

# Our Community Plan Submission Form

## Instructions

### Please read before completing your submission

It will help us process your submission if you clearly state the issue you want the Council to consider, what specific action you think the Council should take, and why that should be done.

If you wish, you can present your submission at a hearing. (If that is the case, please tick the box). The hearings will be held between Thursday 25 May and Wednesday 7 June 2006. Generally, 10 minutes are allocated for hearing each submission, including time for questions.

It will help us if your submission also refers to the page of either the full version or the summary version.

Please note: We are legally required to make all written or electronic submissions available to Councillors and to the public. This includes the name and address of the submitter. All submissions will be published on the Council's website from 10 May 2006.

No anonymous submissions will be accepted.

You may send us your submission:

### By mail

Please mail your submission (no stamp is required) to:

Freepost 178  
Our Community Plan  
Christchurch City Council  
PO Box 237  
Christchurch 8003

### By email

Please email your submission to:  
ccc-plan@ccc.govt.nz  
Please make sure that your full name and address is included with your submission.

### On the internet

You may enter your submission using the form provided on the Council's web site at <http://www.ccc.govt.nz>  
Please follow all the instructions on the web site.

Please remember to indicate if you wish to present your submission in person at one of the hearings.

Please ensure your submission arrives no later than Friday 5 May 2006.

## Your submission (SEE ATTACHED)

You may use this form for your submission on our draft Community Plan if you wish. Whether you use this form or not, please include your name, address and contact telephone number with your submission.

Tick one  I do NOT wish to present my submission at the hearing, and ask that this written submission be considered OR  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

Are you completing this submission:  For yourself +  On behalf of a group or organisation *ratepayers*

If you are representing a group or organisation, how many people do you represent?

My submission refers to:  Full version  Page No.  Summary version  Page No.

Do you also want to respond to:  Development Contributions  Aquatic Facilities  Other

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## SUBMISSION TO 2006-16 LTCCP

(from Tony Gemmill, 57 Woodside Common, Chch. 2)

### INTRODUCTION

This long term Plan provides the cornerstone for the future operations, and funding commitments, of the Council over the next 10 years. As such it is most important that the job is done properly in line with the requirements of the 2002 Local Government Act. The new requirements set by the Act require a much more disciplined approach by the Council, and for a better partnership to be developed with the community in agreeing on the future spending of ratepayer funds. I am not sure whether “we” have a partnership yet??

Because of the importance of the 2006-16 Plan for the future I have chosen to take a wide view of the process and the outcomes now provided. I have chosen to comment on a number of separate issues, generally based on Consultation/Rates increases/Savings/Maintenance etc.

As I have very strong views on many of these I have also provided a consolidated summary of my suggestions in a final section of this submission.

### CONSULTATION

I accept that the 2004-14 process permitted a desk based exercise for Community Outcomes (the supposed “drivers” for the future Council efforts), but I did have an expectation that something much more rigorous would be used for the present process.

I recall that, in review of the 2004-14 process, the Plan was not overly well received by Council (as had been the expectation of a woolly report on the subject). The outcome from consideration on 29 July 2004 asked that more creative ways be developed to ensure that the community could better engage in the 2006 process.

It is relevant that many other Councils around the country, in implementing the requirements of the Act, went to considerable effort to consult directly with their ratepayers to ensure that the Plan (the LTCCP) could really represent the Council/Community partnership espoused by the Act.

The particular technique utilised involved the sending of a questionnaire to households, and businesses, seeking feedback on issues and priorities from the ratepayer’s point of view. Where this occurred there was much pleasure expressed by the ratepayers at the opportunity to be involved to the extent that was offered, and the various Councils took much pride in thanking the ratepayers for their valuable input, and acknowledging the “partnership” which had been established through the process.

I acknowledge that the 2004 Plan was allowed to be prepared as an interim one, and on the basis of what was already known from previous research and priority work, but to me it seems that the 2006 plan was prepared on the same basis, seemingly without any direct input from the ratepayers (as distinct from the “stakeholders”) of the city. I have some real concern therefore that there really is any sincerity in including the word “community” in the current draft Plan.

