

# Sophie Handford – Paekākāriki - Raumati Ward Candidate

## Economic Development

- 1. What is your understanding of the Kotahitanga Board and the role that they play? Should they be independent?** The Kotahitanga Board plays a crucial role in unlocking economic opportunity for and within our district. They've been tasked with the implementation and delivery of the Kāpiti Coast Economic Development Strategy and Implementation Plan 2020–23. They're a team of experts, who're passionate about and able to provide the necessary strategic direction for economic activity that benefits our place, people and environment. The independence the Board has, in my view, allows them to best play their role. So yes, I think they should continue to be independent but well supported and backed by Council, both financially and through recognition.
- 2. Kāpiti Chamber values town centres as vital contributors to our local economic system. What examples of benefits have you seen from town centres?** I tautoko this value held by the Chamber and see town centres as being vital to our district's social connectedness and economic prosperity. I've really appreciated working alongside the Raumati Village Business Association and also local business owners in Paekākāriki over the last triennium to better understand the challenges and opportunities they see present and how Council can be of support. Whether it be greater cycle parking, public art, representation in the form of a Community Board (Yay for the new Raumati Community Board!), or more funding to enable town centres to continue being the pumping heart of our rohe, I am committed to engaging with and acting upon the feedback of our community. Many examples of benefits come to mind; the job opportunities close to home and for our rangatahi, the reduction in reliance on a car to get around and moments like The Raumati Village Street Party back in 2020 which had such an awesome vibe.
- 3. How do you plan to support and grow town centres, and their relationship to the economic development team and wider business community?** I will continue to work alongside and engage with those who live and breathe our own local town centres, and those who have specific aspirations we must take into consideration; the business owners, staff, young people, our elderly, mana whenua and whānau. I'll continue to be enabling and collaborative in the strengthening of these relationships, and relentless in my fight for our town centres in the beautiful Paekākāriki - Raumati Ward; both in kōrero with Councillors, but also with the ED Team. We have to make sure town centres are high on the agenda, as vital pieces in our response to many social, economic and environmental challenges.
- 4. What is your understanding of the purpose of the Tourist Advisory Board and their relationship with Wellington NZ and KCDC?** I see this to be a real example of the leadership that the Kotahitanga Board have been taking, in establishing the Tourism Advisory Board (consisting of tourism professionals) to champion the implementation of relevant projects within our Destination Management Plan. This Plan shines light on the many aspects of our district worth sharing and celebrating

with others. I see the Board's focus to be on increasing tourism activity and visitor numbers to our district, with consideration of our unique treasures, environmental landscape and the need to protect and enhance them. The Board reports to the Economic Development Kotahitanga Board, and will work alongside partners such as Kāpiti Coast District Council, Iwi and WellingtonNZ to ensure implementation is effective and done in a holistic, collaborative way.

- 5. What are the opportunities around tourism in Kāpiti?** I believe there are so many opportunities around tourism in Kāpiti and it is ripe time for us to be catalysing this kōrero. Our environment and natural wonders, such as Kāpiti Island, the Escarpment track, Ngā Manu and Te Ara o Whareroa are incredibly important to so many of us in the district and wider Aotearoa. We can be leaders in sustainable business and tourism, known for our deep care and consideration for the environment and our people. We can grow our workforce in the tourism industry, and seek to be innovative and creative about our offerings, providing greater employment opportunities.

## **Better Infrastructure**

- 6. What role do you think KCDC plays in the Peka Peka Interchange?** The interests of the Paekākāriki - Raumati Ward remain my utmost priority, while also recognising the value of enhancing connections between Kāpiti's various communities. The lack of a regular train service from Ōtaki down the coast, combined with the current roading situation, definitely contributes to Ōtaki being more isolated. For us to address these issues, we must advocate to and liaise with central government frequently to ensure our communities' needs are front and centre.
- 7. KCDC has been making strategic housing purchases. What are your thoughts on KCDC as a housing provider or facilitator? What does intensification mean to you, and how do you think it could change Kāpiti?** I believe Council plays an important role in ensuring our Kāpiti whānau are thriving in connected, socially and environmentally resilient communities, with roofs over their heads. We must be a facilitator, enabler and leader in the housing space and I believe we are on track to fulfilling such a role. This last triennium, we consulted on establishing an independent community land trust (CLT) to help deliver affordable housing. We know, from our Housing & Social Needs assessment, that getting this mahi done as quickly as possible is crucial. Intensification, to me, is a vital element of our response to our growing population and housing challenges. It also presents huge opportunities for designing low-emissions townships, where access to public transport and safe active transport corridors are prioritised. Growth is changing Kāpiti's landscape, but we now have the opportunity to embrace and shape what this looks like for our region's future and take hold of the opportunities it presents.
- 8. As it stands, KCDC has funding to move forward with Te Uruhi. This has been a big talking point in our business community and membership. Assuming it goes ahead, what impact do you foresee the gateway having on business and community**

**wellbeing in the Kāpiti region?** Te Uruhi presents enormous potential to better showcase our natural environment and tell the stories of mana whenua in Kāpiti. Creating space for the stories of our District, in a way that connects people to the incredibly unique experience of travelling to Kāpiti Island is exciting. Something of this ilk and purpose is necessary for delivering our long term goals and vision for Kāpiti. However the projected cost of the project has increased significantly as of recent. This does change the conversation and I do think we need to take a serious look, alongside our iwi partners, at whether it stacks up right at this moment in time. In saying that, my support for the outcomes Te Uruhi is striving to achieve will never waver; connecting ourselves to te taiao and the stories of this whenua.

