Policy

CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

TEAM:	Strategy and Policy
RESPONSIBILITY:	Chief Executive
ADOPTED:	30 May 2019
REVIEW:	In 2021 and then every five years or as required.
CONSULTATION:	Required.
RELATED DOCUMENTS:	Ashburton District Council Long-Term Plan 2018-28
	Ashburton District Plan
	Resource Management Act 1991
	Local Government Act 2002

Policy Objective

To enable the Council to respond in a more integrated manner to climate change to:

- Ensure the sustainability of Council assets and services for the present and future resilience and well-being of the Ashburton District; and
- Enhance the resilience and preparedness of present and future Ashburton District households and businesses; and
- Manage the carbon emissions of the Council to provide an example of effective climate change mitigation for the District, and offer support and encouragement to businesses and households in their mitigation efforts.

Definitions

Adaptation means:

- in human systems, the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.
- In natural systems, the process of adjustment to actual climate and its effects

Climate Change means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.

Council means Ashburton District Council.

Mitigation means a human intervention to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases.

Resilience means the capacity of social, economic and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation.

Policy Statement

1. Scope

1.1 This policy is intended to guide the actions and decisions of Ashburton District Council.

1.2 This policy does not apply to Ashburton District Council council-controlled organisations or private households and businesses except to the extent those organisations, households, and businesses are users of Council services and assets.

2. Current Position

Climate change and its impacts

2.1 Climate change has the definition contained in this Policy.

2.2 The likely impacts of climate change in New Zealand include higher temperatures, flooding, water shortages, and sea-level rise. These impacts will affect many parts of our economy, environment, and society including agriculture, business, and finance, transport, biodiversity, and public health. For example:

a. Agricultural productivity is expected to be impacted. There are risks of drought and spreading of pests and diseases. There are likely to be costs from changing land-use activities to suit a new climate. Climate change is likely to drive greater innovation in efficient water use as well as constraints on water usage in, and methane and carbon emissions from, agriculture. Combined with concerns about water quality and nutrient discharges to land and water from farms, the economic and social impact on the farming community, and in turn on the wider Ashburton District community, could be substantial.

b. Households may find it more difficult to access adequate insurance cover for flood risk. Growers may find it more expensive to insure against weather related damage (e.g. from hail).

c. Hotter summers may damage transport infrastructure (buckled railway lines and damaged roads), with associated disruption and repair costs.

d. Our District may face increased biodiversity risks under climate change, as warmer temperatures alter habitats that are critical to some species. Council recognises that the Ashburton District community values and cares for biodiversity and accepts the shared responsibility to work together to ensure it is sustained and enhanced, both now and into the future.

e. Higher levels of heat-related human mortality in summer and a possible reduction in winter related mortality and illnesses such as colds and flu are two human health impacts from climate change. Climate change will have impacts on other social determinants of health such as extreme weather events causing reduced mental health and wellbeing, housing, food security, and clean recreational and drinking water which pose significant risks to human health.

f. Increased temperatures may reduce the comfort of occupants in domestic, commercial and public buildings and lead to business disruptions.

g. The future likelihood of greater drought and smaller snowmelt will place greater importance on the use of water for the benefit of the surface water resources of the district, including its lakes, rivers, springs, and wetlands. These surface water resources support a range of ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity and enable agricultural, cultural and recreational activities. Finding the best future use of water resources for the long-term economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being of the Ashburton District will be a significant challenge for the whole community.

2.3 From an Ashburton perspective, the greatest of these risks appear to be those related to drought (as discussed in 2.2 a & g) and the increased severity and frequency of extreme weather events. Extreme weather events represent a threat to people and property, including both public and private infrastructure. Flooding and storm damage is a major risk given the proximity of many urban settlements to rivers and waterways. Sea-level rise is less significant for Council-owned public infrastructure, as the Council has no assets in the area up to 1.5 metres above mean high water springs. There will be other public infrastructure, such as electricity supply infrastructure, in affected areas. There is private infrastructure in this area that could be affected, particularly the hut sites at Rangitata, Hakatere, and Rakaia. Council will strive to protect all its communities through its asset management, civil defence emergency management, and district planning activities.

2.4 Reduction in emissions from landfill operations requires the capture of methane. Ashburton waste goes to Kate Valley Landfill where methane capture systems are already in place.

2.5 The impacts of climate change in Ashburton District, New Zealand (and globally) are expected to be more pronounced as time goes on. At the same time, those impacts are not expected to be distributed equally across communities. Some populations and communities (for example, communities situated near the coast or rivers, rural communities who are reliant on food production for income, those who may not be able to afford alternative housing should theirs be at risk) are more likely to experience the adverse effects of climate change disproportionately and require assistance to mitigate and adapt.

Council duties and responsibilities

2.6 Council has a range of statutory duties and responsibilities that can impact on, or are impacted by, climate change. These statutory and associated duties include land use planning, corporate planning, relationships with Māori, land transport, water supply, wastewater treatment, and disposal, stormwater treatment and disposal, waste management, civil defence emergency management, public health, building control, resource consenting and environmental monitoring. This list is not exhaustive. Few, if any, Council activities will be unaffected.

