

Significance and Engagement Policy

Adopted as part of the LTP 2024-34

Introduction

The purpose of local government includes enabling democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities. Engagement with the community is an important part of fulfilling that purpose.

What is the purpose of this policy?

The Significance and Engagement Policy guides 'when' and 'how' Carterton District Council (Council) engages with its community about important Council decisions. The 'when' to engage is determined by the significance of the decision being made. The 'how' is guided by the engagement framework in this policy.

What are the key terms?

What do we mean by significance?

Significance is the importance of an issue, proposal, decision or matter before Council. It is measured by its likely impact on the criteria listed below. If a decision or work programme is considered to have an overall 'High' significance, i.e. is significant under this policy then various levels of engagement with the community are required. Determining if an issue is significant and the level of significance has been based on three key factors:

- The economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of the district
- Affected people and communities
- Council's ability to perform its role as a local authority and achieve its strategic objectives in the Long-Term Plan.

What do we mean by engagement?

Engagement is the process of seeking information from the community to inform and assist decision-making, and providing the community information on the outcome of a decision-making process. Council values and is committed to meaningful community engagement so that important decisions are made with input from the community. Engagement can also be targeted with specific groups or sections of the community rather than with the community as a whole. Council's approach to engagement, including when we will not engage with our community, is outlined further in this policy.

What do we mean by strategic asset?

Under the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002 this policy is required to identify 'strategic assets'. Strategic assets are defined in LGA 2002 as an asset (or group of assets) that needs to be retained so that Council can maintain its capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that Council determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community. These assets include:

- any asset or group of assets listed in this policy;
- any land or building owned by Council and required to maintain Council's capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and

How will we determine the significance of a decision?

Council will generally determine significance in two ways - named strategic assets and a significance assessment criteria.

Council's strategic assets

For the purpose of this Policy, Council considers its networks and other large assets as complete single assets. It is the group of assets as a whole that delivers the service.

The Council has identified its strategic assets as:

- roading network, including bridges, street lighting, and footpaths
- water treatment, storage, and supply network
- wastewater reticulation network and wastewater treatment facilities
- stormwater drainage network
- rural water race network
- landfill site, including the transfer station
- parks and reserves Council-owned land and buildings, public toilets, and sports fields
- cemetery
- Carterton events centre
- outdoor swimming complex
- Kaipaitangata forest.

Significance Assessment Criteria

All matters for Council decision will be assessed for its impact on the following:

Criteria	Higher significance	Lesser significance
The effects on all or a large part of the Carterton District	The decision would have a major impact on all or a large part of the district	The decision would have a lower impact on all or a large part of the district
The effects on individuals or specific communities	The decision would have a major impact on individuals or specific communities	There is a lower impact on individuals or specific communities
The impact on the relationship of Māori including their tikanga (culture and traditions) with their ancestral land, water sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga	The decision would have a major on the relationship of Māori including the importance of tikanga and their relationship with ancestral land, water sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga	The decision would have a lower impact on the relationship of Māori including the importance of tikanga and their relationship with ancestral land, water sites, waahi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga
The likely level of community interest or history of public interest in the matter or issue	There is a history of the matter generating wide and intense public interest and a reasonable expectation that this will again be so	There is no history of the matter generating widespread interest
The financial impact	The impact is major and/or Long-Term on either debt levels or rates There is a major and Long-Term financial impact The decision results in a major departure from the Financial Strategy	The impact on debt levels or rates is of a low level There is a low level of Long-Term financial impact There is no or little impact on the Financial Strategy
Consistency with Council's current strategies and policies including the Strategic priorities	The decision results in a major departure from Council's current strategies and policies including the Strategic Priorities (Te taiao, Te hanganga, Ngā tikanga āwhina tāngata)	The decision is consistent with Council's current strategies and policies.

Impacts on Council's Long-Term Plan, Annual Plan, and levels of service (also including the Regional Land Transport Plan, if applicable)	Full exit from an existing activity or adding a new group of activities There is a major and/or Long-Term change to services	Minor change to how Council manages groups of activities There is a medium to low level of change to services
The decision involves a strategic asset	The decision involves the sale or transfer of more than 20% of a strategic asset	The decision does not impact on Council's ownership of the asset
Whether the decision is reversible	The decision is irreversible and would impact negatively on future generations to a high degree	The decision is reversible, or if it is irreversible, the impact on future generations would not be high

Climate change is an important consideration for Council that is assessed against our Climate Change Strategy and action plan rather than being a criteria for significance. This enables a more detailed analysis to be conducted and also proposes mitigation/adaptation methods.

