

Stratford



Takatū Waikato

Making a Stand for the Waikato

Strategic Direction 2023-2025

He taiao mauriora

Healthy environment

He hapori hihiri

Vibrant communities

He ōhanga pakari

Strong economy

The meaning behind our tohu (symbols)

The pou, or pillars, can be likened to the pillars of a traditional meeting house, symbolising support, strength and resilience.

The niho taniwha, or teeth-like triangular pattern, represent leadership, stability and unity.

Together, and with three pou standing strong, they become a tohu – a symbol of our purpose of working together for a Waikato region that has a healthy environment, vibrant communities and strong economy.

The **He taiao mauriora | Healthy environment pou** stands tallest, symbolising the strong bond people have with our taiao (the natural environment), and reflecting that the wellbeing of our rohe starts with a healthy environment.



We love where we live – the mighty Waikato. A diverse and resource rich region in the heart of the upper North Island. It's a place of powerful opportunities.

Making the most of these opportunities relies on everyone playing their part for a healthy environment. A healthy environment enables communities to thrive. Get that right and the economy will be strong. That's what we're here to do – create a sustainable future for people today and generations to come.

It's ambitious. The issues and solutions are complex and interconnected.

This council is facing the challenge head on, evolving our six strategic priorities and setting new goals for success. Achieving our goals means being clear about the complexity of the issues we face, the financial impact on our communities and the role of our council. In some cases, we'll be the lead provider while in others we will collaborate, work in partnership, provide funding or use our convening and monitoring strengths to support or inform the outcomes we're working for.

We're in it for the long haul and people working together is key. For us, that's partnering with iwi and working with many others in our communities.

Our collective kaitiakitanga – our care – will make the Waikato region even better.

***Tō Waikato, kia wana.
Making your Waikato even better.***

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Ngā aronga nui

Our strategic priorities

 Wai
Water

 Rerenga rauropi, tiakitanga taiao
Biodiversity and biosecurity

 Takutai moana
Coastal and marine

 Hanganga tauwhiro
Sustainable development and infrastructure

 Hononga hapori
Community connections

 Whakaheke tukunga
Transition to a low emissions economy

A focus on wellbeing and how we respond to climate change is woven through all our priorities.

To support the development of this strategic direction, council commissioned an analysis of political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental (PESTLE) trends and their implications (key trends, opportunities and challenges) for the governance of the Waikato region.

