

OMAKAU COMMUNITY PLAN



December 2014

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Background

Community planning is about the local community determining its own future. Emphasis is placed on the views of the community, its local points of difference and the identification of opportunities that will ensure the community remains an attractive and desirable place in which to live, work and play.

The Omakau Community Plan has been developed through consultation with and active involvement by the residents of and visitors to Omakau – this included opinion surveys from residents, local youths, local businesses, and visitors to the community, as well as a community workshop. Feedback from these sources has identified shared values and aspirations of the community that are identified in this plan, along with a number of key recommendations that will assist in the development of Omakau as a vibrant and sustainable community.

While the Plan has no legal status, it does provide an important insight on the direction the community would like to head for the many organisations involved or identified in it. The Omakau Community Working Group, made up of interested community members, will oversee the Plan, on behalf of the community, and will help to drive many of the recommendations within it.

While the definition of the Omakau community may have been defined within a specific geographical in this Plan, the Plan also acknowledges that there is a wider community including residents from neighbouring settlements, private individuals and national organisations that for historical, ancestral, commercial or 'community' reasons consider themselves to hold an interest in the future of this area. It should also be noted that the Ophir community is soon to develop their own community plan, and these two plans should be considered in conjunction when looking at the Omakau / Manuherikia basin as a whole.

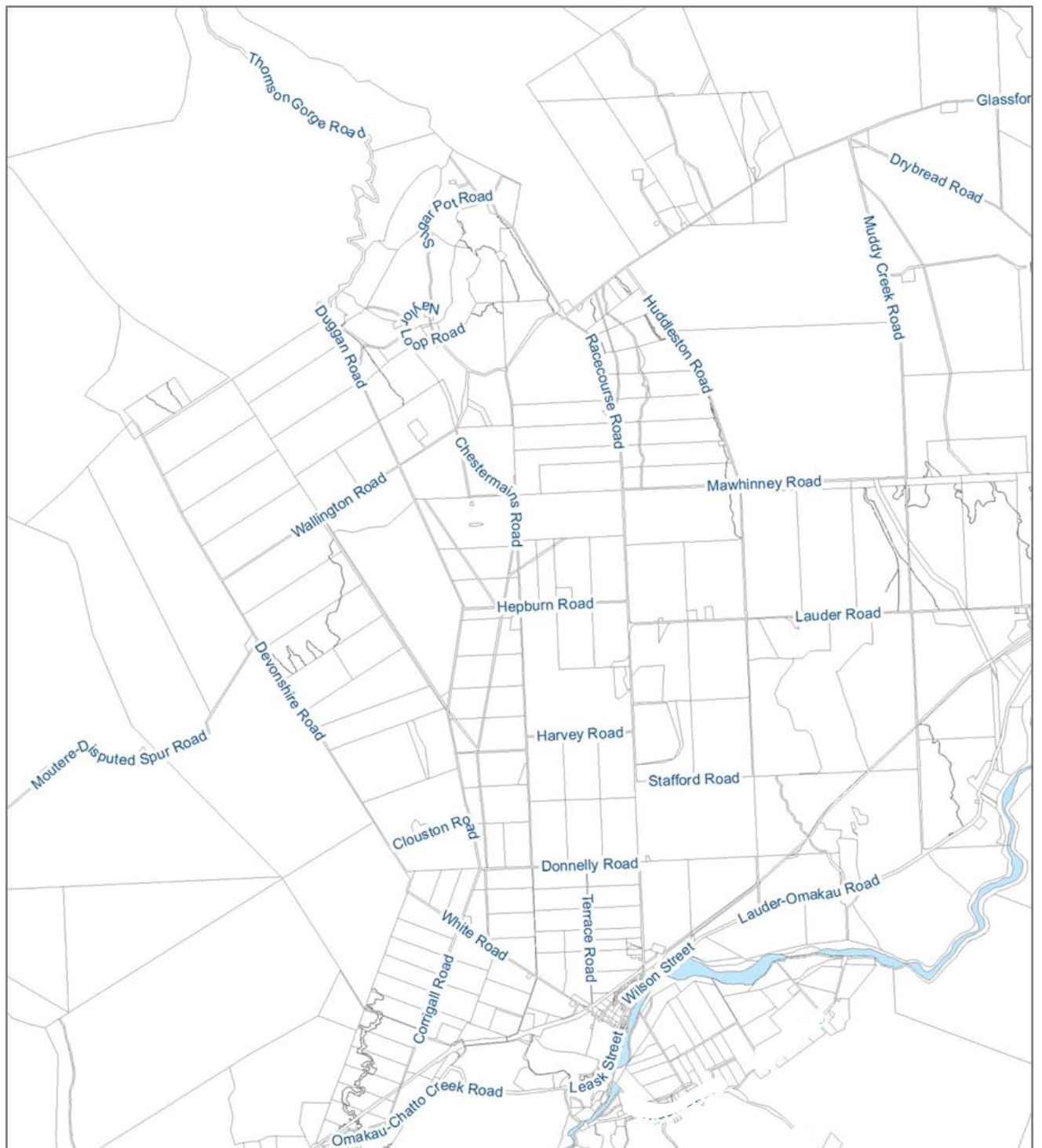
A challenge in achieving some of the objectives identified in this Plan will be funding. It is likely that some prioritisation of work and a planned approach for how to fund initiatives will be required. The community will also want to be aware of who to approach for funding and how to apply.

Community Plan Process

The outline planning process and time frame is as follows:

Community, Business and Visitor Surveys	June 2014
Community workshop held	August 2014
Draft plan developed	September 2014
Draft plan available for community comment	October 2014
Submissions – reviewed by Working party	December 2014
Changes made to plan	December 2014
Community Plan confirmed by Working Party	December 2014
Implementation	December onwards

Map of Omakau



Vision

A thriving (and welcoming) community, with a peaceful rural character and excellent amenities, that provides a safe, sustainable and exciting destination for visitors and residents alike.

We value

Our Community

- small, safe community with its rural values
- people looking out for each other (community spirit)
- getting together as a wider community

Our Facilities

- Omakau Primary School (utilising our community hub)
- sports clubs & facilities
- the diverse recreational activities available

Our Environment

- our river (its water quality, its reliable supply, and the recreational opportunities it provides)
- protecting our landscape and scenery (its beauty and sustainability)
- pride in community and town

Our Economy

- our primary industry and the services that provide to it
- our self-sufficiency as a service town
- the strategic location of our town relative to visitor activities and resources
- building visitation based on the area's strengths

Should all or any of these values we consider important be diminished or lost, the area will no longer be a "special place".

