This chapter discusses the vision for Rotorua and the eight key improvement goals that the district plan will contribute towards this vision. It summarises the unique aspects of our district that have been considered in the development of this plan and demonstrates how the district plan is improving the way we live, work, and play in our community.

This chapter also highlights how the district plan is enabling economic growth by supporting four key economic drivers. Finally, it summarises the statutory frameworks within which the district plan has been developed.

Every district in New Zealand has a district plan, prepared under the Resource Management Act (1991) to manage land use, subdivision and development within the district. It identifies where activities can take place, what land can be developed and what natural and cultural features should be protected. The district plan is the foundation for all land use decisions.

The Rotorua district plan not only helps council fulfill its legal, environmental and sustainability obligations, but is also used to implement the community’s vision for Rotorua into the future.

The development of the district plan was guided by the following principles that were established through consultation with the community. We aim for a district plan that is:

- Accessible, basic and concise.
- Rotorua responsive.
- Focused on planning issues with a strong ‘policy - rule’ link.
- Encouraging of environmentally sustainable economic development.

We acknowledge Te Arawa as key investors and partners to the Rotorua District Council during the life of this district plan. Te Arawa has been at the forefront of tourism development, sharing the geothermal landscape with visitors from all parts of the world and gifting substantial amounts of land to benefit the entire Rotorua community.

This district plan has been developed as an enabler to Rotorua’s Long Term plan (2012-2022) and as a means of fulfilling the Rotorua district vision: “Rotorua – living the dream – world class in every way”. It has also been developed to support Rotorua’s key economic drivers as outlined in the Rotorua Sustainable Economic Growth Strategy (2011).
1.1 KEY IMPROVEMENT GOALS

The Rotorua district plan has been built in consultation with the community. Your involvement led to these eight key improvement goals the diagram below illustrates those themes:

Diagram 1: Rotorua District Planning Strategy & Eight Key Improvement Goals

1.1.1 Enhance Water Quality

Our district’s lakes, rivers and streams are of great cultural, historic and heritage value. Rotorua District Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, and Te Arawa Lakes Trust are working with other partners on a range of initiatives to mitigate the effects of nutrient runoff from pastoral farming and sewage leachate from residential areas. There is a focus on the Lake Rotorua Catchment.

The district plan provides for Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) that encourage landowners to make a change to the use or management of their land that will reduce pollutants entering ground and surface water.

The district plan also promotes riparian zones that separate agricultural fields from water sources. Careful location of buildings, waste disposal equipment and structures that house animals are permitted activities that do not require resource consent. See section 9 for more.
1.1.2 Enable Sustainable Economic Growth

The district plan has a key role in encouraging economic growth throughout the district. It recognises the need to promote investment in Rotorua’s key economic drivers: tourism, forestry and wood processing, and the geothermal and agricultural sectors. This is through initiatives specific to each sector and the development of business and innovation zones. See part 8 for more.

Economic growth is heavily influenced by Rotorua’s central location within the district and the infrastructure that supports the area. Infrastructure must not only be well planned to maximise economic potential, it must also be located to avoid visual impacts to important landscapes and streetscapes.

The district plan aims to ensure development occurs in a planned, sustainable manner that maintains the natural and cultural environment. See parts 2 and 3 for more.

1.1.3 Provide for Social, Cultural & Spiritual Wellbeing

A significant proportion of the district’s population is Maori. The district plan recognises the special relationship tangata whenua have with their ancestral land and allows for the protection of significant cultural and historical sites that are waahi tapu or taonga. It also provides for marae in the area. Treaty settlements will see Iwi play an increasing role in our district’s economic growth. Economic wellbeing promotes other forms of wellbeing; therefore, the district plan attempts to strike a balance between sustainability and prosperity by enabling rather than complicating major land use decisions. The principle of kaitiakatanga guides the district plan to ensure the stewardship of our district for future generations. See part 3 for more.

1.1.4 Strengthen a Vibrant, Strong & Compact City Centre

The community expects our district to have a strong, vibrant city centre with a unique character. The district plan aims to revitalise the city centre by consolidating business into the area and making it the focal point for commercial and cultural activity.

The city centre is likely to see significant changes that will have an impact on its form and function. The new Victoria Street arterial route will serve as a transport corridor and help integrate the central retail area. Tourism development around the lakefront will improve the connection of the city centre to the lakefront and bring more activity to this area.

The city centre boundaries reflect the precincts of the urban design framework. Areas of the city centre, particularly towards the lakefront, have new policy frameworks to promote tourist accommodation and commercial activity consistent with its setting. “Permitted baselines” have also been introduced to the CBD to limit the need for resource consents when building or renovating, and the need to provide on-site parking in the city centre is no longer a consent requirement. See part 5 for more.