View the report: waikatoregion.govt.nz/PESTLE-2022



U i S i N N



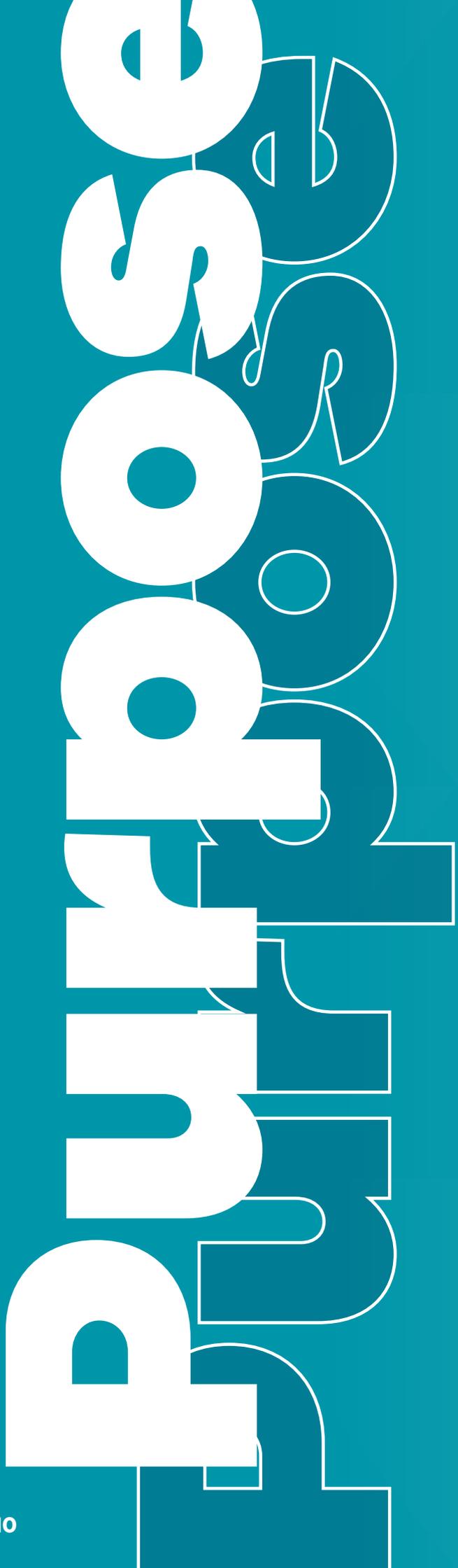
Matawhānui

Our vision

Waikato mārohirohi: Manaaki whenua,
whakamana tangata.

The mighty Waikato: Caring for our place,
empowering our people.





Aronga Our purpose

Working together for a Waikato region that has a healthy environment, vibrant communities and strong economy.

Sustainable development goals

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) were developed by the United Nations in 2015. They are a call for action to promote prosperity while protecting the planet.

Here in the Waikato, with the Waikato Wellbeing Project, we became the first region in New Zealand to develop our own SDGs. The most relevant goals have been incorporated into this strategic direction.

Legislation requires councils to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of our communities. We've embedded and defined this in our purpose.

He taiao mauriora ▲ **Healthy environment**

A resilient and sustainable region that works in harmony with the natural environment, one that's actively transitioning to net carbon zero and fosters the growing of our indigenous biodiversity.



He hapori hihiri ▲ **Vibrant communities**

A connected and inclusive community where our people are actively engaged with whānau and families, communities and governance. A region with a vibrant Māori culture and one that celebrates diversity, participation and understanding.



He ōhanga pakari ▲ **Strong economy**

An innovation leader with a diversified economy that attracts people to the region and builds their capabilities.





Ngā uara **Our values**

Our values define how we work as individuals and together as an organisation to achieve our vision, purpose and commitment to customers.

Kia tika ▲ **Responsible**

Our people model the highest standards of personal and professional behaviour in all job-related activities.

We always aim to do what's right for the Waikato region, now and in the future. Through our elected council, we are accountable to our communities and stakeholders.

We share knowledge and make well-informed decisions based on good information. We listen carefully, look for solutions and remain open to new ideas.

We take responsibility for our own actions and trust others to do the same. We put safety first for ourselves and others.

While we are realistic about what we can achieve today, we are mindful of the effect our decisions and actions will have on future generations.

Kia tau ▲ **Respectful**

Showing others respect is the basis of all our behaviour.

Above all, we are purposeful and ethical in all we say and do. We behave in ways that keep the public's trust and respect.

We are direct, honest and courteous in all our relationships.

Within our organisation, we create a working environment which is enabling, supportive and inclusive so that each of us is valued for the differences, skills and experiences we bring to the workplace.

Work-life balance is a strong focus of our culture. We support our people to put family first and take pride in the roles they fulfil in their communities through the environmental, social and cultural activities that make the Waikato region a better place.

Kia toa ▲ **Effective**

We always aim to give the best we can.

For this reason, we always strive to make a positive difference.

High performance, innovation and adaptability are vital to our success. We build on our strengths and support each other to be the very best we can be at work. We appreciate our successes and those of others.

The services we provide enable regional development and protect and restore the natural environment in ways that improve people's quality of life for those here now and the generations to come.

Strategic priority

Wai Water

What we want to achieve

Clean water and healthy **aquatic ecosystems** that meet iwi aspirations and community needs within environmental limits.

What does this mean?

An **aquatic ecosystem** refers to all the living things that depend on the water for survival.

The why

Many New Zealanders feel a connection to water. For Māori, each body of water has its own mauri (life force).