Our Community Action Plan

The following is a list of outcomes and recommendations that have been prioritised as high, medium or low by the Working Group. Responsibility for implementing these recommendations has also been identified; however responsibility is in no way limited to these groups. It should also be noted that carrying out the recommendations will be dependent on resources provided by all stakeholders involved.

Each priority has been defined as the following:

H (High) – completed in the next 1-2 years

M (Medium) – completed in the next 3-4 years

L (Low) – completed within 5 years

Page	Recommendation	Objective	Priority
19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop, maintain and utilise one or two recognised public noticeboards within the township 	To have a cohesive community through good communication	H
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the possibility of extending the circulation of the school's newsletter to encompass the wider community 		M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the development of a community newsletter, to be distributed by e-mail or available in public-use areas 		L
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage community participation in community projects and planning exercises 		M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop better communication links with the Council 		H
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the facilitation of more socialising events for the community 	Support our successful events and get in behind the development of new ones	M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the A&P Show Committee and Central Otago Racing Club 		L
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify sources to support the volunteer base, through avenues such as <i>Volunteering Central</i> 		M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate a small workshop for community groups, run by <i>Tourism Central Otago</i>, on fundraising, event marketing and coordination, volunteer management, etc. 		M
21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage people to attend fundraising events for Omakau's community services 	To make good use of and support our existing facilities and services	M
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore ways to support Omakau School 		M

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage participation in local recreational committees and sports teams Determine the ongoing maintenance and development of the Omakau Hall 		M H
23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate opportunities for developing more campsites and greater camping awareness Investigate the possibility of developing access ways and walking tracks alongside the Manuherikia River Implement community working bees to clear vegetation and beautify public areas Encourage safe and sustainable land use practices throughout the greater Manuherikia Valley Encourage and promote responsible and environmentally friendly water use practices 	Value our natural resources and make them accessible so that they can be enjoyed for future generations	L M H M M
25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a map of the town that displays interesting places to visit, activities and services Re-fit the map at the railway station so it faces the right way for visitors Develop visitor information about the township, in the form of a brochure, website or map Investigate the possibility of developing of a visitor centre or designated visitor information site within the township Look for other tourism opportunities as well as the Rail Trail, promoting the region's strengths (camping, peaceful lifestyle, natural resources) Promote the area's location in relation to known attractions in and around the area Investigate opportunities to develop collaborative marketing initiatives between stakeholders and across communities 	Grow awareness of Omakau as a visitor destination and provide visitors with information about the services and activities within the town	H H M L M M M
26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of the proposed development of Manuherikia Catchment Water Scheme Liaise with the Regional and District Council in relation 	Maintain Omakau's strong and stable economy	M L

	<p>to planning for land use and the economic development of the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together to ensure sustainable land and water use practices 		M
27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install signage, from the rail trail and town centre, directing people to the public toilets at the Domain • Determine an effective solution for the provision of public toilet facilities within Omakau’s retail sector 	Have public toilet facilities that visitors to Omakau are aware of and utilise	H H
28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with and support the Omakau / Ophir Town Water Supply working party in their investigations into finding the most practical solution for improving the town’s water quality 	Obtain a clean and reliable drinking water source for the town	L
29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take communal responsibility for tidy recycling practices • Notify the Council if the recycling facility is being misused or mismanaged • Investigate alternative recycling options for local businesses • Lobby the Council to install additional refuse disposal units in town • Encourage the local businesses currently servicing public rubbish bins to discuss with Council the possibility of assistance (e.g. bin liners and wheelie bin collection fees) 	Have a tidy and functional rubbish disposal system in Omakau	M M M M M
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gauge community preferences on what they would like to do with the school bus shelter • Notify authorities of any safety concerns for bus stop users • Use the notice board within the shelter to display community messages and information 	Have a school bus shelter that is safe for users and fit for purpose	M M M
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a register of footpath repairs for submission to Council • Investigate the feasibility and practicalities of improving and/or relocating street lights in Omakau 	Have tidy and safe footpaths and kerbing in Omakau	H L

31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobby the Council to increase the priority of replacing the existing one-lane concrete bridge at Omakau 	Have a safe bridge that meets user's needs	L
31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents to voice their concerns regarding Council rates and service provision through their local Councillor and Ratepayers Association 	Keep rates charges to a reasonable level for the community	M
32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate possibilities that could now be available to the community through enhanced community and school broadband capabilities 	Optimise the value to the community of the new broadband capabilities now in the area	M
34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create low-maintenance beautification plans for Omakau's public spaces, in consultation with the landowner, and implement community working bees to achieve these plans Encourage the community to take responsibility for the tidiness of their town Investigate interest in developing a "Trees for Babies" programme for Omakau Consider options for developing a brand for Omakau that represents the town and community 	Have a tidy and attractive town that the community is proud of	H
			M
			L
			M

Community Profile

Location and composition

Omakau (which is correctly pronounced as *Or-maa-koh*) is the Maori name for the Ida Burn and is said to mean “belonging to the husband and wife”, i.e. the baby.

The Omakau community, for the purpose of this Plan, is defined as the people living in and around Omakau township, from Muddy Creek Road and Glassford Road, and up to Devonshire Road to Moutere Despute. Though the nearby settlements of Ophir, Lauder and Chatto Creek are not included within this Plan, residents who affiliate themselves with the Omakau community are welcome to be involved in this Plan.

Omakau township is located on State Highway 85, 27km north-east of Alexandra and 60km from Ranfurly, beside the Manuherikia River. Omakau is both a service town for the surrounding farming land and a popular destination for holiday-makers, including cyclists travelling on the Otago Central Rail Trail.

History

Development of the Settlement

The Manuherikia Valley was first explored by European surveyors and pastoralists in search of sheep country. Land occupation was sparse with properties such as Matakanui Station spanning some 80,000 acres from the eastern side of the Dunstan Range down to the valley floor. Gold miners soon followed and settled in areas such as Blacks (Ophir) and Tinkers (Matakanui) where gold could be found in payable amounts. Omakau was a relatively small settlement at this time, however this changed in 1904 when it was selected as the rail-head for the newly constructed rail link between Dunedin and Central Otago. Omakau was chosen over the then larger settlement of Ophir to reduce the additional cost of taking the line across the Manuherikia River. Subsequently, as the railway established and gold mining dwindled, Ophir entered into a period of decline while in contrast Omakau flourished.

