

It's wastewater decision time

Wairoa has a lot of leakage

A RESOUNDING public vote sent a clear message to the Wairoa District Council that the community want the health of the Wairoa River considered as part of the Wairoa wastewater treatment plant project.

A series of community meetings were held recently to establish the best practicable option for the town's wastewater with the current 25-year consent for its treatment set to expire in May 2019.

Council engineering manager Jamie Cox said it was time to make big future decisions.

Wairoa's wastewater ends up at the treatment plant on Whakamahia Road where it is treated in oxidation ponds before being discharged into the Wairoa River and estuary at the end of Fitzroy Street.

By the end of this year, council need to choose the best option to discharge the wastewater, be it continuing on the same path or an alternative system.

Infrastructure adviser for Rationale and former Wairoa District Council engineering manager, Neil Cook offered information on potential options.

Of the around 80 kilometres of underground piping about half is under privately owned properties.

There are five pump stations in Wairoa, built around 1948, and two treatment ponds, situated near Pilot's Hill and built in the 1980s.

Mr Cook said the primary pond was 2120 square metres and the secondary was 10,970 square metres.

"It is an entirely natural process with the treated water travelling downhill through a pipe and into the river."

Mr Cook said the pump stations had issues with capacity, inflows and overflows, and the treatment system had limited storage and possibly connections that should not be there.

Consultant for LEI, Hamish Lowe said there had been many tests done on the Wairoa River water including testing flounder collected from Wairoa and Mahia waters.

"The flesh of the flounder was compared and the tests indicated no difference," he said.

Wairoa woman Mere Kokiri-Tamanui said they all knew the river wasn't well.

"It doesn't ring true to me that there would be no impact."

"The water is saying what it is saying."

Mr Cook said health was a common factor with the wastewater project.

"Wastewater systems were originally developed as a public health initiative."

One concerned ratepayer questioned if Wairoa's sewer mains were in trouble.

Mr Cook said the sewers had issues with some cracks and stormwater connections where there shouldn't be.

"Cracks can happen over time when there is a shift from an earthquake or from tree roots and so on."

"Every pipe will leak and you always get some stormwater in sewers."

Mr Lowe said when you get external water entering pipes it could cause problems.

There were two options to fix the issues, he said.

One option was to manage the water and accommodate the current issues, and the other would be to replace the pipes.

Mr Cook said the wastewater treatment project process started with resource consent.

"There are several options and we are trying to reach the best practicable option which balances cultural, social, financial and environmental issues for the community."

"It is a balancing act - it can't just be about affordability, there has to be a balance."

In terms of cost, Mr Cook said if the community wanted the "Rolls-Royce, gold plated"

system, the cost could be in excess of \$30 million.

When it came to the minimum cost, Mr Cook said you wouldn't get much change out of a couple of million dollars.

As the project was in an "extremely early" stage, all costs were approximate.

No government subsidies were available at this stage, but that wasn't to say they wouldn't be available in the future.

Options included water or land, and whether the wastewater goes directly or indirectly to water, or stays on land.

Then there were options for it to go to the river, ocean, wetland, forestry, or small or large holdings.

Mr Lowe said if they went with the forestry option, they would need around 200-600 hectares of Wairoa land to pump the wastewater into.

Mr Cook said there was potential for far greater long-term positive effects in investing dollars to improve river health.

"There are several options and we are trying to reach the best practicable option which balances cultural, social, financial and environmental issues for the community." — Neil Cook

Wairoa land attractive to 'outside interests'

ALTERNATIVE land use is a growing option in Wairoa.

At last month's Maori Standing Committee meeting Wairoa Horizons Trust-Te Matarae o Te Wairoa representative Richard Allen said over the last 18 months around 30ha had been planted in apples and 800ha of land for planting was needed.

The average value of Wairoa land made it attractive in the eyes of apple growers and interests outside of Wairoa.

Mr Allen described Wairoa's land value as being an under-valued asset.

He also reported on the freshwater koura developments where he expected seed stock to go into ponds in six to eight months.

"The next step requires a lot more funding and we have secured half the

amount we need for a project manager and ongoing discussions with the regional economic development strategies (REDS) Matariki (Hawke's Bay) and Tairāwhiti."

Matariki REDS' co-chairman and general manager of Maungaharuru-Tangitu Trust, Shane Walker said it was necessary to include the community and social elements in this issue.

Mr Allen said, "We have to look at how we utilise these marae resources that are under-utilised resources for this market."

"Seeka, the biggest kiwifruit growers in the Bay of Plenty, visited Wairoa in June and were shown land from Mahia to Raupunga."

