

**A Submission on the Christchurch City Council Community Plan  
2006 to 2016  
on behalf of the Englefield Residents Association  
by Hugh Bowron 21 April 2006**

This submission addresses two themes of the draft community plan.

1. **Community Support** that aims to build strong and inclusive communities by giving advice and support to community groups, and **Democracy and Governance** in which it is desired to find the best ways to inform people and generate feedback by collating and processing submissions and by arranging and providing support for meetings, panel hearings, deputations and petitions.
2. **City Development** that aims to promote good urban design and the protection of our heritage items by providing information, advice and funding for city heritage and its conservation.

**1. Community Support and Democracy and Governance**

It is good that the city council is encouraging and supportive of neighbourhood groups and residents associations, seeking to inform them about its planning and decision making through a steady stream of consultative documents. However many of these documents are difficult to read, even by educated people, because they are written in a style that is dominated by bizspeak and the language of managerialism. Council officers seem to find it difficult to write clear, lucid prose that communicates simply and effectively.

There is a lot of jargon in these documents. Clichés and platitudes abound so that dead words put readers off. Statements of the obvious are frequent, a case in point from the draft summary document in the "Our future direction" section where it lists the aim of making Christchurch "a place where people enjoy living."

An outstanding example of a difficult to read document would be the "Issues and Options Paper: City Plan Heritage Provisions, December 2005."

The style and nature of this primary method of communicating with community groups is worth mentioning. It takes more time than most community groups have to read the many papers that are sent to them. Not a few of these documents request submissions in relatively tight time deadlines. Those groups that are drawn into this dance often find that it is hard to make submissions that have depth or substance. This may make it hard for Council officers to give much weight to such lightweight submissions.

Consideration could usefully be given to more engaging and attractive methods of communicating with community groups. Briefings by Council Officers, and regular forums with elected representatives spring to mind. Democracy after all as it emerged in the Athenian sense was a face-to-face business.

Another possibility would making an informal agreement with each community group to work on a limited number of issues of particular interest to them. The Council could then make information, research and briefings available to each group, together with meetings with the appropriate elected representatives, so that each group could work through to a conclusion that gave them the satisfaction of seeing results achieved.

## **2. City Development**

The absence of effective planning controls by local government is a significant factor in continuing urban blight in the inner city east and Englefield areas of interest. Although the Council has created the Special Amenities Area classification, and both the Avon Loop and Englefield groups have benefited from this, there is a widespread perception that SAMS have little legislative teeth. A thorough process of consultation and careful law drafting needs to be undertaken to strengthen the provisions of SAMS.

From the 1960's on developers have flung up ugly dwellings in the inner city east and Englefield areas that have paid no regard to the historic character of the areas they are built in. The poor sound insulation of these dwellings leaves elderly residents at the mercy of their Bogan neighbours. Poor insulation of every kind, and slip shod building standards has created dispiriting structures that have rapidly degenerated into the slums of the future.

Central government and local government have passed responsibility back and forth between each other for doing anything effective about this. The end result has been to leave neighbourhood and residents groups powerless to deal with property developers and slum landlords.

Affordable housing for the urban poor and those of modest means does not have to look awful. Furthermore the current priority of the minister of housing that houses should be properly insulated and be high in energy conservation values creates an opportunity for central and local government to co-operate to create the kind of urban planning controls that have existed in some European societies for a long time.

A partnership between residents and neighbourhood groups and local government in urban regeneration initiatives, starting with the joint development of effective planning controls, would be a useful way to overcome the disempowerment process that I have outlined above. The one way avalanche of bizspeak Council consultative documents could be replaced by an equal exchange of voices, views, position papers, and briefing meetings.

Hugh Bowron  
142 Avonside Drive  
Ph wk 389 6948 h 389 3024  
hugh.bowron@clear.net.nz

I wish to talk to the main points in my written submission at the hearings to be held between Thursday 25 May and Wednesday 7 June 2006.