

6th May 2004

Our Community Plan Christchurch
The Christchurch City Council
Freepost 178
Christchurch

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Dear Sir/Madam

Please find below our submission on the Draft Community Plan. For convenience, this is referred to below as the Plan.

Overview

The Plan was released with just one month for public comment and there has been only limited public discussion. To the best of our knowledge there has been just one public meeting (Beckenham) and we were unable to attend.

Various communications from the Council (via the elected representatives and staff) have solicited comments from the citizens. However, given the size of the documentation, it is a serious task to provide informed comment within the time allowed.

(As an example, has anyone actually looked at how long it takes for a person not previously involved in the Plan to actually read and understand the text. That is just the first step, there is still the preparation of a sensible response.)

Given that this is the first Plan and that subsequent versions will tend to be locked in to what has gone before, it is unfortunate to say the least that more time was not made available for genuine public consultation and discussion. We believe the citizens of Christchurch have been done a disservice with this short cut.

There are other aspects of the Plan we would have commented on but one month was insufficient to provide anything other than a 'knee jerk' response on the other issues. We have therefore (rather selfishly) restricted our comments to the one area that particularly impacts on us.

Differential Rating (and the impact on some rural properties)

The Funding Impact Statement (Vol 3, Page 32) states that the Council has *“Concluded that the Rural sector should be charged less General rates than the Residential sector...”*

The Revenue and Financial Policy (Vol 3, Page 40) details that a lower General Rate applies to the rural sector and this will continue, but at a fixed 75% of the residential sector. This lower rate is justified in the text by three assumptions, part quotations of which are repeated below:

- *“A lower standard of services.....provided...”*
- *“...reduced use of amenities by ratepayers...”*
- *“The value and impact of services provided...”*

The Rates Setting and Rates Policies section (Vol 3, Page 112) then defines the rating differential categories for the general rates.

However, as has been publicly acknowledged, a change has been made whereby a sub group of rurally zoned properties will have to pay the general rate at the (higher) residential rate.

The Plan is completely silent on why this change has happened and why the properties that now miss out on the rural differential do not fit in with the three assumptions above.

In the area of the city where we live, (Marshland) the three assumptions in fact apply universally to every property in the locality. Put another way:

- The Council provides a lower standard of services. We don't have footpaths, there are just two street lamps in our 800m street, storm water runs to “ground”, there is no bus service (We realise the Regional Council is also involved here) and there are no playgrounds or libraries, etc.
- As a group, it is no easier for us to access the services provided by the Council than the rural properties in the area that will still have the differential. (Once you are beyond sensible walking distance, it is irrelevant if you have to drive 3kms or 5 kms to the nearest Council playground.)
- The community services provided by the Council do not enhance our property values any more or less than they do the neighbouring properties that still have the differential.

Unable to find the answer for why this change was proposed in the Plan, we visited the Tuam Street offices and spoke with a council staff member. When asked why the change had been made, we received no clear answer.

After general comments like “it’s a difficult area and has been under consideration for a while” and “the changes to the Local Government Act now allow us to do it”, we were asked what rural locality we lived in. On reply, we were shown an aerial photo of a large house within several kilometres of where we live. He then asked why someone living in multi-million dollar home like that should not pay the same rates as those in Fendalton.

We did not know it at the time but the answer to the question we were asked is simple and is in fact explained on Page 40 of Vol 3 of the Plan. Put simply, these properties cost the Council less to service and so should pay less.

(The response we received clearly suggests that to at least some staff within the Council, the ratepayer’s perceived ability to pay is seen as more important than the lower level of service provided by the Council.)

Our submission is that this change to the rural differential for the General rates is unfair. In addition, there is no justification made within the Plan for the change and in fact the change contravenes the reasons quoted for the existence of differential.

Personal Submission

We do wish to talk to the main points at the hearing.

Yours faithfully,

Ross and Kay Major