Unfortunately the die is probably now cast, but the Council should resolve that the 2009-19 process should be conducted on a zero based approach, with absolute involvement from the “bread and butter” ratepayers of our fine city—in fact work should commence immediately in establishing a better relationship with ratepayers to ensure that when “community” is used in the future it is with the background that the Council and the Community are moving ahead as a pair of genuine partners.

While on the subject of consultation I note, under “Democracy and Governance”, on page 112 of the draft Plan, a reference to “wider consultation with options of support for those who do not speak English”. In the light of the process for 2004 and 2006 I would suggest instead that the wording should be “more effort needed to get better spread of views from **all** ratepayers of the city”.

The understanding of Council processes is not strong in the community, and more effort should be given through Community Development exercises to improve this understanding, and an understanding of what the rates are actually spent on. Too often, in debate, or general discussion, the issue is more along the lines of whether particular **capital** projects are important, rather than what the Council should be committing in an **operational** sense ie the matter is widely confused and stronger efforts should be made to differentiate between the different streams of funding.

## **RATE INCREASES**

I am perplexed to understand how the Council has arrived at a proposal for rate increases (average) of 8.55%, 7.03% and 10.75% for the next 3 years. This represents a cumulative increase of 29% (!!!) over 3 years.

Worse still, this may actually represent something like 33 to 35 % (or more) for those with property values higher than the average.

With all the advocacy work in the community (including, of course, the feedback gained during election campaigning in 2004??) I would have thought that the call would be something along the lines of “*concentrate on the core services, and keep those rates increases in line with inflation*” .—at least that is the message that I always received with my many years in working in the community, and still hear within social/family/work circles to this day.

Running the Council is not dissimilar to running a household. Usually the approach is to carefully scrutinise the spending to ensure that there is no overcommitment with the

discretionary spending money. With the Council you are actually dealing with the ratepayers discretionary spending and there should therefore be a like approach.

In the household, commitments to new capital items, or capital renewals, are only made where this can be afforded, and on day to day operations continual adjustment is required to remain in line with the income received. Quite often there is a need to cease, or reduce, some costs to cater for various increases imposed outside of the household control. (increased power costs may mean less power is to be used—by stoking up the fire a bit more?- or some thought is needed to be given to the best health cover when costs increase like they have over the last few days—or it may be necessary to give up some commitments in order to make ends meet??)

I note a reference in the introductory sections of the draft Plan alluding to “this document is the Council’s response to what the community has told us it wants in terms of outcomes”. I do not believe this—I cannot believe that the community has asked the Council to deliver almost 30% in cumulative increases over the next 3 years.

Given that the Council **may** be facing difficult times, and **may** need to deliver increases slightly above inflation, it would (in my view) seem that increases of, say, 5%, 4% and 4% could be relevant for the next 3 years. On this basis the extent of rates required for the 06/07 year would be \$196m instead of \$203m, and there should be a target set to achieve savings of \$7m from the day to day operational cost of the Council.

So, the question may well be how can this net saving be achieved??

I have set out below a number of options available to Council with recommendations that these be pursued with urgency:--

(a) Early Childhood Education.

Why does the Council have to be involved with a Central Government responsibility??

In recent years Government has provided significant increases toward Early Childhood Education and more recently, has announced the introduction of up to 20 hours per week “free” attendance, confirming that this is a responsibility that sits fairly and squarely in the Government’s lap!!

Rather than the Council “looking at this service over the next year, and the Council’s role in how this is to be achieved” (page 97), the decision should be made **now** to terminate Council’s involvement, and funding allocation, for this activity. While there is an apparent saving of some \$400,000, there is also another significant opportunity available for a capital return to the Council.

The Civic Creche, residing alongside the Civic Offices, has been occupying an extremely valuable land asset for too many years. This is not a prudent use of central city real estate, and urgency should be given to the release of this land for more appropriate use.

(b) Out of School Care (including After School Care, and Holiday Programmes)

Why does the Council need to be involved in providing baby-sitting services??

Again, Central Government has provided significant increases (through taxpayer funds) for this activity over recent years, showing that this really is a Government responsibility. I understand that the savings through termination of this support could be almost \$1m which is very significant, and I would suggest that the ratepayers would be very supportive of Council's action in this direction.

Again, there is required to be a tough call here. Now is the time to cut non-core spending—but, please don't just call for a review!!!

