



# HOTEL AND EVENT CENTRE PRECINCT

## UX DESIGN RESEARCH FINDINGS

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HE AHA TE MEA NUI O TE AO?  
WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD?

HE TANGATA, HE TANGATA, HE TANGATA.  
IT IS THE PEOPLE, IT IS THE PEOPLE, IT IS THE PEOPLE.

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## Where it all Started.

Formed out of a desire to create quality infrastructures, that make a difference to the community, the team at Northland Development Corporation (NDC) identified a massive opportunity to develop a Hotel and Event Centre Precinct in the heart of Whangarei's Town Basin.

After completing an extensive feasibility report NDC highlighted a need for greater clarity around 'what it is' they are wanting to achieve from this project; so they are able to not only develop an effective business strategy, but ensure the project will meet the needs of the Whangarei community.

## The Approach.

NDC approached Northland Inc. for support in undergoing a user centered design process, to help them gain a deeper understanding of:

- the specific user groups within the Whangarei community; who would engage with the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct.
- the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct desired customer offerings and experiences,
- the required resources, capabilities and services needed to not only develop, but run the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct; and
- the types of outcomes and benefits the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct will help deliver for the people of Whangarei and the Northland region as a whole.

## Desired Outcomes.

NDC, alongside Northland Inc., identified that once they have developed a collective understanding of the specific user groups and desired customer offerings, they'll be able to define the business case needed to effectively develop the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct.

At the end of the design process we will have:

- clarity and direction around what NDC, and the Whangarei community as a whole, want to achieve with this project,
- validated customer insights around the desired services and experiences offered within the Hotel and Events Centre Precinct; and
- greater understanding of the capabilities, resources, processes and support required to successfully develop this legacy for the Whangarei community.

Overall, a human-centred design process is the perfect recipe for ensuring support and buy-in from all members of the Whangarei community. By providing the opportunity for wider stakeholder groups to engage and collaborate together, it allows everyone's 'voice' to be heard, and used, to shape the process; and at the same time increase community 'ownership' and excitement toward the future of the precinct...the future of *their place*.

\* There are two key phases within the design process. This report marks the conclusion of phase one - the Validation phase.

# OVERVIEW OF PHASE ONE.

## INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY

### **Interview Process.**

Over the last month we have carried out 28 in-depth interviews with members of the Whangarei community. These 60 minute sessions were carried out face-to-face, or over the phone, with each individual.

We interviewed people across a wide range of ages (between 27 - 73 years), genders, demographics and ethnicities, from members of the general public to key business and city leaders within local and regional council, local government, and local iwi tribes and hapu groups.

### **Interview Objectives.**

The purpose of these interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the community's needs, pains, and frustrations when it comes to the future aspirations of Whangarei city, and what they believe a Hotel and Event Centre Precinct could provide for the community and the Northland region as a whole. The interviews were broken down into 3 sections:

#### *Understanding the current perceptions of Whangarei City.*

- Exploring what people feel the ambitions and aspirations are for the city, and the Northland region as a whole.
- Understanding what people feel the key challenges and barriers are, the city needs to overcome in order to realise those aspirations.

#### *Exploring what a Hotel and Event Centre Precinct might provide the city of Whangarei, and its people.*

- Identifying what creates a 'heart' of a city, including the desired experiences and interactions.
- Exploring what makes a 'great' hotel and event centre experience.
- Identifying what specifically is needed to deliver an exceptional Hotel and Event Centre Precinct.
- Understanding what people feel are the key challenges and barriers to making a Hotel and Event Centre Precinct a success.

#### *Understanding the propensity of key business and city leaders to collaborate.*

- Exploring different areas in which local business, council, community groups feel they can engage in/support the development and running of the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct.
- Understanding the level of assurances needed from potential partnership opportunities.
- Understanding what people feel would turn them away from wanting to invest and/or engage in the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct.

The outputs from these interviews were coded, analysed and thematically clustered to identify common themes and insights shared across the community. This document summarises these key findings, insights and recommendations.

# KEY FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS.

If we were to summarise everything we've heard over the last month into a few bullet points, we'd say that the people of Whangarei feel:

## **The city and its people need to, and should, invest in a new Hotel and Event Centre Precinct.**

Participants highlighted there is a huge gap in the market for a quality Hotel and Event Centre in Whangarei, and believe it will have a positive impact on the growth and development of the city; and the Northland region as a whole. However;

The participants feel this work isn't just about a building, it's about the people - their aspirations and dreams, and how a city and its leaders can help realise these through dynamic and inspiring infrastructures.

*Because...*

## **The city centre is dying and needs a point of difference to help shape its identity and sense of place.**

Participants feel there is no real 'heart' or 'soul' within the city of Whangarei, due to the lack of gathering places that bring its people together and celebrates their stories. However participants identified that the Town Basin and waterfront area is making positive shifts towards developing more of a heart.

People feel the development of a Hotel and Event Centre Precinct, alongside the Hundertwasser Arts Centre and the Hihiaua Cultural Centre, will contribute to the movement around the Town Basin, in creating a sense of identity for the city and a gathering place in which people feel a deep sense of pride, connection, and belonging to; both individually and collectively.

## **The city and its people need a collective leadership, who is stronger and more progressive, so Whangarei can finally reach its potential.**

Participants are dying to see the city leaders come together to take real, committed action towards making Whangarei the capital city it's meant to be. The people involved in this process feel the current council and city leaders need to address the mindset and attitude around change, and look towards embracing the future and enabling projects, such as this, that will make this city a true destination.

*Because...*

## **The city needs an inspiring vision that captures and communicates the values, and aspirations of the whole community.**

Participants are hungry for a shared vision, that communicates to it's people, and the rest of the world, that Whangarei is progressive and 'ready' to be a capital city. A city which inspires more economic growth and is ready to mature from a provincial town to a metropolitan city.

# THE CURRENT PERSPECTIVE OF WHANGAREI CITY.

*"Potential, Potential, Potential".*

This is a key word used to describe the city of Whangarei. Participants highlighted that for years Whangarei city has been sitting on the outskirts of its true potential and that now, more than ever, it has finally been identified and we can start to realise our aspirations.