The special relationship the five river iwi have with the Waikato and Waipā rivers and catchments is expressed through *Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato – The Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River*. Created through the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process, it has legal status as the primary direction-setting document for freshwater policy relating to the Waikato and Waipā rivers, trumping all other plans.

Integral to Te Ture Whaimana is the concept of Te Mana o te Awa, which refers to the spiritual authority, protective power and prestige of the Waikato River.

Similarly, Te Mana o te Wai – a national policy requirement – is about recognising the vital importance of clean, healthy water for maintaining the health of our waterbodies, freshwater ecosystems and the communities that rely upon them for their sustenance and wellbeing. To give effect to Te Mana o te Wai, a requirement is that we work with iwi and hapū – those who have Treaty of Waitangi settlement agreements and those still to settle, such as Hauraki.

Lots of work has been done in communities across the region to reduce contaminants to water, helping improve the health of our catchments and waterways. But we all need to do more to protect this critical resource which provides us with food and recreational opportunities, gives us our drinking supplies, generates power and keeps businesses moving.

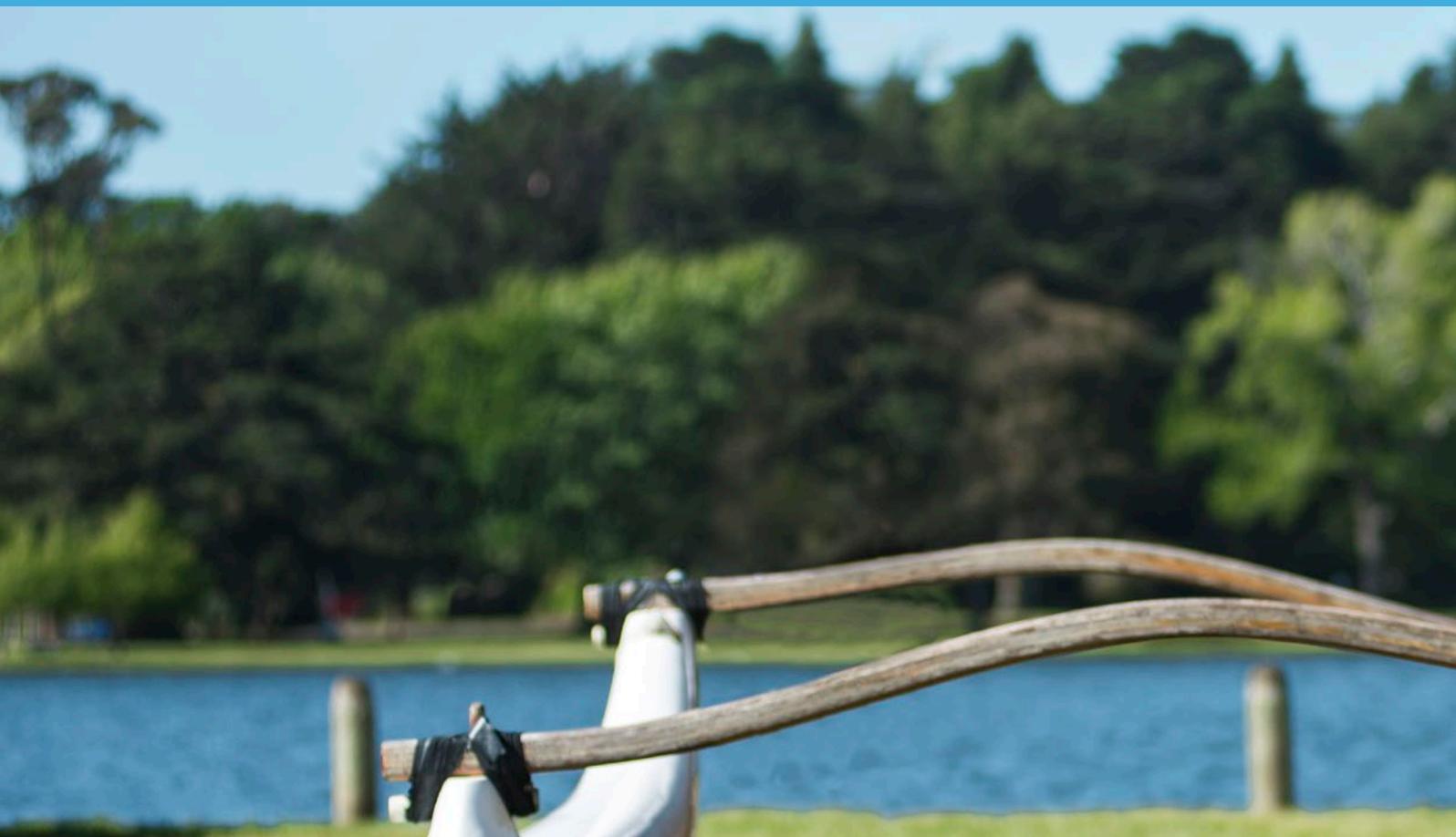
Protecting water is not just about reducing contaminants. The changing climate is affecting the availability of water. In the 10 years to 2020, the region recorded the lowest average rainfall in more than 50 years. Less rain and more evaporation has resulted in decreased river flows. At the same time, water use has increased.

