SUBMISSION TO THE AUCKLAND COUNCIL GOVERNING BODY

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIC PLANNING, PUBLIC ASSET MANAGEMENT AND GROWTH FUNDING IN RODNEY

Table of Contents

Introduction...1

Growth Requires Public Assets...2

The Planning Problem...3

Bowls Warkworth as a Case Study...5

The Limits of Local Board Governance...6

The Need for Collaborative Community-Based Development Planning...6

Recommendations...8

Conclusion...9

Introduction

1. Rodney is Auckland's largest rural district and one of its fastest-growing areas. Significant residential, commercial and industrial development is planned and underway. Yet despite this growth, Auckland Council has no integrated district-level framework that systematically coordinates community aspirations, strategic land acquisition, public asset provision, infrastructure funding and private development. Growth therefore continues while many of the public assets and facilities required to support that growth are progressively delayed, under-provided or funded through increasing rates and borrowing. The situation facing Bowls Warkworth is one example of this wider issue.
2. This submission is not primarily about the bowling club, nor does it seek to promote any particular development outcome. Rather, it asks the Governing Body to improve the process by which Auckland Council, working collaboratively with Rodney communities and other stakeholders, identifies, plans, funds and delivers the public assets required to support growth. The objective is better governance, not simply a different planning decision.
3. Auckland Council has developed a sophisticated framework for regulating private development through the Auckland Unitary Plan and associated statutory planning processes. Those processes determine where development may occur and the

standards that development must satisfy. However, regulating private development is not the same as planning the public assets required to support that development. The latter requires the coordinated identification of future public with private needs and interests, strategic land acquisition, infrastructure planning, funding and delivery over many years.

4. The Governing Body has consistently stated that growth should pay for growth. That principle is both economically sound and widely supported. The question raised by this submission is not whether the principle is correct, but how Auckland Council's current funding framework gives practical effect to it.

Planning Principle

Planning is the process of making today's decisions using the best available information about tomorrow. As new information becomes available, plans should be reviewed and recalibrated. Good governance therefore depends not only on making decisions, but on continually improving them.

Growth Requires Public Assets

5. Every additional dwelling and business generates demand for public assets. Roads, transport corridors, footpaths, stormwater systems, parks, reserves, sports fields, libraries, community facilities, environmental assets, emergency services, schools, health services and other supporting infrastructure do not appear automatically because development occurs. They must be identified, planned, funded and delivered.

6. These public assets are ultimately funded in only one of four ways. They are funded by those creating the demand through growth-related charges, by existing ratepayers, by future ratepayers through borrowing, or they are not provided. There are no other practical alternatives. Consequently, if growth does not fully fund the additional public assets it requires, the resulting costs are inevitably transferred elsewhere or the assets are progressively deferred.

7. Auckland Council's own published economic analysis recognised this issue. In 2017, the Council's Chief Economist estimated the indicative cost of providing bulk infrastructure to service Auckland's future greenfield growth at approximately **$146,000 per dwelling**. Expressed in today's construction costs, this is approximately **$210,000 per dwelling**. That estimate included transport infrastructure, water and wastewater services, parks and community facilities and concluded that then-current Development Contributions would recover only a fraction of those costs. It further concluded that where beneficiaries do not meet the costs of growth, existing ratepayers necessarily subsidise new development. That analysis remains directly relevant to the issues addressed in this submission.

8. More recent Auckland Transport planning for Warkworth reinforces the same conclusion. Auckland Transport has previously estimated that transport infrastructure alone associated with Warkworth's growth is approximately **$120,000 per additional dwelling**. Watercare connection charges are already approximately **$20,000 per dwelling**. Current Development Contributions in Rodney, however, are

typically around **$20,000 per dwelling**, representing only a small proportion of the Council's own published assessment of the likely infrastructure costs associated with growth.