## WHANGAREI'S DESIRED ASPIRATIONS AND AMBITIONS.

What are they and what do we need in order to meet them?

### **Making Whangarei a Destination.**

All participants believe Whangarei feels like a 'drive by' city, as there aren't many events, activities, or attractions to draw people in. As a result many out of town visitors and tourists continue driving North to places such as Kerikeri and the Bay of Islands.

*"What the heck do we have to attract people here?"*

*"We need to become a destination...Whangarei gets by-passed every single time."*

The majority of participants identified that Whangarei needs to aspire towards becoming a destination by providing high quality attractions and events, that encourage people to come, stay, and spend money in the area.

*"I would love to have a list of things I could tell people to go do that I'm proud of."*

### **Leveraging our natural wonders and attractions.**

Most participants feel that tourism opportunities, aimed at showcasing our natural attractions, are not valued or sufficiently supported by the local council. Participants feel the Whangarei District Council doesn't proactively build relationships with Tourism New Zealand, or strive to understand what is needed within the Northland region to sufficiently market and deliver high quality experiences/services; that will attract people to the area.

*"We need to build infrastructure around our natural attractions...it will drive people here!"*

*"The district council has no relationship or drive to understand tourism NZ, they don't value it."*

*"We need seasonal activities bundled together that entices people to come and stay here."*

All participants highlighted that the natural attractions around Whangarei and the Northland region are on par, if not better, to other world class experiences. In particular participants identified that our coastlines, marine life, bush walks, and local harbour are key attractions we should be aspiring to leverage more of, moving forward.

The majority of participants believe there needs to be a greater focus on building relationships and networks within local, national and international tourism groups, to develop 'packages' that connects and promotes a variety of Northland's key attractions. This will not only support local businesses throughout the year, but will provide tourists with the opportunity to stay longer and truly see what the North has to offer - which leads to greater economic growth within the area.

### **Creating an identity we're proud of.**

The majority of participants feel that Whangarei doesn't have an identity or point of difference. As a result we don't provide anything specific to the area that attracts people to come here, or that injects pride and ownership into the local community.

Participants believe Whangarei needs to develop an identity that is unique to the area, and it's people, and to develop more infrastructures, services, and experiences that *communicates and celebrates* its point of difference.

*"We need a point of difference, something that is unique to our area...there is no point doing the same thing as Rotarua or Tauranga, we need our own identity."*

*"We need something that instills pride...not just for Whangarei, but for Northland...something that identifies us."*

### **Strengthening our cultural backbone.**

Most participants highlighted that Whangarei lacks connection with its cultural heritage, and that as a city it doesn't appear to understand the intrinsic value of our history / cultural identity.

Participants feel we need to become more culturally aligned, and leverage our rich history through sharing our stories within the community and educating visitors to the area.

*"We're very rich in our history up here, but we need a deeper engagement...it's not just about the pretty songs."*

*"We need education around our history...we need to tell our own stories, as this will bring connection to our people."*

### **Promoting our arts.**

The majority of participants feel the artistic 'side' of the community has been severely undervalued and under invested in by the local council, and in turn the wider community. For years the focus appears to be largely on promoting and supporting sports, and primary industries such as farming and forestry. As a result, participants believe this has created a poorly educated community with limited world views.

*"Our sports are covered, it's time to focus on our arts and culture... it's what builds a mature and educated city."*

*"For too long Whangarei has been meeting a larger volume of masculine needs...it's time we became more diverse and embraced a more feminine energy [arts and culture]."*

*"Whangarei District Council don't understand or value the arts...they are starving the community of art and what it brings to a community."*

Alongside our rich cultural history, most participants highlighted that there needs to be a stronger emphasis on the 'arts' within Whangarei and the Northland region. Participants believe this would provide opportunities to generate national and international attention, as well as support the development of a more educated and culturally 'rich' community.

### **Promoting our Strength in Business.**

Most of the participants feel Whangarei has a strong business community, that inspires and leads the wider community. Within this, participants also highlighted that Whangarei provides a greater opportunity for business professionals outside of the area to develop their careers here as well as have a 'healthy', balanced lifestyle.

However participants feel that Whangarei, as a whole, doesn't do a cohesive job of selling this story - that we aren't backward when it comes to professional growth and development, and we can provide professionals the opportunity to work and live the 'dream' life here.

Participants feel local business leaders, alongside council leaders, need to collaborate and align around how Whangarei should be marketing the ability to live and work here, and develop a better platform/forum for sharing these ideas locally and non-locally.

*"We need to do a better job of promoting ourselves...we need leadership groups to focus on having a cohesive plan around how we are going to market and promote our ability to live and work here."*

*"We have a strong business backbone up here...the more vibrant this is the more benefits will flow over into our community."*

### **Making Whangarei Accessible.**

Some of the participants feel that Whangarei loses growth opportunities, in particular around attracting highly skilled professionals to live and work in the area, due to poor infrastructure and services for transport. This in turn makes the area appear inaccessible or disconnected to other growth regions. In particular participants highlighted that our airline reliability causes distrust amongst conference and event organisers, therefore they will opt for venues and locations in which they can guarantee their attendees can arrive and leave on time.

Participants feel Whangarei should be aspiring towards making our transport options safe and reliable, to ensure visitors and locals feel connected to national and international opportunities, and that by living here they can easily work, live, and develop their careers successfully.

*"We need to make ourselves more connected logistically so that people don't forget about us...we don't want to become the forgotten North"*

*"We have a pretty backwater flight issue here."*

## Promoting our Success Stories.

Some participants feel Whangarei perpetuates the stigma that it's 'backward', 'unsafe', and 'non-progressive' by promoting the wrong stories to New Zealand public. Participants highlighted that the old marketing motto that 'scandal sells' is not doing Whangarei any favours.

*"We don't promote the right stories ...we tend to focus on the bad stuff all the time, which only stokes negative stigmas about the area."*

*"We don't think about the messages we are communicating to ourselves and others...what does this say about the type of people we are, or the type of people we want to attract?"*

*"Let's change our perception, let's promote our positive stories... somehow we're always in the media for negative things, why can't we get ourselves on the map for the good stuff."*

Most participants believe local news agencies and media channels need to promote the city's strengths, attractions, and successes, rather than its issues. Participants feel that by celebrating the areas strengths and successes, it will not only communicate to the rest of the nation that we are moving forward and maturing as a city, but it also instills pride in the local community.

