



Email: info@sustainablewaikato.org.nz

Web: www.sustainablewaikato.org.nz

HCC candidate name: Nick Johnston – HCC East Ward candidate

1. Have you personally been involved in any group, organisation or activities that relate to sustainability? Please give details and outcomes.

I have not been involved in any group or organisation relating to sustainability. However I have a strong personal interest in sustainability issues, in particular sustainable urban design and energy solutions.

Sustainability is a very important issue in my family. My grandfather was a dairy farmer who was also a very strong conservationist who actively protested for many years against the destruction of native bush. There were several restoration projects on the former family farm. My aunt Amanda Wright has made a career from sustainable event organisation. She founded the Splore festival which has always had a strong commitment to sustainability, and she currently operates GreenShoot Pacific, a team of sustainability advisors providing solutions to waste minimisation and the impact of large scale events on the environment.

While I cannot claim these achievements to be my own, they have been profoundly influential on my own views and actions when it comes to sustainability.

My personal long-term goal is to build a sustainable eco-house with my partner Lauren. Ideally we would be able to do this within Hamilton City and we have been inspired by a few excellent examples such as Heidi Mardon's (Enviroschools national director) house in Hamilton West.

In the meantime we have looked at ways to minimise waste and reduce our own energy consumption at home and have done a lot of renovation work based on the advice of the Council's eco design advisor.

2. Please rank, in order of (1) to (7), what you consider to be the most pressing needs for sustainability today, (1) being the most pressing and (7) the least. Please also add one of your own ideas.

Reducing our contribution to climate change Rank: 1

Sustainable urban design Rank: 2

Sustainable transport options Rank: 3

Sustainable economic growth Rank: 4

Water quality in our rivers and lakes Rank: 5

Other (enter here): Sustainable energy solutions Rank: 6

Adapting to the impacts of climate change Rank: 7

You may comment on your ranking if you wish:

I have rated reducing our contribution to climate change as number one because I see this as our biggest threat to the environment, to the economy and to our society. Sustainable urban design, transport options and energy solutions are all effective ways to reduce our contribution to climate change. Adapting to climate change will be important but I am concerned about taking a potentially defeatist approach at this stage when there is so much more we can try and achieve to reduce our city's contribution.

3. In your view, what is the most effective thing Council could do to improve wellbeing for those of lower socioeconomic status in our city?

One of my main policy platforms is affordable housing. If I am elected I plan to work with other councillors to develop an affordable housing plan that will provide solutions to short and long-term affordability issues as well as balancing a strong commitment to sustainability.

One of the shorter term goals I hope to achieve is to commit funding towards projects that will help improve the current rental housing stock in the city. I believe there are good initiatives that the Council can support to try and improve home insulation and to help reduce energy consumption.

A longer term goal would be to ensure that the city has good planning rules in place to help reduce household energy consumption through smart urban and building design. I believe that this is one of the areas where the Council can play a long-term role in trying to alleviate financial hardship and to try and make housing and accommodation a little more affordable.

4. What do you see as future priorities for transport in Hamilton City and what benefits do you believe these changes will bring?

Another one of my main policy platforms is a 'safe and balanced transport network'. I think that Hamilton has one of the best transport networks in the country for motorists, but investment in alternative transportation options has not kept up. Cycling remains a dangerous mode of transport near the main bridges across the Waikato River and some of the main arterial roads and roundabouts.

My transport priorities are:

- safe and connected cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, including the construction of a pedestrian bridge between the central city and Hamilton East - investigate the development of a commuter train service between Hamilton and Auckland and the re-opening of Hamilton's central underground rail station - support Waikato Regional Council to develop frequent shuttle bus services on key transport routes

Out of these three priorities, my primary focus would be on safe and connected cycling and pedestrian infrastructure. It is an area that Hamilton City Council can play a major role and is less reliant on waiting for partners to be lined up before planning can commence.

Rail connections will be vitally important but it requires a lot of partners to make it happen including a supportive central government, Auckland Council and nearby district councils.

5. What sustainable water management strategies do you think Council should implement?

I think we need a system for water management that balances the financial, environmental and social wellbeing needs of the city. Affordability for households would be the number one priority for me when making a decision.

I am not opposed to the concept of metered water in the city if there was a viable business case. I don't support a fully user-pays metered system because I am concerned about the potential impact on lower-income families in rental accommodation, but I don't think the current system is ideal either.

Instead of paying a set percentage of your rates bill towards water like the current system, regardless of how much or little water you use, I would prefer to see a much smaller portion of the rates bill go towards water and no user charges until a threshold has been hit. If a household is careful with their water use – it should be cheaper than what the household currently pays, and it's a good incentive for investing in rainwater collection tanks. Systems like this could save many households a lot of money in the long-term.

If a household was a high-volume water user and went above a defined threshold, I think it would be fair for that household to pay a user charge for the high use. Many of the high-volume users at the moment use treated water for activities that don't actually need A-grade treated potable water... watering gardens and lawns, filling pools etc. This would be another incentive for the installation of rainwater and greywater collection tanks.

