling, and playing (e.g., running around, climbing trees, make-believe) among the preferences for young people. Walking, gardening, individual workouts with equipment, running/jogging and playing games (e.g., with kids) top the list of preferred physical activities for adults.

## 3. OUR SUBMISSION ON YOUR PROPOSED LONG-TERM PLAN 2024-34

In our submission, we wish to comment on the following:

1. **Thank you:** On behalf of the people of Waitomo District, Sport Waikato thank you for your investment contributions to play, active recreation and sport. Councils are key enablers of physical activity, and your effort and investment are noted and sincerely appreciated. We also would like to congratulate Waitomo District Council and the local community in the substantial investment made into the Gallagher Recreation Centre (Te Whare Takarangi O Te Kuiti) which in just over a year of operation is having a positive impact on community wellbeing outcomes.
2. **Our Recommendations:**

### Centennial Park revitalisation project

**Sport Waikato supports funding for the Centennial Park revitalisation project, including the outlined investment into play assets at the park** highlighted in the Long-Term Plan (*refer to playground recommendations below*).

Pressure is growing on field networks because of factors such as movement in winter and summer sports seasons (coming closer together and in some cases overlapping), the growth in informal social play (outside of structured code play). Outdoor Sport and Recreational facilities are important community assets with 52% of Waitomo Youth reported that outdoor spaces (inclusive of outdoor courts, playgrounds and fields) are locations where they are active, however 31% were either dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied with outdoor sports/recreation facilities (versus 3% very or extremely satisfied).

We support councils ongoing consultation around Centennial Park noting that there is a desire from the community to ensure that sport grounds have well-functioning amenities and supporting infrastructure that meet the needs of the community across our sport ground network. Regionally, sport and recreational organisations have highlighted:

- 53% - facilities and spaces have quality issues
- 41% - facilities and spaces meet the needs of future communities

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<sup>1</sup> There is more evidence required to better reflect the true value of the social cohesion dimension which is considered to be currently undervalued.

- Participants highlighted that improvement to clubrooms was the #1 priority for clubs, followed by amenities (toilets/changerooms) #2 and improved quality of provision (courts and fields) #3

### **Improve our playgrounds**

**Sport Waikato supports funding outlined for playground projects** in the Long-Term Plan.

Play is a vital part of our Tamariki's physical and cognitive development. It has been taken for granted that play has always been, and will always be, part of the childhoods of those growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, levels of play are in decline due to shifting values, increasingly sedentary lives, and changes in urbanisation resulting in fears about the safety of our tamariki. Sport Waikato analysis highlights the following for Waitomo District residents:

- 32% of people within Waitomo District are using existing playgrounds
- Only 7% of playground users are either very or extremely satisfied with these spaces (suggestions made that they are not fit for purpose. Not family friendly, accessible and not able to use for varying ages). Safety and security were also mentioned as barriers to satisfaction

### **Recommendation from Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan – Approach for all councils**

- *Maintain and/or enhance the playground network ensuring:*
  - *Focus on optimising and maintaining existing assets.*
  - *Focus on flexible, accessible, and inclusive provision for all, including low participation groups and aging population including adults play opportunities.*
  - *Exploration of accessibility to school network and facilitate a strategy to increase access*
- *Considerations around future playground planning should occur alongside planning for destination spaces (via town concept planning an alike) and key locations which cater for a large volume of active recreation.*
- *Where playgrounds are highlighted to be renewed, consideration for co-design of engaging age-appropriate play opportunities (inclusion of Adult Play)*

### **Waitomo District Aquatic Centre**

**Sport Waikato recognise and support ongoing investment outlined in the long-term plan for the Waitomo District Aquatic Centre.** The Waikato is home to many natural waterways, including rivers, streams, beaches and lakes. This highlights the importance of water confidence and safety among people in the region, including, of course, sufficient spaces and places to build these capabilities. Equally, we know that:

- The demand for aquatic provision is changing as participation needs change, with a trend toward increased casual, informal and recreational participation. In addition, the Waikato Region has an increasingly aging population which requires flexible pool provision and access to warmer, covered, year-round water.
- Regionally there is an over-supply of cooler temperature and lane (rectangular) water space and an under-supply of leisure, play, relaxation, and hydrotherapy water space, with limited flexibility to meet changing demand and changing demographics (aging population and growth in young families).

Sport Waikato analysis highlights the following for Waitomo residents:

- Waitomo respondents of the Community Survey 22% indicated they were either dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied with the current provision of aquatics facilities (versus 7% very or extremely satisfied)
- Swimming remains a popular activity across all age groups in the Waitomo district – it is the 4<sup>th</sup> most popular activity across youth age groups (5-11years, 12-17 years) with a 28% participation rate, and the 8<sup>th</sup> most popular activity for adults (18+ years).

### **Recommendation from Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan**

*Plan for significant re-investment into existing aquatic community facilities to ensure aquatic provision meets the needs of the wider sub-region community needs. Consider need for flexible water space and take the following approach*

- *Investigate sub regional supply and cross boundary partnerships to continue network approach – taking into consideration the outcomes of any investment Otorohanga Memorial Pool Complex*
- *Optimise and maintain existing assets - consider age and condition of pools prior to any upgrade/refurbishment*
- *Maintain existing operational pools based on asset management plans*
- *Explore partnerships with schools and tertiary institutions*

### **Fees and Charges**

We acknowledge the geopolitical environment and rising cost of living, so we support the pragmatic and fair approach to increase fees and charges at a rate that is hopefully manageable for user groups, while at the same time allowing for key community assets to be maintained and continue to service play, active recreation and sport outcomes. We also recognise the rising pressures for families where reduced disposable income could result in a widening activity gap, particularly among high-deprivation communities, resulting in fewer options and opportunities for them to engage in play, active recreation and sport.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to make a submission as part of Council’s LTP process.

### **1. Key Documents and Data Sets to refer to in Reference to this Submission**

- Moving Waikato
- The Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan (WRASP)
- Waitomo Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plan (2024 – Draft)
- Regional Community Survey 2022
- Regional Club and Regional Sporting Organisation Survey 2022
- Active NZ 2021

## **4. SPORT WAIKATO CONTACTS**

Should the Council wish to seek further information or clarification on this submission, please contact:

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