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Corporate Plan Output: Environmental Improvement Plans	

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress with the design work on the Cathedral Square ‘greening’ proposals. This report is to go before the Environment and the Projects and Property Committees.

BACKGROUND

In November 1998, a seminar was held with Councillors to explain the concept plan for Cathedral Square, as adopted by Council in August 1997. A number of opportunities for additional planting were identified and a plan of these was presented at the seminar, however further design work and consultation was required to fully assess those opportunities. They were as follows:

- Two additional trees in the Colombo Street entrance to the Square to the south
- Two additional planter boxes and trees in the southeast area outside the Millennium/BNZ
- One additional tree in the grass to the south of the Cathedral next to the existing plane tree
- Additional trees in the Stage 5 area to the northwest
- Moveable planter boxes

In December 1998, the Council resolved to support the additional trees proposed, subject to detailed design and consultation. Further work has been done since that Council meeting, and this report summarises the findings of the Concept Team.

THE PLANTING CONCEPT

Cathedral Square is the city’s premier public space, and a principal objective was to create an attractive area, while providing for flexible and functional space for pedestrians and activities.

As part of the redevelopment of the Square, significant physical obstacles, such as the existing walls, are being removed to allow clear, open vistas throughout the Square. This will enhance perceptions of safety, improve pedestrian access and movement, reinforce the cruciform shape of the Square, and open up views of the important heritage buildings around the Square. The openness also allows effective spaces for ‘people-attracting’ activities in the Square.

The original planting concept reflected this desire for openness, by providing for low grassed areas, and large trees with high canopies, rather than bushes or small trees. It was important that the scale of the planting reflected the large scale of the space without being visually cluttering. The concept also recognised that the Square needed green spaces and pedestrian-friendly areas in the northeast, southeast and southwest quadrants to encourage their use. The main events and pedestrian area in front of the Cathedral was kept clear of large features to enable maximum flexibility.

The concept plan adopted by the Council in August 1997 has 70% more green areas than the existing Square, and the same number of trees than was existing before the redevelopment began. The distribution of those trees has, however, changed. Traditionally, barren areas of the Square have had planting and seating introduced, and the area in front of the Cathedral has been opened up, recognising the formal space between the Godley Statue and the Cathedral, and allowing adequate space for activities.

The prime objective for the Square was to attract people and people-attracting activities to it. We have had success in the buildings surrounding the Square, with a number of premises taking up the opportunity of providing outdoor seating in the Square. In many cases, this seating will incorporate planter boxes of some type. People are using the seating around the planter boxes outside the Camelot and the BNZ, and those outside the ANZ will most likely prove to be popular also, being in a sunny spot close to the main events area. There will still be stalls in the Square providing colour and activity, and the Leisure Unit is currently reviewing the provision of events in the Square with a view to providing events on more days of the week. The market will also continue operating in the Square. There are still the silver light poles with red fittings to be installed, and the banner poles and banners have yet to be erected. There is also the major artwork to be located approximately two grids to the north of the most eastern tree outside the ANZ, and the children's interactive art features to be introduced. All of these activities and features are expected to combine to make the Square a lively and visually interesting place to be.

The redevelopment of the Square is by no means complete, in fact, the most visible and public area of the Square is only just beginning its transformation. It is considered that any significant changes to the design at this stage would be inappropriate, and that the redevelopment needs to be given a chance to prove its worth. The concept was designed to achieve the objectives adopted by the Council, and it is not possible to judge it at this stage when it is not complete. The paving and trees are only the base, the life-giving activities, eg the events, the cafes, the stalls, etc, are yet to be fully established. Additional planting can always be done later in a coordinated and planned way without significant disruption, if it proves necessary.

COMMENTS ON POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL PLANTING OPPORTUNITIES

The locations referred to below are shown on Appendix I to this report.