## Building off the success of Hundertwasser.

The Majority of participants feel the Hundertwasser Arts Centre was a catalyst for change within the community, highlighting that the community can 'think big' and be seen as a progressive city. Participants feel this was a key tipping point in realising the city's aspirations, and will provide more growth opportunities moving forward - particularly in tourism, hospitality, retail and accommodation.

*"The Hundertwasser project started a movement, we now have a greater reason to attract and accommodate more people to stay who might not have originally thought of us as a destination."*

*"Hundertwasser is a catalyst for change...it will be an anchor project to support other services and infrastructures, and it will drive more business here."*

## Beautifying our City.

All participants feel Whangarei central is 'disgusting' and conveys a negative message to local and non-local visitors about who we are and what we stand for. Key areas participants highlighted were:

- The CBD (Cameron and Bank street).
- The entrance to Whangarei, off the main highway.
- General buildings and gardens in the surrounding CBD streets.

Participants feel council needs to address the 'look and feel' of the city by beautifying local streets and shops. Participants feel this will not only convey a more positive message to visitors about our sense of place, but it will instill pride and ownership in the local community.

*"The town looks like we don't give a shit."*

*"If the council got behind this and did things up a bit, it would lift*



## FUN FACT:

The nature of your news agencies and media channels distorts peoples views of that area. The consequence of continually promoting negative 'news', is in turn negative - Studies show that consumers of negative news stories develop a misperception of risk, increased anxiety and depression, learned helplessness, and contempt and hostility towards others (just to name a few), which in turn results in a lack of engagement or pride taken in supporting and giving back to their communities.

### **Providing quality accommodation.**

All participants identified that there isn't any high quality accommodation facilities in Whangarei to attract and/or host high quality events. As a result many local businesses are having to forfeit national and international growth opportunities.

*"Corporate businesses, or clients, that come here have a shit time because there is nowhere nice for them to stay."*

*"We have a new hospital being built over the next three years - it will require more people to stay. I really don't know how we are going to accommodate everybody. We are already struggling to get the labour required to build it because there's nowhere for them to stay."*

Some participants highlighted that they are embarrassed to host out of town clients, or teams within their organisations, as the quality of the hotels in Whangarei aren't good enough. Participants will reach out to friends within the community who have 'presentable' homes, or find suitable homes on BookaBach and AirBnB. Participants feel the accommodation in Whangarei is geared too heavily towards 'sports teams', therefore not catered towards business/corporate clientele.

*"I refuse to put my clients in the local motels or hotels. They portray an image that we are a hick-town...they are designed for sports teams, not high-quality guests. "*

### **Providing facilities to host large, high-quality events.**

All participants identified that Whangarei's current facilities aren't large enough, or of a high enough standard, to host large scale events. As a result:

- local, national, and international businesses/groups forfeit the opportunity to facilitate events and conferences in Whangarei,
- local groups have to incur additional expenses and longer 'show' periods to meet a return on investment, due to capacity restrictions, and
- local community members miss the opportunity, or have to head out of town, to experience shows, concerts, conferences, awards etc...

All of which means Whangarei loses economic growth, and promotional opportunities.

*"We miss a huge part of the market because we don't have a decent conference centre...New Zealand businesses get bored of the same old, same old - it's a wonderful opportunity for us to promote ourselves."*

*"The Russian Ballet attempted came here once and they were elbowing each other on the stage...it was embarrassing."*

*"An events and conference centre is a key thing we lack - we don't have the capacity to host large crowds."*

All participants feel there is a huge need and demand for a high-quality conference and event centre to host local and non-local events. Participants believe this will inject greater economic growth, attract national and international attention, and provide greater job opportunities for the region.

# QUOTES SPECIFICALLY AROUND THE NEED FOR A QUALITY HOTEL AND EVENT CENTRE.

"A conference centre and joint hotel is the greatest need...it's too piece-meal here, we have to spread our guests out - a few here, a few there...it would be great if we could keep everyone all together. "

"A hotel and conference centre should've been done a long time ago...between this and the Hundertwasser building, it will rejuvenate the city."

"Our current theatre shows, events, and conferences are mediocre because our facilities are mediocre...we need something to lift the standard."

"There isn't a lot of scope for hosting a wide variety of events...we only have Toll - which is geared towards sports, and Forum North - which is just too small."

"A quality hotel centre would provide the city with an anchor, a focal point in which everything is interconnected."

"We had to turn down hosting our international team because we had nowhere to accommodate them...they went to Hawaii instead."



## THIS YEAR ALONE WE HAVE FORFEITED:

- Hosting Ricoh's international team conference.
- Hosting the 'National' party Convention (estimated \$1,000,000 loss).
- Hosting the National local and regional Councils conference.
- Hosting the North Island Ray White team awards.
- Facilitating the full-scale regional Business Excellence Awards.

*\* Because we don't have the required facilities.*

## WHANGAREI'S BIGGEST BARRIERS.

What's stopping Whangarei from reaching its potential and meeting the community's aspirations? What needs to happen to overcome these?

### **Timid Leadership.**

The majority of participants feel the local council tends to 'back down' when projects or opportunities seem too difficult - finding excuses rather than solutions to progress, which results in the loss of future growth opportunities within the region.

Participants feel the local council needs to show greater leadership within the community, and be prepared to fight for what's best for the people and the growth of the city - instead of being swayed by the opinions of the vocal minority.

*"We need a stronger council who wants to invest in growing Whangarei."*

*"Our council needs the balls to say 'this is where we need to take this city' and stand by it."*

### **Cumbersome, Drawn-out Processes.**

All participants feel local council is too slow to act due to regulations and processes, which make it difficult for projects to progress.

Some participants highlighted that it feels as if council, including council bodies/funded organisations, aren't facilitative or enthusiastic towards helping push projects forward.

Participants feel the local council, and in turn council bodies/ organisations, need to become the 'enablers' in helping streamline processes and reducing 'red tape', so that groups are able to get projects over the line more easily.

