



Whangaehu Flood Resilience Uplift Project

A Rangitikei District Council-led project is currently underway to look at the issues and impacts associated with flooding in the lower Whangaehu valley (Okirae south), and to identify options and actions for managing those impacts. This information sheet outlines why the project is being undertaken, what it hopes to achieve, who is involved and how residents and property owners can be involved.

Why Undertake this Project?

The Whangaehu valley has experienced four major flood events since 2004. On each occasion dwellings, community buildings, businesses and farms have been inundated, resulting in considerable damage, economic loss, social disruption and displacement of local people for many weeks. The villages of Whangaehu and Kauangaroa are particularly susceptible to flooding from the Whangaehu River, but no enduring solutions to avoid or mitigate the effects of flooding have been found. It is clear that these flood events will continue and, within a climate change context, we could expect large flood events on a more frequent basis.

The risk to human life and property – notably dwellings and community facilities – is significant, so removing or reducing these risks is a desired outcome. Further development in these high-risk zones is effectively controlled through the Rangitikei District Plan and the Building Code. However finding solutions for existing properties is not straightforward. There is a range of options (e.g. localised flood protection works, raising floor levels and relocation) to reduce risk and increase resilience, although conventional community-wide flood protection measures are not currently considered practicable or affordable.

Rangitikei District Council (RDC) has acknowledged the need to work with affected communities to find ways of improving individual and community resilience to flood events. RDC has secured funding through the Government's Civil Defence Emergency Management Resilience Fund to work with those affected by flooding in the Whangaehu valley.

The Whangaehu Flood Resilience Project

Increasing resilience to flooding centres on risk management and reduction, and requires a multi-agency approach and active community engagement that builds shared, evidence-based understanding of the problem, barriers and opportunities, and leads to potential solutions. International and local experience shows this is a complex challenge in practice.

This project will bring together local, regional and central government agencies, and draw on expertise from Massey University. The aim is to develop a locally appropriate community-based flood resilience strategy for the Whangaehu River by putting communities at the centre of efforts to resolve this complex and sensitive issue.

There are options to eliminate or reduce the risk of harm to people and major damage to property, and these will be identified and assessed (using an evidence-based approach) in conjunction with affected communities.

The approach will involve collaborative issue identification and problem-solving, and allow for the strengthening relationships between communities, local stakeholders, government agencies, local authorities, iwi leaders and researchers. This should create an environment where any difficult community decisions can be made, and appropriate action taken.

This project provides an opportunity to adapt approaches and tools used elsewhere in hazard management and mitigation, with the aim of identifying and evaluating options to reduce flood risk in the Whangaehu valley. The project will integrate international and local experience, including other research/studies, to build community-wide understanding about flood risk and develop resilience-building solutions.

Whangaehu communities are not alone in New Zealand when it comes to flood risk and the need to find enduring solutions to the continued occupation of at-risk flood areas. The methodology and model adapted for use and tested as part of this project will be transferrable for use elsewhere in New Zealand.

Organisations Involved

Rangitikei District Council is the lead organisation, and has overall responsibility for the project. Massey University, as an independent organisation, will lead the community engagement process. The project is supported by Horizons Regional Council, Ngati Apa (Whangaehu and Nga Wairiki Ki Uta), Federated Farmers Ministry of Social Development, Te Puni Kokori and the Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management. Additional agencies/organisations will be included in the project as necessary. Representatives of these organisations will form the project advisory group.

Project Process and Timeframes

The focus of the project is to work with local communities to identify flood-related issues and impacts, consider options for addressing risks and determine appropriate actions to manage those risks.

The project will run until 30 June 2017, with a major focus on working with residents, property owners and community groups. This will generally take the form of community/stakeholder meetings and targeted interviews, and may involve surveys to ensure a complete picture of the issues and potential options and solutions is obtained.

The project will have 4 key phases, summarised in the following table:

Phase	Description	Timeframe	Comment
1	Understand the Whangaehu Valley context and scope of Flood Risk	September/ October 2016	Work with key stakeholders and community representatives. Undertake community briefings
2	Assess Flood Risk in the Whangaehu Valley	October/ November 2016	Work with key stakeholders and community representatives. Undertake community briefings
3	Develop Risk Reduction Action Plan (covering short, medium and long-term)	November/ December 2016	Work with key stakeholders and community representatives. Community briefings & workshops
4	Finalise and Implement Risk Reduction Action Plan, and Monitor Progress	2017+	Some actions may require significant resources from councils and/or government agencies. Commitment of these resources may need to follow a formal approval process. For councils this may be an annual plan or long term plan process. End of project report to Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management

Getting Involved and Keeping in Touch

There will be meetings arranged during the course of the project, and details of these will be notified once they are confirmed. Regular progress updates, including meeting notifications, will be available on Council’s website www.Rangitikei.govt.nz Email notifications will also be available – send your details to FloodProject@Rangitikei.govt.nz to get on the email list.

I look forward to extensive community and stakeholder involvement this project as we work together to find lasting solutions to reduce the impacts of flooding in the Whangaehu valley.

Ross McNeil

Chief Executive, Rangitikei District Council

September 2016

