

# CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL LONG TERM COUNCIL COMMUNITY PLAN

## SUBMISSION BY THE BECKENHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION INC.

### INTRODUCTION

Although public attention has been focussed primarily on the financial/numerical aspects of the LTCCP, and although we address some of those aspects in this submission, we are also mindful of Albert Einstein's dictum that: "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted", and we see some very significant aspects of the LTCCP that have little if anything to do with revenue or expenditure but are essentially matters of the quality, style and mode of government in our city and with the quality of local democracy, all of which are important aspects of the quality of life.

Given that the proposed LTCCP will act as a driving force in relation to those matters over the next ten years, we have serious concerns as to what kind of local government we might have at the end of that time. Changes in local government practice, once they are locked in place by a long-term planning document, are less easy to amend or repair than are decisions about spending priorities.

### PROPOSED "SAVINGS" (VOLUME 1, P86)

A general observation regarding these proposed cuts is that, in the context of the overall scale of revenue and expenditure, the envisaged "savings" are so relatively minor that they appear to be driven less by a genuine search for meaningful economies and more by the cosmetic wish to be "seen to be cutting something". Some of the proposed cuts are so small as to appear arbitrary, petty, and mean-spirited. Indeed, one might wonder if they have been proposed partly in order to divert public attention from other aspects of the LTCCP whose implications are possibly more significant but less immediately obvious.

### Our comments regarding specific proposals are as follows:

#### •closure of community halls

See the following NOTE

NOTE: We are struck by the arbitrariness of the 20% closure target, and at the absence of any demonstration of how a 20% closure will produce a saving of \$397,000. We accept that there may well be community halls that no longer serve a useful purpose, but we would urge that they be treated case by case rather than on a quota-driven basis.

#### •closure of community libraries

We oppose this

#### •withdrawal of mobile library

We oppose this

•closure of suburban swimming pools

See the following NOTE

We recognise that there may well be a case for closure of some suburban pools. However, we would also urge caution in implementing this proposal. We would argue that the current usage figures do not reflect the impact of increased fuel costs on the cost of travel to and from more centralized facilities, and that the likelihood that those travel costs will continue to increase is likely to mean that suburban pools, which were mostly built at a time when fewer people owned cars, could become more attractive because they can be accessed without having to use a car. Thus, suburban swimming pools that might currently be viewed as under-utilized might well in future undergo a revival and increase in local usership.

•reduction in number of issues of City Scene

We oppose—see the following NOTE

NOTE: We would find this proposal more amenable to consideration if it were put forward in the overall context of a strategic examination of the Council's *two-way* communication with the public and how that might be made more effective. Indeed, we would go so far as to acknowledge that the spread of access to electronic communications and information technology might at some stage make a reduction in "hard copy" communication media quite justifiable. We are not persuaded that that time has yet come. As it is, in the absence of a strategic review of communications, and especially given the proposed saving of \$20,000, we see this proposal as one of those to which the epithets "petty" and "arbitrary" particularly apply.

•outsourcing of Council payments

We oppose: see the following NOTE

NOTE: This proposal has implications that go far beyond any question of what savings in expenditure might accrue. It touches on the local interface between the Council and residents, and one of its effects will be to reduce the scope of local staff interactions and dialogue with local people. The underlying intention would appear to be to move towards stripping service centres altogether of the key function of revenue collection—as an obvious first step towards and as-yet-undeclared goal of closing service centres altogether.

We see this proposal as being not so much about money as about centralization of the interface between the Council and the public—making the Council more remote and less accessible to local people. This is ultimately about the centralization of power, and this causes us to have serious misgivings.

**"NON-PRIORITY" DISCRETIONARY PROJECTS (VOL. 1, PP74~75)**

**We would request that the following be redesignated as priority discretionary projects**

- Water re-use feasibility studies
- "Mid Heathcote Vision" project
- Inclusion of Avon-Heathcote Ihutai Trust Development
- Implementation of Biodiversity Strategy
- Cashmere Stream Living Streams Development

## **FINDING THE FUNDS**

As to where the Council look for savings to cover the relatively modest effect of the above, we would suggest as follows:

**(1) Reduce spending on the Banks Peninsula**

Given that metropolitan ratepayers had no say on the inclusion of the peninsula into Christchurch City, we would regard it as utterly unacceptable for any spending on the Peninsula to be at the expense of metropolitan ratepayers or of the quality of services in metropolitan Christchurch. If (as we suspect) the LTCCP proposes more spending on the Peninsula than the Peninsula is expected to contribute, then reduction of that excess spending would, we suggest, be one justifiable source of funding to meet the implication of the foregoing sections of our submission.

**(2) Review estimates and/or timescale of major capital projects**

**(3) Reduce/eliminate/“de-prioritize” spending on discretionary items currently designated as “priority”**

(possible candidates: Botanic Gardens Visitors Centre; City Mall)

**(4) As part of (3) above: reduce streets & transport expenditure from the currently proposed \$187.3 million**

## **POLICY ON DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE (VOL. 1 pp 290~294)**

It is in this area of the LTCCP that we see the greatest cause for concern. The underlying thrust of this section appears to us to be aimed at enlarging the scope of action by the City Council or its staff that will be “off limits” to any public consultation or debate and hence rendered impervious to any expression of public opinion. The general scope inherent in the significance criteria appears to be such as to enable action to be taken without consultation either with the people of Christchurch or their elected representatives, and for those criteria to be used (especially by the bureaucracy) to fend off objections to action being taken without consultation.

The specific issues that particularly concern us are:

**<◊> Re-classification of the Redbus Limited and City Care as non-strategic assets (especially the bus company)**

Quite apart from being surprised that the transport services provided by the bus company should be deemed a less “irreplaceable part of the city’s infrastructure” than the Council’s interest in the Jade Stadium, we are opposed to the apparent intention to make it easier for the bus company in particular to be privatized without consultation.

**<◊> Absence of any reference to public housing assets, and of any indication of how strategic or otherwise they are considered to be**

<◊> **Doubling of the operating revenue criterion from \$500,000 to \$1 million.**

<◊> **Criteria to be used in determining significance**

Our concern here relates most of all to the first of the bullet-point items on p. 292, namely the “extent to which the decision flows logically and consequentially from a significant decision already made or from a decision in the LTCCP (as amended). As an example of the kind of concern this creates: if service centres have their revenue-collecting function stripped away as envisaged in the draft LTCCP, then subsequently it might be deemed “logical and consequential” to get rid of service centres altogether; and the same “logical and consequential” argument might subsequently be applied to the abolition of community boards. In this way, the “flows logically and consequentially” criterion appears capable of being used as an enabling clause for actions and agendas that are as yet undeclared.

Such concern is strengthened when we look at the way in which service centres and community boards have been treated under the current regime. There seems to be no sign of appreciation of the role that service centres and their staff have in the processes of local grassroots interaction with local people, and in the quality of local grassroots democracy. Community Boards too appear to have been treated with belittling contempt, as too has the concept of “community advocacy”.

Professions of concern for democracy and of commitment to transparency are no substitute for democracy and transparency in practice. The draft LTCCP gives us no reassurance on this score. This, in the long run, we see as being of far greater significance than a few dollars either way on the rates.

We wish to be heard in respect of this submission. The relevant direct contact details are set out below.

5 May 2006

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