1.1.5 Enhance a Productive Rural Economy

Most land in the Rotorua district is rural, with agriculture and forestry the two main land uses. The rural area of our district is important not only for its physical features, habitats, indigenous plants and wildlife, but also as a significant working environment. The district plan seeks a balance between economic use and protection of the environment.

Using TDRs, the district plan encourages land use and land management change in the northwest part of the Lake Rotorua catchment. This is likely to affect pastoral activities with high nutrient loss – particularly dairy farming - and lead to new land uses that have less impact on water quality. Possibilities include housing, recreation and tourism, any one of which would change the existing character of those rural zones. There is also the prospect that heavy industry will seek to locate outside the caldera, which will further change the balance of the rural area to a working environment. See part 9 for more.
1.1.6 Protect Significant Landscapes

Our district is home to many outstanding natural features and landscapes, including volcanic plateaus and calderas, geothermal features and indigenous ecosystems that contribute to spectacular views and passive and active recreational opportunities.

While development and economic growth are priorities, they must be balanced with the maintenance and enhancement of the natural environment that makes our district an attractive place to live, work and play. Our district plan provides a framework to ensure important landscape elements are considered alongside development proposals.

Important landscape elements include Whakarewarewa, Tikitere and Waiotapu geothermal areas, as well as mountains such as Ngongotaha and the Paeroa range. Protection is also offered to natural features such as the Mamaku Tors and Makatiti and Horohoro domes. See part 2 for more.

1.1.7 Provide Safe & Attractive Residential Spaces

Residential areas are expected to provide safe and attractive streetscapes, with space to give each household reasonable privacy and outlook. The district plan anticipates that existing residential areas will continue to be efficiently used, with further infill subdivision, but is careful to ensure environment and amenity values are upheld.

Almost one in five residents live outside the main city area and demand for semi-rural lifestyle blocks and lakeside living is strong.

The district plan has also identified areas of rural land suitable for future land conversion and, appropriate to consider for the city’s urban land bank. The demand for land on the eastside of Lake Rotorua means development will likely occur here first. Land to the south of Pukehangi Road has identified a number of future development zones.

1.1.8 Enable Growth With a Realistic Approach to Natural Hazards

A secure and safe community is a healthy community and will attract growth. Our district has learned to safely take advantage of natural hazards. The oldest settlements in our district are within active geothermal areas where surface and underground features present a potential hazard to building and living.

The volcanic landscape presents opportunities but also risks that need to be factored into land use decisions. Fault lines and soft soils represent a risk to ground stability in the event of earthquakes. High intensity rainfall can lead to short term, localised flooding. The effects of climate change need to be planned for and managed.

Our district plan takes a practical approach to assessing and addressing these risks and balancing them with development.
2.0 OUR UNIQUE DISTRICT

Rotorua has many features that set it apart from other districts. This section summarises the unique aspects that have been considered in the formation of this district plan. These unique features create constraints but also offer opportunity for the continued growth of our district.

Maori were the first inhabitants of the district and continue to make up a significant proportion of the population. This Maori heritage brings both a deep historical significance and a proud, welcoming spirit of hospitality, or manaakitanga, which attracts over three million visitors a year.

The Rotorua district covers 261,906 hectares, and falls almost equally into the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions. 41% of land use is in forest, 43% in agriculture, and 8% of the district's area is made up of lakes. Natural resources abound; their sustainability is a priority for our district plan.

Founded on the Taupo Volcanic Zone, Rotorua has the most geothermal fields in New Zealand. They provide a unique source of energy as well as a base for tourism. Geothermal activity is highly visible throughout the district with numerous steam vents, hot mud pools and geysers. The volcanic landscape presents opportunities but also risks that need to be factored into land use decisions. Our district plan takes a practical approach to assessing and addressing these risks and balancing them with the desire for community development.

Rotorua boasts 18 volcanic lakes (16 accessible), 120 wetland areas, three major rivers, and the Hamurana pure water spring. The lakes are of importance to our community for their recreational opportunities, fisheries and significance to tangata whenua. Lake water quality is a key concern for the community, and its improvement is one of the goals of this district plan.

The geothermal flavour of the area also means the district's vegetation is unique. The pastoral history has had a significant impact on native vegetation. While there are some large areas of native bush, generally our native remnants need protection.

Rotorua boasts many outstanding natural features, from the caldera Rotorua is formed in, to islands, mountains, landscape features and geothermal areas. The district plan takes a pragmatic and incentivised approach to their management and protection.

