SOUTH DUNEDIN FUTURE – PROGRAMME UPDATE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

Department: Climate and City Growth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 The purpose of the paper is to present the key findings from the recent community engagement activities relating to the South Dunedin Risk Assessment and seven Potential Adaptation Futures for South Dunedin; and to provide an outline of the workplan and schedule through to completion of the South Dunedin Future programme in December 2026.

2 The South Dunedin Future (SDF) programme is a joint initiative between the Dunedin City Council (DCC) and Otago Regional Council (ORC) to develop a climate change adaptation plan for South Dunedin. The programme vision is "a safer and better South Dunedin, where sustainable urban regeneration leads to improved community resilience and wellbeing". The programme remains on track to deliver the final climate adaptation plan by the end of 2026.

3 In March 2025, the councils released technical reports relating to the risk assessment and potential adaptation futures for South Dunedin. These reports formed the basis for a subsequent period of community engagement from 29 March to 11 May 2025, which consisted of community workshops, drop in events, online surveys, and targeted stakeholder engagement.

4 Feedback was received from over 1,200 individuals and organisations, including over 300 residents, 200 business stakeholders, 250 students and educators, iwi and community groups, among other stakeholders. Feedback represented a broad range of perspectives and the demographics of responders broadly matched census 2018 data for the South Dunedin area.

5 Feedback indicated a range of views, though some key themes were also evident. There appears a strong desire for change in South Dunedin, with almost 73% of responses indicating that Future 1 – Status quo (keep doing what we are doing) is taking South Dunedin in the wrong direction. Future 4 - Space for water (waterways and wetlands) attracted the most support, with almost 60% of responses agreeing this would take South Dunedin in the right direction. Future 7 – Let water in (large scale retreat) was the least popular, with 47% of responses indicating this future would take South Dunedin in the wrong direction. Respondents were also asked to comment on whether each future provided choice for where and how people live, what impact each future would have on their overall quality of life, and which future should we aim for.

6 A range of views were also collected on the community's tolerance of flooding, including location and duration, and who should pay for actions taken to reduce flood risk now and in the future. Targeted dialogue with infrastructure, insurance, banking, property, and social service stakeholders underscored the need for a clear long-term strategy, coordinated planning, risk-based decision-making, and a focus on delivering equitable and financially viable outcomes.

7 Analysis of engagement findings, along with further technical and economic work, will be used to develop a shortlist of three potential adaptation futures for South Dunedin, which will be competed in late-2025 and presented to Councils in early-2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council:

a) **Notes** the South Dunedin Future Engagement Report – Stage 4 Engagement: 7 Potential Adaptation Futures for South Dunedin.

b) **Notes** the community engagement results will be combined with further technical and economic analysis to assess the 7 Potential Adaptation Futures for South Dunedin, to produce an initial shortlist of futures for further investigation.

c) **Notes** a fully developed shortlist of potential adaptation futures for South Dunedin is expected to be completed in late-2025 and presented to Councils in early-2026.

d) **Notes** the work plan and schedule for the final two phases of the South Dunedin Future programme, which is expected to be completed by December 2026.

BACKGROUND

8 The South Dunedin Future (SDF) programme is a joint initiative between the Dunedin City Council (DCC) and Otago Regional Council (ORC) to develop a climate change adaptation plan for South Dunedin. A programme plan, which outlined the high-level approach for delivering the SDF programme was approved by DCC and ORC Council Committees in July 2022 (refer Part A Item 9, Planning & Environment Committee, 6 July 2022).

9 The SDF programme vision is *"a safer and better South Dunedin, where sustainable urban regeneration leads to improved community resilience and wellbeing"*. The purpose of the programme is to enable South Dunedin to prepare for, and adapt to, the impacts of climate change, while also realising the opportunities that come with change. Broader strategic objectives of the programme relate to just transition, community safety, environmental and cultural restoration, social and economic resilience, and sustainable urban development (refer Item 10, DCC Council Meeting, 28 November 2023).

10 The SDF programme has been broken into five phases, five workstreams, and a number of programme actions. The workstreams include: (i) natural hazards; (ii) strategy and programme management; (iii) communications and community engagement; (iv) risk assessment; and (v) adaptation planning. This breakdown has been explained more fully in previous Council papers and workshops but is also illustrated in the A3 SDF Programme Overview (**Attachment A**).