*"I found [council organisation] to be unsupportive in enabling or facilitating the next steps. They didn't provide anything...they weren't welcoming or enthusiastic, and people sense that."*

*"The local council doesn't have a great history with helping get projects over the line, especially since the Hundertwasser project, they have a reputation for being difficult to work with."*

*"Politically Whangarei doesn't have a great reputation...we have a history of making U-turns - yes we support it, no we don't, yes we do...the process is unpredictable."*

### **Conservative thinking.**

All participants feel the local council inhibits the growth of the city because of a non-progressive mind-set and attitude towards change. Participants feel the council tends to 'play safe' and focus on solving 'today's issues, rather than planning for the future. As a result there appears to be no real 'vision', or an aspiring 10 year plan for the city.

*"There appears to be a few toxic people in council who hold us back...they aren't progressive thinkers."*

*"The council here is small minded - they are fearful of change and it hinders progress."*

*"Have you seen the 10 year plan? It's not progressive or inspiring at all!"*

*"The obvious problem is that there is no forward thinking or planning, [by our council] of what needs to happen for us to grow."*

Therefore, the participants feel council, alongside the wider community, needs to develop a more inspiring vision for the future of Whangarei. Participants feel this vision needs to show that we are worthy of being the 'capital' of the Northland region - a capital city which inspires more economic growth, employment opportunities, skillset development, and tourism attractions.

### ***BUT...What is causing Whangarei's future vision to feel so un-inspiring?***

#### **Too focused on rates.**

Most participants feel there is too much focus put on keeping rates low, and appeasing the minority, rather than what is needed to support the future of the city. Participants highlighted that the most celebrated story (besides the Hundertwasser Arts Centre) is that Whangarei hasn't had a rate increase in 20 years. This is further compounded by....

#### **Self-serving leaders who are driven by elections.**

All participants feel the local council's vision and aspirations for the city is governed by the elections, in that council plays safe with future projects and planning to ensure they are re-elected by the vocal minority. As a result, participants feel Whangarei's growth potential suffers for individual gains. This is further compounded by...

#### **Fragmented community voice.**

The majority of participants highlighted that Whangarei has pockets of 'strong' community groups throughout the area, yet lacks a collective voice (and in turn identity). As a result participants feel this fragments the wider community and creates a sense of disconnect around Whangarei's future vision/s and aspirations.

Some participants feel a lot of time, energy, and money is wasted on different groups all going after the same 'money-pot' to get their individual projects off the ground, as opposed to identifying the common cause / benefit to the wider community and working together to achieve it.

*Key community groups identified were:*

- local and regional council,
- local businesses,
- local Iwi and Hapu tribes,
- arts and cultural groups,
- sports groups,
- general population.

*"We need a council who is willing to not focus on the pay check, but rather on the future vision of this city."*

*"We need council to stand up and say we're not going to focus on fixing potholes...that we have a plan to make this city move forward...a plan to start acting like a capital."*

*"Wouldn't it be great if council was prepared to put their necks out on the line, and stand up for what would move this town forward... sadly they are too worried about pleasing the voices that don't want change, the voices that would prefer us to stay hidden."*

*"We need strong leadership from council to push past the voters who are concerned about their pavements."*

***SO...What is needed to help overcome these barriers and eliminate the negative perceptions around Whangarei's future vision, and its leaders?***

Besides stronger leadership, participants feel that council needs to get alongside the visionaries within the local community and develop:

- a shared understanding of what Whangarei as a city values,
- a shared understanding of what is needed / missing to ensure the city can live up to its values and reach its aspirations,
- a shared vision for Whangarei moving forward that captures the regions values and point of difference,
- a clear action plan for how Whangarei will achieve its vision/s,
- a clear understanding of how the wider community will benefit from achieving Whangarei's vision/s, and
- a single voice to communicate Whangarei's vision/s, plans, and benefits, and to stand up to adversity and vocal minorities.

*"We need greater collaboration between groups such as Northland Inc., local businesses, and council...they need to come together and look at where we need to take this city. Where is this city heading, and how do we get there? "*

*"One voice, one vision. We need leaders to get together for the same goals, free of ego, so we can come up with mutual solutions that will benefit this city and its people."*

# QUOTES SPECIFICALLY AROUND WHANGAREI'S LEADERSHIP AND VISION.

"The city lacks collective vision...what do we, as a region, want this place to feel like? I feel this is why we lack pride in our city."

"Whangarei is meant to be the major city of the North...it has slipped behind. Rotarua, Hamilton, Palmerston North, and Tauranga have grown exponentially...why aren't we moving forward too?"

"Whangarei is quite disconnected...our community leaders are not on the same page - the lack of collective vision holds us back."

"The Hundertwasser Arts Centre was a good demonstration of people not seeing the bigger picture and getting on the same page...we nearly lost a huge growth opportunity for the region because of this."

"Our voice is not one. Each group only thinks of themselves, they are all scrambling for the same money-pot, when they could be coming together to fight for a common cause."

"The 10 year plan was un-inspiring - nice language with no guts."

"Our current council lacks connection, intelligence, and foresight. Their only concern is getting re-elected."

"We're about creating environments for our future generations, yet our democracy doesn't reflect our community...it's a very old system, with non-progressive thinkers."

## THE IMPACT.

What is the impact on Whangarei if the community's aspirations aren't met?

### **A Dying City Centre.**

The majority of participants highlighted that not having a progressive vision for the city, or the leadership needed to achieve it, has led to a dying city centre. The lack of focus and attention towards developing a thriving hub or city centre that draws people in, makes participants feel as if the city has no real heart or soul.

Participants feel the current CBD is 'disgusting' and doesn't provide a good enough reason to want to go and spend time or money there, yet alone attract out of town visitors or tourists. Most believe this is due to the lack of activity, retail and inner city living within the CBD area.

*Note:* All participants mentioned that the Town Basin, and the Loop are making a positive shift towards creating a 'heart and soul' within the Whangarei community, as the waterfront is a gathering point for a variety of activities and encourages more diversity and interaction among its people.

### **Local Businesses Struggle.**

Most participants identified that they, or their employers, are struggling to grow their business because:

- the can't attract the highly skilled professionals needed, to deliver exceptional services,
- they don't have the facilities to host or accommodate the events and conferences needed to further progress their business and/or staff, and
- they can't run a viable and financially sustainable business all year round.

