

# Submission to the Marlborough District Council

## Annual Plan 2022 -2023

Sitting down to write this year's annual plan submission on behalf of the ratepayers of Grovetown, to try and convince the current Councillors to **'do the right thing'** and treat the ratepayers of Grovetown equally and fairly, comes with some hope and unease at the same time.

The Labour Government's Three Waters proposal sounds just like what is needed to make the settlement of Grovetown thrive; something we have been unable to do over the last 14 years since the sewerage scheme was instigated.

Property owners back then were told that if we paid \$15,881 per property for a sewerage connection, then this would enable us to subdivide our larger sections, just like the people in Renwick were able to when their sewerage scheme was installed.

The Grovetown community was from the very beginning concerned with the excessive cost and the formula used for the combined sewerage scheme repayments. After all, Grovetown residents already had working toilets – there would be no additional benefit to any individual for agreeing to pay such high costs. However, Councillors and Council staff were offering the opportunity for individuals to subdivide their larger sections, if a combined Spring Creek/Grovetown sewerage scheme was agreed to.

The Councillors and Council staff at the time advised the community that if we wanted costings to change, then the best way was to make submissions to the annual plan, where Councillors would review all funding requests.

Well, history has shown that Councillors and Council staff have not allowed either of these assurances to come true.

Council staff will confirm that we have well and truly paid back the \$1,489,189 in capital costs, that Grovetown was advised would be our share of the combined sewerage scheme (correspondence dated 31 August 2007). Yet, we still can't subdivide, because of the financial hurdle and difficulties of effectively dealing with the stormwater discharge. Something that was mentioned by ratepayers at the time but disregarded by those at Council who wanted the sewerage scheme to go ahead. Under the existing arrangements, having already paid back our share of the construction costs, we still have up to 16 years of internal sewerage loan repayments to make.

We will therefore once again plead to your good nature to **'do the right thing'** and fix the mistakes from the past, in the funding of the combined Spring Creek and Grovetown sewerage scheme.

Including the remaining internal Grovetown sewerage loan, in with the other internal sewerage loans (of those that use the Blenheim Sewerage Pond) would be much fairer. With the Three Waters proposal starting from 1 July 2024, this might be the last year local Councillors have the ability to correct the mistakes from the past.

The sewerage infrastructure installed in the Grovetown township, has improved the environmental condition of the waterways in Grovetown and across the wider region. It has enabled Spring Creek's sewerage to be sent to the Blenheim Sewerage ponds (via Grovetown's pipework). It has also alleviated the need for Council to apply for a resource consent to discharge sewerage from Spring Creek direct into the river; a resource consent Council would have been unlikely to get.

However, it has not enabled those original ratepayers in Grovetown to sub-divide their larger sections, and it has not made Grovetown a more desirable place to buy a property. This is partly due to the disproportionate Council rates charged on properties. The total dollar value of Council rates on a Grovetown property is much higher than other similar properties across Marlborough. However, for our rates we do not receive a water supply or rubbish collection. We have limited footpaths and verge mowing, and we struggle to get the culverts cleaned out. You may have also seen the so called 'playground' in Vickerman Street, which is a few old rubber tyres plonked in the middle of long grass.

Over the years that we have been paying the Grovetown sewerage loan, much profit has been made by Council, by charging an interest rate on the internal loan over and above the cost of any Council borrowings; something we were told would not happen. This has meant the community of Grovetown is essentially subsidising other projects in other areas of Marlborough. This cross-subsidising of other Council projects is something we were told by Councillors and staff could not be allowed for the combined Spring Creeks and Grovetown sewerage project.

The Government's Three Waters rightly believes and promotes that it **should not be the size of the ratepaying base** that determines who has access to quality and affordable services like sewerage, drinking water and stormwater. If this same philosophy was used by the Marlborough District Council, then the cost of providing the sewerage infrastructure in Grovetown should be spread over at least all those that use the Blenheim sewerage ponds.

This system of spreading the cost over a wider ratepaying base, was used by the Marlborough District Council when deciding how to charge the Seddon ratepayers for their new water scheme. Those in Seddon who pay the new water rate, pay exactly the same as those in Blenheim who pay a water rate.

We are still looking for the answer to why Councillors won't allow the same rule to apply in Grovetown. Aka: a rule that those who use the Blenheim Sewerage ponds pay the same sewerage rates, regardless of whether they live in Grovetown or Blenheim.

The comments made at last year's annual plan hearing, suggest that Councillors believe the Grovetown ratepayer has been told why we are treated so differently. Hopefully, the official information request we recently put to Council, will provide us with this information as we do not believe we have received it. Hopefully, we will receive copies of the correspondence provided to the Grovetown ratepayer, explaining Councillors reasons for treating Grovetown and Seddon differently when paying for new Council owned and controlled infrastructure.

Grovetown not having an affordable or fairly charged sewerage loan, and not having any firm Council commitment for dealing with stormwater in the area, has hindered those original ratepayers from subdividing their larger properties.

Fortunately for Grovetown, the supply of water in the area is not a problem. Grovetown has been quoted by Council staff as 'having water for Africa'. This has been the reason given why they won't clean out the ditches regularly just in case they hit more springs. However, the community does need support and guidance from the Council to meet the new water drinking standards, at an affordable cost.

Included in the internal Grovetown sewerage loan, Council also added the cost of a land purchase. Council's later justification for this was that it would be used for a potable water supply site, for the community.

What will happen to this land that 120 ratepayers have paid for (and continues to pay for) when Three Waters is introduced? Will it be handed over to the Three Waters – Entity C - for development in the future? Or will it be something else the Grovetown community has unfairly paid for and received no benefit from?

Therefore, we ask again that you take seriously our request to include the sewerage internal loan rates, payable in Grovetown, in with the other sewerage loan costs, paid by all those that use the Blenheim Sewerage Ponds. Just as those in Seddon and Blenheim pay the same water rates, regardless of where they live.

I mentioned in the first paragraph of this submission that it has been written with a little unease. This is because even though it is Central Government's intention that small communities like Grovetown, with a small rating base, are entitled to be provided with Three Waters infrastructure at a reasonable cost, I am not convinced the additional bureaucratic system proposed, will actually achieve the outcome they want.

However, if Grovetown can receive all three services of sewerage, stormwater and safe drinking water for only \$1,260 per year, this would be cheaper than what the Marlborough District Council is currently charging us, just in sewerage rates.

Marlborough needs more affordable housing and supporting the future development of Grovetown, by not charging so much in sewerage rates, could be one step forward in achieving this.

How about putting some of that profit that the Marlborough District Council has made on the Grovetown ratepayer over the years (by charging an interest rate on internal loans at more than Council's cost of borrowing) back into our community.

#### **Outcome required –**

- **This year make the change to include the remaining internal Council sewerage loan that Grovetown ratepayers are paying, with the other internal loans of those that use the Blenheim Sewerage Pond. This way all users of the Blenheim Sewerage Ponds pay the same annual sewerage rate.**
- **Don't just dismiss our request without getting the Council's finance team to calculate what the financial impact of our request would have on the Blenheim Group Sewer rates. Then you will have in front of you, the actual cost of our request, so you can make a more informed decision.**
- **Take a serious look at how stormwater can be dealt with cost effectively for those original ratepayers who were told, if we agreed to pay for the sewerage scheme costs, we would be able to subdivide our larger sections.**

Kind regards  
Yvonne Wratt  
Grovetown Residents Association

**Yes, I wish to be heard at the upcoming submissions hearing.**