

Grovetown Residents Association
Submission to Marlborough District Council
Annual Plan 2023 - 2024

The Grovetown Residents Association would like to make a submission to the 2023/2024 annual plan requesting the Marlborough District Council honour the commitment it made to the Grovetown ratepayers back in 2007, regarding the COSTS and OPPORTUNITIES that a combined sewerage scheme with Spring Creek would bring to our small Grovetown community.

We have been submitting now for the last 16 years for Council to fix the mistakes of the past. Our investigations have shown that Councillors, if the political desire is there, can make changes and fix this problem, if only Councillors have the courage.

Grovetown ratepayers asked Council from the very beginning, back in 2007, to spread the infrastructure costs associated with sending Spring Creek and Grovetown's sewerage to the Blenheim sewerage ponds, over all other ratepayers that pay a sewerage rate and send their sewerage to the Blenheim ponds. Just like Seddon's new water infrastructure costs are spread over all ratepayers that pay a water rate.

This proposed solution is even more relevant today because over the last 16 years the Grovetown community has already paid in excess of our share of the combined sewerage infrastructure costs (Aug 2007 costings \$1,489,189).

We have paid over a MILLION DOLLARS in interest payments. These interest costs have then been used to subsidise other unrelated Council activities and projects. The Grovetown community has also paid our share of the costs associated with upgrading the Blenheim sewerage ponds during this time. Under the current Council charging arrangement, the Grovetown ratepayer is looking at paying millions of dollars more for sewerage rates over the next 14 years. This is despite there being no progress on a storm water plan for the community. Therefore, creating little opportunity to sub-divide our larger sections cost effectively, as we were promised we would be able to do, if we paid for sewerage infrastructure in our community.

Background:

Council wanted to install a sewerage scheme in Grovetown to improve the environment and water quality in surrounding waterways. The scheme would enable the sewerage from Spring Creek to be carried to the Blenheim sewerage ponds via pipework through Grovetown, with Grovetown picking up a pro rata proportion of the costs. At the time Council was faced with a huge problem as discharging from the Spring Creek sewerage ponds to the river was no longer an acceptable option. The Grovetown community was told that by connecting to the combined sewerage scheme with Spring Creek, we would be able to sub-divide our larger sections and that the community would develop. Council also stated at the time that they

realised it had to be affordable and fair and, if we had concerns, we should make a submission to the annual plan, requesting changes. Since this time, it has been anything but fair, when compared to other communities in Marlborough that pay sewerage and water rates. From the very beginning, back in 2007, the Grovetown ratepayer objected to the way costs were being allocated to pay for our share of the combined sewerage scheme, enabling the sewerage from Spring Creek and Grovetown to go to the Blenheim sewerage ponds.

During the last 16 years there have been public meetings, private meetings, committee groups, slide shows and written details given to the community on how the scheme could be paid for, then many of these conditions were later just changed by Council.

There has been changes in the projects design, unnecessary land purchases and legal fees all charged to Grovetown ratepayers.

Grovetown residents have protested, one year putting in over 500 submissions to the annual plan asking for a more affordable sewerage scheme, this being before construction began.

Council has also calculated the internal interest component on the Council's internal loan, differently from the Mayor's written correspondence given to the community. As a result, the Council are making huge profits from the Grovetown ratepayer on our sewerage loan costs.

Council have also changed the meaning of charging Grovetown on a pro-rata basis for our volume of sewerage compared with Spring Creeks, to be a pro-rata basis of our sewerage plus the volume of freshly pumped water at Spring Creek to enable better flow; all additional costs charged to Grovetown.

Council staff have in the past made errors in their reporting to Councillors, made errors in their reporting to the Grovetown community and have made mistakes that have required Council lawyers and ratepayers lawyers to become involved. On one occasion Council told a ratepayer that even though a legally drawn up agreement says one thing, it just won't be happening. On the next occasion stating that Council's pockets are deeper than the ratepayers to pay lawyers. Most of this has been brought to the attention of Council staff and Councillors in the past, but often they just refuse to respond. Council deliberately told Grovetown ratepayers, to encourage and obtain agreement to start the scheme, that they would apply for infrastructure funding from Central Government (31 Aug 2007), like they did for the Renwick sewerage scheme. However, Council knew all along that no funding would be available as the scheme was closed years earlier.

If you read through each of the Grovetown Residents Association submissions made over the last sixteen years, you will see we have provided you with numerous pieces of written correspondence, between Council and the Grovetown community, proving that not all reporting that has been put out by Council staff is accurate. These submissions also provide evidence that what the community was told in writing would happen, with a combined sewerage scheme with Spring Creek, has not eventuated; especially in regard to the amount of internal interest charged on sewerage loan rates as well as the lack of progress with any stormwater infrastructure.

Therefore, the Grovetown Residents Association request that Councillors seriously consider our requests in this years' annual plan deliberations.

- **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. No other ratepayers in Marlborough are paying over \$1,230.00 per year to Council in sewerage rates, other than Grovetown.**

- **Don't just dismiss our request without getting the Council's finance team to calculate what the financial impact of our request would be 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. We have requested this information previously but have had no response.**

- **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 sub-divide our larger sections.**

Kind regards
Yvonne Wratt
Grovetown Residents Association

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