- **Two additional trees in the Colombo Street entrance to the Square to the south.**

These two trees are shown as locations 1 & 2 on Appendix I. The total estimated cost for these trees is \$7,600 (costed by City Design Unit). These two trees can be provided without affecting the integrity of the design. They are located on the most northern grid intersection in the Colombo Street entrance to the south. They will be the same size and species (pin oaks), and provided to the same level of detail, as the four existing trees in the Colombo Street south entrance, eg tree grates, irrigation.

It is proposed that these two trees be planted as soon as possible this year.

- **Two additional planter boxes and trees in the southeast area outside the Millennium/BNZ**

These two planter boxes are shown as locations 3 & 4 on Appendix I. The total estimated cost for these two planter boxes and trees (including associated moving of services and relocating of a vehicle cutdown) is \$76,000 (costed by City Design Unit).

Location 3 is a stall location and, therefore, is not available for a planter box. Even if the stall was relocated, a planter box could not be centred in the grid at this location as it would be less than 1½ metres from the roadway edge, whereas 3 metres is required for pedestrian safety reasons.

Location 4 could be a possible location for another planter. The Manager of the Millennium Hotel has advised that he would be open to a planter and mature tree in location 4. However he stressed that he considered it vital that any additions to the Square be in keeping with the design concept and not be ad hoc additions. He considered it important that the open, uncluttered feel of the area was retained, in keeping with the overall design concept.

The Concept Team notes that a mature tree in this location would cast afternoon shadow over the outdoor seating areas and would require moving of the existing kerb cutdown giving access to the BNZ building. It is considered that adding additional planters in this area, at this stage, would compromise future flexibility in the area. There will be two stalls in the area, there are vehicles driving in to the BNZ building, there is a shuttle stop, and there is the Millennium Hotels outdoor area. The ground floor of the BNZ may be open to the Square and an artwork could be introduced in the future. This area has the potential to be a busy and colourful space. Until summer, when the stalls and outdoor areas are operating, the functioning of that area cannot be fully assessed.

It is proposed that no additional planters be introduced into this quadrant at this stage.

- **One additional tree in the grass to the south of the Cathedral next to the existing plane tree**

This tree is shown as location 5 on Appendix I. It is located on the land owned by the Cathedral Chapter. The total estimated cost for this additional tree is \$4,750 (costed by City Design Unit). When the diseased tree was removed from this location, its replacement was deliberately placed further to the east of the Cathedral carpark area so that the architectural features of the Cathedral would not be obscured. For this reason, it is not considered appropriate to plant another tree in this location. The Cathedral Chapter have advised that they do not agree with the planting of an additional tree in this location. They are currently developing plans themselves for a feature in that area.

- **Additional trees in the Stage 5 area to the northwest**

There is opportunity for additional trees to be incorporated in the Stage 5 development. Detailed design and consultation will be undertaken at the time of the Stage 5 planning.

- **Moveable planter boxes**

The Design Report adopted by Council in August 1997 stated that additional planting, especially of flowering plants for particular seasons, could be introduced into the Square throughout the year using moveable planter boxes, which would be specifically designed. It is still the intention of the Concept Team that these are provided, and some have already been placed in the northeast quadrant. The design and locations of moveable planter boxes in the Square is being reviewed by the Concept Team, in consultation with City Design and the Operational Review Group (which is reviewing traffic management in the Square).

RETENTION OF EXISTING TREES

Since the Council consideration in December, the matter of the retention of existing trees in their current positions has been raised. The trees that have been discussed are one tree outside the Press building, and three trees in the Stage 4 area.

- **Retention of the lime tree outside the Press building**

This tree is shown as location 6 on Appendix I. This tree was to be removed as part of the Stage 3 contract, but this has not been done.

The Press building is a Group 2 listed heritage building. The trunk of the tree is located 4 metres from it. The tree impedes the view of the building from all of the principal locations in the Square, except north from the Heritage Hotel. This is because of the closeness of the tree to the building. The section of the façade screened by the tree is considered as critical in heritage terms, and the Arboriculturist estimates that the tree could double in size by maturity, thereby further screening this important building, and encroaching on it. It is considered that this tree adversely affects the Press building's heritage value and its architectural contribution to the Square.