9. This submission is asking the Governing Body to explain how Auckland Council's published assessment of the cost of servicing growth is reconciled with its current Development Contribution policy and with its repeated commitment that growth should pay for growth. That is fundamentally a question of governance, accountability and transparency.
10. Resolving this question is important not only because of its financial implications but because it directly influences the quality of future communities. If public assets are not identified and funded early enough, opportunities for coordinated development are progressively lost. Strategic land becomes unavailable, acquisition costs increase, infrastructure lags behind development, and communities inherit public asset deficits that become increasingly expensive and difficult to remedy.
11. For the sake of its communities, Auckland Council needs to adopt a planning framework that links development planning, private development, strategic public asset identification, land acquisition, funding and delivery into a coherent process capable of supporting sustainable long-term growth.

The Planning Problem

12. The underlying issue is not simply one of funding. It is the distinction between **regulatory planning** and **development planning**. Auckland Council's statutory planning system is primarily designed to regulate private land use by determining where development may occur and the standards that development must satisfy. While this is an essential public function, it does not by itself determine what public assets will be required, when they will be needed, where they should be located, how they will be funded, or who should deliver them.
13. Development planning performs a different function. It identifies the public assets required to support future communities and coordinates their delivery over time. It requires communities, landowners, developers, infrastructure providers, Auckland Council and relevant central government agencies to develop a shared understanding of future needs before individual investment decisions progressively constrain future options. Its purpose is not to replace statutory planning, but to ensure that statutory planning is informed by a realistic and coordinated programme for delivering the public assets upon which successful communities depend.
14. Effective development planning is therefore inherently collaborative. It should involve existing residents, landowners, businesses, developers, mana whenua, community organisations, infrastructure providers, Auckland Council and relevant central government agencies responsible for services such as education, health, emergency management and welfare. Each brings different knowledge, responsibilities and investment intentions. Bringing these participants together at the outset provides a far stronger basis for identifying future public asset requirements than relying on consultation after statutory planning proposals have largely been prepared.

15. Development planning is a structured planning process through which design principles and guidelines are developed with the community, future public asset requirements are identified, alternative development scenarios are explored, strategic priorities are agreed, indicative costs are estimated, land requirements are identified and realistic funding pathways are considered before statutory decisions are made. Communities become participants in planning rather than simply commentators on completed proposals.
16. Development planning may be best understood as assembling the public and private pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Private landowners and developers naturally determine many of the private pieces through investment decisions. Auckland Council, however, is responsible for most of the public pieces—transport corridors, parks, reserves, sports fields, community facilities, environmental assets and other infrastructure. Unless these public pieces are identified, funded and delivered at the right time, the individual private pieces cannot combine into a coherent and well-functioning settlement.
17. This relationship follows a simple sequence. Public assets that are not identified are unlikely to be costed. Assets that are not costed are unlikely to be funded. Assets that are not funded are unlikely to be delivered. Development can therefore continue while the public infrastructure and facilities required to support that development progressively fall behind.
18. As this occurs, developers are left without the public pieces of the jigsaw into which their developments can be integrated. Strategic land that could have accommodated future transport corridors, sports fields, community facilities, reserves or environmental assets is committed to other uses. Acquisition costs increase, opportunities for coordinated development diminish, and communities inherit infrastructure and facility deficits that become progressively more difficult, disruptive and expensive to remedy. The issue is therefore not that individual developments are necessarily poorly conceived. Rather, it is that the absence of a coordinated public asset framework makes coherent long-term settlement development increasingly difficult.
19. This also explains why Auckland Council increasingly encounters Private Plan Changes, Fast Track applications and other developer-led initiatives. These are often characterised as the cause of fragmented development outcomes. However, they are more accurately understood as a predictable response to the absence of a sufficiently detailed and credible development framework capable of coordinating private investment with public infrastructure and community aspirations. Where Council does not provide a practical pathway for coordinating growth, individual landowners and developers naturally pursue the opportunities available to them under the statutory framework.
20. Warkworth provides a clear illustration of this wider issue. The town is expected to grow from approximately 7,000 residents to well over 20,000 during coming decades. Yet the overall vision for District outcomes and design principes and parameters to achieve them are either not agreed, or borrowed from AC’s urban forms; and there is limited of no certainty regarding the future location, acquisition, timing and funding of many of the additional public assets that such growth will

require, including sports fields, reserves, community facilities, strategic transport connections and other essential public infrastructure essential for the many sports, recreational and community groups requiring access to, lease or rent of public spaces. Growth is therefore proceeding while important pieces of the future settlement remain unidentified or unfunded.

