

PART A

DISTRICT OVERVIEW AND MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

A1 THE DISTRICT

This chapter provides a snapshot of the features that make the Rotorua district unique, and highlights key environmental priorities. Many of the priorities addressed by this district plan are a direct result of the special landscapes present in the district, and the economic and cultural responses people have made in, and because of, these landscapes. The landscape is also inhabited by a special mix of people and the history of Te Arawa and European settlement is briefly described. The chapter concludes with an overview of the key policy directions that are proposed to shape land use decisions in the Rotorua district.

The Rotorua district covers 270,800 hectares and falls almost equally into two regions. The north-eastern part of the district is in the Bay of Plenty region, and the south-western part is in the Waikato. The natural environment is discussed first, followed by the built and economic environment.

A1.1 THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

A1.1.1 Much of the district overlies the Taupo Volcanic Zone and geothermal activity occurs in concentrated areas throughout the district. Many cultural and economic values are linked to this geothermal resource – two of the most significant Maori villages – Ohinemutu and Whakarewarewa, have highly visible geothermal features. Much of the tourist accommodation was built to answer the demand of people wanting to come and see attractions like the Pohutu geyser and bubbling mud pools. The natural environment also provides future potential energy opportunities. Geothermal energy is likely to be a significant renewable energy resource in the future of the district.

A1.1.2 Rotorua city is located within the Rotorua caldera, a circular depression that was left following the collapse of the magma chamber of an old volcano. The ‘caldera rim’ is about 22 kilometres in diameter and a large part of the basin is occupied by Lake Rotorua. Close to the centre of the lake is Mokoia Island, one of several rhyolite domes remaining from subsequent periods of volcanic activity. Lake Rotorua/Mokoia Island is one of many important natural and cultural landscapes in the district.

Lakes, rivers and streams

A1.1.3 There are 18 major and several minor lakes in the district covering collectively around 8.5% of the land area. Lake Rotorua is the largest. As well as Lake Rotorua, the lakes to the south-east of Lake Rotorua (Okataina, Tarawera, Okareka, Rotomahana, Rotokakahi and Tikitapu) and north-east (Rotoiti, Rotoma, Rotoehu) are regarded as being of national significance.

A1.1.4 All lakes of the district are of local importance for their recreational opportunities, fisheries and significance to tangata whenua. The beds of 13 of the major lakes were vested in the Te Arawa Lakes Trust in 2006, with the settlement legislation providing for ongoing rights of public access to the water for recreational use. A significant proportion of tourists who visit Rotorua each year do so as a result of the unique lake environments.

A1.1.5 Lakes Rotorua and Rotoiti are the source of the Kaituna River, which empties into the Bay of Plenty at Maketu and provided the original access route for Maori moving inland from the coast. The upper reaches of the Kaituna River provides some of the best whitewater kayaking and rafting in New

Zealand. The Waikato River defines the southern boundary of the district, and the Waikato River floodplain provides some of the richest agricultural land in the district. Many smaller streams drain into the lakes and these two major rivers.

Climate

A1.1.6 Most of the district is over 300 metres above sea level and has a cool temperate climate. The warmest months are January, February and March, with July and August the cooler months. There is an average of 117 rain days annually when 1mm or more of rain is recorded.

Risk management

A1.1.7 The volcanic landscape presents opportunities but also risks that need to be factored into land use decisions. The district has many fault lines; fortunately, they are located away from the major population areas. The sediments of the Lake Rotorua caldera are soft and could be subject to liquefaction in the event of an earthquake. High intensity rainfall can occur at any time of the year in both localised and widespread catchments, although flooding is usually localised and of short duration. Climate change is also seen as an environmental risk that needs to be planned for and actively managed. The district plan takes a practical approach in responding to these risks, and has particular regard to the likelihood and frequency of each type of event occurring. It also takes into account the strong cultural links between geothermal areas and Maori settlements (eg Whakarewarewa and Ohinemutu).

A1.2 THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Rotorua urban area

A1.2.1 The Te Arawa people landed at and settled around Maketu in the Western Bay of Plenty. Tamatekapua's grandson, the explorer Ihenga, travelled inland to the Rotorua lakes where Te Arawa settled. Today Rotorua has one of the highest proportions of Maori in the country, reflecting the long tenure of the Te Arawa people.

A1.2.2 The city was established by the Fenton Agreement in 1880, close to the Ngati Whakaue kainga of Ohinemutu, Whakarewarewa and Ngapuna. The township was laid out in 1881 and the central business district started taking shape during a period of expansion in the 1920s, accompanied by considerable residential development.

A1.2.3 Large areas containing geothermal activity were set aside as reserves for the benefit of Rotorua's residents. Much of this land still remains in reserves such as the Government Gardens and Kuirau Park.