The principal of kaitiakitanga guides the district plan to ensure the stewardship of our unique district for future generations.
2.1 THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The city was established in 1880 close to the Maori villages of Ohinemutu and Whakarewarewa. The central business district started taking shape during a period of expansion in the 1920s. The built residential areas expanded further, surrounded by geothermally active sites which were set aside as reserves for the benefit of residents. Much of this land, such as Government Gardens and Kuirau Park, is still close to the city and remains in reserve.

The city and its residential suburban belt generally follow a traditional north-south grid pattern from the southern edge of Lake Rotorua. The city is at the intersection of five major state highways and is a key junction in the network of roads linking Hamilton, Taupo, Whakatane and Tauranga.

Recreational settlements containing a mix of permanent and temporary residents have developed around the edges of the larger lakes.

2.2 INFRASTRUCTURE

Rotorua is in a strategic central location and has excellent infrastructure to facilitate the transfer of goods, energy and information. Five major state highways converge in Rotorua: 5, 30, and 30A near the city centre and 33 and 36 on the outskirts of the city. Most of the industrial and manufacturing activities are concentrated on the northern, eastern and southern highway routes.

The State Highway network has a major influence on land use planning in the district and the efficiency of this network is crucial for our district’s future economic growth. A balance needs to be maintained for tourists to easily reach our city, and for freight to be efficiently shipped through it. Aspects of the district plan and many of the roading projects are aimed at reducing friction between local and through traffic.

The Rotorua International Airport, 9km northeast of the city centre, off State Highway 30 and close to large residential areas, is the international gateway for the wider Bay of Plenty Region. It is a focal point of the city with significant ongoing investment and development planned.

Part 2 of the district plan gives a detailed summary of Rotorua’s ongoing infrastructure development. Map 101 illustrates the state highways in more detail.
3.0 THE VISION FOR ROTORUA

The Rotorua Sustainable Economic Growth Strategy (RSEGS) has been developed to support the district vision: “Rotorua – living the dream – world class in every way”. It does this by targeting sectors where the district has a competitive advantage.

The district plan and council can support the RSEGS in these objectives:

1. **Improve the Reputation of Rotorua as:**
   a. A leader in the forestry and wood processing, tourism, geothermal and agricultural sectors.
   b. A preferred lifestyle destination.
   c. An attractive and easy place to invest and do business with.
   d. A district with an enabling regulatory environment.

2. **Lift the Performance of the Local Economy by:**
   a. Achieving growth of new businesses in the area.
   b. Retaining and developing existing businesses.
   c. Creating new jobs.
   d. Attracting new residents.

This section shows how the district plan supports these strategies and gives guidance for how we can live, work, play, and grow in our district.
3.1 LIVE, WORK & PLAY IN Rotorua

3.1.1 Live

Rotorua’s population is expected to grow by 5% by 2026. In addition, the Rotorua district hosts an average of 10,000 visitors each day. Rotorua has a modern infrastructure and services capable of supporting an increase in population. The district plan is committed to ensuring living options remain ahead of projected residential and visitor growth.

Rotorua is a well planned and laid out district offering easy access to work, the city centre, education, health, and sporting, recreational and transport services. A key point of difference is the range of lifestyle options the district offers – including inner city, traditional suburban and rural residential – with lake views a common feature. The district plan aims to create a compact city and therefore encourages urban infill, mindful of retaining residents’ privacy, usable outdoor space and views. Changes to rural land use, designed to improve lake water quality, will result in further options for semi-rural lifestyle blocks and lakeside living.

There are over 34 marae and many important cultural and historical features in the district. These ancestral lands, water sites, waahi tapu and other taonga are carefully protected in the district plan.

Unique to Rotorua are the residential areas located in, or on, areas of geothermal activity, with Ohinemutu and Whakarewarewa the main examples. There are strong cultural links between these villages and the surface features. It is one reason that both villages are international tourist attractions.

Tourist accommodation is also a focus of the district plan, which allows specific tourism zoning and policies that promote additional accommodation, particularly towards the lakefront.

The district plan aims to clearly define residential, non-residential and commercial zones to provide certainty to residents and maintain a high level of residential amenity.

See parts 4, 5 and 6 for more.

3.1.2 Work

The city centre is the main retail, commercial and entertainment precinct. It is also the focal point of community social and cultural activities. The district plan aims to encourage a vibrant, modern city centre for residents and tourists alike.

Rotorua’s key economic drivers are the tourism, forestry and wood processing, geothermal and agricultural sectors. Tourist attractions have been given specific zoning to encourage further development in concentrated areas, including accommodation, especially towards the lakefront.

