

Ohiti Project Community Advisory Group

Ohiti Community Advisory Group

First hui

December 11 2024, 5.30-7.30 pm

Rūnanga Marae

Community: Carle Kupa, Mare Kupa, Chels Kupa, Billy Ropiha, Shane Nuku, Sandra Gifkins, Andrew Russell, Kylie Morrison, Amber Kupa, Willem Kupa, Tessa Robin (Chair)

Hawke's Bay Regional Council: Te Wairama Munro, Jessica Easton, Harry Donnelly

Hastings District Council: Councillor Ana Apatu

Community-Appointed Science Advisor: Kit Rutherford

Admin: Neala Rosandich, Steph Howard.

Apologies: Meihana Watson (Mana whenua), Malcolm Smith, Steve Cornes (Community) and Ian Emmerson (Heavy Traffic/Road user); Te Kaha Hawaikirangi, Mell Anderson (Hawke's Bay Regional Council); Gus Charteris (Hastings District Council)

High Level Summary

At this first hui, we discussed a number of issues that were top of mind for the community, including:

- The importance of ensuring that proposed stopbanks do not negatively impact the Ōmāhu community or surrounding areas; the frustration of affected landowners due to financial and legal uncertainty about their properties
- Shared frustrations over past instances of inadequate consultation and respect for landowner rights.
- The reset that this process offers as long as what has gone before is acknowledged and there is a more respectful attitude towards landowners. That includes approaching landowners well in advance if access to or across their land is needed; not interpreting a lack of response as permission and using channels that work for landowners
- The information base for the proposed stopbanks and
 - gaps in data and modelling, particularly historical knowledge about land use and weather impacts
 - the need to respect and draw upon local knowledge of place to groundtruth and test theoretical modelling.

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- The desire for a holistic approach to deal with flooding in the area, in addition to any flood protection for the Ohiti properties. This includes understanding how to reconnect waterways and waterbodies.
- The role of this group and that some conversations would continue to be private conversations between council and individual landowners.

1. Welcome and Whakawhanaungatanga

After a karakia and mihi, members of the community, regional and district council introduced themselves, sharing their background, connection to the affected area.

2. Community Advisory Group

The purpose of the group is to bring together whānau katoa – affected landowners and the surrounding community- to ensure the best outcomes for the community, infrastructure and assets in the Ohiti Road area:

- Identify effective solutions for the affected Ohiti Road properties
- Ensure that risks are not unfairly transferred to the wider community, particularly to Omaha, the community that lives around and above the site of proposed flood protection measures and the community/businesses that depend on the integrity of the Taihape Road; and
- Give the community confidence that their concerns have been addressed and that the outcomes are fair.

Chairperson:

- The group endorsed the interim Chairperson as Chair

Independent Science Advisor:

- Introduced himself and provided an overview of his expertise, including his background in hydrology, environmental science, and community engagement.
- Shared the specific questions he intends to address, such as:
 - The reliability and independence of the current flow models.
 - Potential environmental impacts and mitigation measures.

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- Long-term resilience strategies for flood-affected areas.
- Emphasised his role as a neutral party, committed to providing factual, evidence-based guidance.

Minutes and Community Access to Documents:

- It was agreed that minutes would be made publicly available, but individual names would be omitted to respect privacy.
- The Admin(s) were tasked with ensuring that all relevant documents are accessible to group members through a shared online folder.

How the group operates (Terms of Reference):

- Community members were encouraged to review the ToR and provide feedback or suggested amendments before the next meeting.
- Admin will pull together the feedback and share an updated version for final approval at next meeting.
- A 7-day deadline was set to finalise the document, ensuring the group can proceed with a clear framework.

3. Community Concerns and Issues

Key Issues Discussed:

- **Property and Landowner Challenges:**
 - Several landowners voiced their concerns about the council's/hapū approach to accessing their private properties (excludes stop banks) without prior notification. They highlighted instances of miscommunication and a lack of respect, stressing the importance of being informed and consulted before any actions are taken. The need for a reset in communication was acknowledged.
 - Calls for respectful engagement with landowners before decisions or actions are taken (2 week's notice by phone/text; followed by confirmation email).
- **Insurance Issues:**
 - Difficulties obtaining insurance post-flooding events, particularly.
 - Lack of clarity on guarantees for building permissions and removal of Section 72 restrictions.
- **Infrastructure and Flood Risks:**
 - Concerns over the integrity of bridges and stopbanks during extreme weather events.
 - Requests for transparency in the flow modelling process and impact assessments.

4. Background and update over proposed options

HBRC provided an update on ongoing flow modelling efforts, including a review of the Council's proposed flood protection option and an alternative option under consideration. This included:

- Preliminary projections for water flow during extreme weather events, identifying potential flood zones and updating risk assessments.
- Technical details of the modelling
- Financial matters, among them community buyouts, insurance implications for property owners in flood-prone areas, and the necessity of independent peer reviews to validate the modelling data.

