

**MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS - SELWYN DISTRICT COUNCIL
ON WEDNESDAY 9 JULY 2025
COMMENCING AT 9:01AM**

PRESENT

Mayor S T Broughton, Councillors S N O H Epiha (Chair), G S F Miller and N C Reid

ATTENDEES

Mesdames A Sneddon (Chief Financial Officer), C Quirke (Head of Community and Economic Development), H Tate (Communications Advisor); Messrs. J Richmond (Head of Sport and Recreation), J Trewin (Policy Planner), W Elkington (Kaitohu); Ms T Davel (Governance Lead), and Mr B Adhikari (Governance Coordinator).

The meeting was opened with a Karakia.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received in respect of Ms McKay and Mayor Broughton for early departure.

Moved – Councillor Miller / **Seconded** – Councillor Reid

‘That the Economic Development Subcommittee receive the apologies, as notified.’

CARRIED

EXTRAORDINARY OR GENERAL BUSINESS

None.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

1. Confirmation of Public Minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Economic Development Subcommittee of 14 May 2025.

Moved – Councillor Epiha / **Seconded** – Councillor Miller

‘That the Economic Development Subcommittee confirms the minutes of ordinary meeting held on 14 May 2025’

CARRIED

Referring to the Terms of Reference, Councillor Reid noted that the document still listed former Councillor Phil Dean's name. It was confirmed that one of the recommendations in the Executive Director's report was for this to be the final meeting of the Subcommittee for the triennium.

REPORTS

2. Chairperson's (Verbal) Report

Councillor Epiha expressed his gratitude to former Councillor Phil Dean, who also served as Chair of the Subcommittee, for his contributions during his tenure. He also acknowledged Mana Whenua representative Puamiria Parata-Goodall for her efforts in advancing the strategy to its current stage. He noted that this would be the final Subcommittee meeting of the triennium and shared that he had attended the first cross-sector steering group meeting.

Councillors asked about the relevance of employing consultants to facilitate the meetings rather than using Council staff. In response, staff clarified that this was only for the inaugural meeting to ensure the group was set up correctly, with all processes and the terms of reference in place. Staff noted that this would be the last time the consultant would be employed.

Moved – Councillor Epiha / **Seconded** – Councillor Miller

'That the Economic Development Subcommittee receive the (verbal) update from the Chairperson for information'.

CARRIED

3. Executive Director Report

Staff recommended that the Subcommittee not meet again until after the triennium, pending the Council's decision on the future committee structure. They noted that if any emerging matters, opportunities, or risks arise in relation to the Investment Framework work programme, staff would contact members directly, call an out-of-cycle meeting, or refer the matter to the full Council.

Moved – Councillor Epiha / **Seconded** – Councillor Miller

'That the Economic Development Subcommittee receive the report from the Executive Director.'

CARRIED

4. Economic Development Quarterly Report

Head of Community and Economic Development

Staff invited guest speakers Dr Leslie Van Gelder and Mr Benje Patterson to speak on potential demand and economic benefits of dark sky tourism in Selwyn.

Dr Gelder emphasised that Selwyn is uniquely positioned for dark sky accreditation due to its combination of dark skies and iconic landscapes. She noted that New

Zealand ranks third globally for dark sky locations, with nine accredited sites. While the dark sky model is US-centric, posing some challenges, it also presents opportunities for local adaptation. Referring to Arthur's Pass and Castle Hill, she highlighted strong community support for accreditation, which aligns with goals for regional economic development and community well-being.

Mr Patterson provided an economic overview, outlining the potential benefits of dark sky accreditation in terms of business activity, employment and tourism. He shared that approximately 1 million visitors pass through Arthur's Pass annually, with half being international tourists. He noted seasonal fluctuations, which present opportunities to develop off-peak tourism, and emphasized the growing demand for dark sky tourism, particularly given proximity to Christchurch.

Mayor Broughton left the meeting at 9:41am.

Councillors asked if the regions that have received the accreditation have gained any economic benefits. Guest speakers said that Mackenzie region has quite significant benefit with some sites attracting 40,000 to 50,000 visitors annually. They added that there are some smaller operators setting up cabins in remote areas with hot tubs and marketing them as dark sky experiences. However, the speakers clarified that they haven't explored the latent demand from people who already travel through New Zealand and haven't considered those who might be specifically drawn to visit because of dark sky tourism offerings.

