



1. DEVELOPMENT OF A CANTERBURY SUSTAINABLE LIVING STRATEGY

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The purpose of this report is to respond to a resolution of the Canterbury Regional Council to establish a Canterbury Sustainable Living Strategy Committee.

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Council is proposing to lead the development of a Canterbury Sustainable Living Strategy and set up a committee to oversee it. The Council has passed a resolution to commit resources that enables it to lead the development of the strategy. It has appointed three members to enter discussions with elected representatives from the City Council, Selwyn, Waimakariri, Hurunui and Banks Peninsula District Councils on formal mechanisms to achieve the development of the first stage of a Canterbury Sustainable Living Strategy.

According to the report that went to the Regional Council, the Strategy provides the opportunity for the Council to “further its outcomes” in a number of areas. These include urban growth and transport, as well as such matters as biodiversity considerations, avoiding damage from natural hazards, and minimising the impact of global climate change and sea level change. It should be noted that all of these matters have already been considered by the City Council and, where appropriate, incorporated into the City Plan or other policy statements.

BACKGROUND

The concept of a long term urban growth strategy emerged as part of the preparation of the City Plan dealing with cross boundary issues. Following a sharp increase in population growth in the mid 1990s, the City Council initiated the establishment of a Joint Standing Committee in 1996 on urban growth. This Committee had, as its terms of reference and through its draft constitution, a brief to examine the issue of long term growth in and around Christchurch. The Committee comprised elected members from the City and Regional Councils as well as Hurunui, Waimakariri, Selwyn and Banks Peninsula District Councils.

However, concerns were subsequently raised by the City Council about potential legal problems the project could create for the City Plan process, and the activities of the Joint Committee were confined to information gathering. It was also felt that provisions made for new urban development as a result of hearings will adequately provide for growth needs of the City over the next 10 to 15 years. Consequently little progress was made in achieving the terms of reference and the Joint Committee was not reconstituted by the new Council in 1998.

In September 1999 the Council resolved to enter discussions with the surrounding district councils on urban growth issues. This was in recognition of the need for a joint approach to such matters as transport planning, open space acquisition and infrastructure provision. Around the same time the Mayors of Waimakariri and Selwyn Districts convened a meeting at Rolleston to discuss the whole area of urban growth and regional development. That meeting asked officers of Waimakariri and the City to prepare a proposal for the establishment of a joint committee or forum and report back.

A proposal has been circulated to the Districts and Region inviting a response prior to reconvening the mayoral forum. That proposal reflects an apparent desire expressed at that meeting to extend the brief of such a forum beyond urban growth so as to include regional development issues.

CANTERBURY REGIONAL COUNCIL PROPOSAL

From the above it is readily apparent that some kind of joint approach to managing urban growth, and possibly other development issues, is needed. This need is being generated not only by what is happening in Christchurch, but perhaps more by the rapid growth occurring in surrounding districts and which is having significant implications for transport planning and other planning for the City. There appears to be also a growing realisation that the Resource Management Act does not necessarily mean that councils cannot plan. The recent change of Government is probably also encouraging some councils to consider wider issues such as regional economic growth.

The Canterbury Regional Council obviously feels that there is a strategic planning gap which it believes it is in the best position to fill. It appears to be using a model based on the Auckland Growth Forum. The Auckland Metropolitan area, of course, includes five cities, unlike Christchurch where the metropolitan area and its immediate rural hinterland is managed by one (the City) Council.

At the outset it must be realised that the Canterbury Regional Council does have some strategic planning functions, including in transport. These roles are given to it under legislation particularly the Resource Management Act and the Land Transport Act and implemented mainly through the Regional Policy Statement, Passenger Transport Strategy and Regional Land Transport Strategy. It sees the Sustainable Living Strategy as being a means of implementing the objectives in those other strategy documents. With an overarching function in resource management, particularly in relation to air, land and soil resources, the Region is a major player.

However, the Region's proposal focuses on urban issues, most of which are in the City and under the responsibility of the City Council. The City contains 80% of the population of the area under consideration and has within its boundaries the largest single concentration of built physical resources (including the airport and Central City), as well as having a significant rural component. Having the Region take leadership in a process involving planning of the future use, development and protection of these resources seems inappropriate. If the Region's proposals placed more emphasis on region wide development issues (e.g. diversification of the Region's productive base) then it would be worthy of stronger support from this Council.

Public transport and air quality are two sustainable living issues of great importance to the city over which we need to co-operate closely with the Regional Council.

Urban growth in and around Christchurch is a matter for the City to lead in a partnership with the surrounding districts and the region. At the moment this is not happening as quickly as it perhaps should, mainly because a high proportion of experienced staff resources have been diverted to settling references on the City Plan. If the Council is to continue to take the lead in this area and expedite the process, then it should identify specific resources and make a clear commitment to the region and the surrounding district councils to do the job. At the same time, the slowing down in population growth in the City, coupled with the significant amount of additional residential land zoned in the City Plan, may have taken some of the urgency out of the issue.

CONCLUSION

There is a definite need for Christchurch to manage the effects of its development in a co-operative manner with its surrounding districts and the Regional Council. An attempt has been made in the past to establish a joint committee, but for a number of reasons little progress was made. The fact that the Regional Council, Waimakariri and Selwyn District Councils have moved to re-establish a forum of one sort or another are strong signals that the City should be taking a more proactive role on these matters.

This report has been seen by the Chairpersons of the Resource Management and Environment Committees, who support the approach advocated in the above report.

Recommendation: That the Council:

1. Support a regional approach to the sustainable development of Canterbury's natural resources.
2. Agree to co-operate with the Canterbury Regional Council and territorial local authorities in a regional initiative for the sustainable development of Canterbury's natural resources.
3. Seek a meeting with the Canterbury Regional Council and territorial local authorities to discuss the scope of a process to address these issues, and in particular to seek greater emphasis on Canterbury wide development issues including the diversification of the Region's productive base.
4. Note that the Christchurch City Council is responsible for planning the sustainable growth and development of the Christchurch Metropolitan area, including the matter of determining the urban density within Christchurch.
5. Seek an assurance from the Canterbury Regional Council that it accepts the principle underlying recommendation 4.