Development of the township commenced in anticipation, with significant structures being erected, such as Pomona House – a two-storey residence built by Mr William Leask in 1898 – that was soon converted into accommodation for weary travellers and then later into the Commercial Hotel. Construction of the Central Otago line continued in earnest, reaching Chatto Creek in 1906 and then on to Alexandra, Clyde and Cromwell, thus creating an invaluable transport service into the centre of the region for both passengers and freight.

Land became more closely settled as the railway was established and as farmland irrigation was developed. The Omakau Area Irrigation Scheme, comprising one main race (built in the 1930's) and five creek schemes, utilised water from the Manuherikia River, with supplementary river flows from Falls Dam during drier periods, to deliver irrigation water to over 3,600ha through a 93km network of races. Farming prospered and at its peak in the 1960's the Omakau railway was one of the busiest stock loading stations in the country. The rural town became a thriving settlement boasting two

churches, two hotels, a post office (which doubled as the local telephone exchange), bank, two grocers, two garages - one with smithy attached - a clothing store and boarding house. The community hall hosted films on a fortnightly basis, and dances were held there regularly too.

The Omakau School was first opened in 1935. It was originally intended to be a centralised primary and district high school to consolidate the numerous small schools throughout the district, although at the time of opening, Spottie's Creek School (located in one room of the original "Chestermains" homestead) was the only school that actually closed, and its sole teacher became the principal of Omakau School. However when Matakanui School closed in 1945, followed by Ophir in 1975 and Becks in 2000, their pupils did come through to Omakau. The Omakau swimming pool was opened in the late 1940's and was covered some 40 years later.

Completion of the Roxburgh and later Clyde hydro-electric dams, coupled with better roads and more freight carried by truck, led to a gradual decline and eventual closure of the Central Otago railway line in 2000. Small adjoining settlements, such as Omakau, also declined as a consequence. Farming remained a stronghold of the community, however properties became less labour-intensive over time and this added to the population slump. Ironically it has been the re-development of the Central Otago railway line into the Otago Central Rail Trail for cyclists, walkers and riders that is once again invigorating Omakau township.

Recreational Pursuits

Sporting pursuits were developed within the Omakau district from very early on. Horse racing has been a long-standing passion of the district. The Vincent Racing Club was formed through the amalgamation of the Blacks and Matakanui Clubs in 1884. Re-named the Central Otago Racing Club in 1996, Omakau continues to host annual gallop and trot race meets, and its course is widely regarded as one of the most popular venues in the South island.

Team sports were also keenly pursued from an early date. The Matakanui Football Club was formed in 1887 by a group of hardy miners. Their first practices were held on the old Matakanui Station paddocks by Thomson Creek and home and away matches between Matakanui and Clyde were recorded as early as 1890. For many years the rugby ground was located in a stock paddock beside the Commercial Hotel, and utilised the hotel's stables as changing rooms. The Club shifted to its present site at the Omakau Domain in 1955, and clubrooms were built in the 1970's. Declining rural populations prompted club amalgamations with Valley RFC in 1971 and with Becks RFC in 1991 to form the present-day Matakanui-Combined Rugby Football Club.

Women also actively participated in team sports. The Omakau Ladies Hockey Club was formed in 1924, assisted by coaching and friendly games with the Clyde Hockey Club. The team entered the local competition (comprising teams from Lauder, Poolburn, Oturehua and Dunstan Creek) and travelled to Dunedin for tournaments. After going into recess in the 1930's the Club reformed in 1951 and joined the Vincent competition, which took them to club matches as far away as Glenorchy. Games were played on the school grounds for some years before shifting to a field at the Domain. As with rugby, dwindling player numbers caused the Omakau and Alexandra Hockey Clubs to amalgamate in 2000.

Omakau and districts communities have always been passionate about sport and have a proud legacy of achievements, both in winter sports and summer sports such as tennis and cricket. The community 'punches well above its weight' both in the competitiveness of its club teams, and in the number of players that have progressed on to play at provisional and national levels.

Heritage Sites

Omakau district's heritage is evident through the structures and landmarks that are still present today. The Central Otago District Plan contains a register of historic buildings, places, sites and objects that contribute to the character, amenity and historic values of the District (schedule 19.4). Sites currently included within this register are St Mary's Anglican Church in Omakau; Downshire Homestead; the early 1900's Shepherds Hut in Thomson Gorge; the hotel, woolshed (formerly Matakanui school with school bell), and Duggan's store, stables and yard wall in Matakanui. These sites are recognised as being important to both the cultural and economic composition of the area, and are protected accordingly.

Economy

The primary sector remains the dominant industry in and around Omakau. Sheep and beef farming are the mainstay of Omakau's economy, although dairy farming is establishing itself in the region and milk tankers are becoming a regular site on local roads. These more intensive land-use practices are highlighting the need to develop a more sustainable irrigation supply for the wider district. Omakau's current water scheme struggles to meet existing demand pressures during dry periods. A proposal is currently being put together by the Manuherikia Catchment Water Strategy Group to develop a new irrigation system that is environmentally sustainable and will meet future water demands of the community. Research has determined that through infrastructural improvements and more efficient irrigation methods, the quantity and reliability of supply can be enhanced, without having a negative impact on the environment (www.mcwater.co.nz). The preferred option is to raise Falls Dam so as to provide significantly increased water storage for the Manuherikia catchment.

Omakau's township provides a centralised service hub for the Manuherikia and Ida Valleys, providing many of their daily retail, service and trade needs. Agricultural contractors (including shearing, wool merchant, spraying, stock and fertiliser transport, excavation, horticultural contracting, irrigation, etc.) provide essential services to the farming industry. Other services provided locally include construction (building, plumbing, concrete cutting), a garage, engineer, a local supermarket, plus craft and retail shops selling new and antique/second-hand goods. Professional services (such as accountants, lawyers, medical specialists, etc.) are generally accessed in Alexandra.

Otago Central Rail Trail has stimulated tourism and hospitality businesses in the community, and tourism is now recognised as an important contributor to the region's economy. Omakau is well positioned along the Rail Trail for overnight stopovers and/or refreshment breaks by cyclists and their support people. As a consequence, a number of businesses are now operating in farm cottages or former service stores of the town, which as a by-product has revitalised the townscape and

celebrates the town's heritage. Hospitality businesses in Omakau include cafes, a hotel, guest accommodation, and recreation activities – such as bike hire and organised tours.