The speakers highlighted that some Regional Tourism Organisations are beginning to collaborate with emphasis on a broader range of night time experiences. They added that the South Island offers a stunning trail from Kaikoura to Oxford, through Selwyn with its diverse offerings, then on to Mackenzie and further South. Each location offers something unique, for those passionate about stargazing, it could be a Milky Way along the spine of the South Island. They noted that there is emerging work in this space to understand how to bring this all together so that everyone benefits both domestically and internationally.

Councillors said they were supportive of the idea but expressed concern about infrastructure. Referring to Arthur's Pass and Castle Hill, the Councillors said there are particular challenges when it comes to providing water and sewage services and costs could be significant. In response, the speakers acknowledged the concerns and added that there needs to be another layer of analysis which includes conducting a more detailed stocktake of existing infrastructure capacity. They added that around 1 million visitors per year travel through those areas and clarified that dark sky tourism works best during longer nights, meaning visitors don't have to stay up as late to see the stars. There are wide windows throughout the year when traditional visitor infrastructure is underutilised.

Councillors emphasised that significant infrastructure spending cannot be done without confidence in the returns. They noted that other communities have explored visitor levies to help cover these costs, which might be something to consider. The speakers highlighted that dark sky tourism is different from daytime tourism and visitors are usually already accommodated, they are staying somewhere overnight, and tours are typically short, as most people don't want to stay out too late. They added that there is less need for large-scale infrastructure

like public toilets for daytime walkers and instead the focus should be on leveraging the existing facilities during the times they are not typically in use. They further said this is not adding 500,000 tourists already passing through but adding 150 or so visitors who might choose to stay the night. The speakers noted that a sensible approach would be to assess what infrastructure already exists then strategically locate guiding businesses where they can make use of that capacity.

Councillors noted that they were happy to receive a comprehensive report with economic and social perspectives demonstrating that this is a viable initiative. Staff noted that they have considered the Councillors' feedback and will provide a response regarding infrastructure capacity.

Councillors emphasised that the dark sky accreditation is US-based certification and asked whether this opens up potential in the US tourism market, which could further present opportunities for partnership. They added that a model similar to Lake Tekapo's observatory could be considered and asked whether there is an opportunity to include partnership, one being Mana Whenua and other overseas investment. The speakers responded that there are opportunities to consider as New Zealand's growing interest and involvement in space sector, including collaboration with SpaceX. They added NASA had done a lot of work in this area and even conducted testing in Wanaka. The speakers also noted that there was potential for growth and from Mana Whenua's perspective Ngai Tahu has shown strong interest. Referring to the West Melton observatory that is already in place, the speakers added that the Castle Hill community has shown a strong interest in building a small observatory.

Dr Gelder and Mr Patterson were thanked for the presentation.

Moved – Councillor Miller / **Seconded** – Councillor Reid

'That the Subcommittee receives the Economic Development Work Programme Quarterly Report.'

CARRIED

5. RESOLUTION TO MOVE TO PUBLIC EXCLUDED

Moved – Councillor Reid / **Seconded** – Councillor Epiha

'That the public be excluded from the following proceedings of this meeting. The general subject matter to be considered while the public is excluded, the reason of passing this resolution in relation to the matter, and the specific grounds under Section 48(1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 for the passing of this resolution are as follows:

This resolution is made in reliance on Section 48(1)(a) of the Local

General subject of each matter to be considered		Reasons for passing this resolution in relation to each matter	Ground(s) under Section 48(1) for the passing of this resolution	Date information can be released
1.	Minutes	Good reason to withhold exists under Section 7	Section 48 (1) (a)	
2.	Public Excluded Report: Economic Development Update			Upon confirmation and approval of public announcements Subject to procurement processes being completed

Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 and the particular interest or interests protected by Section 6 or Section 7 of that Act or Section 6 or Section 7 or Section 9 of the Official Information Act 1982, as the case may require, which would be prejudiced by the holding of the whole or the relevant part of the proceedings of the meeting in public are as follows:

1, 2.	To protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons	Section 7(2)(a)
2.	To protect information where the making available of the information would be likely to unreasonably prejudice the commercial position of the local authority.	Section 7(2)(b)(ii)

2. that appropriate officers remain to provide advice to the Committee.'

CARRIED

With no further business being discussed, the meeting closed at 10:03am.

DATED this 27 day of August 2025