We need to use water strategically to ensure there is enough to go around. Our communities need to know how to make the most of every drop using smart ways of capturing, storing, using and recycling water.

Goals for success

By 2025

- ▲▲ Put the health of our region's waterbodies and freshwater ecosystems first when making decisions, giving effect to Te Mana o Te Wai, Te Mana o te Awa.
- ▲▲ Increase regional water security through a multi-stakeholder plan to ensure wellbeing and resilience within defined environmental limits for the next 30 years.
- ▲▲ Leverage our investment in catchment and river restoration work through funding partnerships and community actions, contributing to water quality improvements that are demonstrable in the long term.





Strategic priority

Rerenga rauropi,
tiakitanga taiao

Biodiversity and biosecurity

What we want to achieve

People working together to protect and restore our unique local native plants and animals, and the **indigenous ecosystems** they live in.

What does this mean?

Indigenous ecosystems in the Waikato region include hill country forests and scrub, remnants of lowland forest, lakes, wetlands, waterways, alpine tussock grasslands, coastal dunes and the coastal marine area.

The why

Connection to our natural environments, and the native plants and animals within them, is an important part of our culture and way of life. But these environments and species are threatened.

Only 27 per cent of the land in our region remains in native vegetation, with less than 10 per cent in many lowland districts. More than 200 species of native plants and animals are under threat of extinction, several of which are unique to the Waikato region. Most habitats continue to degrade due to animal pests and weeds. Some 75 per cent of our peat wetlands have been drained or filled for pastoral or urban use. When peat is drained for development, the carbon in peat becomes exposed to air and forms carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas.

Reversing biodiversity loss is possible, but only with greater and more collective effort.

We can't live without biodiversity; our economy depends on it. Protecting and restoring biodiversity is an investment in our future.

Biodiversity helps clean our water, recycle nutrients, provide food, and protect from flooding. Maintaining and enhancing these ecosystem services is also the most cost-effective way we can address the climate crisis. The more biodiversity we have and the healthier it is, the greater its capacity to store carbon dioxide, helping reduce emissions and increasing resilience to environmental change.

Our biosecurity work enables this by reducing the impacts of weeds, pests and diseases, and protecting human health.

Goals for success

By 2025

- ▲▲ Work with partner agencies to have an agreed region wide biodiversity accord in place.
- ▲▲ Progress a prioritised strategic pathway for our region that protects and restores biodiversity out to 2050 and beyond.
- ▲▲ Support and empower people to protect and restore the natural environment and **taonga species** by integrating their efforts with councils and other agencies.
- ▲▲ Work with others to protect ecosystems, human health and economic activities through effective pest management.

What does this mean?

Taonga species are plants or animals and their ecology that are significant to the identity and wellbeing of local Māori, iwi or hapū.