Most businesses in Omakau are locally owned and small in size (i.e., according to the 2014 Omakau Business Survey, 76% of respondents employ 4 or less full time equivalent staff positions). The businesses also tend to be well established, with 75% of respondents to the Omakau Business Survey reporting that they had been operating for more than 6 years.

Environment

The Omakau community is situated in the Manuherikia Valley, comprising a vast glaciated valley with low rolling hills bordered by the Dunstan Mountains and Raggedy Range (Blacks Hill), and with stunning vistas of the St Bathans and the Hawkdun Ranges to the north-west. The distinctive dry and arid appearance provides a unique colour palette of gold, grey and brown on the hillsides, contrasting the irrigated green fields in the valley floor. The region's predominantly dryland pastoral heritage has been a strong definer of the appearance of the landscape over many decades – irrigation has enabled more intensive land-use practices to develop in recent times, though these practices are restricted to the low-lying countryside. The Manuherikia River, which meanders through the centre of the valley, provides a valuable resource for the community both for functional and recreational purposes.

Manuherikia Valley's sparse terrain, with the relative absence of settlement and vast clear sky, is well known throughout the international atmospheric research community due to the work undertaken at the NIWA research station, situated at Lauder (7km from Omakau). NIWA's atmospheric research station specialises in measuring CFCs, ozone, UV levels and greenhouse gases and has a wide range of world-class instruments and research scientists. Approximately 20 staff are employed at the Centre.

Lifestyle

The Manuherikia Valley is essentially populated by families with a strong sense of connection to the area. Many families have lived in the area for generations and have a proud connection with the land and its development over time. The wider community comprises predominantly of families, with older teenagers and young adults tending to travel out of the region for career or 'life' experiences, although many later return to raise their own families in Central Otago. There are a number of retired people living within Omakau, although residents requiring specialised care need to relocate to Alexandra.

Residents of Omakau enjoy its relaxed rural lifestyle and quieter pace of life. A number of residents choose to live in Omakau and commute to Alexandra for work. Some families also send their children into Alexandra for their schooling, though tend to still associate with Omakau as their home community. As internet and telecommunication technology continues to improve, more opportunities are developing for professional people to relocate their workplaces to places that offer a better lifestyle balance.

Sport and recreation remain an important aspect of Omakau life. The community's passion for sporting and recreational pursuits is reflected in the quantity and variety of clubs and facilities on offer in the district. Residents also make the most of their natural environment. The surrounding hills, nearby lakes and the labyrinth of rivers within the Matakanui Valley provide recreational opportunities for fishing, swimming, boating, walking, biking, horse trekking, camping, hunting (rabbits, pigs, deer, and ducks), four-wheel driving, and curling – when the weather permits.

Social Infrastructure

The Omakau community is made from a cohesive social fabric born of multiple successive generations farming in the area. Omakau is well resourced, for a town of its size, with many residents considering themselves to be a predominantly self-sufficient rural community.

Omakau's Volunteer Fire Brigade and community-based co-responder team assist the local police officer to provide an excellent first response unit for the wider community. The plunket nurse makes periodic trips to Omakau and makes house calls to newborn babies' families, however there are no other resident medical facilities – residents instead travel to Alexandra for these services.

The Omakau Primary School comprises three classrooms, a community library and a community swimming pool. There is also a Playcentre (located in Ophir), and a toy library. Daily school bus services are also provided to Dunstan High School plus other primary schools in Alexandra.

Omakau is rich with recreational resources: Omakau Domain contains the rugby field and clubrooms, cricket ground and nets, a hockey/tennis turf, squash courts, playground, campground, chalets and ablution block. Other recreational facilities include the racecourse, golf club, bowling club, community hall, and swimming pool at the school.

There are a core group of volunteers in Omakau who support the many social services which operate in the area, and this strong volunteer base is very important to the continuation of these services.

Special Features of the Area

Population

Omakau township has a population of about 260, and the wider Omakau community is estimated at 350. Variations in Central Otago community populations, over the past ten years, are demonstrated in the table below:

Populations	2013	2006	% change in population
Dunstan*	4,515	3,771	19.7 %
Maniototo #	1,077	1,035	4.1 %
Alexandra	4,800	4,824	-0.5 %
Central Otago	17,895	16,644	7.5 %

Source: Statistics New Zealand – 2013 Census data

* The Dunstan region encompasses Omakau, Earnscliffe, Bannockburn and Tarras communities, but excludes Cromwell, Clyde, Alexandra, Otarehua, St Bathans and Ranfurly.

The Maniototo region encompasses St Bathans, Otarehua, Kyeburn and Patearoa communities, but excludes Ranfurly and Naseby.

Population Proportions in 2013	
% population aged 0 – 14 years:	
Dunstan	18.8
Maniototo	24.4
Alexandra	17.1
Central Otago	18.2
% population aged 15 – 29 years:	
Dunstan	12.6
Maniototo	13.5
Alexandra	14.8
Central Otago	12.1
% population aged 30 – 64 years:	
Dunstan	57.7
Maniototo	52.6
Alexandra	44.9
Central Otago	48.5
% population aged over 65 years:	
Dunstan	11.1
Maniototo	10.4
Alexandra	23.0
Central Otago	21.2

Source: Statistics New Zealand – 2013 Census data

People

Families, retirees, farmers, trades people, contractors, property owners, holiday makers (particularly in the summer months)

<i>Climate</i>	A continental climate with extreme variations in temperature, from 38°C in summer down to at least -15°C in winter, and a low average rain fall (of approximately 350mm).
<i>Features</i>	<p>Manuherikia River</p> <p>Dunstan Mountains</p> <p>Raggedy Range (which includes Blacks Hill)</p> <p>St Bathans and Hawkdun Ranges</p> <p>Tiger Hill</p> <p>Lauder Gorge</p> <p>Ophir Gorge</p> <p>Thomsons Gorge 4WD track, shepherd's hut and gold tailings</p> <p>Historic Matakanui gold mining and settlement site</p> <p>Historic farm station settlements (e.g. Matakanui)</p> <p>Drybread Cemetery</p> <p>Otago Central Rail Trail – tunnels and viaduct</p> <p>NIWA</p>
<i>Regular Events</i>	<p>Omakau A & P Show</p> <p>Interislander Summer Festival Omakau Trots</p> <p>Interislander Summer Festival Omakau Gallops</p>
<i>Industries</i>	Agriculture, agricultural contracting, trade and commercial services, hospitality and tourism.