There is another point which should be mentioned, and this relates to the Government's recent introduction of the family package enabling households to benefit from increased discretionary spending (at the taxpayers expense), and the opportunity to further partake in the extended baby-sitting services. There are plenty of private providers around, so why is the Council involved???

(c) "Community Support"

Of prime concern here is the rapid growth over past years of so called support for the community, most of which is in the form of grants. As it happens much of this grant funding actually contributes to community/social/Maori/youth "workers", or supervisors, or co-ordinators. The city of Christchurch is very well endowed with these type of people, engaged by numerous (and an increasing number of) community organisations, all, seemingly, aiming at improving the well-being of the people of Christchurch.

And, we should not forget that the Government also provides funding for a further group of similar people in our community. Isn't this just another example of both the taxpayer and the ratepayer (often the same individual) paying towards the same desired outcome???

I understand that there is a total of \$5.7m allocated for community grants of this nature, but I believe that there is an opportunity to save at least \$2m by simply rationalising the support given (and hence the vast number of organisations currently depending on Council support). There is no justification for the existence of so many organisations in such a small metropolitan area, and the Council staff should be given the challenge now to work on the rationalisation of support based on a substantial reduction in grants through this funding category.

(d) Community Board Funding

It does not seem clear where the current funding for Boards is included in the document but, on the basis that everyone should share the "pain" in making savings for the

ratepayer, I am sure that the Boards could sustain a reduction of, say, \$50,000 p.a. each until such time as the current budget difficulties ease.

A savings of \$300,000 p.a. is a significant contribution toward a more acceptable rate increase for 2006/07.

(e) Libraries

Naturally the Council's interim decision is one that seems to have met with some concern from the community. Unfortunately the creation of "mega"-libraries in some parts of the city **does** impact on the smaller/older outlets. Unfortunately also there does need to be some rationalisation in these cases (the issue of swimming pools is no different).

I initially had a neutral stance toward the Council's interim decision but, when I noticed, in a recent Situations Vacant notice, that the particular position "will involve working with the 19 libraries in the network", my view has changed somewhat!!  
If the figure of 19 is correct then I would agree that there really is a case for rationalisation.

On the matter of the mobile library my view is that this would actually be an assist to work in conjunction with a slimmer network, and should therefore be retained as part of the rationalisation outcomes.

As far as the Spreydon Library is concerned there should be lasting concerns of safety if this facility is retained. In addition to there being no real parking provided, the close proximity of the busy Barrington Street, and the very busy entry/exit to the adjacent Mall, makes it a very dangerous facility to access.

From my regular observations the level of activity here suggests an accident waiting to happen!!

As far as the Bishopdale Library is concerned, Council should not forget the "bigger picture" with the overall Council stakeholding at the Bishopdale Shopping Centre.

In December 2003 the Council **did** acknowledge this point by resolving "to review the overall Council stakeholding at Bishopdale"—subject to the successful transfer of the YMCA's recreational activities to Bishopdale.

Through the report to the Council it was pointed out that the Council actually owned most of the car parking areas, and the pedestrian walkways within the original shopping precinct, in addition to the existing Community Centre (and the Library within this Centre), the Creche, and the Public Toilets. The Council also provided significant support to the Police, the Citizens Advice Bureau, and Plunket.

Before any isolated decision is made to close the Bishopdale Library it would seem relevant that the "bigger picture" be addressed first.

While also on the subject of Libraries I would like to comment on the capital side of the ledger, with respect to the Halswell Library.

While acknowledging the “need” driven by the rapid recent growth of population in this area, I continue to struggle to understand why a decision was made to create a completely new facility (at a capital cost of \$8.15m!!) in lieu of the option to refit the old Supermarket at the Halswell Shopping Centre. If nothing else, the building must be of an appropriate size (or even larger than the area required for a relocated facility??) and the parking is already there (and largely unused during the day!!)

I would strongly suggest that the fitout option be revisited as soon as possible.

(f) Community Halls

The reduction in costs related to the operation of community centres, etc. is endorsed. For too long the Council has retained many of the inefficient (and poorly managed) community facilities—although, through the very good “Management Guidelines”, which have been available for some time, the ability for staff and the Community Boards was always there to conduct reviews into operations, and to take action where utilisation was not above a certain threshold.