21. The resulting tension between growth aspirations, infrastructure delivery and community expectations should therefore not be viewed primarily as a failure of developers, communities or individual projects. It is more fundamentally the consequence of the absence of an integrated strategic development planning framework.

Bowls Warkworth as a Case Study

22. The current situation facing Bowls Warkworth provides a practical illustration of the broader planning issues discussed above. The club occupies a strategically important site within the future Warkworth town centre. It owns the land but faces financial pressures associated with changing demographics, declining participation and the increasing commercial value of the site as the town develops.

23. The question for Auckland Council therefore is whether the Council has identified the future public asset needs of a town expected to grow from approximately 7,000 residents to well over 20,000, and whether it has a coordinated strategy for delivering those assets as growth occurs.

24. At present there appears to be no agreed development framework identifying the future location, acquisition, timing or funding of many of the public assets that Warkworth will require, and the design parameters to govern their identification. These assets include additional sports fields, community facilities, public open space, transport corridors, parking, civic spaces and other strategic public assets. Nor is there a coordinated plan identifying where existing facilities that may ultimately require relocation, including Bowls Warkworth, could best be accommodated in the longer-term interests of the community.

25. This uncertainty has consequences for both public and private decision-making. The bowling club must make decisions about its own future. Adjacent landowners and businesses make investment decisions based upon expectations of future town centre development. Developers consider redevelopment opportunities. Auckland Council considers public investment priorities. Yet these decisions are being made without an agreed development framework identifying how they contribute to a coherent long-term vision for the town.

26. This piecemeal and reactive approach has brought us to the current situation where Auckland Council has not undertaken the development planning necessary to determine the highest long-term public value of this strategically important location before decisions are driven by immediate financial pressures or isolated development opportunities.

27. It shows clearly why strategic land acquisition is an essential component of development planning. If land required for future public purposes is not identified and secured before surrounding development occurs, opportunities are

progressively lost and acquisition costs rise substantially. Decisions that appear financially difficult today frequently become significantly more expensive in the future because the necessary land has already been committed to other uses.

28. Bowls Warkworth should therefore be viewed as a catalyst rather than the problem itself. It highlights the consequences of attempting to resolve individual development questions in the absence of an agreed framework that identifies future public asset requirements, strategic land needs, funding pathways and implementation priorities. Similar issues already exist, or are emerging, elsewhere in Rodney in relation to sports fields, reserves, transport infrastructure, community facilities and environmental assets.

The Limits of Local Board Governance

29. Residents naturally look to the Rodney Local Board to resolve many of these issues. The Local Board has demonstrated its willingness to assist community organisations and has provided valuable advocacy on behalf of Rodney communities. However, the Board does not possess the statutory responsibilities, funding powers or strategic planning authority necessary to resolve the issues identified in this submission.

30. Responsibility for Development Contribution policy, growth funding mechanisms, strategic land acquisition, regional transport investment, Long-Term Plan priorities, major infrastructure programmes, regional asset management, and design parameters for development in each area, rests with the Governing Body. Local Boards may advocate, facilitate community engagement and provide limited local funding assistance, but they cannot establish the strategic framework within which growth and public asset provision are coordinated.

31. This distinction is important because the issues raised by Bowls Warkworth extend well beyond the future of a single community organisation. They concern the way Auckland Council plans, funds and delivers public assets across an entire district. They therefore require decisions that only the Governing Body can make.

32. The Governing Body is also the body that has adopted the principle that growth should pay for growth, approved Development Contribution policy, adopted the Long-Term Plan and determined Auckland Council's strategic investment priorities. It is therefore the appropriate body to consider whether these policies collectively provide an effective framework for delivering the public assets required by growth.

