

SUBMISSION ON
The Draft Christchurch City Council
Long Term Council Community Plan 2006-2016

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SUBMISSION OF:

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Thank you for the opportunity to present this written submission. I wish to make a verbal submission in support of this document.

CORE THEME OF THE SUBMISSION

The Christchurch City Council (the 'City Council') is tasked with the overwhelming responsibility of creating a great city for not only ourselves but, so far as it can, for future generations. This goal will be most likely achieved if the correct decisions are made today. And it is in a genuinely consultative decision-making environment best decisions are most likely to be made. The LTCCP recognizes this in stating at the beginning of the Democracy and Governance Plan that what the City Council wants is "to set the future direction for the city and Banks Peninsula and find the best ways to inform people and generate feedback, so that the community is involved in decision-making processes". The key question is whether or not the draft Plan does all it reasonably can to nurture such an approach.

WHERE WE COME FROM

The role of an Electorate Member of Parliament ('MP') involves an amalgam of individual and community advocacy and representation, and the responsibilities of being a member of a political party Caucus, with any additional duties provided to them by that Caucus or its leader. At a local level, the core of an MP's service delivery is based around the operation of Government services in their area particularly if they are Government Members of Parliament. Their office (in both senses) is likely to be used as a place to bring complaints when all else has failed.

The Christchurch Central Electorate Office is a busy one. Our overall constituent work breakdown reflects, as one would anticipate, the dominance of Central Government concerns within that mix.

The breakdown of 860 Central Government cases for the period May 05 to May 06 is as follows (numbers rounded and based on our internal "Tracker Database System"):

70% relate to Immigration,

12% to Work and Income,

10% to Housing New Zealand and

8% to Child, Youth and Family, ACC and CDHB.

(The 30% of non immigration works usually reflects very complex situations).

However, what has become increasingly noticeable in my office is the significant increase in the proportion of constituent work relating to the Christchurch City Council which is being brought to our attention for our action. The percentage of work relating to local body over the past five years has been as follows (numbers rounded and based on internal "Tracker System"): 2002/3 – 9%, 2003/4 – 10%, 2004/5 – 19% and 2005/6 – 30%. They reflect a number of areas such as noise, traffic and road safety, graffiti, suburban libraries, community boards, derelict buildings, preschools, council housing, social isolation, perception of safety, neighbourhood support, public nuisance, prostitution by-laws, sale of alcohol, rubbish collection, parks, central city up-grade, parking on berms, heritage buildings, leaky homes, water springs, swimming pools, community agencies and funding, to name but a few.

The cause of this rise is substantially unknown, but in general a rise in concerns expressed to our office in this way is an indication of service problems and/or a reduction of confidence in the likely success of making a direct approach to that service. It may also be an indication that confidence in the agency running those services is for some reason reducing.

APPLYING OUR CONCERN TO THE DRAFT LTCCP:

DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS

Each year the City Council surveys its residents on a wide range of topics to gauge satisfaction levels. The most pertinent question relating to the democratic process in the survey would be under the Council Consultation/Community Involvement category - **"Satisfaction with the way Council involves the public in the decision it makes"**. The results from these council surveys have shown the percentage of persons surveyed as being either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the City Council. In the year 2000 – 37%, 2001 – 37%, 2002 – 35%, 2003 – 39% and 2004 – 36%. However, the draft LTCCP states (at Page 111) that this years performance, being (assumed by myself, un-sourced in the document itself) from the 2005 survey, involves the percentage of residents satisfied with the way the council involves the public in decision making, rising to 47%. Whilst this could be purported as a rise in satisfaction in actual fact the Residents Survey 2005 document states "The survey methodology in 2005 was a telephone methodology whereas the methodology for past surveys was a door to door methodology. Due to the change in methodology the data of this survey would not be compared with previous surveys". I also believe there was a change in contractors engaged to carry out the survey.

Given that the City Council must clearly be uncomfortable with this previous trend and still low current percentage of satisfaction in order to have set a target of 75% satisfaction for the next 3 years and this then reduces to 65% in the subsequent 7 years. Ignoring for a moment why the City Council might be foreseeing a declining need to involve residents in future, the next step is to look at the action proposed to change the current situation.

The LTCCP (page 110) states that the Council's objective is:

To develop strategies and policies which set the direction and work for the future of Christchurch.

