



Project Forever Waiheke wants your input

Part of Project Forever Waiheke's local working group are Denise Roche, Cath Handley, convenor Pam Oliver and Darleen Tana.

Photo Emma Haas

The community-led initiative Project Forever Waiheke has just launched their website www.foreverwaiheke.com and a sustainable tourism draft strategy, which is up for community input for these next two months.

On a mission to ensure that Waiheke's environments are protected now and in the future by developing a strategy for sustainable tourism, Project Forever Waiheke first came together in November 2017.

It was officially launched in February this year with a fundraiser and workshop, and has since been consulting with the local community through a survey and additional workshop to get views on tourism and development on the island.

Based on that process, the local working group has produced two documents; the Community Consultation Report and a draft Sustainable Community and Tourism Strategy, which for now is a one-page summary.

The consultation report brings to light what residents think about both tourism impacts and current development in general on the island, and in particular what their concerns are and thoughts and ideas on how to work towards sustainable community and tourism here.

"A key message in the report is that many Waihekeans are concerned with the very rapid increase in tourism and the fact that tourist volumes are not being managed," convenor Pam Oliver says.

What is interesting about the findings is that when residents are asked about the perceived impacts of tourism in general, they do believe there are some benefits for

local businesses. But when asked about the impacts of tourism on them personally, they see no benefits.

"Tourism has diluted the Waiheke culture, and ruined our roads and infrastructure," said one respondent, while another was more ambivalent.

"There are both benefits and disadvantages to tourism - it's about finding balance," they said.

"Ferry services can be overcrowded and not run on time, but on the other hand we now have a half-hourly schedule compared to two hourly in the past. I'd like to see more infrastructure that benefits visitors and locals (like public toilets, playgrounds, bus services, arts facilities) and less developments that cause damage to the environment (like double-decker buses)."

"Many people think that tourism is bringing new wealth to the island. The issues are how equitably that's being spread and the cost for the community and environment," Pam says.

The Community Consultation Report also asked about residents' views on recent developments and found that satisfaction was high when it came to emergency and health services and sense of community and community cohesiveness.

On the other hand, a majority was very dissatisfied with issues such as transport, housing, wastewater management and governance by Auckland Council.

Based on these findings, the group set out to make a Draft Waiheke Island Sustainable Community and Tourism

Strategy that includes 14 strategic action objectives and four core principles; *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship), *manaakitanga* (protection and care), *whanaungatanga* (connection) and *motuhaketanga* (local direction and decision-making).

"Waiheke Island is loved and protected - first, foremost and forever - for its unique and intrinsic environment, heritage, character and communities, by locals, the tourism industry and visitors alike," states the vision on the one-page summary.

Now, the local working group would like your input into the draft strategy. You can see the strategy, feedback form and more information on the project's website. Two community workshops to be held in September will also collect feedback.

If you would like to make a group response on behalf of an organisation or interest group, members of the working group are available to attend a meeting with your group for half an hour to answer questions. To arrange that, contact Pam Oliver on pam.oliver.waiheke@gmail.com.

Following community input through August and September, the draft will be developed into a comprehensive strategy, including tangible goals and actions. When it is finalised it will be presented to the local board.

Its purpose will be to provide a directional framework for the board in relation to tourism and community development, and to inform decision-making by the local board, council, local organisations and interest groups, and ordinary Waihekeans, Pam says. • Emma Haas