



Waitomo District Economic Development Strategy

Prepared for the Future



The purpose of our Economic Development Strategy

Economic development can be defined as actions that positively influence economic growth and improve the economic and social well-being of a community.

Economic Development is the key element for a prosperous and thriving community which in turn leads to enhanced economic activity.

Waitomo District Council can contribute by providing good quality infrastructure and regulatory services, actively promoting business and industry development and attracting people to the District by providing appealing and well-serviced public assets and services.

By becoming more prepared for the future we can offer reassurance to the existing community and provide an appealing factor for potential new residents looking for the advantages of rural New Zealand.

There is currently a sense of positivity about doing business in the Waitomo District. When we asked our local businesses and residents what they thought about doing business and living in the Waitomo District the following positive perceptions were reported:

- There is good cooperation with other business in the District
- There are sufficient local suppliers and support services for doing business in Waitomo
- We have a strong sense of community
- People are proud of their community
- Our central location, beautiful countryside and the quietness are major influencers for living in the District

Working with community organisations and local businesses to help foster and assist in growing the economy for the District will continue to be a priority in implementing this Economic Development Strategy.



What we want to achieve

Waitomo District Council's Long Term Plan 2015-2025 outlines the strategic intent for our District and key outcomes for our Community. The Waitomo District Economic Development Strategy will align with Council's vision:

“Create a better future with vibrant communities and thriving business”

This Economic Development Strategy identifies where we can best influence economic growth. The key economic goals for our District that will support our community outcomes and economic vision are:

- To fly the Waitomo flag; promoting living, working and visiting our District
- To work towards providing a business friendly environment for existing and new business
- To retain and attract new residents to the Waitomo District
- To support business access to recruitment assistance and employer readiness programmes
- To support youth development opportunities in particular workforce related
- To ensure Council assets and provisions of services are appropriate for all ages of the community
- To maximise the benefit that visitors bring to our District



Our situation now

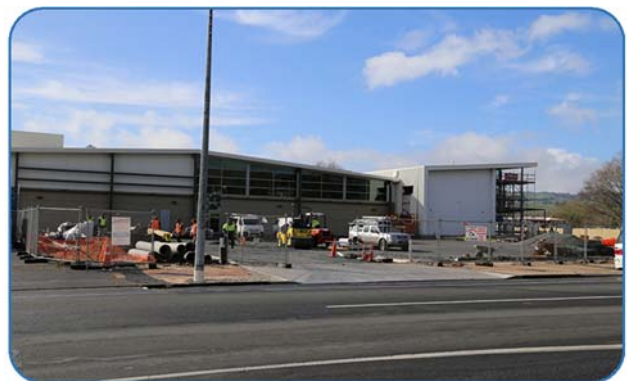
Waitomo District encompasses 354,649 hectares of predominantly rural and conservation land on the west coast of the Central North Island.

The western boundary is the sea. It is adjacent to Otorohanga District to the north, Taupo District to the east and Ruapehu and New Plymouth Districts to the south. While the District is predominantly contained within the Waikato Region, the south-eastern corner of the District is within the Manawatu-Wanganui (Horizons) Regional Council's jurisdiction.

Te Kuiti is the main township of the Waitomo District, with approximately 45% of the district's population residing here. The other two main centres are Waitomo Caves Village and Piopio. Other smaller settlements in the District include Aria, Benneydale, Mokauti, Mahoenui, Mapiu, Taharoa, and the beach settlements of Mokau, Awakino, Marokopa and Te Waitere.

Our Local Economy

- Agriculture, tourism, meat processor plants, and natural resource mining are the main drivers of economic activity in the district. The majority of the population work in the primary sector followed by manufacturing and education.
- 4,550 people are employed in the Waitomo District as wage and salary earners.
- Tourism plays an important part in our local economy. Currently, estimated tourism expenditure in the Waitomo District is \$71 million per annum.
- The number of businesses in the District officially reported by Statistics New Zealand in 2016 was 1,581 employing 4,523 people.



Our Challenges

Our challenges are not large scale or directed at any one activity.

The current challenges facing our District

- A skills shortage in our labour market
- A projected decline in our population
- Net migration of our youth
- A limited telecommunication service in parts of our rural community
- Limited housing options in our urban communities
- A lack of commercial investment to support our tourism sector – i.e. accommodation
- Limited availability of industrial and commercial zoned premises

Our Opportunities

In light of the challenges facing the District, the launch of a focused economic development strategy can be used to create awareness and stimulate a collective response by the community and businesses across the District. There are many opportunities within the District that can be leveraged.

Aging Population

New Zealand and Waitomo District's aging population is viewed as an opportunity. Residents of the Waitomo District want to continue to reside in their local area when they retire. This will provide economic opportunities for business servicing this market, ranging from industry growth opportunities in specific niche sectors such as design for life products, health, retirement and assisted living to increasing demand for trades people.