(g) “Kerb Buildouts”

This, to me, is an absolute waste of time and money (Having said that I am not sure whether it is funded through “operational” or “capital” funding, or both??)

Too often we see this practice included in road works all over the city—and you only have to observe traffic flows around the city to see that buildouts actually provide a major hindrance to the overall flow.

I was delighted to see, recently, an adjustment being made to the entrance to Westmorland. In the past few weeks a left turn slip lane has been provided for westward bound traffic, in lieu of the previous restricting buildout. (I am doubly pleased with this because this was part of my submission some years ago when I challenged the (then) proposal to create a right turning lane for the almost non-existent traffic in that direction, in the \$80,000 project completed at that time).

On the debit side I note that there is a current proposal to create a buildout in lieu of the left turning slip lane at the Memorial/Roydvale intersection.

Perhaps this philosophy of slowing traffic by building silly, and dangerous, buildouts is part of a private ploy to get gridlock in the city and prove a point??

I would strongly suggest that the value of these treatments be urgently reviewed, and the practice dispensed with.

(h) Museum Funding

The question of charging, or not, has been around for a long time.

My thoughts are that some of the customers are already being charged—or at least paying the bus/tour operators who provide many of the visitors to the attraction. What is wrong with the Museum imposing a licence fee on the operators who convey visitors to the Museum???

**OTHER COMMENT**

(a) “Maintenance”

As a frequent walker, much of the following comment arises from my use of the Council infrastructure—not only in the south part of Christchurch, but anywhere within the city.

- (i) General Tidiness. There is no doubt that, over the years, the city has lost much of its “clean green image” with ongoing problems (and no solutions) to the widespread litter issue. While I note that there are various initiatives dreamed up from time to time, the main problem surely is simply that of “antisocial behaviour”—much of it associated with the scourge of delinquent youth, usually in the hours of darkness. The visual outcomes of a “night on the town” clearly showing on Saturday/Sunday mornings speaks for itself.

Notwithstanding that the Council is also a contributor to this.

- (ii) Rubbish Bin Emptying. I note, in particular, the rubbish bins along the Cashmere Road river reserve which are generally not attended to during each weekend. Of particular note here was the recent Easter weekend where this area could only be labelled as a disgrace to the city.

In drawing this matter to attention I am not asking that more money be spent to overcome this blight—rather, I would suggest that more stringent monitoring be applied toward these types of contracts (I am sure that the regular emptying required would be adequately covered in the specifications for such work???)

- (iii) Overhanging Trees. As a walker I would also wish to draw attention to the issue of overhanging trees. It is clear that there is no proactivity at all which is directed to this issue. For too long Council has simply provided only a reactive approach (ie only responding when called), and this does not in any way say much for the “management” of the By-law which was put in place so many years ago to address the problem.

Again, I would not ask for more money to be thrown at it—just that it be done!!



- (iv) “Lichen” Infestations. As a further comment (again from my casual exercising) I wish to refer to the growing danger of lichen (or whatever it may be) which is currently infesting the footpaths/kerbs/carriageways within the city. When wet this provides a very dangerous situation—and when you realise that many shady footpaths remain in a damp state during the day there is a real problem for those who may be aged or infirm.

It is clear to me that it is some years since any action on this problem has been undertaken around the city—it makes me wonder if someone has forgotten to include this need in the maintenance specifications?? (or simply not to check that it is done??)

On the basis that it is still included in the specifications then there should be better routines in place as far as the Council’s monitoring processes are concerned. And, on the basis that it is still in the specifications, there should not be a need to throw any more money at the problem.

- (v) Cigarette Butts. As a final comment (this time with particular reference to the Cashmere Road reserve area—opp. Princess Margaret Hospital), I wish to draw attention to the very untidy (and, perhaps, unexpected?) habit of the DHB employees leaving copious piles of cigarette butts on “our” land.

The DHB as the prime lobbyists of anti-smoking, have shunned their employees from their own land when smoking, which now results in large smoking groups on ratepayers land. The outcome with days of spent butts building up, and the occasional dispersal/breaking up with infrequent mowing services, is not one that anyone should be proud of.

Perhaps the Council needs to lobby the DHB to get their people to have some respect for the ratepayers reserve??