Community Development

Omakau residents value their strong and supportive community. Thirty percent of respondents to the Omakau Community Survey identified Omakau's friendly, small and safe community as being the single most important strength to living there. Residents value the town's 'rural feel' with its safe and peaceful environment, away from the rush and intensity of city life, and its friendly community with a strong community spirit – it's a place where families look out for others. The Omakau community also values its fascinating gold mining and farming histories – with many families having lived in the community for generations, there is a strong connection with the heritage and subsequent development of the area.

Omakau residents would like to see greater cohesion within their community. They want to create opportunities that bring the wider community together and bridge any perceived gaps between young and old, town and rural, or amongst individual settlements. Better communication throughout the community and more community activities were two key areas that the community wanted to develop in order to achieve this.

1. Communication

Communication is key to developing greater awareness of projects and initiatives that are taking place in the community – the community hope that better communication will encourage greater involvement in community activities and the development of community pride.

Opportunities to enhance communication include developing and using public information sites, such as community noticeboards and/or community newsletters. The community would like to see one (or maybe two) public noticeboards located in the centre of town that people seek out and use to exchange community-related information. Residents also suggested the development of a community newsletter that could be distributed either by e-mail or hand-delivery. Omakau School's communication networks with the wider community were also suggested as a mechanism that could be utilised more to distribute information and link community members.

Communication links between the community and the Central Otago District Council could be improved. There is a perception that the Council isn't involved in the Omakau community and can be unhelpful. Residents are encouraged to contact their elected Council representative directly with individual concerns, or to utilise representative committees (e.g. the Ratepayers Association, Community Plan Working Group, etc.) or their elected Councillor to create a line of communication.

Participants at the community plan development meetings expressed a desire to see more planning and consultation taking place, and to see greater community involvement in planning processes. This will enable the community can take ownership of the direction in which their town is heading. It is also hoped that the Omakau Community Plan will help to provide leadership and direction for not only residents but government authorities and other stakeholders in the area.

Objective:

To have a cohesive community through good communication

Recommended actions:

- Develop, maintain and utilise one or two recognised public noticeboards within the township
- Investigate the possibility of extending the circulation of the school's newsletter to encompass the wider community
- Consider the development of a community newsletter, to be distributed by e-mail or available in public-use areas
- Encourage community participation in [community projects and planning exercises](#)
- Develop better communication links with the Council

2. Community Events and Activities

Omakau residents thoroughly enjoy their community events and activities and would love to see more developed. The town hosts two major annual events – the Omakau horse race meetings in January and the A&P Show in February. The community values these events and want to ensure that they continue to be well supported, by residents and visitors alike. They also would like to see more events in their area – some of which could be organised as one-off events and others as regular or annual events. Suggestions included events that utilise the community hall (e.g., games nights, movie nights, or stage events such as the recent very successful “Stars in their Eyes” evening), a community party, or sports days at the Domain. The community felt that events such as these would help to bring people together and to foster community spirit.

Community events rely on the good will of volunteers to facilitate and organise them and, in some cases, funding for equipment and supplies. Volunteers and funding would need to be taken into consideration before organising these events – the community organisation *Volunteering Central* is now available to assist local communities to connect with, support and promote local volunteers.

Good planning is also necessary to ensure the community has plenty of notice, that other event dates don't clash, and that organisers and participants are prepared and ready to go on the day. Linking into Tourism Central Otago (TCO) – a resource unit based at the Central Otago District Council that provides advice on tourism and marketing ideas and initiatives – may assist local event coordinators with planning techniques and event coordination.

Objective:

Support our successful events and get in behind the development of new ones

Recommended actions:

- Encourage the facilitation of more socialising events for the community
- Support the A&P Show Committee and Central Otago Racing Club

- Identify sources to support the volunteer base, through avenues such as Volunteering Central
- Coordinate a small workshop for community groups, run by Tourism Central Otago, on fundraising, event marketing and coordination, volunteer management, etc.

Facilities & Resources

Omakau's facilities and resources were recognised by the participants at the community planning meetings as the greatest strength of their community. Residents value their sports clubs and facilities, their first response support (including Police, Fire Service and Co-responder Team), and their educational facilities (particularly the school, but also Playcentre, the secondary school bus route, the community library and the toy library). They also appreciate the natural amenities – their rivers, hills and climate – that make living and recreating in and around Omakau so enjoyable.

1. Community Facilities

The community acknowledges that there are challenges to keeping Omakau's current range of community services and facilities operational as many of them are completely reliant on trained volunteers. They would like to ensure that these volunteers are supported and that people continue to step forward and be willing to be involved in these organisations.

Residents are concerned that the Omakau School roll is declining and feel this could be due in part to pressure from competing schools (e.g. in Alexandra or at Poolburn). Participants at community meetings wanted to see their community get in behind the school and utilise this 'community hub,' regardless whether they have children attending or not. They would also like to see the community library being utilised more by the wider community.

The community want to promote their sporting clubs so as to increase player memberships and encourage spectator support. They would also like to see their recreational facilities used more, and their sports groups and committees supported by the wider community (e.g., the Omakau Pool Committee). Participants at the community workshop would like to see greater use made of the community hall – it was suggested that if the hall was "re-vamped" and utilised as a community centre, this may encourage more frequent use.

However, the community hall poses a real challenge for the Omakau community. A district wide assessment of all Council-owned buildings determined the Omakau Hall to be an earthquake-prone building that requires significant strengthening work to bring it up to earthquake-proof standards. This means that no code of compliance sign-offs can be issued on any building alterations until the strengthening exercise is completed. Thus, if the community wish to re-vamp their hall in any way other than merely cosmetically (e.g. painting), they will potentially need to undertake a significant fundraising exercise. An alternative could be to review other community buildings within the township to see if there is another venue that, with some re-development, could be used as a town community centre.

Objective:

To make good use of and support our existing facilities and services

Recommendations:

- Encourage people to attend fundraising events for Omakau's community services
- Explore ways to support Omakau School
- Encourage participation in local recreational committees and sports teams
- Determine the ongoing maintenance and development of the Omakau Hall

2. Natural Amenities / Environment

The Omakau community has a close connection with its environment – for recreational and aesthetic reasons, as well as business and/or commercial purposes. Residents want to ensure that their landscape and natural amenities are used and enjoyed but are valued and protected too.

