

7. 'CHARACTER' HOUSING MAINTENANCE GRANTS POLICY

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of the report is to consider options and make recommendations on a policy and guidelines for the application of a 'Character' Housing Maintenance Grant Programme.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Council resolved in March 2004 to provide grants funding towards the external maintenance of older character houses to assist in their retention and continuing contribution to the residential amenity and identity of their local areas. There was concern that these houses, particularly the larger, timber homes with expressive architectural style were being lost and replaced by new, higher density residential units with a consequential loss of the quality of local streetscapes, neighbourhoods, open spaces, settings and trees. The grants programme proposed recognised that there was a financial burden associated with the retention of these older, larger character houses which was contributing to their continuing loss throughout the city.
3. The resolution of Council was to develop a policy and grant conditions for the assessment and application of the proposed grants programme.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

4. Budget provision has been made of \$75,000 per annum from the 2005/2006 financial year for five years, with a maximum grant of \$5,000 per house. The resolution provided for an agreement not to demolish for a period of at least five years, the agreement to continue with the property title. This could be provided with in the form of an encumbrance registered against the property title. However, the use of a conservation covenant under s77 of the Reserves Act has a significant administrative and legal overhead which could be inconsistent and onerous with regard to the grant limits proposed by the Council resolution.
5. The policy and grant provisions are to be reviewed in five years from the date of the adoption of the policy.
6. The Character House Grants were identified as a possible budgetary saving option for the Strategy and Planning Group and it was inappropriate to bring this report to the Council until that decision was made (the option was not pursued by Council). It is therefore proposed that the programme be commenced from July 2006 for a period of four years before further review. The amalgamation with Banks Peninsula has increased the number of Community Boards. The budget provision has therefore been increased in the 2006-2016 LTCCP to \$100,000.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council:

- (a) Approve and adopt the guidelines, application and administration of the proposed character housing grants operational policy as attached.
- (b) That a conservation covenant under s77 of the Reserves Act be a condition of a grant subject to the grantee's agreement. Otherwise, that a written confirmation be provided by the grantee to the Council that the grantee will not apply for a consent for demolition for a period of 10 years from the time of the grant payment.

BACKGROUND ON CHARACTER HOUSING MAINTENANCE GRANTS

7. The Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee at its budget meeting of 9 February 2004 expressed concern at the loss of the character and identity of many Christchurch suburbs, through the demolition of older houses of particular distinction, and quality of setting which made a distinctive contribution to the streetscape of local areas. Funding of \$75,000 per annum was requested. This request was reported and agreed by the Annual Plan Subcommittee of 23 February 2004. The grants programme was approved by Council resolution at the LTCCP meeting of 18 March 2004.
8. The following recommendations were adopted:
 - “1. *That a policy be prepared for the assessment and application of grants for external maintenance to non-listed ‘character’ houses in residential Christchurch.*
 2. *That individual grants be provided at 10% of the actual maintenance cost or a maximum of \$5,000.*
 3. *That where a grant is provided and the property is regarded as being worthy of a heritage listing, that the agreement of the owner to listing be given as a condition of the grant.*
 4. *That where a grant is provided the owner to enter into an agreement not to demolish for a period of at least five years, the agreement to continue with the property title.*
 5. *That provision of \$75,000 per annum for five years be made for the purpose of implementing the ‘character’ house maintenance policy starting in 2005/06.*
 6. *That the policy and grant conditions be reassessed after a period of five years from the date of the adoption of the policy.”*
9. There was no definition of what constituted a ‘character’ house, the scope of external maintenance or the means of implementing the grants programme in the resolutions of the Council. These have been addressed in the proposed operational policy attached which includes the preferred options addressed in the latter sections of this report, as well as the previous resolutions of the Council. These options have been considered by and a preferred option identified with the Team Leader, Community Engagement and by the Board Chairpersons and Staff Forum on 16 December 2005.

OPTIONS

10. Two general issues need to be addressed in preparing a policy for the assessment and application of grants.
 - (a) The guidelines and assessment process
 - (b) The management of the grant process
11. In the following pages options for each are summarised below:

A) The selection guidelines and assessment process

The guidelines should provide the basis for the identification of character houses which make a particular contribution to the visual character and quality of the streetscape and local area. The assessment process would apply criteria to individual houses perceived by the local Community Boards to be of particular merit in their neighbourhood.

The selection guidelines of particular significance are likely to be age, intactness and distinctive architectural design, landmark prominence and belonging to a group of houses of similar appearance and street presence. The recognition of significant character houses is very much to do with local community understanding of their own sense of their ‘place’.

To assist the Community Boards it is proposed that the Strategy and Planning Group provide a workshop on the criteria, guidelines and selection process.