11 In March 2025, the councils released technical reports relating to the risk assessment and potential adaptation futures for South Dunedin, including:

a) South Dunedin Risk Assessment – Provides the first comprehensive overview of the area's current and future flood-related and other risks through to 2100.

b) Potential Adaptation Futures for South Dunedin – Background Context Report – Sets out the technical and strategic foundations for long-term planning.

c) Potential Adaptation Futures for South Dunedin – Micro Business Cases – Presents a range of possible adaptation scenarios, shaped by technical and economic analysis, and early community input.

12 These reports formed the basis for community engagement during the period 29 March to 11 May 2025, which sought community feedback on the impacts of both the identified risks and the potential options for managing and mitigating them.

DISCUSSION

Why is community engagement important?

13 In 2023, Councils commissioned the University of Otago's Centre for Sustainability to review the latest academic research and best practice in community engagement for climate adaptation. The resulting research summary noted a fundamental requirement for effective adaptation is for councils to work together with the community to solve problems and build social cohesion. Long term council-community relationships are essential as climate change impacts will keep evolving. If care is not taken, existing issues such as inequalities may be perpetuated or worsened by climate change and/or by adaptation actions. Effective engagement can mitigate such injustices and have positive flow-on effects, with many benefits for both the community and the local authority. Poor engagement (or lack of engagement) brings risks of alienating the community and producing inappropriate adaptation plans[1].

14 Councils are committed to a fair, inclusive, and transparent adaptation planning process for South Dunedin. The area faces complex challenges related to climate change and long-term resilience, so it is important that the views of all those who live, work, and have a connection with the area are heard and understood.

Engagement on South Dunedin Risk Assessment and 7 Potential Adaptation Futures

15 In March 2025, the councils released three technical reports relating to the risk assessment and potential adaptation futures ('Futures') for South Dunedin. These reports formed the basis for community engagement during the period 29 March to 11 May 2025. This engagement aimed to deepen council's understanding of what matters most to the South Dunedin community — not only in terms of physical assets and infrastructure, but also the social and cultural connections people hold to place. This included seeking to better understand how partners and stakeholders perceive risk, their likely response to increasing risk, and supporting them to make more informed decisions about their future. The results of the engagement are captured in a report, included as **Attachment B**.

16 While this engagement was not intended to be a vote or referendum on any particular Future for South Dunedin, it nonetheless offered valuable insights into the community's views, priorities, and thresholds for change. This helps ensure the development of Futures and associated pathways that are both technically sound and socially grounded — creating the best possible plan for everyone, now and into the future.

What was the focus of this engagement?

[1] Barth, J., Bond, S. & Stephenson, J. (2023) *Community engagement for climate change adaptation*. Research Summary for the South Dunedin Future Programme. Centre for Sustainability, University of Otago.

17 During this engagement phase, the community was asked to consider and provide feedback on seven potential adaptation futures. For each Future, participants were invited to reflect on:

a) whether that Future takes South Dunedin in the right direction (rated from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*);

b) whether that Future provides people with meaningful choices about where and how they live (rated from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*); and

c) how their overall quality of life might change compared to the present (rated from *increase significantly* to *decrease significantly*).

18 Participants were also asked a direct question: "What Future do you think we should aim for?" This direct questioning helped identify preferred directions and priorities for the area.

19 To explore tolerance for change and risk, respondents were asked questions about when they believed South Dunedin would become 'unliveable' for them — using a range of scenarios related to the frequency of flood events and the potential impacts of those events, such as flooding of homes, garages, gardens, roads, and constraints accessing local shops.

20 Finally, community views were sought on potential sources of funding for implementation of whichever Future is preferred at the end of the SDF programme. Questions included:

a) who should pay for adaptation?

b) If rates were to be used, what level of rates increase would be acceptable?

21 This range of questions sought to help build a better understand community preferences, values, and thresholds — critical factors in planning for a safer and better future for South Dunedin.

Who participated in the engagement?