33. We therefore seek Governing Body leadership, not because the Rodney Local Board has failed, but because the planning, funding and governance issues identified lie beyond the powers that the Governing Body, under Parliament's laws, has given Local Boards. Resolving these issues requires district-wide strategic planning supported by regional funding decisions and long-term investment commitments.

The Need for Collaborative Community-Based Strategic Planning

34. The issues identified in this submission point to the need for a planning process that complements Auckland Council's statutory planning framework rather than

replacing it. While the Auckland Unitary Plan provides the regulatory framework within which development occurs, there remains a need for a collaborative process that brings together those who will shape, fund, provide and ultimately live with the outcomes of growth.

35. The objective is not to transfer statutory decision-making from Auckland Council to community organisations. Rather, it is to establish a structured planning process through which Auckland Council and those with an interest in the future of a community work together to identify the public assets, infrastructure and investment required to support growth before statutory planning and investment decisions are finalised.
36. Development planning should involve all parties with a significant interest in the future development of an area. Each contributes different information, investment intentions and responsibilities. Bringing these perspectives together at an early stage produces a more realistic understanding of future community needs than consultation undertaken after planning proposals have largely been developed.
37. This is an important distinction. Consultation typically asks communities to comment on proposals that are substantially complete. Development planning asks communities and stakeholders to participate in identifying the issues, opportunities and public asset requirements before those proposals are prepared. Communities become contributors to planning rather than simply respondents to it.
38. Effective development planning follows an iterative sequence rather than a linear process. Engagement identifies community aspirations, local knowledge and future opportunities. Planning translates these into public asset requirements, strategic land needs and implementation priorities. Strategic land acquisition, costing and funding test whether the plan is practical and affordable before delivery occurs.
39. Each stage should validate the previous one. Engagement informs planning. Planning is tested against land availability, funding and delivery constraints. Delivery is evaluated against the intended outcomes so that experience informs the next cycle of engagement. Continuous feedback and recalibration are therefore fundamental to effective governance.
40. This follows the standard planning cycle of information gathering, analysis, synthesis, implementation, feedback and recalibration. Delivery ultimately depends upon five connected elements: engagement, planning, land, funding and implementation.
41. This sequence also provides a practical explanation of why Auckland Council frequently experiences tension between development aspirations and infrastructure delivery. Where public assets are identified only after development proposals have progressed, opportunities for strategic land acquisition are reduced, costs increase, funding becomes more difficult and infrastructure inevitably lags behind growth. The issue is therefore not simply one of insufficient funding. It is also one of planning sequence.
42. Strategic land acquisition deserves particular emphasis. Once development has occurred, opportunities to secure land for future transport corridors, parks, reserves, sports fields, community facilities and other public purposes diminish

rapidly. The cost of acquiring equivalent land later is frequently substantially higher than if the requirement had been identified during the planning stage. Early identification and acquisition of strategic land is therefore not simply a planning exercise; it is one of Auckland Council's most effective long-term financial management tools.

43. Development planning also provides greater certainty for private investment. Developers, landowners and businesses benefit when they understand the likely timing of infrastructure provision, the location of future public assets and the long-term direction of community development. Rather than constraining private investment, credible development planning provides a clearer framework within which investment decisions can be made with greater confidence.

44. The approach proposed in this submission should therefore be viewed as an investment in better governance rather than an additional planning process. Engaging willing professionals from within the community can also reduce planning costs while strengthening local ownership of the resulting plans. Unlike externally commissioned studies prepared for a single client, collaborative planning is developed with those who will ultimately live with its outcomes.

45. The outcome is one we all surely espouse: a practical mechanism for aligning community aspirations, private investment, public infrastructure, strategic land acquisition and growth funding within a coordinated framework capable of evolving as circumstances change.

Recommendations

46. We respectfully request that the Governing Body initiate the work necessary to establish a framework for Collaborative Community-Based Development Planning in Rodney. That framework should enable locally prepared development plans, developed collaboratively with Auckland Council and all relevant stakeholders, to inform strategic public asset planning, growth sequencing, Long-Term Plan priorities and future funding and investment decisions. The Local Board is well placed to coordinate that community engagement and stakeholder-based work and provide grant funding to community organisations to support it e.g. as part of its community engagement programme.