Omakau has an ideal climate for camping during the summer months and the community would like to see more camping opportunities in their area. Omakau currently has two recognised camping areas – the serviced public campground at the Omakau Domain, and a campsite beside the Manuherikia River that is designated for self-contained campers only (Camping in Central Otago, 2010). It should be noted that active marketing of non-serviced camping sites is discouraged in Central Otago’s camping policy.

The Manuherikia River as a fabulous natural resource and offers an array of recreational opportunities. Residents would like to see walkways developed alongside the Manuherikia River so that people can access this beautiful waterway and undertake recreational activities such as fishing, exercising dogs, etc. – one suggestion was to create a walkway ‘from bridge to bridge’.

The river also provides some fabulous swimming holes right beside Omakau, yet few people (other than locals) are aware of them. The community would like to make some of the popular swimming holes visible and accessible to the wider public, and suggested conducting working bees to clear debris and form access footpaths. Gaining permission from the governing body of the marginal strip before any work commences is recommended.

The water quality of the Manuherikia River has been a long-standing issue for residents. There are periods, such as after heavy rains or when water levels are especially low, when toxin levels escalate and bacteria, such as *escherichia coli* (E coli), or the toxic *phormidium* algae breach swimming standards. Recent water tests conducted by the Otago Regional Council when the river was last below median flow indicated that the river exceeded acceptable water quality standards on three measures: Dissolved reactive phosphorus; turbidity (discolouration); and E coli.

Manuherikia River water quality is a ‘whole of catchment’ issue – from farming practices and town wastewater discharges, through to native/wild animals and recreational users. Increased intensification of farming practices requires farmers to look to more efficient irrigation methods (e.g. spray and centre pivot methods rather than border-dyke and flood irrigation) which significantly reduce surface water contamination. Increasing the river’s year-round minimum water flows will also help to dilute toxins – the proposed development of the Manuherikia catchment irrigation scheme is expected to address this. Omakau’s oxidation ponds empty into the Manuherikia River just below the township and the Council is required to regularly monitor toxicity levels to ensure that they are not breaching contamination standards. There may also be residential run-off or below-surface leachates that property owners need to take responsibility for and clean up.

Objective:

Value our natural resources and make them accessible so that they can be enjoyed now and for future generations

Recommendations:

- Investigate opportunities for developing more campsites and greater camping awareness
- Investigate the possibility of developing access ways and walking tracks alongside the Manuherikia River
- Implement community working bees to clear vegetation and beautify public areas
- Encourage safe and sustainable land use practices throughout the greater Manuherikia Valley
- Encourage and promote responsible and environmentally friendly water use practices

Economy

Omakau is a centralised service hub for the wider Manuherikia Valley and Ida Valley. Community members consider their town to be virtually self-sufficient, providing most of the products and services they need on a daily basis – from food and grocery items through to agricultural contracting and trade services – in fact the only service that residents noted as missing from their town was banking services or an ATM.

1. Business and Tourism

Responses to the Omakau Business Survey indicate that Omakau's business people are in a stable position and are optimistic about the foreseeable future, with 80% of respondents indicating a good or very good outlook for the next twelve months. Business operators in Omakau value the loyalty of their local customers, the reliable support of other local businesses, and the communication networks available (Omakau Business Survey, June 2014). The town's relative proximity to its markets was also seen as an advantage by a number of operators, along with reliable freight and transport services. However other operators noted that transport costs and the time/distance from suppliers and services were a disadvantage to their business. Planning and compliance issues were also noted as a constraining factor – with some requesting a need to free up industrial land for development, and for more housing to be made available, particularly rental accommodation for workers.

The popularity of the Otago Central Rail Trail, and cycle tourism in general, is continuing to provide stimulation to Omakau's hospitality industry – from eateries and accommodation through to activity based businesses. Visitors to the town enjoy its friendly and relaxed atmosphere, and the helpfulness and local knowledge of its businesses and local people (Omakau Visitor Survey).

Omakau businesses would like to grow visitor awareness of their town and the activities and facilities available within it. Suggestions for improving visitor information and services in and about the town include:

- A map of the township, installed at the railway station and in the centre of town, displaying the town's activities and services;
- Directional signage to amenities within the town (e.g., public toilets);
- Information about the town – in the form of a brochure, website or map (pad of maps so that visitors can take one away) – that includes facts and history of the area (including the correct pronunciation of "Omakau"), interesting places to visit, activities (including recommended fishing and gold mining spots), accommodation and other services;
- The development of a visitor centre or designated visitor information site within the township;
- Free Wi-Fi connections along the main street.

Some community members are concerned that businesses are too reliant on the Rail Trail and wish to see the development of other tourism opportunities, such as camping, that capitalise on the region's strengths – i.e., its peaceful lifestyle, natural resources and long warm summers. Other marketing suggestions included promoting Omakau's location – both in relation to its

neighbouring communities (e.g. Ophir and St Bathans) and its relative proximity to larger centres such as Queenstown and Dunedin (with their international airports) – and developing collaborative or joint marketing initiatives between communities and stakeholders.

Objective:

Grow awareness of Omakau as a visitor destination and provide visitors with information about the services and activities within the town

Recommendations:

- Develop a map of the town that displays interesting places to visit, activities and services
- Re-fit the map at the railway station so it faces the right way for visitors
- Develop visitor information about the township, in the form of a brochure, website or map
- Investigate the possibility of developing of a visitor centre or designated visitor information site within the township
- Look for other tourism opportunities as well as the Rail Trail, promoting the region's strengths (camping, peaceful lifestyle, natural resources)
- Promote the area's location in relation to known attractions in and around the area
- Investigate opportunities to develop collaborative marketing initiatives between stakeholders and across communities

2. Primary Sector

The agricultural industry continues to provide the mainstay for Omakau's economy.

A reliable irrigation source is critical for the sustainability of this industry and community members commented on the significance of the proposed Manuherikia Catchment irrigation development in providing long term benefits to both rural and townsfolk.

Some residents voiced concern about the number of dairy conversions that are taking place in their region, commenting on environmental impacts (water contamination, odour) and heightened irrigation demands. Concern was also raised over the potential change in community structure that may occur if farming units are staffed by employed workers who tend not to stay in the area long and are required to work hours that are uncondusive to community engagement. Concerns were also raised that land prices are likely to change and that any profits from corporate-owned properties would be syphoned out of the district. On the other hand, another possible threat noted by local business operators was the community being resistant to change.