Strategic priority

Takutai moana **Coastal and marine**

What we want to achieve

Healthy **marine ecosystems** that provide us with many benefits like recreation, food, improved water quality, increased resilience to climate change, and sustainable economic opportunities.

What does this mean?

Marine ecosystems span the transition of fresh and salt water in estuaries, including habitats like mangroves and salt marshes, out to the open sea. Healthy marine ecosystems support a high diversity of habitats and species and provide many benefits to society.

Blue economy is looking after the ocean and everything in it to enable sustainable economic growth and improvements in people's livelihoods and wellbeing.

The why

The Waikato region's coastal and marine environment is immensely important. From the high tide mark out to 12 nautical miles offshore, our region's coastal and marine environment includes 1200km of coastline and covers over 10,000km² in area for leisure, aquaculture, recreational and commercial fishing, shipping and tourism.

In addition to these activities and uses, marine ecosystems are integral to the cultural identity of many communities across the region.

Healthy marine areas provide habitat for shellfish, other invertebrates, fish, birds and mammals. They improve water quality by filtering water, soaking up nutrients and trapping sediment. They also play a vital role in climate regulation by capturing and storing carbon.

Given the coastal and marine environment is a third of our region, there are opportunities to further develop this '**blue economy**', strengthening the Waikato and the wellbeing of people who live in our coastal communities and/or make their living from marine-based industries.

Interest in our region's blue economy will undoubtedly increase. We need to prepare for that now, ensuring the right planning and policies are in place so future blue business activities can be economically viable while supporting the needs of our marine ecosystems. At the same time, we need a better understanding of the role these ecosystems could have in supporting a sustainable blue economy, and the resilience and adaptability of coastal communities.

Integrated coastal and catchment planning is key to keeping our marine ecosystems healthy. It's an approach which recognises the relationship between land-based activities, the fresh water that flows into marine ecosystems, and activities at sea.

Goals for success

By 2025

- ▲ Adopt a ki uta ki tai – mountains to sea – approach to consider coastal ecosystems as sensitive receiving environments.
- ▲ Support and empower people to reduce harmful impacts of land-based activities on coastal environments.



- ▲ Work with communities, and iwi and hapū to carry out integrated coastal and catchment planning and restoration activities to protect and enhance coastal marine ecosystems.
- ▲ Partner with communities, and iwi and hapū to deliver a future-focused coastal plan.



Strategic priority

Hanganga tauwhiro

Sustainable development and infrastructure

What we want to achieve

Resilient communities that plan for intergenerational wellbeing, develop with nature in mind and are able to respond to and recover from adversity.

The why

The decisions we make today shape our future. In the wake of extreme weather disasters in New Zealand, there is an understanding that we must take bold and deliberate steps to change the way we plan and fund investment in infrastructure. We need infrastructure that serves our current economy but more importantly secures community resilience and our future wellbeing.

Resilient communities understand the risks they could face – natural and human made – and have strategies in place to manage them.

Infrastructure often plays a critical role in protecting communities from risks, but needs to be accompanied by efforts to accommodate, minimise or avoid vulnerabilities.

Our council is responsible for flood management and land drainage schemes. We also work alongside communities, stakeholders and partners to help them understand and manage their risks, so they're prepared for the unexpected.

Through long term thinking and planning, we'll need to consider whether and where communities can evolve and grow, factoring in the changing environment. In turn, this will provide more certainty for investment and new sustainable economic opportunities. Changes in resource management, spatial planning and climate adaptation supports this type of holistic approach.