Further forestry and wood processing development is also encouraged via land use changes towards forestry and the creation of education and research zones at the Scion and Waipa sites.

The district plan aims to protect productive rural land for agriculture. Key considerations are the environmental impacts of industry on the natural environment and the reduction of pollutants into Rotorua’s water. The plan allows for geothermal exploration and development of geothermal fields, while protecting the tourism industry and environment.

The district has a strong manufacturing and service industry to support these key sectors. The district plan encourages further development of innovation parks where related businesses can co-locate. The district plan also enables education and research with special provisions for areas like the Scion campus and Waiairiki Institute of Technology.

Careful thought has also been given to ensuring support infrastructure is well maintained and prepared for future growth. This means continued development of Rotorua
International Airport, and ongoing maintenance and development of major roadways, gas and geothermal energy pipelines, telecommunications, electricity and sewerage services. These infrastructure and support services are covered in part 15.

While the plan supports economic growth, it is also mindful of noise, dust and traffic impacts, especially where industrial and residential zones meet. Rural areas, which contain most of the important natural landscapes and sites of significant cultural heritage, are also managed to balance the protection of these values with the working rural landscapes they are part of.

See parts 4, 7 and 9 for more.

3.1.3 Play

Rotorua has a reputation as New Zealand’s “playground” with abundant tourist attractions, and recreational and entertainment opportunities. The city centre boasts world-class dining, retail and entertainment options and the surrounding environment offers an array of adventure and leisure activities.

Strengthening a vibrant, strong and compact city centre is one of the key improvement goals for the district plan. The urban design framework is aimed at creating a central entertainment hub. Initiatives within the district plan that support this include allowing restaurants and alfresco dining on footpaths without consent, and zonings to encourage further tourism accommodation near the lakefront.

Rotorua is second only to Auckland in the number of events and conferences it hosts. The district plan allows for temporary events to be held in most zones. For large events, it provides guidelines for high use reserves such as Rotorua International Stadium and the Energy Events Centre.

Rotorua’s extensive natural features create a perfect environment for outdoor activity. The forested hills surrounding Rotorua are ideal for walking, running, and mountain biking. Rotorua’s Whakarewarewa Forest is internationally renowned for mountain biking and is home to the new National Cycling Centre of Excellence.

The district's many lakes provide opportunities for swimming, camping, fishing, and other outdoor pursuits. Rotorua has 16 accessible lakes, three major rivers and numerous waterways, which hold cultural significance to Te Arawa and require careful management to ensure water quality is protected.

Rotorua also has over 800 hectares of council-maintained reserves, gardens and parks available for community use. Within this area are more than 110 public reserves with a wide range of amenities, playgrounds and walking tracks.

See part 10 for more.
3.2 **GROW ROTORUA**

The Rotorua Sustainable Economic Growth Strategy has defined four key priorities for economic growth: forestry, tourism, geothermal and agriculture.

The Rotorua district plan is designed to uphold the Resource Management Act (1991) by creating an enabling regulatory framework that balances the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the community.

This section summarises how the district plan supports economic growth in each sector.

### 3.2.1 Forestry

Rotorua has over 64,000 hectares of forest including Kaingaroa – the oldest and largest production forest in the Southern Hemisphere. Forestry and wood processing contribute 18% of local GDP and is the district’s second largest employer. Rotorua is part of the Central North Island (CNI) area which contains 30% of New Zealand’s plantation and produces 45% of the country’s annual wood harvest. Due to the vast amount of available raw material, Rotorua is home to leading companies such as Red Stag Timber, Lockwood, Hayes International, Timberlands and Verda. The Scion Crown Research Institute is also located within our district, providing science and technology support for this highly productive industry.

The district plan supports the forestry sector with a permissive approach to development. Resource consent is not required for forestry establishment as a primary industry in the rural zone. To further promote the industry, a specific business and innovation zone for the forestry sector is defined, with the Scion and Waipa sites as primary anchors.

### 3.2.2 Tourism

Tourism contributes 11% to Rotorua’s GDP and is our district’s largest employer. Rotorua is an iconic domestic and international visitor destination, providing world class tourist attractions, events, facilities and amenities. Rotorua is a global brand based on Maori culture, geothermal attractions, lakes and adventure activities.

The region hosts approximately 3 million visitors every year. On any given day, there can be 8,500-10,000 tourists in our district, and Rotorua is second only to Auckland in the number of events and conferences it holds. These also attract visitors to our many accommodation, restaurant, retail and tourism options.

