

Developers home in on quiet rural haven

By [Wayne Thompson](#)

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Pokeno – a forgotten village since a highway bypass 10 years ago – is being reinvented by developers as a live, work and play town of the future.

Big plans for the rural rest stop, known for its bacon and big icecreams, could lead to its present 1100 residents being joined by 6000 more within 20 years.

Franklin District Council's growth plan has latched on to Pokeno's sleeping potential as a business and residential centre at the southern foot of the Bombay Hills that is handy to customers and jobs in Auckland and Waikato.

It is 50km by road and 60km by rail from downtown Auckland, and nudges the Auckland–Waikato Expressway and State Highway 2.

The council has taken an unusual step in forming a partnership with the Pokeno Landowners Consortium to design the new town.

It is a move which council chief executive Sally Davis said shifts the financial burden of beefing up water and sewerage services from ratepayers to developers.

It would also enable the council to work with the community and developers to come up with the best plan.

For example, at a workshop, community representatives were split into five groups, each producing a design for the future of the village's centre.

A common wish was to feature elements of the village's past – the train station, and the Queen's Redoubt – the site of the first military headquarters for the Waikato phase of the 1860s New Zealand Wars.

Revival of the main street as a leafy shopping attraction, with apartments above the shops, is also urged.

Sally Davis said the extra 6000 residents should be seen in the context of the district's growth rate of 1000 new residents a year or 400 new households spread among towns and hamlets.

"This will be slow change over a couple of decades, resulting in a country town and we expect its growth will result from both natural expansion and new growth from neighbouring Auckland and Waikato."

The partnership is working on a structure plan that lays out fresh areas for different types of land use and guides how it will fit with the existing settlement and be serviced.

An application to the council to change the District Plan to allow for development is expected in November.

Consortium member Kerry Dines, an Auckland civil engineering contractor and developer, said the demand for business sites and resulting job opportunities would drive the rate of housing settlement.

"We have had approaches from timber, rural service and construction sectors looking for cheaper land than Auckland can offer.

"It's an ideal business location, on the distribution network for the upper North Island and only 16 to 17 minutes to Manukau city centre.

"I think people who settle here will be a mixture of those nearing the end of working lives and families wanting a more rural setting and for their kids to grow up away from the pressures of the Auckland area."

He said the proposed 5200 extra residents would need about 1700 to 1800 houses.

A density of 10 people a hectare would allow for larger lots of 1200 to 1500sq m but mainly sections of 600 to 700sq

m.

"Growth is a good thing but it has to be done properly," said Todd McIntosh, a developer who has lived in Pokeno all his life and built 30 houses there over five years.

"The capacity of the sewerage system will dictate how much development is sustainable."

Pkeno is likely to be connected to the Pukekohe Wastewater Treatment Plant.

TOWN DIVIDED OVER GROWTH PLEA

Pkeno residents are divided over whether increasing the size of their town is a good idea.

Trish Rankin (right), who has turned a former mohair factory shop into one similar to a country general store, said Pokeno needed growth so it could support amenities such as a supermarket.

"We moved from Hillsborough in Auckland eight years ago and absolutely love the rural lifestyle. Growth is going to happen anyway, so it's much better for it to be done in a controlled way."

But Helen Clotworthy, of Pokeno Bacon, said she would oppose industrial zoning next to her home.

"It would change the whole reason of why we've loved living in Pokeno for 30 years – the country lifestyle."

Pkeno homes are advertised at \$350,000 to nearly \$400,000 for three bedrooms in tidy condition on a good-sized section. The price for not so tidy ones drops to about \$300,000.

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