If it was purely between the current system and a fully user pays metered system, I would most likely favour of the status quo but with a strong emphasis on smart water use education and promotion.

6. Do you see the Council as having responsibility towards managing native biodiversity within the city? If yes, what policies would you like to see in place to support this? If no, please explain.

Absolutely – I believe it is vital that the Council's continues and improves its resourcing towards managing native biodiversity in the city. We must ensure appropriate resourcing towards the development of Waiwhakareke, gully restoration and the natural areas in the Council's parks portfolio.

My understanding is that one of the biggest challenges for gully restoration is the way the gully network is divided up across hundreds of privately owned parcels of land. That is the main reason why I worded one of my policies as "support property owners and community groups to restore and maintain Hamilton's gully network".

Biodiversity is not an area of expertise for me so if I was elected I would be looking for guidance from ecological experts to make sure I can make an informed decision on how council resourcing can be utilised most effectively.

I currently work in the Community Group as a strategic advisor and I work alongside Gerard Kelly in the Parks team. It has always surprised me that we only have one role like his covering the whole city. If I am elected I would be very interested to see what the Parks team would be recommending for any future potential resourcing – whether it is actually in additional staffing or directly towards the biodiversity projects. While project resourcing is vital, we need the staff resourcing to manage and coordinate.

7. What strategies do you think Council should employ to minimise the City's waste?

I visited Xtreme Zero Waste in Raglan two years ago and was very impressed with their operation and their commitment to waste minimisation. I would like to see similar commitments to waste minimisation in the Hamilton City contracts.

I regularly visit the recycling centre for shopping and I am always impressed by how busy it is. I would be keen to investigate whether the retail aspect of the recycling centre should be on the same location as the rubbish and recycling drop-off. There might be a bigger uptake in purchasing recycled items if the shop was more accessible (there is very limited parking available and the site is frequently grid-locked).

While it is budgeted in the 10 Year Plan for new recycling wheelie bins, my understanding is that it will be harder for the materials to be sorted upon collection. If this is the case and we get lower grade recycled materials for the convenience of putting our recycling in a bigger bin, I am weary of supporting this.

I am supportive of initiatives like Kaivolution for food waste minimisation and I would like to see if there is further resourcing and supportive the Council can provide for this service. I have volunteered twice at the Hamilton Homeless Trust in the last few weeks to build up my knowledge of some of the issues currently facing the city, and this really demonstrated to me how vital a service like Kaivolution is – for waste minimisation and social wellbeing.

8. How can Hamilton celebrate cultural diversity while helping to strengthen cross cultural ties?

For my campaign I have summarised my vision for Hamilton in five main priority areas. One of those is 'inclusive and connected communities'. The celebration of cultural diversity is very important to me and it is represented in several of my other policy points including 'provide greater support to migrants and new residents of Hamilton' and 'support events that Hamilton's diverse cultural communities'.

I believe the Council needs to have a financial support role so that community trusts can deliver on these objectives.

I am a member of the Asia New Zealand Foundation Leadership Network and I have a personal interest in building cultural and artistic ties between New Zealand and Asia. My partner also comes from a multicultural refugee family so I have heard many accounts of the challenges for integrating into a new country. While on-going support to new migrants and residents is vital, I believe that cultural events are a great way of improving the understanding of the many different cultures and ethnicities in Hamilton.

9. Do you think Council has a role in supporting businesses, schools, families and individuals to make more sustainable choices? If no, why not and if yes what ideas do you have to support this?

Yes. I want to see a continued commitment to organisations like Enviroschools. I would be keen to investigate if there are other ways the council can support schools like Rhode Street Primary School who have taken their sustainability education to the next level and have developed an amazing educational experience for their students.

I understand that their eco-island has taken part of the former school field space but this has been mitigated by accessing nearby council reserve land for some of their sports activities. By ensuring schools can access nearby reserve land for school activities, there might be ways to try and encourage more initiatives like the amazing work at Rhode Street School.

10. Do you think Council has a responsibility to have policies to mitigate climate change and manage its impacts? Could you please give some examples?

Yes. I believe it's important to look at initiatives for carbon reduction from our current activity in the city as well as future planning to ensure we are making our contribution to the minimisation of climate change as well as adapting to the effects of climate change that we are already experiencing.

As it is covered in question 2, I believe sustainable urban design, safe and affordable alternative transport options to private motor vehicles, and sustainable energy options are all ways that we try and address the city's carbon emissions. While I believe that it is important to not take a defeatist approach to climate change, we do need to look at the city's resilience in the short term.

11. Suppose that your Council is considering a proposal for economic development. The development would increase regional GDP and create a significant number of jobs. It would also add significant pollution to waterways and further degrade their ecosystems. Would you support the proposal or not? What is your reasoning?

I would not support it, it is the wrong kind of growth for our city especially at this time. My vision for economic growth is to develop Hamilton's knowledge economy – we need to try and encourage growth in the quaternary sector and reduce dependence on primary sector industry which is already have a significant environmental impact in our region.