Objective:

Maintain Omakau's strong and stable economy

Recommended actions:

- Raise awareness of the proposed development of Manuherikia Catchment Water Scheme
- Liaise with the Regional and District Council in relation to planning for land use and the economic development of the community
- Work together to ensure sustainable land and water use practices

Infrastructure

There were several infrastructural issues mentioned across community meetings and opinion surveys, that the community would like to see addressed.

1. Public toilets

A lack of conveniently located public toilet facilities was considered the single most important issue for residents attending community meetings. This negative view was shared by visitors to the township, with 61% of comments about what respondents did not like about the town relating to a lack of public toilets.

Omakau currently offers public toilet facilities at the Domain. Directional signage to these toilets is located from the state highway and at the Domain gateway. However people traveling along the rail trail or stopping in the town's retail centre may be unaware of their location.

Suggestions to address this issue include installing directional signage from the Rail Trail and town centre, and ensuring maps of the township have the toilets clearly marked on them.

A number of businesses and residents would like to see public toilet facilities provided in the retail area. Efforts have been made in the past to make the toilets in the Community Hall available for the public, but difficulties arose in limiting access to the rest of the facility, and any structural changes to the building now will incur significant earthquake strengthening costs (as discussed in *Facilities and Resources*). Local businesses can and do offer their toilet facilities to the wider community, and this was appreciated by respondents to the Visitor Survey. The local garage has an arrangement with Council to make their toilet facilities available to the public, and is compensated for the cost of toilet paper.

Should the Omakau community choose to erect purpose-built toilet facilities on the main street the cost of these will be significant and will be a large burden on the small community. Other options for the community include strengthening individual business agreements with the Council such that a nominated business may be subsidised for its toilet's running costs (e.g., water rates and consumables) in exchange for allowing the facilities to be advertised, clearly visible and easily accessed as a public toilet facility.

Objective:

Have public toilet facilities that visitors to Omakau are aware of and utilise

Recommendations:

- Install signage, from rail trail and town centre, directing people to the public toilets at the Domain
- Determine an effective solution for the provision of public toilet facilities within Omakau's retail sector

2. Drinking water

Omakau's drinking water was identified as an issue for the town by both residents and visitors. Concerns related to water discolouration, the necessity to boil drinking water (particularly after heavy rain), and poor water pressure.

The Omakau / Ophir Town Water Supply treatment plant does not meet current national standards, which means that when the water becomes discoloured (e.g., after a heavy rain) drinking water must be boiled to counter the risk of bacteria getting through with the sediment. A working group – comprising three community representatives, a local councillor and the Council's Water Services Manager – is currently investigating options to find the most practical long term solution in creating a year-round potable water source for the town. Funding of this solution will be next significant challenge.

If members of the community are interested in finding out more or being involved in the group, they should contact the Water Services Manager at the Central Otago District Council.

Objective:

Obtain a clean and reliable drinking water source for the town

Recommendations:

- Liaise with and support the Omakau / Ophir Town Water Supply working party in their investigations into finding the most practical solution for improving the town's water quality

3. Rubbish collection

Residents expressed concern about the refuse disposal services provided to their community. Current services operated by the Council include a fortnightly residential wheelie bin service for household rubbish and a centralised recycling unit, located at Hickies Woolstore on the main street of Omakau. The recycling unit caters to the greater Omakau region, with the next closest facilities being located in Alexandra and Oturehua. Central Otago Wastebusters is contracted to service the recycling bins on a weekly basis, increasing to twice weekly between Christmas and mid-January.

Periodically the recycling bins become over-full which results in glass and cardboard overflowing into the yard and causing an unsightly mess. Local businesses put pressure on the facility when they dispose of their recyclable products there. The Christmas holiday period is another pressure-some time for the facility, due to the increased visitor numbers. The facility also gets misused by a small minority who dump household rubbish or second-hand items, which then have to be collected and taken away by Council staff, at an additional cost to ratepayers. The Omakau community would like to see their recycling facility better managed and there are opportunities, through individuals taking better responsibility for their waste and greater liaison with the Council, that this can be achieved.

Another concern of residents was the provision and servicing of public rubbish bins. Members of the community felt more rubbish bins were needed and that it was unfair that local businesses were expected to service the bins outside their premises and discard of the rubbish bags in their own wheelie bins, without some sort of compensation by Council.

Objective:

Have a tidy and functional rubbish disposal system in Omakau

Recommendations:

- Take communal responsibility for tidy recycling practices
- Notify the Council if the recycling facility is being misused or mismanaged
- Investigate alternative recycling options for local businesses
- Lobby the Council to install additional refuse disposal units in town
- Encourage the local businesses currently servicing public rubbish bins to discuss with Council the possibility of assistance (e.g. bin liners and wheelie bin collection fees)

4. School Bus Shelter

A school bus shelter has been recently installed by the CODC on the main street of Omakau. Members of the community felt they were not adequately consulted on the process, with concerns including its location (i.e., it impedes the view of the picnic area; it's too close to the Harvey Street intersection; it should have been located at the other end of town), its size (some considered it was too small and did not fit everybody inside), and the fact that it still displayed a map of Cromwell within it.

The shelter is positioned at one of the town's existing school bus stop sites. The positioning of bus stops and planning of the bus routes are controlled by the Ministry of Education, who fund the school bus service. Both the local bus company and police officer have been monitoring the site for safety issues, however if residents are observing unsafe practices at the site they should contact these authorities and have these concerns followed up. "School Bus Stop" signage may also help to keep vehicles clear of the immediate stopping area.

The shelter is larger than most school bus shelters in the district – roading administrators considered that Omakau would benefit from a larger shelter so arranged for its relocation from Cromwell, at no additional cost to local ratepayers. Inside the shelter is a perspex display panel. A map of Cromwell township was still inside the panel when the shelter was shifted, but this has subsequently been removed and there is now an opportunity for the community to display their own community information.

The community may wish to consider "re-vamping" the shelter, in consultation with the Ministry, or re-landscaping the green space surrounding the shelter to help it blend in. Alternatively, if the community is strongly opposed to the current bus shelter they could

investigate the possibility of building another one, again under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and the Central Otago District Council.

Objective:

Have a school bus shelter that is safe for users and fit for purpose

Recommendations:

- Gauge community preferences on what they would like to do with the school bus shelter
- Notify authorities of any safety concerns for bus stop users
- Use the notice board within the shelter to display community messages and information

5. Footpaths and Kerbing

Maintenance and upkeep of Omakau's footpaths and kerbing was viewed as an issue by residents – specific concerns included uneven and/or slippery footpaths and no kerbs on some streets. Several street signs also need to be repaired (e.g. Alton / Leask St and the speed limit sign on Harvey St).