The alternatives are that the heritage criteria should be applied in the same manner as for listed heritage items, or that only houses in areas already designated as Special Amenity Areas (SAMs) be considered. While there will be similarities generally with heritage criteria, guidelines for character houses would be applied for their community and streetscape contribution to local identity rather than just for their heritage or geographical significance.

B) The management of the grant process

If it is agreed that the identification of character houses is predominately from a community perspective, then the management and recommendations for grants should also include a community focus.

Applications would be sought from property owners, and applications received by the Strategy and Planning Group would be reported to each of the respective Community Boards. Community Boards could then make recommendations based on the selection guidelines and assessment criteria to a Character Housing Grants Panel. This panel would consist of a representative from each Community Board, and Strategy and Planning Group staff to provide specific heritage, urban design and neighbourhood planning advice and assist the community Grants Panel. The Panel would make the final decisions regarding successful applications and the quantum of the grant. The Community Board would advise all applicants of their success or otherwise. Grant payments would be retrospective and administered by the Strategy and Planning Group.

Details of the process could be advised to all Community Boards by the Strategy and Planning Group, such as information required with an application, the selection process and advice and final selections. This process should be reviewed after one or two years once the panel became more familiar with the selection process.

The alternatives are for the Strategy and Planning Group to be solely responsible for the management of the programme, to provide a consistent standard for the assessment and selection process across the city or for the Community Boards to be responsible for the grant process. In the former option the link to the local community is weakened. In the latter option, Community Boards would need resources to support the process which Strategy and Planning have been advised are not available.

ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS

The Guidelines and Assessment Process

Preferred Option:

12. The guidelines, report on nominations to Community Boards, and management of the grant payments are the responsibility of the Strategy and Planning Group. The Community Boards recommend applications to a Character Housing Management Group who provide approvals to the Community Boards for notification.

	Benefits (current and future)	Costs (current and future)
Social	Direct association of Community Boards with the local community in the Character Housing programme.	Strategy and Planning group perceived to be the point of contact for the programme.
Cultural	Continuity of sense of place and community through reduction in loss of older housing.	
Environmental	Shared responsibility between Community Boards and Strategy and Planning Group for improved amenity and character for streetscapes across the whole city.	
Economic	Sustainable maintenance of a broader city housing stock managed by the Strategy and Planning Group.	Administrative complexity.

Extent to which community outcomes are achieved:

Primary alignment with community outcome for a Liveable City.
Also contributes and a Cultural and Fun City.

Impact on the Council's capacity and responsibilities:

Improves the Council's contribution to the community and neighbourhood identity in a consistent process for improvements to local residential streetscapes.

Effects on Maori:

N/A

Consistency with existing Council policies:

Extends the scope of grants for residential amenity and identity while being consistent in general approach with current heritage grant policies

Views and preferences of persons affected or likely to have an interest:

Other relevant matters:

The focus is on the retention of older character houses which make a contribution to the local streetscape and the identity of the residential area through their street presence as perceived by the local community

Option 1

13. Community Boards have responsibility for grant applications, nominations, and application approvals with the Strategy and Planning group providing a support role of advice and grant administration and management

	Benefits (current and future)	Costs (current and future)
Social	Maximises Community Board involvement and grant discretion within Board areas.	Potential for uneven application of the guidelines and grant approvals.
Cultural	Continuity of sense of place and community through reduction in loss of older housing.	
Environmental	Equitable distribution of funds across the city.	
Economic	Grant management by Strategy and Planning group	
<p>Extent to which community outcomes are achieved: Primary alignment with community outcome for Inclusive Communities Also contributes to a Cultural City</p> <p>Impact on the Council's capacity and responsibilities: Greater commitment to a community perception of residential identity and amenity with direct community participation through the Community Boards.</p> <p>Effects on Maori: N/A</p> <p>Consistency with existing Council policies: Emphasis on local and Community Board participation</p> <p>Views and preferences of persons affected or likely to have an interest:</p> <p>Other relevant matters: Community Boards do not have the resources available to adequately support this option.</p>		

Option 2

14. Applications and nominations are made to the Strategy and Planning Group for review and decision by a Character House Maintenance Grants Panel. Management and administration of grants by the Strategy and Planning Group.

	Benefits (current and future)	Costs (current and future)
Social		
Cultural	Potentially less emphasis on houses and areas of significance to the local community.	
Environmental	Increases likely benefits on a city-wide basis.	
Economic	Grant management by the Strategy and Planning Group.	
<p>Extent to which community outcomes are achieved: Primary alignment with community outcome for a Liveable City : Also contributes to an Inclusive and Cultural City</p> <p>Impact on the Council's capacity and responsibilities: Increased commitment to enhanced residential identity and amenity for a wide section of the community</p> <p>Effects on Maori:</p> <p>Consistency with existing Council policies: Emphasis on Community involvement</p> <p>Views and preferences of persons affected or likely to have an interest:</p> <p>Other relevant matters:</p>		