Council officers provide a recommendation of a decision's significance to elected members. The final decision about the significance of any matter rests with elected members. When making this determination other factors may need to be considered; e.g. urgency, safety, commercial sensitivity and public good.

How will we engage?

Council's approach to community engagement?

Council communicates and engages with our community all the time to deliver our work - whether it's to gather input at the start of a process, get feedback on a proposal, or just keep people informed of decisions that have been made and work that is being undertaken. There is a responsibility to communicate the work we do with the right information, at the right time, in the right way. Council has a number of different legal requirements for engagement depending on the matter being decided. The legal requirements are the minimum standards that we then build on in our approach to community engagement. Council's approach to community engagement is to:

- promote a sense of ownership of Council decisions by the community.
- inform people and communities about issues that affect them.
- provide opportunity for people and communities to have meaningful input into Council decisions.
- create a sense of awareness of the diversity of opinion within the community.
- show leadership.
- deliver innovation and be responsive in all communication and interactions with our community.

Council's preferences for engagement methods may be different for different types of issues and opportunities, and that these preferences may change over time. Council, when engaging with affected or interested communities, will recognise the relationship elected members have with the location, specific communities and individuals affected by consultation or engagement initiatives. Participation of elected members in Council engagement is an essential component for our engagement approach.

How communities want to engage

Communities are dynamic and evolve rapidly. Technology is changing the way that our communities want to engage with us and there is an increased uptake and desire for online engagement. Council's engagement methods are evolving to meet new platforms that our communities use.

Face-to-face opportunities are still important as these opportunities strengthen relationships, and provide visibility and accountability.

Council will continuously review feedback from communities about engagement processes and continue to evolve our methods on an ongoing basis rather than only reviewing methods at a fixed point in time.

Phases of engagement for Councils decision making process

Staff must consider the required engagement for a decision or work programme as part of their assessment of significance. The three-phase engagement model focuses on the connection between significance and engagement in the decision-making process.

If a decision or work programme is considered to have an overall 'High' significance, ie is significant under this policy Council will conduct three phases of engagement (Early Engagement, Consultation, Promotion) as part of the process. The process will start with engagement as part of the design phase, consultation on a proposal, and promotion of the final outcome.

If a decision or work programme is considered to have an overall 'Medium' significance under this policy Council will conduct two phases of engagement (Consultation, Promotion) as part of the process. The process will start with consultation on a proposal, and promotion of the final outcome.

If a decision or work programme is considered to have an overall 'Low' significance under this policy Council will conduct one phase of engagement (Promotion) to communicate the final outcome.

The phases of engagement are sequential – early engagement comes before consultation; consultation comes before promotion.

Refer to the table below:

Phases of Engagement

Phases	Early Engagement	Consultation	Promotion
	<i>Informal Early Engagement</i>	<i>Formal Engagement and Special Consultative Procedure</i>	<i>Informing and Educating</i>
Purpose	We'll engage with affected communities in the planning or development of concepts for proposed documents or work programmes, to: • identify needs or aspirations find out what people want us to change or improve • ask for input into solutions or options	After drafting proposed documents, changes or work programmes, we present actions, options, implications and benefits to get submissions from affected groups or the wider community, to: • check it reflects their input or desired outcomes • find out if they agree or disagree with the proposal or preferred options • identify if there are any further things to consider before we implement the proposal	We'll inform, educate or promote to our community what we're doing and how it affects them. This is generally when work has been planned, a decision has been made, or change is occurring.
Outcome	We'll use feedback to develop direction, content or actions in proposals or work programmes.	We'll use submissions to determine final recommendations and inform elected members in making decisions	Communication is typically one-way, however it's intended that the community is aware or takes action as a result. We evaluate if communication is successful via measures of action and/or through feedback where necessary

Timeframe	2-6 weeks depending on significance	4 weeks (minimum)	Following decision or prior to implementing work. As required to provide ample promotion or notice.
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