A1.2.4 The city and its residential belt of suburbs generally follow a traditional north-south grid pattern from the southern edge of Lake Rotorua. Motels are a prominent feature between Whakarewarewa and the southern edge of the city centre. The city is the intersection of four major state highways, and is a key junction in the network of roads linking it to Hamilton, Taupo, Whakatane and Tauranga. Most of the industrial and service activities concentrate on the northern, eastern and southern highway routes into the city.

Villages and rural communities

A1.2.5 Outside of the city the district is predominately rural. Other smaller urban areas in the district include Ngongotaha village on the western shores of Lake Rotorua, and the rural settlements of Hamurana, Kaharoa, Reporoa, Mamaku, Ngakuru, Waikite Valley, Rerewhakaaitu, Broadlands, Golden Springs and Kaingaroa.

A1.2.6 Recreational settlements have developed around the edges of lakes Rotoiti, Rotoehu, Rotoma, Rotorua, Okareka and Tarawera, and these contain a mix of permanent and temporary residents.

A1.3 THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

A1.3.1 Rotorua is rich in natural and cultural heritage, and the lakes and forests are one of New Zealand's favourite playgrounds. The district receives major economic benefits from tourism, forestry, agriculture, and related industrial and commercial activity. Te Arawa has been at the forefront of tourism development, sharing the natural wonders of the landscape with visitors from all parts of the world. They own or control a significant proportion of the land and resources in the district and are likely to be key investors going forward.

Farming and forestry

A1.3.2 Farming and forestry have played a major role in shaping the landscape. Land cover is about equally pasture and forest, with production forests slightly more abundant than indigenous forests. Most agricultural land in Rotorua is used for dairy, sheep, beef and deer farming. Horticulture is a relatively minor industry by comparison, limited to areas where soils and microclimates are favourable.

Tourism and events

A1.3.3 Rotorua is one of the country's leading tourism centres, offering a wide variety of tourist accommodation and attractions including Maori culture, lakes, geothermal features and adventure opportunities. Tourism is ranked as the third contributor to the Districts GDP after forestry and manufacturing. At any one time there can be up to 4,000 tourists in the district in addition to the usually resident population, and this additional pressure has to be factored into infrastructure planning. Projections completed by the Ministry of Economic Development predict a total overall increase in visits to Rotorua in the medium to long term.

A1.3.4 Temporary cultural and sporting events are another major draw card to the district. Many of the events focus on mountain biking, walking and running in the forests or around one or more of the lakes. The city is also a preferred destination for major conferences, which has increased since the completion of the Energy Events Centre and the commencements of international flights from the Rotorua airport.

Manufacturing and service industries

A1.3.5 Rotorua has a range of manufacturing businesses located throughout the district which form a key part of the Rotorua economy. A large proportion relates to wood and paper products manufacturing. Machinery and equipment manufacturing, and food and beverage processing, are also significant local employers. Manufacturing and service industries are expected to continue to experience growth and development in the future.

Research and development

A1.3.6 Rotorua is home to Waiariki Institute of Technology, one of the largest tertiary institutions outside of Wellington and the major provincial centres. Scion Crown Research Institute has a forestry and forest product focus, and is a centre of excellence for waste management solutions and renewable energy.

Infrastructure

A1.3.7 Rotorua is one of the key intersections in the North Island highway network. The Rotorua airport is regionally significant transport infrastructure, and takes domestic and international flights. The Ohaaki Geothermal Power Station is a major feature of the southern part of the district and further plants are proposed in other geothermal fields.

Growth Assumptions

A1.3.8 The zoning of land for residential and commercial purposes, and the provision of Council infrastructure, is guided by growth projections based on census data. At the 2006 census, around 50,000 residents live within five kilometres of the southern edge of Lake Rotorua. It is expected that the eastern suburbs will continue to grow through to 2021. It is also predicted that Hamurana and Ngongotaha will experience steady growth. A 50-year structure plan for these areas has been developed separate to the district plan. The district plan has a focus on the next 10-20 years of this longer-term view.

A2 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT

The major considerations driving this district plan are discussed below in priority order.

Land use and lake water quality

- A2.1 The district's lakes have great cultural, historic and natural heritage value. Nutrient inputs, particularly in the form of phosphorus and nitrogen from both human activities and natural sources, have caused deterioration of water quality. Reducing the entry of nutrients into the lakes is a key issue for future land management.
- A2.2 Rotorua District Council, regional councils, central government and Te Arawa Lakes Trust are working together on a range of initiatives designed to mitigate the effects of nutrient runoff from pastoral farming in lake catchments, and sewage leachate from residential areas. The process involves significant infrastructure development, some changes in farming practices, and further research on options for within-ground nutrient capture. Improvements to water quality are anticipated over long time periods.