*This is due to the fact:*

- Whangarei isn't seen to promote itself as a progressive city, that is chasing opportunities for future growth and development. Therefore highly skilled professionals don't see Whangarei as a place for them.
- The current infrastructure for accommodation and events are not large enough, or of a high enough standard to meet business needs and expectations.
- There isn't enough 'going on' all year round, to bring the required number of visitors or financial investment to the area.

### **The Youth Leave.**

The majority of participants feel there is a huge concern around the number of youth, and in turn talent, who are disengaged or leaving Whangarei for other regions. Participants feel this is due to fact there is nothing compelling for them to stay and contribute to the future growth and development of the city.

WILL A HOTEL AND EVENT CENTRE PRECINCT HELP WHANGAREI  
REACH ITS ASPIRATIONS.....

THE PARTICIPANTS THINK.....ABSOLUTELY!

## THE NEED.

All 28 participants believe that a Hotel and Event Centre Precinct is something Whangarei should invest in and believe it would have a positive impact on the growth and development of the city.

**So, if we were to invest in a hotel and event centre precinct what is needed to provide a world-class experience?**

## THE DESIGN - LOOK AND FEEL.

### **Reflective of who we are.**

All of the participants believe the overall design and aesthetics of the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct (HEP) should reflect the local community, and in turn the wider Northland region. Participants highlighted that a successful design should consider integrating our cultural history and stories, and provide guests with a 'genuinely Northland experience.'

### **Sustainable and Eco-friendly.**

The majority of participants believe the HEP should be sustainable and take into consideration the natural ecology around it, so that it is environmentally, socially, and economically viable and beneficial to the area.

### **Integrates with nature.**

All participants believe the design and aesthetics of the HEP should include elements of nature, in particular water, and should connect to the regions natural landscapes. Participants also highlighted that there should be a seamless integration of internal and external spaces.

### **Integrates with public spaces.**

Most of the participants believe the HEP should have spaces for the general public to simply 'enjoy', and that people should be able to easily move through, and around it. For example:

- Outdoor seating areas for people to eat there lunch or to people watch.
- Walkways through and around the entire complex.
- Areas where local artists / bands can play.
- Grass areas for children to run around in, or for families to picnic.
- Connections into the 'loop' and Town Basin area.

Participants feel the integration of public spaces in the HEP will provide people with a place to gather and connect, which they feel is integral to creating a 'heart of a city'.

### **Integrates local art.**

The majority of participants believe the design needs to include local art and sculpture throughout, to represent the strong artistic and cultural 'flare' within the region. Participants feel this will not only provide a consistent thread, that connects the HEP to other key attractions such as the Hihia Cultural Centre, and the Hundertwasser Arts Centre, but it will help lift the artistic and cultural profile of the area.

Participants feel that with careful, considered, and community-first planning, the HEP can be a beautifully designed building, that will create a point of difference for the area. This in turn helps support, alongside other key projects, the creation of a vibrant, dynamic, and engaging city.

## THE FACILITIES.

### **4 / 5 Star Hotel and Apartment Living.**

All participants believe the hotel needs to be an international graded 4-5 star service, which includes:

- gym and pool facilities,
- day spa facilities/services,
- 24hr in-house catering facilities/services.

Participants also believe the hotel needs to offer short term and long term accommodation, or apartments for inner city living, as this will bring more activity and people to the area on a consistent basis. Participants highlighted that people are what creates 'buzz' and a sense of atmosphere.

### **Conference centre.**

All participants believe the HEP needs a conference centre that can host between 100 - 1,000 people. Participants highlighted that this space needs to be multi-purposeful to cater for a wide variety of events, seminars, and conferences, as well as having access to in-house catering.

### **Multi-purpose / Flexible spaces.**

The majority of participants feel the HEP needs to provide multi-purpose spaces which can be manipulated to suit different sized events and needs e.g. big seminars, small workshops, rehearsal spaces, meeting spaces, intimate shows.

*Note:* The conference centre could act as a multi-purpose space for conferences, concerts, theatre productions, small workshops and exhibitions.

### **Theatre space.**

Some participants feel the HEP needs a full theatre space to host larger local and non-local shows. Participants highlighted that a theatre space would require wings, a backstage area, dressing rooms, and movable tiered seating.

*Note:* A few participants highlighted that it would be great to have a fly-tower for international sets, however understand this is a huge financial investment.

### **Variety of Eateries.**

All participants believe the HEP should provide a variety of different styled eateries including bars, restaurants, and cafes. Participants highlighted the having *choice* is the main key factor.

*Note:* The majority of participants highlighted that currently Whangarei's night life, and choice of quality bars and restaurants are low, and that there isn't much choice for eateries after 5pm.

### **Breakout / Meeting spaces.**

A few participants believe the HEP needs some break-out spaces which can facilitate individual 'down time' or a small meeting.

### **Boutique Retail.**

A few participants feel the HEP needs to provide boutique retail in the precinct area, that is attractive to non-local visitors. Participants felt these stores would be more geared towards 'tourism' trinkets connected to our arts and culture and natural attractions.

For example:

- Maori art, sculpture, carvings, and jewelry.
- Beachwear and accessories.

## THE SERVICES AND DESIRED EXPERIENCES.

### Activity Packages.

All participants believe the HEP needs to offer activity packages which showcase the region's attractions and services. Participants highlighted that this would provide a fabulous opportunity for collaboration with local and non-local tourist groups and businesses, and ensure local businesses are supported all year round.

*Key activities participants highlighted were:*

- Tutukaka Dive, fishing, and boating trips to the Poor Knights etc.
- Waka trips to Limestone Island.
- Tours to the Hen and Chicks.
- Walks around Parahaka and other culturally rich locations.
- Marae trips / stays.
- Educational workshops and entertainment at the Hihia Arts Centre.
- Tours to the Hundertwasser Art Centre and Kawakawa toilets.
- Harbour day cruises.

*Note:* Participants see the HEP becoming an ideal location for booking / organising these packages, and the main place in which customers depart from and return to.

### Conferences, Seminars, Concerts, and Shows.

All participants believe the HEP needs to become 'the place' to go for high-quality national and international conferences, concerts, and shows.