22 The engagement reached over 1,200 individuals and organisations, collecting a diverse range of feedback, from an extensive range of participants across South Dunedin and beyond, including:

a) over 300 residents who provided input through online surveys and in-person events,

b) more than 200 business and commercial sector representatives, including property owners, insurers, banks, and infrastructure providers,

c) around 250 students and educators from local schools and universities,

d) community groups and organisations, including representatives from disability advocacy, Māori groups, and cultural and religious networks,

e) public attendees at festivals, workshops, and community events numbering over 400 participants,

f) broad online and media reach with over 190,000 social media views, nearly 2,000 website users, and email newsletters sent to over 500 subscribers.

23 This inclusive and multi-channel approach ensured a wide spectrum of views and voices were collected and will now inform the adaptation planning process.

Feedback received - views on the 7 Potential Adaptation Futures

24 The engagement focussed primarily on the community's response to the seven potential adaptation futures for South Dunedin. The engagement results contain a wide range of views and perspectives; however, they also illustrate some clear convergence in certain areas. Table 1

below seeks to summarise and simplify community sentiment in relation to the broader question of whether each Future takes South Dunedin in the right direction?

Future	Takes South Dunedin in the right direction			Net Score[2]	Rank
	Disagree	Neutral/unsure	Agree		
1	73%	13%	15%	-79.07	7th
2	35%	13%	51%	17.57	2nd
3	33%	18%	48%	12.46	4th
4	25%	16%	59%	39.39	1st
5	34%	18%	48%	13.00	3rd
6	37%	16%	47%	9.36	5th
7	47%	15%	38%	-13.24	6th

Table 1 – Community feedback: Does this Future take South Dunedin in the right direction?

25 Some key themes or takeaways from these results include:

a) Future 1 – Status quo (keep doing what we are doing) was the least supported, with 73% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that it would take South Dunedin in the right direction. Many respondents commented that this Future lacks ambition, would result in wasted investments, and no long-term effectiveness. This feedback suggests a strong public mandate for change from the current approach.

b) Future 4 – Space for water (waterways and wetlands) was the most preferred overall, with 59% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it would take South Dunedin in the right direction. It was also viewed as being the most well-balanced and cost-effective approach, though there was concern about high residual flood risk.

c) Future 7 – Let water in (large scale retreat) was the only other Future to receive a negative net score, with 47% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that it would take South Dunedin in the right direction. It was viewed as being very disruptive, expensive, and the displacement would have negative impacts on community wellbeing and inequality. That said, some felt it was the most sensible long-term solution.

d) Futures 2, 3, 5, and 6 received mixed support, though all had positive net scores (between +17.57 and +9.36), indicating respondents saw a range of merits in these different approaches. This suggests an openness from community and stakeholders to different approaches for managing risk and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

26 No single Future stood out as strongly providing choice about where people live, although Futures 2, 3, and 4 were seen as offering more flexibility in that regard. Futures 1, 6, and 7 were viewed as offering limited choice.

27 When asked how each Future might impact quality of life, most respondents thought Futures 1–5 would lead to life staying about the same. Futures 4 and 5 had a significant number of respondents expecting some improvement in quality of life. Futures 6 and 7 were largely seen as likely to significantly reduce quality of life.

[2] Net scores were calculated by applying the following factors to each of the six potential responses (strongly disagree [-1.5], disagree [-1.0], neutral or unsure [0.0], agree [+1.0], strongly agree [+1.5]), summing the totals, and then combining the six responses to three simpler categories.

28 When asked a more direct question about which Future respondents felt we should be aiming for, Futures 2 (27%) and 4 (29%) were most preferred; while Futures 1 (2%) and 3 (7%) were least preferred. While this more direct line of questioning resulted in Futures 4 and 1 retaining their positions as most and least preferred respectively, results for other Futures varied.

29 Two prominent themes emerged in the feedback across all futures, including that council should build more infrastructure in the short term, to reduce present day flood risk, and that stakeholders wanted more information about any potential managed retreat process, including in regard to location, timing, and policy and process for property buy-outs.

Tolerance of flooding

30 A series of questions were asked to understand respondent's experiences with flooding and whether they had been affected before, how often flooding occurs, and under what circumstances. Respondents were also asked when they believe South Dunedin might become 'unliveable' due to flooding. These questions were aimed at better understanding tolerance for flooding, which helps inform design of potential adaptation actions, for example, seeking to limit flooding in buildings to once every 50 years (versus shorter or longer timeframes).