The district plan includes new policy frameworks that promote additional tourist accommodation in the city centre, particularly towards the lakefront. Permissible building heights and on-site carparking provisions are features of the district plan. Tourist attractions have also been given specific zonings to encourage similar activities in concentrated areas, particularly along the entranceways to Rotorua.

### 3.2.3 Geothermal

The Rotorua geothermal field and its features are national treasures. They also have cultural significance for locals. Our district is located on some of the highest temperature geothermal fields in the country. The development of geothermal energy for heating, electricity generation and emerging bio-fuel processes is expected to have a significant and positive impact on Rotorua’s economy. The Ohaaki Geothermal Power Station is a major feature of the southern part of our district and will be followed by others.

Rotorua is part of a Bay of Plenty regional strategy that considers new approaches to cleaner and more responsible energy. The district plan classifies and maps the district’s geothermal systems according to regional council advice, identifying where development can occur. The district plan allows for geothermal exploration and development of geothermal fields, in specific areas, while protecting the tourism industry in others. This
natural resource needs to be carefully managed to ensure standards, stability and monitoring are in place to ensure resource sustainability and safety.

3.2.4 Agriculture

Agriculture plays a major role in the local economy, contributing 4.7% of GDP. Most agricultural land is used for dairy, sheep, beef and deer farming. The region also boasts a number of award winning, sustainable farming systems. Profitable operations that also demonstrate reduced environmental impacts will be an increasing focus.

Nutrient release into our lakes and waterways is a key concern, and the Lake Rotorua catchment is a major priority. Rotorua District Council, regional councils, central government and Te Arawa Lakes Trust are collaborating on initiatives to mitigate the effects of nutrient runoff from pastoral farming. The district plan is one regulatory instrument that needs to align with the regional plans and policy statements on this important issue.

The district plan introduces TDRs, which encourage landowners to change land use or land management to recreation or tourism related activities that result in a reduction of pollutants entering waterways.
4.0  **STATUTORY INFLUENCES**

This part has outlined the vision for Rotorua “Rotorua – living the dream – world class in every way” and referred to the Rotorua long term plan and Rotorua Sustainable Economic Growth Strategy, as key documents that are driving Rotorua’s future development and growth.

This vision and growth needs to be well planned and managed and a holistic approach taken to balance the economic, social, cultural and environmental well being of our community. The Resource Management Act (1991) is the main piece of legislation that sets how we should manage our environment. It is based on the idea of sustainable management of resources and encourages communities to plan for the future of their environment.

The district plan must also be developed within the framework of other national, regional and local planning legislation, summarised below.

Diagram 2: National, regional and local Influences on district planning
4.1 NATIONAL & REGIONAL

The district plan must consider regulatory matters that are of national relevance, including National Policy Statements, Statutory Acknowledgments, National Environmental Standards and Settlement Acts. It must also take into account management plans and strategies prepared under other Acts, such as the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, the New Zealand Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy, the Conservation Management Strategy and Reserve Management plans.

The following settlement Acts are applicable within our district when resource consent applications are being considered: the Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Act (2006), the Ngati Tuwharetoa, Raukawa and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act (2010), the Ngati Awa Settlement Act (2005), and the Affiliates Te Arawa Iwi and Hapu Claims Settlement Act (2008). Effective governance of these Acts and collaboration with Te Arawa are fundamental to the Rotorua district plan’s development and management.

The Rotorua district is located within both the Bay of Plenty and Waikato regions (the north-eastern part of the district is in the Bay of Plenty and the south-western part in the Waikato). Therefore consideration must be given to Regional plans and Policy Statements prepared by both the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Waikato Regional Council.

4.2 LOCAL

Our district is surrounded by four territorial authorities, each operating a separate district plan. Cross-boundary issues between territorial authorities need to be considered in relation to rural subdivision, significant landscapes, multiple landownership, transport and infrastructure.

Our district has a number of archaeological sites, historic buildings and historic sites registered with the Historic Places Trust. Development needs to ensure the cultural and historical significance of these sites is respected.

A number of local council Bylaws regulate key issues unique to our district, such as natural hazards. They also influence resource consent assessment and applications.

By adhering to these national, regional and local statutory frameworks, while also keeping the principles of the Resource Management Act (1991) in mind, the district plan provides a foundation for the people of Rotorua to achieve long term economic growth, without compromising social, cultural or environmental well being. It is a fine balancing act. The district plan offers guidance on how you can interact with our district whether you are living, working, playing or investing here. It is a living document that is reviewed every three years.

The following chapters provide detailed information on the matters of strategic importance and then each zone of the district.