*Key events participants highlighted were:*

- Business events, awards, and seminars.
- Music concerts - including musicals and bands.
- The Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra (average band size is 75 piece)
- The Royal New Zealand Ballet.
- Comedy Shows / Festivals.
- Film Festivals.
- Art and sculpture exhibitions.
- Theatre productions.

*Note:* All participants highlighted the benefit of the hotel and conference centre going 'hand-in-hand', as the out of town event organisers, staff, and performers will require accommodation during the show period, as well as the event attendees.

### Smart Technology.

All participants believe that the HEP has to provide in house access to 'smart' technology, and that it has to be up-to-date in order to deliver high-quality experiences. In particular for the conference centre, as this is a major draw card for event organisers. Participants highlighted that the additional cost and time spent in resourcing required lighting and audio for events, can deter people from hiring a space.

*Key technology required by participants were:*

- In-house lighting, audio, and visual.
- Free access to unlimited wifi.

### **Professional and industry-experienced team.**

The majority of participants highlighted the need for highly skilled and professional staff who have experience and knowledge in the hotel and event industry. Participants believe this needs to be a key focus when developing and running the HEP, as it is vital in ensuring the facilities are booked all year round, and that the services delivered are of a high standard.

Key staff highlighted by participants were:

#### *Events / Conference Centre Team:*

This team needs to consist of those whose sole focus is to attract, book, and run events. Staff include:

- *An artistic director* - who sets the tone of the centre, and proactively reaches out to national and international tourism and entertainment sectors to build strong relationships and networks.
- *Booking and planning* - who proactively bring events to the area and ensure the centre's schedule is fully booked all year round.
- *Management / HR* - who oversees staff and the running of the events. This includes ensuring staff have a sustainable rosters, particularly around set up and breakdown of events, to avoid 'burn out'.
- *Technical / production staff* - who assist groups with the technical set up and logistics of events.
- *Floor staff* - who assist groups with the set up and break down of events, catering, and front of house services.

#### *Tourism and Hospitality Groups:*

These teams need to consist of skilled staff, who are knowledgeable in the service industry and who:

- are friendly, welcoming, and approachable,
- are presentable and take pride in their work, and
- are mostly from the area, who can tell 'our stories'.

### **Access to the Town Basin & CBD.**

The majority of participants believe the HEP needs to be accessible to the Town Basin and CBD, to ensure it isn't causing further fragmentation of the city centre. Participants highlighted the need for:

- Safe, nicely-lit walkways.
- Access to buses and/or trams directly from the HEP to different locations around the city centre.
- Access to taxis.

# THE IMPACT.

What is the biggest impact a hotel and event centre precinct could have on the Whangarei community, and the Northland region as a whole?

*Participants feel that a hotel and event centre precinct will:*

## **Support and Grow Local Business.**

All participants believe a high-quality HEP would provide positive 'spin-offs' for local and regional businesses. Participants feel local businesses would not only increase their revenue, but be able to grow and develop their businesses to meet future demands / aspirations.

## **Provide Greater Employment Opportunities.**

The majority of participants believe the HEP would provide locals with greater career opportunities, and the ability to leverage a wider skill-set within the Northland region. Participants believe the following career opportunities would 'bloom' as a direct result of the HEP:

- Hospitality
- Tourism
- Retail
- Event Management
- Art and Culture
- Technology - audio, visual, lighting, media.
- Business Development.

## **Promote Economic Growth.**

All participants believe the HEP will increase economic growth in the Whangarei and Northland region, due to the increase in opportunities for visitors to stay and engage in more activities / attractions - in turn bringing increased revenue to local and regional businesses.

## **Up-skill Local Professionals.**

The majority of participants feel the HEP will enable people to up-skill and undergo professional development in the area, due to more opportunities to attend and/or facilitate industry seminars, conferences, events.

## **Provide Opportunities for Collaboration.**

Most of the participants believe that the HEP will provide a greater opportunity for local and non-local businesses, council, and community members to collaborate and support each other. As a result participants feel this will aid in developing a shared vision and aspiration for the city.

## **Develop a Culturally Rich and Educated City.**

The majority of participants feel the HEP, alongside other inspiring projects such as the Hundertwasser Arts Centre and the Hihiaua Art Centre, will help develop a more culturally rich and educated population - as it will provide opportunities for the local community to engage and value the arts, and local history.

## **Develop a Sense of Identity and Pride.**

All participants believe the HEP, alongside the Hundertwasser Arts Centre and the Hihiaua Cultural Centre, will help create a sense of identity for the community of Whangarei. Participants feel these projects will provide the city with a point of difference, that welcomes and unites local and non-local people as one, which in turn injects greater pride and ownership of 'our place'.

## **Attract out of Town Interest.**

All participants believe the HEP will aid in future growth and expansion of Whangarei, as it facilitates the opportunity for out of town people to consider it as a viable option to live and work - they can 'have it all' here, an ideal lifestyle as well as a progressing career.

**Retain the Youth.**

The majority of participants believe the HEP will play a role in retaining the youth of Whangarei, as it will provide them compelling opportunities to engage and grow alongside with, as well as the opportunities to develop and leverage their skills and talents.

**Communicate we are a Mature City.**

All participants feel the HEP, alongside other key projects in the area, will communicate to the rest of the world that we are 'coming of age', and that the community, and its leaders, see Whangarei as a progressive, capital city of New Zealand.

**Make Whangarei a Destination.**

All participants believe that a high-quality infrastructure, which offers high-quality services and attractions, will be a key player in making Whangarei a destination for national and international visitors.

*"We deserve this, and we are ready for this."*

*"The time was ripe 18 months ago, we need to do this."*

*"There is a huge need for this in Whangarei, we lose so many opportunities...let's show the rest of the world why we love it here."*

# THE RISKS.

What are the perceived barriers or risks involved in developing a Hotel and Event Centre Precinct in Whangarei, and what is needed to overcome them?