It states that it will achieve this by:

What we will do in year 1 to 3?

– comply with statutory requirements in terms of providing agenda on time and panel hearings.

This is then followed by:

What we will do in years 4 to 10?

– continue to do the same.

From these statements it could be interpreted that the City Council believes that merely by meeting the minimum statutory requirements, it will significantly raise the level of community participation in the decision making process. The absence of any tangible plans is an indication, in my view, of a chronic weakness in the LTCCP which needs to be addressed.

It is also worthy of note that in the Draft Summary (page 12)

What Achievements will show our success? It states;

Satisfaction with the way the Council involves the public in decision-making (65% in 2006/7)
Satisfaction that the Council makes decisions in the best interests of Christchurch (75% in 2006/7)

Are these statements of fact, or setting targets? Their intent is very unclear. The percentage figure of 65% does not relate back to the comparable figure in the main document.

Clearly proposals designed to help the City Council reach and exceed these targets will be generated by the LTCCP consultation process and I trust that some will be incorporated in the final document. However, I feel obliged to register concern at the paucity of thinking in this area in the draft Plan as presented.

I believe in order to come anywhere close to the target of 75% in customer satisfaction, some analysis of reasons for what I believe to be a significant reduction in confidence in the functioning of Christchurch City democracy needs to be undertaken. Certainly there is indication in a range of aspects of the post-2004 reorganisation of the City Council that the protection and growth of democratic systems and citizen engagement has not been a core driver of change. Moves such as:

- The reduction in the number of councillors not being paralleled by a review of ward boundaries at the same time;
- The maintenance of a low level of support services for councillors through the reduction in councillor numbers (see my submission to the Draft Reorganisation scheme in relation to Banks Peninsula in 2005);
- The shift in the boundary between governance and management, to the advantage of the power of the latter;
- The reported loss of an unusually large number of staff with many years of experience of relating to citizens and their organizations in the provision of council services;
- The abolition of subject committees of councillors and the subsequent reduction in citizen contact with councilors, through such devices as petitions, in decision-making forums;
- The failure to increase the powers or spending levels of Community Boards as the City Council committees were abolished or the Council was downsized;
- The establishment of "briefings" run for elected members, with changes such as their translation into being public rather than private forums being forced by public pressure rather than internal realization that a problem existed;
- Dramatic changes in the council's attitude towards specific matters (for example, gaming) without any public mandate or initial debate; **and**
- Proposals to reduce the strategic status of some key city assets, so reducing consultation obligations were they to, for example, be sold in future,

have combined to create what many are seeing as a crisis in the functioning of city democracy.

Given that the City Council has set, through the draft LTCCP, an immediate target of 75% for future responses to the survey questions concerning engagement with public in decision making, and yet has not proposed any substantial change in policy or approach, I believe, it is incumbent to propose some actions. I propose the insertion for the 2006/7 year of the LTCCP the following actions:

- Review the level of support services for City Councillors and Community Board members;
- *Review how City residents receive information on the work of the City Council;*
- Review with a view to increasing powers (i.e. delegations), including financial powers, of Community Boards;
- Review the impact of the changes in the “governance/management” division of responsibility within the City Council in relation to public input and public confidence in the council;
- Review the impact on democratic involvement of the reorganization of City Council committees;
- Add the number of petitions received and heard as a measure of democratic engagement;

and for the 2007/8 year the following actions:

- Review the ward boundaries, with a focus on communities of interest and an enhanced direct democracy, based on one member one ward,

as the minimum necessary to start to reverse this desperately worrying trend in the views of residents towards their local democracy.

I now move on to a number of specific matters which, in their handling, serve as rich illustration of the growing democratic deficit in our city.

SUBURBAN POOLS – Edgware Pool

The proposed closure of the well-utilized local suburban pools could be seen to highlight the issues of engagement around local democracy.

The Edgware Pool (the ‘Pool’) has been a long-standing community facility, which has with age and use become in need of repair. The repair needed has been well known and documented by the council over a number of years. However the City Council repeatedly took the decision not to act on those entirely predictable needs by neglecting to include depreciation in its annual budgeting. And now the City Council is citing the cost of repair as a reason for eventual Pool closure. The resultant community cynicism can perhaps be understood.