47. The outcome would include a **Rodney District Public Asset and Development Strategy** integrating transport, reserves, sports fields, community facilities, environmental assets, growth infrastructure and strategic land acquisition within a single long-term development framework. It would recognise that appropriate design principles and guidelines for Rodney are not those of another urban greenfields subdivision. The strategy should identify the major public assets required to support anticipated growth, their indicative timing, land requirements, estimated costs and potential funding pathways.

48. To give practical effect to this framework and the strategic spatial planning work envisaged when Auckland Council was established, we request that the Governing Body review Development Contribution policy and associated growth funding mechanisms (taking into account the pending Infrastructure Financing legislation) against Auckland Council's own published assessments of the infrastructure costs

associated with growth. As Auckland Council's own published economic analysis shows, expressed in today's prices, the indicative cost of servicing greenfield growth is approximately **$210,000 per dwelling**, while current Development Contributions recover only a fraction of that amount. We respectfully ask the Governing Body to explain how its published assessment of growth infrastructure requirements is reconciled with its current funding policy while maintaining its stated commitment that **growth should pay for growth**.

49. Extending this beyond Rodney, we also request that future structure plans, town centre plans and other major growth planning exercises explicitly identify the design principles and spatial outcomes for the area, and the public assets expected to be required by growth, together with their indicative location, strategic land requirements, timing, funding pathway and delivery responsibility. Planning for future communities should include not only where development may occur, but also how the public assets required to support that development will be delivered and what their timing is tied to.

50. Finally, we recommend that Auckland Council report publicly on Development Contribution revenue generated within Rodney, the public assets funded from that revenue, and the extent to which current growth funding policies give practical effect to the Governing Body's commitment that growth should pay for growth. Transparent reporting will strengthen public confidence and provide a clearer basis for future policy decisions.

Conclusion

51. Better planning is not achieved by producing more plans. It is achieved by creating a planning system that continuously tests its assumptions, learns from experience and adapts before problems become embedded.

52. The issues raised in this submission extend well beyond the future of Bowls Warkworth. The club has simply brought into focus a broader challenge facing Rodney as one of Auckland's fastest-growing districts. Similar issues already exist, or are emerging, in relation to transport infrastructure, sports fields, reserves, community facilities, environmental assets and the other forms of public infrastructure required to support growth.

53. Rodney does not have a shortage of development. It has a shortage of coordinated development planning. Auckland Council has developed a comprehensive framework for regulating private development. It now needs an equally effective framework for identifying, funding and delivering the public assets that allow individual developments to become successful communities.

54. This submission has argued that the principal issue is not simply the level of Development Contributions or the availability of funding. More fundamentally, it is the absence of a planning framework that systematically links development planning, strategic public asset identification, strategic land acquisition, funding and implementation. Without these connections, growth continues while the public pieces of the settlement are progressively left behind.

55. The consequences are predictable. Public assets that are not identified are unlikely to be costed. Assets that are not costed are unlikely to be funded. Assets that are not funded are unlikely to be delivered. Strategic land that is not identified early becomes progressively more expensive to acquire, and opportunities for coordinated development are lost. The costs do not disappear. They are transferred to existing ratepayers through higher rates, to future ratepayers through increased borrowing, or to communities through the continuing under-provision of public assets and services.

56. This submission therefore asks the Governing Body to address not simply the symptoms of these issues but their underlying cause. In particular, we ask the Governing Body to consider how Auckland Council’s own published assessment of the infrastructure costs associated with growth is reconciled with its current Development Contribution policy and its stated commitment that **growth should pay for growth**. We believe this is a legitimate question of governance, accountability and strategic planning that deserves transparent public consideration.

57. We also ask the Governing Body to establish a development planning framework that enables Auckland Council, communities, landowners, developers, businesses, infrastructure providers, mana whenua and relevant central government agencies to work together in identifying the public assets required by growth before future options become constrained. Successful communities are created not simply by regulating development, but by coordinating public and private investment around a shared long-term vision.

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