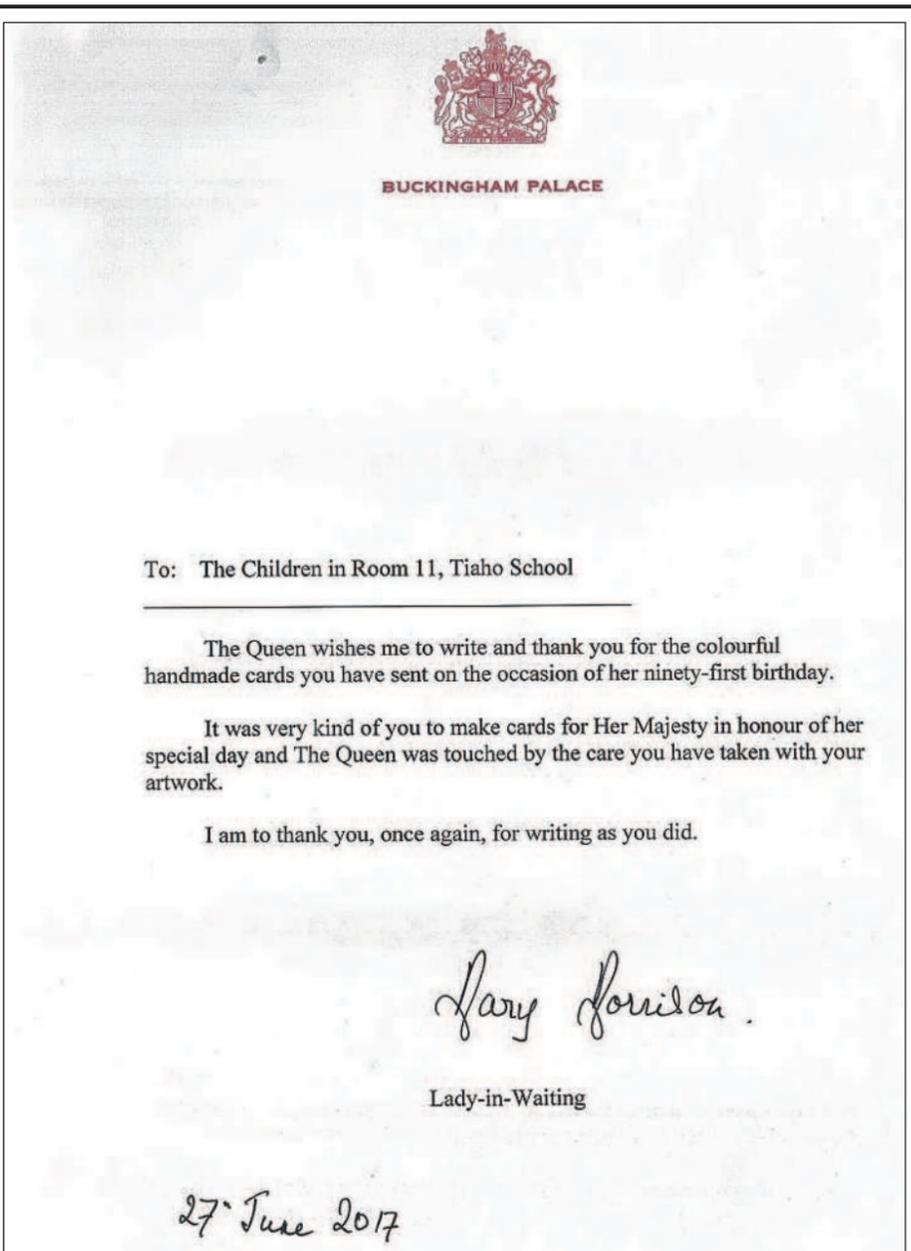
"They were blown away and they realised it was too big for them but there was huge potential and there are ongoing discussions with the project manager."

The average value of Wairoa land made it attractive in the eyes of apple growers and interests outside of Wairoa.



Colouring comp winners

Winners of the Wairoa Star colouring competition were Geronimo Mete, Valerie Mete, Maxian McSporran and Defne Eginc. The competition ran for a week in July and gave youngsters around the district a chance to show off their creative skills. The Star received a lot of entries for the competition which retail manager Becca Morrell said was a great turnout. The next event is shaping up to be a fun one with plans for a papier mache competition during the December/January school holidays.



The royal letter of thanks, Tiaho School's room 11 students received after they sent handmade birthday cards to Queen Elizabeth II last term.

Royal thanks for Tiaho pupils

TIAHO School has received the Royal nod.

The school's room 11 students and their relieving teacher Nicky Kavanagh took on the project of making birthday cards for Queen Elizabeth.

The new entrants' teacher found an address and posted the handmade

cards off.

Last week the children and teachers, Miss Vivvy and Mrs Kavanagh, were thrilled to receive a letter of thanks from Buckingham Palace.

It was a great learning experience said Tiaho School principal Diane McCallum.