The St Albans/Edgware community is hugely supportive of the retention of the Pool because the facility has direct impact on their individual and collective lives. It is where their children learn to swim; where they meet for social gatherings during summer; where they can send their children to unaided and have reassurance that they will be safe; where the swimming club can operate from; where the local school sports swimming days and regular swimming lessons can take place; but most importantly a place where there is a sense of community – not just yet another facility.

The current proposal around the Edgware Pool appears to be in conflict with many of the current established City Council policies stated in its community outcomes:

Governance: Everybody actively participates in public decision making. Everybody feel represented by their decision-makers. Our decision-makers plan for a sustainable Christchurch.

Whilst City Council reports refer to the costs involved and the project saving of up to \$130,000 was closure to occur, no analysis has been done on the generation of social capital which a facility such as this has on a community. This can only be heard through the democratic process of deputations, submissions and petitions, many of which have been presented to the City Council through its democratic processes over recent years, but with little effect. The community does not feel that decisions are being made in their best interests. What can be more sustainable than a small-scale community-based facility for community-based activity?

Health – We live long, healthy and happy lives. Our city environment supports the health of the community.

Clearly the health of this community is not being considered in this decision. Families use the Pool in the summer months not only to swim but also to meet and gather. Not only does it provide a facility for people to learn how to swim and be active; it allows family and friends to have picnics and barbeques and enjoy the relaxed outdoors in a healthy, happy environment.

Recreation – We value leisure time and recognize that the arts, sport and other recreational activities contribute to our economy, identity, health and wellbeing.

Parents of local primary school aged children feel confident in letting their children travel to the Pool unaided. This confidence arises out of the fact that it is just like traveling to the local school and once there they are likely to meet other children and families they are familiar with. They would not feel confident in letting their children travel un-aided to other parts of the city, such as the proposed alternative of a community pool in Papanui. They would need to travel in cars or by bus to other facilities, decreasing the time available for children and families to swim. The type of recreational activity created by an outdoor local swimming pool is not provided or available anywhere else in the city.

City Development – Christchurch has a vibrant centre, attractive neighbourhoods and well-designed transport networks. Our lifestyles and heritage are enhanced by our urban environment.

The closure of the Edgware Pool is also at odds with this policy. St Albans/Edgware is a neighbourhood attractive not just in the visual sense, but most importantly because of its strong quality of community spirit and involvement. The Pool plays a major role in this sense of community, as it is a meeting place for friends and families. The age of this Pool may also make it a heritage landmark.

This policy also states that “*we design our city to meet current needs and future challenges*”. One of the biggest challenges facing this city and indeed this country is its aging population. As evidence of this is well documented, along with the implications of an ageing population, it would appear to be more pertinent to retain more locally focused services. This would not only make them more accessible for older people but also reduce the need for increased movements around the city by vehicles. To be able to swim locally, I believe, would increase the opportunity of people swimming all together.

I recommend that the City Council retain Edgware Pool for the benefit of the community and the well being of the city as a whole.

POLICY OF DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE

The unheralded change of the Policy of Determining Significance could also be, and indeed has widely been, viewed as a move away from the intent of the Local Government Act to ensure that all “significant” decisions are made in a transparent and democratically accountable way. Whilst on the one hand the City Council has stated that it wished to increase the involvement of citizens in the decision making process, it appears that by changes to this policy the City Council is indeed taking away the previous opportunity for city residents to have their say in the process of what happens to their strategic assets, as identified by the LTCCP. *Reference to Jade Stadium, Red Bus Ltd and City Care, also that the City Housing Units are not listed as a strategic asset.*

I would recommend that, in the best interests of the citizens of the city and a truly engaging democratic process, under the criteria of determining significance the level of operating expenditure remain at \$500,000.

NEW CIVIC OFFICES

The debate over the need for new Civic Offices, and then (if that is decided) their cost and related aspects, should involve considerable input from the citizens of the city; primarily as ratepayers and owners but also as people who should benefit from better service from those Offices. There appears to be little reference to new Civic Offices in the LTCCP document. Under the current policy of significance (spending above \$500,000) and its intent, it would have been natural to think that this type of development would be well documented. To not allow ratepayers the opportunity to comment on this makes it look as if the City Council is not being transparent and accountable in its process. To then understand that funding is proposed to be through a leaseback arrangement involving the City Council’s asset holding company could surely lead the average city resident more convinced than ever that their Council had a weak interest in involving them in such key decisions.

Thank you.