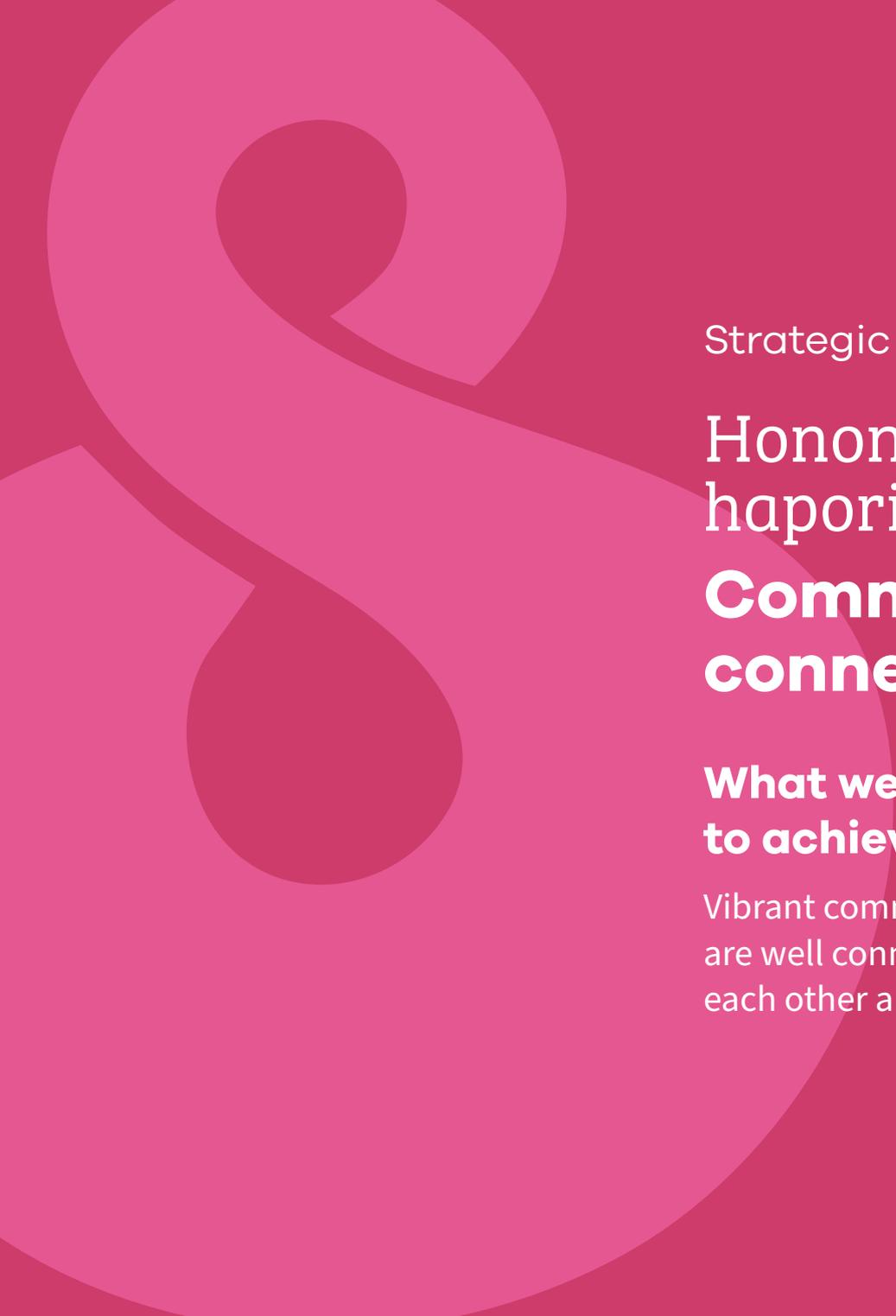
Through regional spatial planning, we'll also have a role to play in ensuring other community infrastructure is built in the right places out to 2050 and beyond. That's everything from roads to water systems, to electricity networks – the infrastructure that provides critical services for resilient, thriving and growing communities.

Goals for success

By 2025

- ▲▲ Ensure infrastructure in the region is planned and provided for, and that it is economic, sustainable, and climate resilient out to 2050 and beyond.
- ▲▲ Involve communities, and iwi and hapū in understanding risks and developing short and long term management strategies that are holistic, sustainable and adaptive.
- ▲▲ Engage communities, and iwi and hapū in the development of a sustainable flood management and land drainage infrastructure strategy that considers land uses, working with nature and funding.
- ▲▲ Advocate for infrastructure and investment decisions that support greater climate resilience and a rapid transition to a low carbon freight and distribution network through the upper North Island.