Key Discussion Points:

- **Flood Mitigation Strategies and the risks during >1:100 year events:**
 - Strategies include stopbanks and other community interventions to protect homes from flooding.
 - Modelling focused on a 1:100-year event and impacts on individual properties.
 - Discussion covered:
 - the legal obligations of councils regarding flood protection
 - the community's concern about the potential impact of stopbanks in larger weather events
 - the desire for flow modelling for "over design" events to understand what impact flood protection measures would have on downstream Omahu and on the bridge and road that 800+ households rely upon.
- **Technical and Safety Considerations:**
 - Community members signalled the need for:
 - detailed modelling to assess the financial implications of flood protection options and their impact on community safety
 - clear information about what type of protection the stopbanks would provide affected landowners - adequate evacuation time during severe flooding events was a priority.
- **Infrastructure and the bigger picture:**
 - The community expressed:
 - their concerns about how flood flows can be managed
 - the importance of understanding what else can be done to reduce flood risk – in other parts of the catchment area. There was discussion about where and to what extent council budget is needed to reduce flooding risk.

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Community Questions and Responses

- Questions focused on the independence and validation of the modelling process, the potential implications for property owners, and the impact on future land use.
- HBRC committed to preparing a simplified summary of the flow model findings and providing ongoing updates to the group.

Action Points and Recommendations

- Ensure models account for a range of scenarios, including over-design events and consider impacts on infrastructure.
- Secure funding and address budget constraints to implement effective solutions.
- Clarify timelines and submission processes for government documentation.
- Maintain transparent communication with the community and provide accessible updates.

5. Insurance Issues

Uncertainty around insurance or the inability to get insurance is causing angst and frustration for flood-affected property owners. Common issues are:

- Difficulty obtaining insurance for flood-prone properties due to Section 72 notices.
- Uncertainty around council guarantees to lift restrictions post-flood mitigation work.
- Personal experiences of delays, denials and inconsistent communication from insurance companies.
- Limited insurance: some landowners have been offered just 1 year of insurance and have no guarantee that it will be renewed.

For the regional council, the challenge has been that when the flood protection schemes were put to Central Government for resourcing, the insurance industry had indicated it would insure properties if flood protection measures were in place.

Key Issues:

- Insurers refusing to cover properties within identified risk zones.
- The council's expectation that proposed projects will improve insurability but this not being the reality for landowners.
- Lack of clarity around Council guarantees for Section 72 removal and future building permissions.

Action Points and Recommendations

- Advocating to Insurance Council for clearer outcomes for landowners and greater support from insurance providers.
- HBRC and HDC to discuss conducting a survey to better understand the barriers posed by insurance industry.
- That we form a sub-group to explore insurance challenges in more detail and come back with recommendations about what can be done, and support Councils in engagement on these matters
- Hastings District Council staff who are responsible for the review of s72 notices will come to a meeting so that affected landowners can ask questions and get clarify on what they can expect.

6. General Comments

Transparency and Communication

- There is a need for clear, regular communication with the entire community. Suggestions included a monthly newsletter and hosting community hui to share updates and gather feedback.
- The lack of advance communication about decisions impacting private landowners and failure to seek permission to access stopbank sites on private land are a source of frustration and disrespectful. Landowners should be approached early and consistently. Lack of response should not be taken as permission.

Community Engagement

- The council was urged to be more inclusive in the way it involves and talks with the community. Consultation needs to be culturally appropriate.

Technical Clarity:

- Accessible explanations of technical data are needed, particularly for residents without a technical background. Visual aids, such as maps and infographics, were requested for all future presentations.

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Equity and Fairness:

- The needs of both urban and rural communities are equally prioritized.
- Members discussed potential strategies for balancing resource allocation and ensuring fair outcomes.

Collaboration and Accountability:

- The formation of the advisory group is appreciated, but the community wants its recommendations to carry real influence
- The group agreed on the importance of accountability, both internally and from external stakeholders.

7. Focus and Schedule of Work

Immediate priorities are to:

- Review and discuss the flow modelling for:
 - the council's preferred option and the alternate option for up to 1:100 year and 'over design events'
 - What a "do nothing" approach looks like to help understand what difference flood protection makes to Ohiti homes and the wider community on either side of the bridge
- Line up independent review of the flow modelling
- Get clarity on the project timeframes
- Address concerns around:
 - Insurance
 - s72 notices: prospects for these to be lifted and district council process to review them

A preliminary schedule was proposed, with milestone dates to be confirmed at the next meeting.

8. Action Items

Action	Responsible Party	To be done by
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1. Send mins for review + agenda for next hui	Admins	Friday 13 th Dec
2. Share document folder	Admins	Friday 13 th Dec
3. Make sure everyone is happy with how this group process is to be run (review the Terms of Reference)	All	By December 18
4. Confirm Independent Peer Review: Budget and reviewer	HBRC + Independent Science Advisor	December 18 meeting
5. Clarify the project timeline and contract schedule	HBRC	December 18 meeting
6. Breakdown of proposed options and associated costs.	HBRC	December 18 meeting
7. Council staff responsible for s72 review will attend a meeting to go through the process so that affected landowners can ask question and understand what to expect	HDC	TBC. Either December 18 meeting or early in New Year

Undertakings

That Council and anybody else wanting to access or cross land ask for permission well in advance. Ideally by phone or text, and followed up by email once permission has been given.

9. Next meeting

Wednesday, December 18, 5.30-7.30 pm: At Omaha marae or on Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86210810239?pwd=8XDTrdJN5mHiFvA7LlgGHmCyfN3Cbl.1>

Meeting ID: 862 1081 0239; Passcode: 931990