31 Respondents had the least tolerance for flood water entering their homes, with 83% of the 270 responses indicating that South Dunedin would become 'unliveable' if flood water entered their homes (with responses spanning periods from 1-50 years). Almost 20% of respondents indicated their home had previously flooded. Most respondents said that flood water ponding on their lawn, local sports fields, and in public car parking areas would never make South Dunedin unliveable – suggesting increased tolerance of 'nuisance' flooding, but clear intolerance of flooding entering homes.

Who should help pay?

32 When asked who should help pay to fund South Dunedin's future, most respondents selected Central Government (24%) and Local Government (22%). This was followed by property developers (15%), and Dunedin residents and businesses (13%). Respondents had the option of selecting multiple answers.

33 When asked whether they would support rates increases to reduce flooding, responses varied:

a) if rates were the only source of funding, 50% of respondents said they would support a 10% rates increase and 10% supported a 25% increase, while 26% said they would not support any increase; however

b) if rates were to cover the full cost, support dropped, with 39% of respondents supporting a 10% rates increase and 18% supporting a 25% increase, while 30% said they would not support any increase.

34 These results suggest that while many respondents are open to contributing through rates, support is higher when costs are shared more broadly.

Targeted stakeholder engagement

35 In addition to public surveys, workshops, and drop-in sessions, a series of targeted engagements were undertaken with key sectors, including infrastructure providers, financial institutions, property stakeholders, government agencies, and community representatives. These stakeholders brought specific insights based on commercial interests, operational responsibilities, asset holdings, or community services and connections.

36 Common themes included a strong call for clear direction, coordinated planning, and timely investment from council to build confidence in whatever strategic direction results from the South Dunedin Future process. Infrastructure providers highlighted the importance of information and data sharing, to support more informed investment decisions, and the need to align asset maintenance and renewal cycles with any anticipated changes in land use and infrastructure levels of service. Property groups, including investors and developers, sought certainty, including clear plans and actions from council that actively manage identified risks, while at the same time promoting and enabling investment opportunities in lower risk areas. Social service agencies and community groups stressed the importance of equity, accessibility, and inclusive planning, particularly for renters, disabled people, and low-income communities.

37 The insurance sector acknowledged South Dunedin's high flood risk and signalled support for a broad risk management approach. This includes improved three waters network maintenance, infrastructure investment, and property-level interventions in the shorter term, while making risk-based decisions about land use and infrastructure in the longer term that include insurability as a central consideration. Banks raised concern over the tension between short-term insurance cover and long-term mortgage lending risk, referencing the need for standardised hazard data and better risk information to support more informed lending decisions. It was also signalled that banks may need to take steps in the near future to better reflect natural hazard and climate-related risks, including, for example, via increased loan to value ratios for higher risk properties.

38 While the commentary above, and the attached engagement report, focus primarily on feedback received during the period 29 March – 11 May 2025, engagement with a wide range of stakeholders continues on a week-to-week basis, and further rounds of formal engagement are planned in future stages of the SDF programme.

OPTIONS

39 There are no options presented for this report.

NEXT STEPS

Closing off latest round of engagement

40 The attached engagement report and a 1-2 page 'plain English' summary (currently in development) will be uploaded to the SDF programme web page and key findings will be conveyed to stakeholders via an e-newsletter and regular stakeholder interactions.

Developing a shortlist of potential adaptation futures for South Dunedin

41 The next step in the adaptation planning process is to complete an initial multi-criteria assessment (MCA) of the seven Futures. This assessment will utilise the community engagement results, and involve technical and economic assessments by council and consultant teams, using the decision-making framework previously noted and endorsed by Councils (refer Item 7, Council Meeting, 18 March 2025). This assessment will refine the longlist of seven Futures to produce an initial shortlist of three Futures. The results of this initial shortlisting process will be presented to Councils in August 2025.

42 Modelling will then be undertaken on the three short-listed Futures, to test the efficacy of each and determine the optimised balance of infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and managed retreat required to manage risk to acceptable levels. This modelling will, for example, indicate how risk would be managed in each of the short-listed Futures, the likely size, location, and cost

of adaptation actions, and the resulting residual risk (i.e. risk remaining even after various adaptation actions have been implemented).