Maintenance for street signs and footpaths is the responsibility of the local Community Board. A maintenance programme is drawn up on a three yearly priority cycle – however specific jobs at specific sites can be added to this list if there is a safety issue or if emergency maintenance is required. Community members are encouraged to inform the Council of any safety / emergency maintenance issues before the problem escalates.

Another issue related to street lights being on the opposite side of the road to the footpath in some instances. Street lights on the main street are the responsibility of the NZ Transport Agency and side roads are managed by the District Council. Investigations could be made into the feasibility of repositioning street lights. It should also be noted that the Council is currently reviewing all street lighting throughout the district and proposed changes, such as LED bulb installations in the next 2-3 years, may significantly improve luminance direction and pedestrian visibility.

Objective:

Have tidy and safe footpaths and kerbing in Omakau

Recommendations:

- Create a register of footpath repairs for submission to Council
- Investigate the feasibility and practicalities of improving and/or relocating street lights in Omakau

6. One-lane Bridge

Road access from Omakau to the Ida Valley requires crossing either the historic suspension bridge by Ophir or the concrete bridge beside Omakau, both of which are narrow single-lane bridges. The bridge at Omakau is commonly used by agricultural vehicles but its 2.7m road width is too narrow for many larger vehicles which have to drive with one wheel on the concrete wheel guard. This activity compromises the structural integrity of the bridge and it is extremely daunting for cyclists and pedestrians trying to use the bridge at the same time.

The Council acknowledges that there is a problem with this bridge and it is identified as one of the priorities in Councils upcoming 30 year Long Term Plan. However, as always, funding is the challenge. Costing exercises, undertaken by Council a couple of years ago, indicated the following options:

- Retain the current bridge during the 30 year Long Term Plan with on-going maintenance (including costly under pinning) at an estimate of \$1million
- Construct a new single-lane bridge (4.1m width) with footway at an estimate of \$1.9million

This bridge is one of a number of bridges identified in the 30 year Long Term Plan that require major work or replacement.

Objective:

Have a safe bridge at Omakau that meets users' needs

Recommendations:

- Lobby the Council to increase the priority of replacing the existing one-lane concrete bridge at Omakau

7. Rates

Overly expensive Council rates are considered a negative aspect of living in Omakau, according to respondents to the Omakau Community Survey – in fact 28% of respondents selected high property and water rates as being the most significant weakness of living the region. Dissatisfaction seemed to be linked with the standard of the services provided, such as water quality, streetscape, roading and refuse disposal.

Objective:

Keep rates charges to a reasonable level for the community

Recommendations:

- Residents to voice their concerns regarding Council rates and service provision through their local Councillor and Ratepayers Association

8. Digital Technology

A concern of the community in the past has been the speed and efficiency of its telecommunications – cell phone coverage has been patchy and internet connection speed has been laboured. This has recently been addressed by the government’s *Rural Broadband Initiative (RBI)*, a project that has enabled the construction of a series of strategically placed cell towers throughout the country with the specific purpose of providing high speed, inexpensive broadband connectivity to our smaller townships and rural communities. Omakau, and its surrounding rural communities, are now able to access high-speed broadband comparable with urban areas.

Digital Otago is an organisation, made up of representatives from each of Otago’s regional, city and district councils, whose specific role is to lead in the development of new digital services throughout the region and to assist communities in realising the potential that this new technology is presenting.

Objective:

Optimise the value to the community of the new broadband capabilities now in the area

Recommended actions:

- Investigate possibilities that could now be available to the community through enhanced community and school broadband capabilities

Beautification

The Omakau community has a strong desire to tidy and freshen-up their township. Key areas for improvement are the town entranceways and the public picnic area. Residents at the community meetings recommended re-landscaping the town entranceways, using endemic and/or dry-plant planting options, and replacing the entrance signs with tasteful signage, as the current ones were described as “shocking”. The community may choose to develop a town “theme” or “point of difference”, and this could be included into the signage and/or landscaping also. A number of suggestions were given for how the town picnic area could be tidied and beautified – these ranged from landscaping, installing public seating and a barbecue site, removing the fence alongside the toy library, to removing the bus shelter and installing new public toilets. The community also wanted to develop visible and attractive access ways, both to the picnic area, and to popular swimming holes in the Manuherikia.

The community would like to see more trees planted in public spaces. Alexandra’s “Trees for Babies” programme was a suggested option to achieve this. The programme is a joint initiative between the community and Council, whereby Council provides the location, planting plan and register of who planted what, and the family of the newborn baby supplies the tree, assists with the planting and adheres to its watering and upkeep. Several public spaces in Alexandra have been planted out under this programme.

Omakau’s streetscape was another area that the community wanted to see improved. Suggestions included updating signage and noticeboards, tidying and clearing footpaths and road verges, and encouraging business and home owners to tidy and beautify their own properties. Residents hoped that by encouraging a communal sense of town pride, residents may elect to “do their bit” on their own properties.

Litter control was an area of concern for residents. A lack of public bins and an at times unsightly recycling unit were noted by participants at community meetings (as discussed in *Infrastructure*, above). Another concern was the amount of dog excrement left on streets – community members wanted dog owners to be more responsible with controlling and exercising their dogs – suggestions to address this included placing notices in community newsletters and noticeboards, or designating a community dog control officer for the township.

The Omakau community would like residents to take responsibility for their own beautification and cleanliness practices. A suggestion on how this could be achieved was by integrating cleanliness messages into public signage (e.g., “Beautiful Omakau – Keep it Clean”) to convey to visitors that residents are proud of their town and do not want it littered or defecated on.

Community members were keen to organise working bees to deal with a number of these projects. By turning the project into a family-focused event, whereby people could pitch-in together on a specific task and then have a barbecue and get-together at the end, it is hoped that these beautification projects could be made into enjoyable and satisfying community experiences.

Objective:

Have a tidy and attractive town that the community is proud of

Recommendations:

- Create low-maintenance beautification plans for Omakau's public spaces, in consultation with the landowner, and implement community working bees to achieve these plans
- Encourage the community to take responsibility for the tidiness of their town
- Investigate interest in developing a "Trees for Babies" programme for Omakau
- Consider options for developing a brand from Omakau that represents the town and community

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