2.7 The 2018-28 Long-Term Plan records that Council responses to climate change will include:

a. Monitoring and planning for the provision of drinking water to address reduced water availability from groundwater and variable river flows
b. Investigating major rain events and their impact on wastewater and stormwater capacity and performance. Increased inflow from intense rainfall may result in overflows or other service failures.
c. Planning for the effects of increased demand, decreased river flows and lower groundwater availability on our water race network.
d. Planning for impacts on the road network, such as the effects of drought on the efficiency of roadside swale drainage, the impact of flooding on road assets, and increase drying of unsealed roads leading to surface material wind erosion.

e. Continuing to build relationships with tangata whenua and foster Maori contribution to decision-making. Mana whenua will be affected by the impact of climate change on Māori customary rights due to rising sea levels inundating customary lands, including mahinga kai and sacred sites (wahi tapu and urupā).
f. Continuously improving our Biodiversity Action Plan, Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan and District Plan to ensure that land use development, biodiversity enhancement and community resilience are appropriate for a changing climate including increased extreme weather events.

2.8 Future operational activities also offer scope for new climate change response. Reviewing the District Plan and Development Contributions Policy offers the opportunity to build environmental and economic resilience by enabling, promoting and supporting climate-appropriate economic development. So too does Council-led developments (such as the Ashburton Industrial Park, the Ashburton CBD Project, and the Library and Civic Centre) and planned investment in economic development. Council projects also enable modelling of sustainable development, such as water harvesting.

2.9 The range and potential scale of climate impacts on Council's statutory duties, roles and responsibilities (and the potential for Council to lessen the adverse effects) show that climate change response is essential local government work. Council's approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation will benefit from more consistency and alignment as this will be more effective and efficient than ad hoc approaches.

Response from Central Government

2.10 Government is developing and implementing a work programme for long-term management of climate change response in New Zealand. These initiatives include:

a) Legislation:
   i. A Zero Carbon Bill
   ii. Amendments to the Climate Change Response Act 2002
   iii. Two-stage reform of the resource management system. Stage Two will address climate change and is planned to commence in 2019.
b) Response to the recommendations of the Climate Change Adaptation Technical Working Group.
c) Consultation on a proposed *National Disaster Resilience Strategy.*

2.11 The unfolding of these initiatives over 2019 and beyond will provide more certainty about the roles and responsibilities of local authorities (and may increase them). They will also provide better information, support and (potentially) funding for local authorities as they manage local climate change response.

Response from Council

2.12 Council puts most of its climate change effort into adaptation, as will many territorial authorities. Government and local communities expect that local government will pay increasing attention to all aspects of climate change.

2.13 Council currently governs its climate change adaptation work through the corporate planning and reporting systems. These mechanisms provide for some consistency and integration and there is potential for continuous improvement.

2.14 Council proposes to establish a benchmark for its carbon emissions and strive to reduce these emissions.

3. Policy Goals

3.1 Council will strive to understand climate change and what it means for the Ashburton District now and in the future, and create opportunities to share that knowledge with the wider community.

3.2 Council will respond to climate change in ways that:

a. Ensure the sustainability of Council assets and services for the present and future well-being of the Ashburton District; and
b. Enhance the resilience and preparedness of Ashburton households and businesses in the present and for the future; and
c. Reduce carbon emissions from its own activities.

4. Principles

4.1 In making decisions that can impact on (or are impacted by) climate change, Council will consider the following principles, alongside other decision-making considerations:

a. **Kaitiakitanga/Stewardship** – Council shares in a collective duty of care to safeguard the natural environment. Policies and decisions on climate change need to be flexible and enabling to allow for local decisions and empower organisations and individuals to reduce emissions.
b. **Anticipatory Governance** – Council will think and act with the long-term in mind to provide clear and consistent plans towards a low emissions economy.
c. **Equity/Justice** – Council will consider the needs of the most vulnerable and those without a voice – including future generations – as it responds to climate change. This includes recognising and advocating for the needs of communities and individuals disproportionately affected by climate change.
d. **Informed decision-making** – Council will use the best available information to understand the potential impacts of climate change and available options for responding to those impacts – including their costs and benefits. Council will make this information available to engage in meaningful conversations with communities.
e. **Work as one** – Wherever practicable, Council will work co-operatively and collaboratively with partner organisations and communities in the District. Council will also strive to ensure greater alignment and integration of its activities relating to climate change.
f. **Resilience** – Some impacts of climate change are already inevitable. Council will work with communities and businesses to improve their understanding of climate change risks and what they can do to avoid and mitigate climate change risk so that they can continue to thrive.

5. Decision-making and resource allocation

5.1 Council will have appropriate regard for climate change adaptation and mitigation in its decision-making and resource allocation.

5.2 Council will continue to develop its people, processes and tools to ensure that decision-making and resource allocation that can impact on (or is impacted by) climate change is integrated, effective and efficient.