Sustainable economic growth

- A2.3 The Rotorua economy is based on farming, forestry and tourism. Expansion and diversification on these three platforms is anticipated over the life of this district plan. There may be associated growth in residential, commercial, and industrial activity. Investment in all forms of renewable energy is expected to increase, in particular geothermal. Population growth in Rotorua has been at a low rate for a number of decades. Economic growth and investment mirrors this trend. There is a community expectation that the district needs to reach a population of 100,000 to obtain the benefits of a major city. There is also an expectation that the district plan should enable rather than complicate this transition of Rotorua to major city status.

Maori cultural, spiritual and economic wellbeing

- A2.4 This district plan recognises the special relationship tangata whenua have with their ancestral land and aspirations for the development of multiple-owned land. Treaty settlements with Iwi may see the start of a phase of significant investment in forestry, renewable energy and other land uses. As with the broader issue of sustainable economic growth canvassed above, there is again the expectation that the district plan should enable rather than complicate major land use changes. These issues are discussed further in Part 3.

The city centre

- A2.5 The city centre is an important focus of commercial and cultural activity. The high rates of vacant buildings in the city centre are often pointed to as products of the global recession and the slow district growth rates. There is a community expectation that the district needs a strong, vibrant city centre. The district plan has a role to play in revitalising the city centre through facilitating and consolidating business into this area. It is part of a broader initiative to enable development that is sustainable, sensitive to heritage values and appropriately located.

Subdivision

- A2.6 Subdivision is usually the first step in a change in land use, or how intensively land is used. Changes caused by subdivision may be irreversible. For example, infill housing in an established suburb increases housing density permanently. A greenfield subdivision in rural areas will remove land permanently from its production role as farm land. The size of residential, rural and commercial sites has been a major consideration in the development of this district plan, as it has a major role in the other major priorities of lake water quality, sustainable economic growth, and amenity.

Amenity

- A2.7 Amenity values are defined in the Resource Management Act 1991 as those "natural qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to an appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence and cultural and recreational attributes". A major point of difference the Rotorua district has is the diversity of spectacular landscapes and lakes across a relatively small area. Keeping the urban areas compact is one way of reducing the impacts on these vistas. However, making the suburban sections so small that no one wants to live there needs to be at the forefront of urban planning. Likewise,

increasing the number of houses in rural areas can also challenge people's perceptions of what constitutes rural character. This is a major consideration for a district where most of the land surface and the biggest zone is 'rural'. The community has identified both lifestyle blocks in the rural areas and infill housing in the urban areas, as actions that can adversely affect amenity.

Important landscapes

A2.8 Water bodies (lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands) are significant natural elements in the district's landscape and an important resource for recreational and tourism activities. Within the district there are many other outstanding natural features and landscapes, including volcanic landscapes, geothermal features and indigenous ecosystems that contribute to spectacular views and passive and active recreational opportunities.

Hazards and community safety

A2.9 The district's population has learned to live with and take advantage of natural hazards such as geothermal features. The district plan is one of several mechanisms in delivering a practical management approach. A secure community is a healthy community, and will attract growth. The district plan is also one of a range of measures used to deliver improvements in community safety, not only from natural hazards, but also through building and public space design that reduces the risk of criminal activity.

A3. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY DIRECTIONS

A3.1 All of the water and land in the district is zoned, and a suite of specific objectives and policies guides each zone. Following on directly from the resource management considerations presented in Section 2 the major objectives this district plan is trying to achieve is to:

1. Enable people wanting to change from a high-nutrient land use to a land use that has less or no impact on lake water quality
2. Limit new activities with a large nutrient footprint that will have an adverse impact on lake water quality
3. Enable developments that generate long-term employment opportunities, with environmental effects compatible with the zoning of the land. There is a broad range of economic drivers in the district, with development most likely to be related to:
 - a. Iwi and Iwi-owned land
 - b. Tourism
 - c. Geothermal
 - d. Forest research (Scion)
 - e. Forestry and wood processing
 - f. Lakes environment
 - g. The regional city scale
 - h. Rotorua's central location
 - i. Agriculture
 - j. Education
4. Promote the city centre as the premier location for commercial activity, office-based administration, specialty retail, dining, and tourist accommodation
5. Manage the type and quantity of built form within important landscapes to ensure the unique landscapes of the district are maintained.
6. Maintain a balance by providing for the continued operation of working environments whilst protecting and enhancing important and significant natural landscapes.
7. Manage the type of development and activities that establish within residential zones to ensure the maintenance of residential amenity.

A3.2 This district plan recognises that landscapes undergo change as a result of both natural and human-induced processes. Any change should not threaten community wellbeing. The district plan needs to provide for environmentally sustainable change in the interests of the community.

A3.3 This district plan also recognises people's lifestyle aspirations are diverse, and the district plan should support those aspirations in a sustainable manner. The district should continue to be a place where people want to visit, live, work and play.