## VIABILITY.

### A Financially Sustainable Event Centre.

The majority of participants feel the biggest risk would be in ensuring the event centre is financially stable all year round, and able to 'wash its own face'.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- Hire an in-house events team, dedicated to scheduling and booking events all year round, and that the programme is drawn up in advance each year to help forecast the annual revenue and expenses required.
- Ensure the centre is filled daily with local and non-local groups, and has the systems and processes set up for seamless hire and transition of spaces.
- Partner/collaborate with NZ tourism bodies and businesses to create sustainable attraction and activity packages that can coincide with different events e.g. two day business seminars with bundled daily activities.
- Consider offering group discounts for the use of rehearsal and performance spaces, as currently local art and culture groups are struggling to find adequate rental spaces. This could be set up as a yearly rental agreement/contract.
- Consider providing yearly concession discounts to locals for show season. For example Auckland Theatre Company offers a yearly subscription of 7 shows for \$220 - paid upfront.

*"Keeping it alive is going to be your biggest problem. You need to keep it full of life with daily activity."*

*"Don't put any barriers around community groups using it...make it feasible for them, they will be the ones keeping it full."*

*"Advanced scheduling and booking is going to be key for survival, and ensuring it's booked out and in use all year round - know your target market's annual spend on shows; what are they going to spend on a weekly, monthly, yearly basis?"*

### Thinking too small.

Most of the participants highlighted the risk of the developers thinking too small and building the HEP for today instead of the future - in turn making the facilities and provided services redundant in 10 years time.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- don't let naysayers and vocal minorities sway the decisions, aim high - build for our future generations.
- take into consideration the environmental threats/changes to the area, within the next 10-100years; such as rising sea levels and unstable ground foundations. Know exactly how you are you going to mitigate these so that the infrastructure can stand the test of time.

*"We need to build it for tomorrow, not today...it must be aspirational and future-proofed for our younger generations."*

*"Thinking too small will turn around and bite you in the butt...you need to think about the region's growth potential."*

## Finding the right funding model.

All participants feel unsure around how the HEP should be funded, and believe this may become a barrier to success.

All participants don't believe it should be crowd/community funded, as the local community is feeling 'exhausted' from rallying previous projects.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- The hotel operators and developers privately fund the hotel aspect of the HEP, and the local and regional council provide additional funding support for the event centre - as this will inject economic growth and professional development opportunities into the area.
- Consider a three-way funding model with the developers, council, and local businesses.

*"I have no confidence in council being able to organise themselves to help fund this...the big risk here is around clarity of funding - is it council and ratepayers money? If it's funded by council does this mean they own it, therefore everything is on their terms?"*

*"Our council relies too heavily on the community to do all the heavy lifting...I can't see local community raising the funds for this - they are exhausted, council has exhausted the local community's energy, everyone is tired."*

*"Council hands their role too often to the community...people are exhausted, you can't expect them to constantly do council's work."*

## Community Ownership.

Most of the participants believe there could be risks around ownership of the HEP, especially if the local community doesn't feel they are welcomed or represented in the design and running of the facilities. As a result this may impact the numbers required to fill it, or in ensuring there are enough people using the spaces to create 'atmosphere'.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- Ensure the design (look and feel) of the building represents the local community, in the sense that it connects to the history and cultural backbone of the region. *Please refer to page 21 for more detail on this.*
- Ensure the local community is engaged in the design of the building and supporting services/attractions, to ensure their stories are told.
- Ensure the local community feels welcomed within the HEP and that the facilities cater to their needs as well as tourists and non-local visitors.

*"Carefully consider the tone of the building - you want to make people feel comfortable or else they won't use it... it's about quiet quality not intimidating quality."*

*"A risk is that locals don't feel welcomed there... that it's designed for, and over-run with, tourists."*

*"Please don't make a tall, conventional, non-Northland building no one feels connected to."*

*"Make sure it celebrates our culture in the design...this will make the locals feel comfortable, this will get them owning the space."*

## Further Fragmentation of the CBD.

The majority of participants believe the water front is the key location for the HEP as it is connected to the harbour and builds on the buzz that is already developing around the Town Basin area. However, some participants highlighted this may cause further fragmentation of the CBD, as it will draw more people away from the city centre.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- Ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place to make the CBD and Town Basin area accessible to and from the HEP. For example: paved walkways, and walk-over bridges.
- Consider providing access to simple transport options such as buses, ferries, taxis, shuttles, trams.

*“The only concern I have is around disconnection...how do we connect people to the Town Basin and CBD?”*

*“Our CBD area is a ghost town...will this cause further fragmentation of our centre?...I trust developers know how to bring everything together.”*

*“You need to consider the infrastructure needed to support this, such as liquor licensing, walkways, transport options.”*

## WILL TO PROCEED.

### Slow, cumbersome processes within council.

The majority of participants believe a huge barrier to getting the HEP over the line will be the will of council, and getting through the ‘red tape’ and regulations.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- Ask council to ‘step up’ and act as *enablers* in streamlining the process by removing unnecessary barriers and getting alongside the vision.
- Ask a council body, such as ‘Northland Inc.’, to help the developers pull it all together by bringing in relevant resources and networks to the table, finding ways to by-pass unnecessary processes and regulations, and overcoming potential ‘set backs’ and barriers.

*“We need a leader such as Northland Inc. to pull it together, to pull the people together, and make the process easy for developers.”*

*“Council leadership is weak - no one will step up to the table and support this.”*

*“Council needs the guts to lead and push this vision along and to remove unnecessary processes to help speed it up!”*

*“Council needs to back this - put in place a cohesive plan that instills confidence in the developers.”*

## **Non-progressive Mindset and Attitude.**

All participants highlighted that a barrier to success will be the mindset and attitude of the vocal minority, and in turn council, who are 'scared of change'. Participants believe naysayers will see the HEP as a negative influence on the township, as it will 'upset the quality of life' in Whangarei - no longer making it New Zealand's 'best kept secret'.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- Create a compelling vision of the HEP and Whangarei, that brings the local community along the journey.
- Clearly communicate how the HEP will support Whangarei in reaching its aspirations, and how specifically it will benefit the individual members of the local community - in particular its youth/future generations.
- Ensure the local community is engaged throughout the entire process from conception through to reality.
- Ensure all communication is transparent and encouraging - market/promote the journey across the local media channels.