Low median house prices and rents compared to New Zealand nationally

Waitomo District has lower than average house prices and rental costs, nationally and compared to neighbouring population centres such as Hamilton and Auckland. This is an attractive proposition to potential migrants.

Positive Net Migration

Now is an opportune time to attract migrants and returning New Zealanders in particular those that grew up in the area and wish to return.

Planned review of Waitomo District Plan

The District Plan is scheduled for review. The key priorities of the Economic Development Strategy will be front of mind during the District Plan review.

Primary Industry: Alternative Land Use

Waitomo District has a strong and stable primary sector. However, to stimulate further economic growth, the District could consider other uses of existing land and / or potential change in land use.

Construction

The local construction sector scene is buoyant. Local tradespeople are busy, supported by out of town contractors on the bigger projects. This provides an opportunity for local tradespeople to consider taking on apprentices to ensure the sustainable supply of labour in the construction sector, and provide opportunity for local young people.

Infrastructure

The Southern Link and improvements to State Highway 3 (Awakino to Mount Messenger and Te Kuiti to Ohaupo) will enhance linkage for our local businesses and to domestic and international visitors.

Predicted growth in international visitor numbers and expenditure

International tourism to New Zealand is set to grow significantly over the next decade. International visitor arrivals to New Zealand are expected to grow 5.4 per cent a year, reaching 4.5 million visitors in 2022 from 3.1 million in 2015 and total international spend is expected to reach \$16 billion in 2022, up 65.5 per cent from 2015.

Waitomo District has strong foundations on which to capture an increased share of this predicted growth in numbers and expenditure.

Potential to increase share of the domestic tourist market

The Waitomo District is located within a "tank's drive" of many major population centres. With increasing emphasis from existing caving operators on the domestic market, the ongoing attraction of new businesses and amenities and the continuing promotion of the Timber Trail and Te Araroa Walkway, the Waitomo District is in a strong position to significantly increase domestic visitor numbers and expenditure in line with spend in neighbouring Districts.

Our Priorities

The Economic Development Strategy has identified three areas of focus. Within these areas there are a range of goals and initiatives to contribute to the development of vibrant communities and thriving business.

A Place to Live and Learn

The focus of this stand is to retain our youth, encourage ex-residents to return, embrace New Zealand's aging population, and promote our District as a great place to live.

- *Keeping youth at heart*
- *Preparing our district for an ageing population*
- *Connecting the different age groups within the population*
- *Providing an adequate supply and appropriate places for our community to live*
- *Ensuring functional and attractive town centres*
- *Promoting our district as a place to live and learn*

Current Initiatives

- Housing development planning initiatives

Proposed Initiatives

- Develop a promotions campaign that showcases the key attributes of living in the Waitomo District
- Age friendly initiatives to be undertaken in conjunction with key stakeholders
 - Stocktake of current youth and senior related projects/groups
 - Conduct an age-related needs analysis to identify gaps with particular focus on existing provision/management of Council services/assets, e.g. Library, Parks and Reserves
 - Formation of a network focusing on age specific challenges and opportunities

A Place to do Business

The focus of this strand also has a youth focus; preparing our businesses for working with youth and empowering our youth to be successful employees. Our district's workforce also desperately needs more skilled workers to ensure a sustainable and innovative business community.

- *Optimising our workplaces and workforce for new entrants to the workforce*
- *Attracting and recruiting skilled workers*
- *Being a Business Friendly Council*
- *Ensuring the District is digitally connected in particular the rural sector of the community*

Current Initiatives

- Continue to lobby, submit applications and build relationships with key stakeholders in the telecommunication community to extend broadband and mobile coverage

Proposed Initiatives

- Support the establishment of an initiative to attract skilled workers to the District
- Support our business for working with youth
- Facilitate stakeholder collaboration to ensure a local response to youth employment
- Support the establishment of an initiative to assist job seekers in preparing for the workforce
- Promote and communicate business success in the community to a nationwide and worldwide audience

A Place to Play and Stay

The focus off this strand is in leveraging off the large volume of visitors to the Waitomo Village at the same time ensuring that their experience is of a high quality. Also of importance is that we have appropriate infrastructure, accommodation and housing in place to cater for visitors and tourism and hospitality staff.

- *Educate and inform to encourage overnight and multi-day stays in the Waitomo District*
- *Ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place to accommodate and service visitors to the District*

Current Initiatives

- Supportive approach to the development of Waitomo Village as a tourism hub
- Sustainable development of freedom camping in the District
- Continue to support the growth of the Timber Trail cycleway
- Continue to facilitate the opportunities for investment or development of accommodation in the District

Proposed Initiatives

- Develop an overriding brand for the District
- Develop a website to provide a co-ordinated effort to tell the whole Waitomo story and encourage overnight stays and participation in extra activities
- Co-ordinated planning to support the accommodation needs of people seeking to move to Waitomo to undertake a career in tourism and hospitality
- Application to Regional Mid-Sized Tourism Facilities Fund for provision of infrastructure utilised by visitors