43 The modelling will inform further technical and economic analysis and enable development of pathways for each of the three shortlisted Futures. These pathways will show anticipated change at different intervals, likely periods of 25 years, including at 2050, 2075, 2100 and beyond. The shortlisted Futures will include more detailed information on the useful life of adaptation actions, linking together different actions such as infrastructure investment, creating green space, and potential managed retreat, into viable pathways, where changes in approach result from pre-agreed signals and triggers, so change only occurs if or when necessary to manage risk.

44 The fully-developed shortlist of potential adaptation futures for South Dunedin is expected to be completed in late-2025 and presented to Councils in early-2026.

Signatories

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Attachments

	Title	Page
⇩A	South Dunedin Future Engagement Report – Stage 4 Engagement: 7 Potential Adaptation Futures for South Dunedin	79
⇩B	SDF Programme Overview A3	183

SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS

Fit with purpose of Local Government

This decision enables democratic local decision making and action by, and on behalf of communities. This decision promotes the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future.

Fit with strategic framework

	Contributes	Detracts	Not applicable
Social Wellbeing Strategy	✓	☐	☐
Economic Development Strategy	✓	☐	☐
Environment Strategy	✓	☐	☐
Arts and Culture Strategy	✓	☐	☐
3 Waters Strategy	✓	☐	☐
Future Development Strategy	✓	☐	☐
Integrated Transport Strategy	✓	☐	☐
Parks and Recreation Strategy	✓	☐	☐
Other strategic projects/policies/plans	✓	☐	☐

The SDF Programme is a horizontal initiative, working across a range of strategies, groups, and budgets.

Māori Impact Statement

Accurately reflecting and integrating the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, and Crown's partnership with Māori, is a central element of the SDF Programme.

Sustainability

Sustainability will be a central component of the SDF Programme as it seeks to develop climate change adaptation options for South Dunedin over short-, medium- and long-term timeframes. This work will be integrated with the wider climate change work programme, including aligning with DCC's Emissions Management and Reduction Plan 2022 and Zero Carbon Plan 2023.

Zero carbon

Adapting to the impacts of climate change in South Dunedin has the potential to materially increase or decrease both city-wide and DCC emissions, depending on the adaptation option selected. The criteria for assessing each potential adaptation future includes carbon emissions and waste, meaning options that act to reduce emissions will receive more positive assessments (for that specific criteria).

LTP/Annual Plan / Financial Strategy /Infrastructure Strategy

The SDF programme has dedicated resourcing in the current 9-year plan (2025-2034). Selected activities that result from the SDF programme, including mid-scale and medium-term investments in 3 waters infrastructure (for example), are also included in the 9YP. It is anticipated that the adaptation master plan for South Dunedin, scheduled for completion in December 2026, will inform a range of strategic land use-, finance-, and infrastructure-related decisions for South Dunedin as part of future 10-year planning processes.

Financial considerations

The cost of the SDF programme is fully budgeted for within the existing SDF programme budget. No decisions have been made about funding for potential adaptation work that may arise from the SDF programme.

SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS
Significance This issue is considered high in terms of the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy. Community engagement is and will continue to be a central element of the SDF Programme, and extensive engagement is planned in future stages, in accordance programme plan and with relevance council polices.
Engagement – external Extensive external engagement has been undertaken with a range of partners, stakeholders, and affected communities on the topics covered in this paper. Mana whenua have partnered with SDF throughout the development of the programme. Engagement has included (but is not limited to): central government departments, state owned enterprises, crown research institutes; private sector organisations and industry groups; community groups and affected communities.
Engagement - internal A large number of internal individuals, teams, and departments across DCC and ORC have been engaged in development of the SDF programme strategy and related work described in this report.
Risks: Legal / Health and Safety etc. There are no anticipated legal or health and safety risks associated with this report. Risks relating to the SDF Programme are described in this or previous Council reports.
Conflict of Interest There are no conflicts of interest identified.
Community Boards Community Boards have not been directly involved with the development of this report; however, all Community Boards have an interest in climate adaptation.