- 9. What do you think are the opportunities for business if the Kāpiti Airport stays an airport, or if it gets developed?** I see the opportunities if it's developed and Puketapu hapū, as mana whenua, are very much a part of the process to be significant. Ultimately, my support is entirely behind the hapū and the aspirations they have. There is potential for many possibilities to be unlocked, such as greater supply of housing, restoration of the environment and more workforce and training opportunities. I think it's vital that Puketapu's voice, alongside that of our wider community, are front and centre in communicating imaginative visions for the potential future of the airport.

## Future thinking

- 10. What actions should KCDC be taking to support businesses to become climate friendly?** Council has declared a climate emergency, adopted a Climate Emergency Action Framework and we are seeking to be aspirational in setting an ambitious net zero target for the district's emissions. We need to lead, and do everything in our power to enable others to do the same as we're running out of time to act on the climate crisis. We should be continuing to support and invest in the newly established Pakihi Toitū o Kāpiti, a network to help businesses on their journey to more environmentally sustainable ways of doing business. As actions and key focus areas arise from this rōpu, we must honour and back them. We must also recognise those businesses who're leading the way, such as Sustainable Foods and Orba, and share their stories and success.
- 11. How do you envision the relationship between local iwi and KCDC operating in the future?** The relationship must be embodied as a true partnership. Aotearoa exists in the context of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which must serve as the foundation for how we co-exist. Council also has a Memorandum of Partnership with the three mana whenua iwi in Kāpiti: Ngāti Toa, Te Atiawa ki Whakarongotai and Ngā Hapū o Ōtaki. This triennium, we voted to enhance mana whenua representation within Council's Governance Structure, with full voting rights and remuneration, and I am extremely passionate about this continuing into the next triennium. I always see and feel the value of having our mana whenua partners around the table for discussions, bringing with them such rich matauranga, connection to whakapapa and a deep-seated care for communities, the environment and the next generation. Our decision making

process and outcomes will be strengthened and far more meaningful if we focus on tending to and strengthening our relationship with iwi, through having open ears and hearts.

**12. Summarise your understanding of the following reforms: Three Waters Reform and Local Government Reform. How do you plan to keep Kāpiti's voice strong throughout these changes and advocate for our business community?**

**Three Waters:** The overarching purpose of the reforms is to ensure the provision of safe, reliable drinking water, wastewater and stormwater to our communities across Aotearoa. The health and wellbeing of our people and environment is dependent on these services. To keep Kāpiti's voice strong as these changes occur, we must elevate our perspectives and strengths, especially being a district that has invested heavily in our water infrastructure for the benefit of our community and the environment. Our water-related assets together have a value of \$579 million. **Local Government Reform:** The Review into the Future for Local Government is presenting us with the opportunities to reflect on the past, take note of the present and collectively write the future of local governance and democracy. It's prompting us to consider how these systems effectively respond to an evolving Aotearoa, and ultimately support our diverse communities and environment to thrive. I am well connected to our MPs in both the Mana and Ōtaki electorates, so would seek to use those channels in ensuring our voice is heard, as we move through this very needed period of change.

**13. What is your vision for Kāpiti, and how do you intend to implement it? Name three visionary actions you aspire to implement?**

A Kāpiti where we centre our focus on the well-being & mana of our diverse communities and support our most vulnerable. Where we enable and create greener, more sustainable and accessible townships, which prioritise active modes of transport in tackling the climate crisis. Where our partnership with iwi is at the core of our pathway forwards. Where the vibe is lifted, we have vibrant public spaces and young people have more spaces to hang out in. Where there's a hum in all of our town centres, people and business are connected and thriving. Three actions: Committing to leading Kāpiti to carbon neutrality by 2040 and developing a plan alongside the community to get us there. Fast tracking and furthering our mahi in the housing space, getting houses built for the people who need them most in partnership with a Community Land trust. Bringing together Council and the community to foster increased collaboration on the wider vision for our district.

**14. How do you plan on being a visible and accessible leader for our council and community?**

Being visible, accessible and enabling is something I see to be part of our core responsibilities as people elected by you to serve our wider community. I'll be present at events, proactively engaging with those we don't tend to hear as much from and most importantly, listening with an open mind and heart. My proven ability to work efficiently and effectively puts me in a prime position to continue doing so, in a manner which is inclusive, dynamic and energetic.