*"The one thing that will hold it back will be the poo, poo people who worry about tax payers money."*

*"A huge risk is the community - the ones who fear change, the people who are worried their quality of life will be damaged."*

*"Mindset of council...roads are more important to them, they won't see why we need this."*

*"Win the public over - show them the benefits, sell them an exciting vision."*

## **Fragmented Leadership.**

Some participants believe developers may come up against a barrier in getting key 'players'/ leaders within the Whangarei community on the same page and supporting the project. Participants feel this may cause the project to 'fall' over.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- Create a collaborative relationship between regional and district council, local business groups, and local Iwi and Hapu tribes.
- Create a shared vision for the project and how it will contribute to the Whangarei community and the Northland region as a whole.
- Create one voice moving forward, that can communicate the needs, wants, and hows of the project. A voice which will stand up against nay-sayers within the community.
- Connect the HEP in with other key projects in the 'mix' such as the new hospital build, the Hundertwasser Art Centre, and the Hihiaua Cultural Centre, to ensure greater momentum and support.

*"It's a vicious cycle between government, council, community - if one doesn't come to the table it all falls over."*

*"There is a risk in getting all the key players on the table, you need commitment, to get them all on the same page as ONE."*

*"Council must be willing to partner with business leaders - get on the same page with the city's vision."*

*"Ensure this project is developed in tandium with other projects...it creates greater momentum rather than being in isolation."*

### **Reputation and Skillset of key players.**

Most of the participants feel there are risks involved if the reputation and skill-set of the hotel and development team isn't of a high enough standard. Participants feel a lack of reputation and experience will seed doubt in the community's mind around the ability to deliver a truly exceptional experience.

*Key recommendations from participants are:*

- Ensure the hotel operator has an internationally, reputable brand such as Accor, Hilton, Pullman, and that it is an international 4/5 star grade.
- Show that the developers are tenacious and have the required strengths and experience in development - highlight how each members brings the 'right' skills, strengths, and knowledge to sell the vision and get the project over the line.
- Ensure the developers have a clear action plan and structure that outlines exactly who, what, and how they plan to develop and run the HEP, as well as providing specific information around:
  - who the targeted demographic is, and their expected spend,
  - the proposed funding model to develop and sustain the HEP,
  - the upfront and ongoing fees required to develop and run the HEP,
  - the number of tourist/visitor buses that stop into Whangarei on a daily basis,
  - the expected ROI,
  - the benefits to the area, and how the local community will be engaged (particularly around youth and Maori population), and
  - future proofing of the building and additional services, and ensuring it meets the future aspirations of the city and it's people.

*"We need faith in the people doing it...do we have the people with the skills to drive this, to champion this?"*

*"A risk could be the reputation and skill of the hotel operators and developers...do they have the skills to deliver and maintain this? What is their experience - can we trust them to do a good job?"*

*"The only assurance I need is trust in the hotel brand and the services...they need to have experience in the tourism industry and have the networks and connections to deliver it."*

*"The developers needs courage and tenacity to deliver quality."*

*"It all comes down to brand - it has to be reputable to gain our trust."*

*"You need a team who knows their game...they have industry experience and expertise, as well as a reputation for delivering high standards."*

# THE SUPPORT.

How do the participants see themselves supporting, collaborating, or investing in the Hotel and Event Centre Precinct?

## LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORT.

### End-Users.

The majority of participants, within the business community, see themselves as end users of the HEP. Participants highlighted that their assurance around this support would be:

- Booking the venue for business awards, seminars, workshops, conferences, and functions - locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Using the venue for staff and client meetings.
- Booking the hotel for client accommodation.
- Booking activity and event packages for staff and client functions.

*Specific examples of proposed engagements were:*

- accommodation for out of town clients every 4-6 weeks.
- large scale annual events for over 9,000 attendees from all around New Zealand.
- room hire for staff and/or client workshops and meetings on a weekly-monthly basis.
- 2-3 day conferences with an average spend of \$1,000,000.

*"I would love to have a conference here for our national teams."*

*"Build it and we will come."*

### Supplying additional resources & networks.

Some of the participants, within the business community, highlighted that they would support the HEP both during and after development by providing additional expertise, resources, and connections to a wider network of knowledge. Key areas in which participants felt they can provide additional support were in:

- Financial coaching - planning, forecasting, and accounting.
- Business coaching - preparing a viable business case and proposal for both the development and running of the HEP.
- Connecting developers with networks within other local 'leadership and cultural groups', for example: Momentum North, Ngatiwhai, Prosper Northland, Tewareho, local iwi tribes and hapu groups, WDC, and NRC.
- Providing education and training, particularly around the region's history and culture.
- Legal advice.

*"We are looking for more opportunities to train and educate our people."*

### Service Partnerships/Collaboration.

A few participants, within the tourism industry, highlighted that they would partner with the developers of the HEP in creating activity/attraction packages.

*"Yes absolutely we would look at partnering...the Hundertwasser centre is going to be a huge catalyst for growth - we need to be prepared together to meet the demands."*

## COUNCIL AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT.

### **When it comes to funding - stay away.**

All participants, within council and government, highlighted that developers should 'stay away' from asking council and/or government for additional funding support. Key reasons participants feel this way are:

- The developers would come up against 'small' interferences from council members (and the smallest 'things' deter councillors).
- It is difficult getting all 14 local councillors on the same page, and this can 'drag out' the process.
- Partnering with council and/or government comes with strings. For example: ownership and final decisions around the design, supporting services, and running of the facilities.
- the community would resist council involvement in a hotel.

*"Keep away from local council - you'll get interferences."*

*"Be careful around partnering with us, it comes with strings."*

*"Getting all 14 council members over the line is difficult."*

**Note:** Although participants highlighted that seeking additional funding support from council and/or government for the hotel is not possible, they did identify that there is \$10.5million in the Whangarei District's long term plan for a *new theatre*.

### **Additional Support & Resources.**

Participants, within council and government, highlighted that they are better suited to provide support around process and connecting the developers with their networks, to aid in the development and running of the HEP. Key areas in which participants believe they can provide additional assistance are in:

- talking to the local council's 'planning' team to ensure it fits in with regulations, and eliminating resource consent.
- ensuring the project doesn't come up against any barriers in the district plan.
- providing links to other services and projects that can directly support the development and running of the HEP.