## MISCELLANEOUS

### (a) Council Payments/Customer Services.

I note the proposal to proceed with out-sourcing of Council payments to New Zealand Post.

This will, likely, have some impact on the distribution of customer service personnel throughout the city.

I have raised this matter because I do not believe that the Council, or Management, has really appreciated the value of “**delivering services to the community, in the community**”. In fact it seems that there may be a flavour against the principle of “decentralisation”.

Some years ago a decision was made to centralise (in Civic Offices) the building/planning team based at Fendalton. The intention at that time was also to centralise the similar Linwood and Sockburn teams. Apart from disenfranchising customers from one third of the city (ie more than 30,000 households) the experiment to centralise this activity appears to have been a failure.

I think that the Council really does need to understand the merits of providing service in the community. With well established bases already in place at Service Centres, there should be more work done on the subject of “decentralisation”, in acknowledgement of the appreciation of these services by the Council’s customers.

There would also be advantages with reduced area needs for any new (and expensive) future central city office location.

#### (b) Central City Revitalisation.

I find it very hard to understand the moves related to revitalising the central city area.

The reality is that the central city does not hold much attraction for city dwellers. Not only are much of their needs met by the suburban malls, but the central city remains unattractive from the point of view of the appearance of the infrastructure and some buildings, and from many sections of young people who choose to frequent the area for some reason or another.

The increases to parking fees, and the continued reduction in on-street parking, really does not inspire the good folk of Christchurch to readily return.

I feel sorry for the central city shopkeepers who, obviously, would like to have a growth in patronage, but the reality seems to be that the Council is only encouraging people to go elsewhere.

It almost seems that insult is being added to injury by having to impose targeted rates for central city businesses where new works are to be created.—and possibly having to do their own cleaning if I have heard the story about new initiatives correctly???

I would suggest that both the increased parking fees and targeted rates should be reconsidered.

## CONCLUSION

The following summarises my suggestions for Council on the raft of issues that I have covered in my submissions:--

1. That the fait accompli of insufficient consultation in the lead-up to “our” Community Plan be received with regret, but that the Council ensure that a thorough process be undertaken as soon as

possible to get appropriate input from **all** ratepayers of the city on their desired community outcomes and priorities for the future.

2. That the Mitigation Option on page 112 of the draft document be replaced with the following:-“More effort needed to get better spread of views from all people of the city” (or similar).
3. That more effort be given to explaining the difference between operational and capital funding, and the extent of day to day operational funds that require funding through rates.
4. That the Council resolve to set reduced levels of rates for the next 3 years (a target of 5%, 4% and 4% is suggested).
5. That the Early Childhood Services funding be terminated as soon as possible.
6. That alternative use of the valuable commercial land currently being occupied by the Civic Creche be investigated with urgency.
7. That the Out of School Care funding be terminated as soon as possible.
8. That the level of Community Support grant funding be reduced by \$2m, and that staff be tasked urgently with initiating steps in rationalising the work of those groups who currently receive such funding.
9. That Community Board funding be reduced by \$50,000 p.a. for each Board.
10. That the Council proceed with a rationalisation exercise for the City’s Libraries.
11. That, if there is to be a reduction of the number of Libraries, the added value of a retained mobile service be considered.
12. That the future of the Spreydon Library be viewed in the context of need, and also the present dangerous situation for customers of this facility.
13. That the proposed review of Council stakeholding at the Bishopdale Shopping Centre be proceeded with before any decision is made on the future of the Bishopdale Library.

14. That the fitout option (of the old Supermarket) for the Halswell Library be revisited as soon as possible.
15. That the rationalisation of Community Centres be proceeded with.
16. That the future use of kerb buildouts be seriously reviewed, and savings identified as an outcome.
17. That improved monitoring be implemented to cover the emptying of rubbish bins around the city.
18. That improved performance in policing of the “overhanging trees” By-law be implemented forthwith.
19. That the issue of “lichen’ (or whatever) on footpaths, kerbs and carriageways, be addressed with urgency.
20. That the matter of DHB cigarette butts on the Cashmere Road river reserve be addressed with urgency.
21. That more work be done on “decentralisation” in acknowledgement of the customers appreciation of delivering services “in the community”.
22. That increased fees and targeted rates for the central city be revisited.



Tony Gemmill  
Westmorland,  
4 May 2006.