

11. CENTRAL CITY AVON RIVER PROJECT

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The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress on the Avon River Strategy.

Committee members will recall discussion on the Avon River at a seminar last year held to provide information on the Avon River Tree Replacement Strategy and on progress on the Avon River (Central City) Project. All elected representatives should have received a copy of the "Avon River (Central City) Character Analysis: Antigua Bridge to Fitzgerald Avenue". Councillors are requested to bring their copy of the document to the meeting.

BACKGROUND

A strategy for the Avon River within the four avenues was requested by the local branch of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects in 1998. It has since been highlighted as an integral part of the central city and in public response to the "Heart of the City" consultation document.

Preliminary work on the strategy was carried out by staff in the former Environmental Policy and Planning Unit and when this unit was restructured the project was transferred to the Parks and Waterways Unit.

A display in "Our City" has highlighted some of the history that has shaped Avon River as we know it today. In conjunction with the display a series of talks and walks were provided for members of the public. The topics covered were:

- In-Stream Wildlife
- Landscape Ecology
- Heritage

Around 180 questionnaires returned to the Council have given some direction as to residents' priorities and ideas for what they would like to see change or remain the same.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

From the consultation it was established that priorities centred around improving water quality and wildlife by cleaning up the river. Residents' ideas included:

- Having a river festival day or carnival
- Having an area like the Strip which is alcohol-free for families
- Returning carols by candlelight to the river
- Creating a wildlife reserve in the city
- Light the river and highlight the bridges as monuments.

Themes for the river suggested by some respondents were "An emerald necklace to the sea", "The aorta of life through the city" or making it central to the "city of romance".

While people generally did not want to see too much change, many believed pedestrian and cyclist circulation along the river could be enhanced and more, low-key events and activities could occur.

Areas identified for improvement were parts of Oxford Terrace which have diminished appeal due to the presence of service lanes, high building facades and car park entrances. Some respondents noted that the buildings near the Public Library and between Colombo and Manchester Streets had "turned their backs" on the river corridor instead of capitalising on their northerly aspect and river environment.

THE PROPOSAL

The Avon River (Central City) Analysis has incorporated these views and noted them as areas for improvement. Common themes throughout the document are:

- Retaining the existing character of the each identity area along the Avon River but establishing some unifying themes, such as a definite design guide for park furniture and structures
- Reducing the presence of car parking activity along the river edge

- The need for improved connections across the busy streets that cut across the Avon
- The establishment of a clearer and safer pedestrian and cycle route along the Avon
- Highlighting areas of particular cultural and historic significance.

The Analysis notes three research documents which together with the consultation information will form the basis of the proposed strategy. They are:

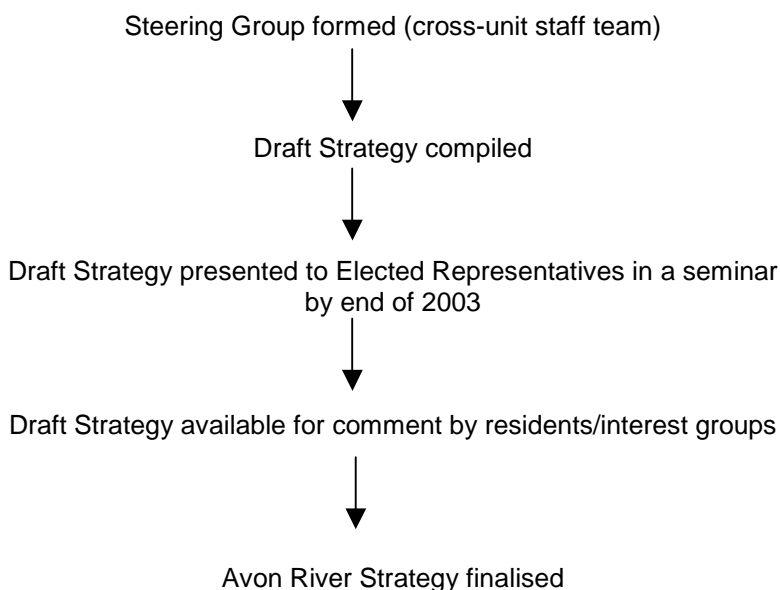
- Avon Riverbanks Tree Replacement Strategy by Dieter Steinegg (2002)
- Avon River Trout Spawning Survey by Mark Taylor (2002)
- Ecological Assessment of the Avon River Mainstem by Shelley McMurtrie and Mark Taylor (just released).

It is now proposed to set up a cross-unit steering group to advance the strategy based on the above information. The strategy will seek to provide the following:

- Objectives and policies to guide future activity or proposals for the Avon River.
- A tree replacement list for each character area of the central city Avon.
- Definite design plans for some parts of the Avon River corridor that have been identified as needing to be improved.
- Development of an action plan and budget to implement the improvements over the next ten years.
- A design guide for seats, bollards, lights and other structures on both banks of the Avon.

Overall it will promote the Avon River as a key component of Christchurch's identity and highlight ways to further promote its enjoyment by residents and visitors.

The process to be followed from this point is



CONCLUSION

Progress on the Avon River (Central City) Strategy is being made and some robust background information is now available to direct the project. It is expected that the cross-unit steering group will work together to produce a draft strategy for elected representatives to comment on by November this year.

Staff

- Recommendation:**
1. That the information be received.
 2. That the steering group report to elected members in November prior to releasing the Central City Avon River Strategy for public comment.

Chairman's

- Recommendation:** That the above recommendation be adopted.