Strategic priority

Hononga
hapori

Community connections

What we want to achieve

Vibrant communities that
are well connected with
each other and to services.

The why

Our people are as diverse as the region we live in, and our social structures are changing. For example, our population is ageing but we've also got growing numbers of young Māori and Pasifika people.

The Waikato is experiencing higher than average rates of social deprivation and the intergenerational social issues that poverty and other associated issues create. Our lives have also changed dramatically in the past few years. Social division, disconnection from community and a growing mistrust in information are ongoing issues.

We need to work together to build trust and understanding, and counter inequities where we can. This means we need to understand our communities better and ensure people have access to education, employment, recreation, health and other services.

Goals for success

By 2025

- ▲ Lead and encourage land-use decisions that shape sustainable, resilient transport networks to ensure communities have affordable access to services, amenities and social life.
- ▲ Improve safe, accessible and affordable low emissions passenger transport options for our communities, with a particular focus on frequency and reliability.



- ▲ Work with local councils to understand what communities, and iwi and hapū value most and make it easy for people to participate in decisions and actions that affect them.
- ▲ Strengthen our role as a trusted source of timely, relevant, and high-quality information, and make it easy for people to access environmental, economic and social information.



Strategic priority

Whakaheke tukunga
**Transition to a low
emissions economy**

What we want to achieve

Work with others to transition to a competitive low emissions economy that's fair for everyone and enhances community wellbeing for the future.

The why

The Waikato is known for its natural environment from which we produce great products through innovative systems and processes developed by smart, hardworking people.

To maintain these strengths, the region needs to position itself to help lead New Zealand's transition to a low emissions economy. This is necessary, given the impact changing weather patterns are already having on our region and the people, animals and plants that live here.

Communities, infrastructure, roads, rail and communications networks are being tested by extreme weather events – more frequent and increasingly severe storms and increased rainfall events compounded by rising tides.

Rural and urban communities are already feeling the effect of water restrictions on their businesses and domestic use, and many will face increased fire risk. Low water flows during times of drought challenge farmers and growers and impact the ability to generate hydropower.

Current and future regulatory changes at home and abroad will increasingly incentivise a low emissions economy and place costs on polluters. Consumers are shifting their preferences to sustainable options.

It's time for the Waikato to accelerate the transition to a profitable low emissions economy that delivers higher skilled jobs and incomes, investment, innovation, and new economic bases of activity that enhance and protect the environment.

Goals for success

By 2025

- ▲▲ Work with iwi partners and stakeholders to agree options and equitable pathways to help guide industries and communities to reduce use of fossil fuels and increase energy efficiency in our transition to a resilient, low emissions economy.
- ▲▲ Enable Waikato farmers to be national leaders in the adoption of climate smart practices and technologies by aligning our farmer education and support services with those of industry bodies and central government.
- ▲▲ Deliver an updated regional energy strategy and facilitate an increase in access to and use of renewable energy.
- ▲▲ Achieve year on year progress toward reducing council's own corporate emissions, including through our supply chain, consistent with New Zealand's target for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.



Areas of focus critical to delivering on our shared purpose and, ultimately, this strategic direction.

Apataki **Customer**

We will provide welcoming, responsive and connected service, preempting needs and keeping our customers informed.

Auaha **Innovation**

We will foster transformative approaches and mindsets, with a focus on increasing digital capability and productivity.

Ahurea **Culture**

We will foster an adaptable, inclusive, values-led culture that celebrates success.



Kounga Excellence

We will strive for excellence in everything we do, improving our performance through the efficient use of resources targeting:

- ▲ governance, leadership and strategy
- ▲ financial decision making and transparency
- ▲ regulatory and service delivery
- ▲ communicating and engaging with the public and business.

Te ao Māori

We support our people to develop the capability and confidence required to grow and maintain effective relationships with iwi Māori in our region. Our Kawe Kōrero app is a key learning tool for staff. This app, which includes our organisational waiata — Toitū te taiao, can be downloaded on the App Store and Google Play.



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