- **Retention of the two plane trees and one lime tree in the Stage 4 area in their current positions**

The matter of retaining these trees has been raised in the last month. They are shown as locations 7, 8 & 10 on Appendix I.

The current concept is to relocate tree 7, a plane tree, to the western planter in the northeast quadrant. If the relocation is unsuccessful, a second plane tree, tree 10, could be transplanted, otherwise it will be removed. Likewise, tree 9, a lime tree, is to be relocated to the centre planter outside the ANZ, with the other lime tree, tree 8, being the 'back-up' tree. (Tree 8 may be the preferred first choice given its size is more in keeping with the other trees in the ANZ planter boxes. This opportunity will be investigated further, and tree 8 may be relocated first if it proves possible.)

The Council's Arboriculturist has advised that the trees may not be able to be successfully relocated. The condition of the root balls and the material that they are located in is not known at this stage, and will not be known until excavation is begun.

In terms of design, the planting in Cathedral Square follows a formal design theme, complementing the grid pattern, defining the edges of the Square, and reinforcing the spaces that have been defined. These spaces provide for a range of activities ranging from the formal to the informal. An important formal, ceremonial space in the Square is located in front of the Cathedral. In recognition of its formality, this space is intersected only by the line of open steps and the light standards.

The Concept Team considers that the existing trees in this space do not reinforce either the formal axis or the paving grid, and note that the trees are noticeably arbitrary in their location. It is considered that the retention of these trees would undermine the success of the relationship between the formal spaces and elements of Cathedral Square.

One of the most important new opportunities created in the Square will be the ability to have a clear view across the Square. Views of the Cathedral will be compromised by the retention of these trees in their existing locations.

It is important to note that urgent resolution of this matter is required in order to give the Stage 4 contractor and project team a clear direction so as to avoid incurring additional costs at this stage.

The concept team does not consider it appropriate to retain any of these trees in their existing locations for the above reasons, and it is proposed that these works go ahead as per the current concept plan.

RESOURCE CONSENTS

It must be noted that a number of resource consents have been obtained for the Square redevelopment due to its heritage place status. Any significant changes to the approved concept plan would require a further application for either a change of conditions, or a new resource consent.

FUNDING

An amount of \$50,000 is already provided in the Cathedral Square redevelopment budget, therefore no additional funding is sought.

CONCLUSIONS

- New planting elements should only be added to the Square where they are in keeping with the design concept. The concept already provides a 70% increase in grassed area in the Square and the same number of trees as previously existed. The redevelopment is by no means complete, and the features and activities giving life to the Square have not been fully introduced as yet. It is not possible to judge the success of the design until it has been completed, and the activities introduced.

- A number of different options for further ‘greening’ of the Square have been investigated at this stage. Those that will complement the planting concept are trees in the Colombo Street south entrance, moveable planter boxes, and additional trees in the Stage 5 area. No additional provision is required in the Stages 1-4 budget. The Stage 5 project has not been defined or costed as yet.
- Additional plantings can be done later in a co-ordinated and planned way in the future, if it proves necessary.

Recommendation:

1. That the information be received.
2. That the planting in the Square proceed as per the approved concept plan, but that:
 - (a) Two additional trees in the Colombo Street south entrance (shown in locations 1 & 2 on Appendix I) be planted as soon as possible this year.
 - (b) Moveable planter boxes be established as soon as possible.
3. That the provision of additional trees in Stage 5 be assessed during the design stage for that area.
4. That the Cathedral Square redevelopment proceed in accordance with the approved plan, it being noted that the following works have yet to be completed:
 - installation of lighting standards
 - placement of six street stalls
 - establishment of market area
 - activation of events area
 - installation of major Year 2000 sculpture
 - construction of children’s interactive playground
 - installation of heritage plaques
 - installation of banners
5. That the development plan be revisited one year after the completion of works to address any opportunities or issues that may have since arisen.