

TOWARDS COMPLETING THE SQUARE

Report of the Cathedral Square Design Team 15 May 2001

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Foreword

This report, accompanied by appendices containing conceptual sketches and diagrams was prepared for presentation to the seminar meeting of the Christchurch City Council on 15 May 2001. This (and the presentation) is a progress report on the ideas and solutions that have been developed for "completing" the Square, both the north west quadrant ("Stage V") and other parts of the Square where redevelopment has occurred but which still requires completion or fine tuning.

This is not a final blueprint for final decision making and construction, but rather it describes a process and puts forward ideas for consideration and endorsement before continuing a programme of consultation and development of concepts for implementation.

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BACKGROUND

The current redevelopment of Cathedral Square has been under active consideration by the Council since 1991. Following the adoption of a long term vision for the Square in December 1996, which foresaw the longer term removal of public transport buses from the Square and the creation of an essentially pedestrianised Square, (see Appendix 1) design work followed by construction occurred over the period 1997-2000.

A decision to use granite paving stones, sourced from China, and subsequent difficulties and concerns relating to their laying and on going maintenance together with a degree of adverse public reaction to the finished result has led to the issue of the final design and process of achieving that design receiving further consideration by the Council. The construction of the new Bus Exchange and removal of buses from the Square commencing from 20 November 2000 and completed on 30 April 2001 has meant the need to commit to completion of this Stage V area perhaps rather earlier than first anticipated. At the same time elsewhere in the Square some elements still require completion (eg lighting).

At its meeting on 23 November 2000, the Council adopted five resolutions relating to Cathedral Square redevelopment. These related to functional requirements/use by area of the Square, appointing a subcommittee to develop a traffic management plan for the Stage V area, and a request for the appointment of appropriate design consultants for Stage V to be recommended to the Council.

At the February meeting the Council resolved:

1. That Ian Athfield and James Lunday together with the Senior Professional, - Project management and the Central City Policy Team Leader review the design of Stage V of Cathedral Square.
2. That this team consult with the Canterbury Branch New Zealand Institute of Architects, Central City Committee.
3. That the team co-ordinate its proposals and the views of the Traffic Management Subcommittee established at the November 2000 Council meeting.

STUDY BRIEF

While the Council resolution specifically referred to the Stage V (the North Western) area, which had been developed as the interim bus terminal, together with the Police Kiosk area), it is apparent that this cannot be considered in isolation from the balance of the Square. This was reflected in the brief agreed with the Consultants.

“Work...will involve the following:

Construction of a large but simple model of the Square showing the surface, trees and elements, together with block models of the Cathedral land surrounding buildings.

Ian Athfield and James Lunday will develop a shopping list of items within and above the existing fabric to be included in the changes which will upgrade the quality of the space. Models of these items will be made to enable these to be placed within the existing fabric.

Details will be provided of the bollards and adaptations to this element and a full size mock up will be made.

Ian Athfield and James Lunday will be available for continued dialogue with stakeholders, property owners and other interested parties as identified by Dave Hinman.

Ian Athfield and James Lunday will provide diagrams of the surrounding area including the completed area of the Square, discussing the following influences on Stage 5 of the Square:

- a. pedestrian movement*
- b. car movement*
- c. public transport*
- a. nodal points*
- b. development potential of surrounding sites*
- c. walkways and lanes into the Square*

Incentive regimes for adjoining owners.

A final written report shall be provided making recommendations on the changes and additions required...."

METHODOLOGY

Key elements in the process of developing concepts towards the completion of the Square have been:

- construction of a 1:200 scale model of the Square and adjacent buildings, for use in consultation, developing concepts and in demonstrating options.
- Meeting with key Council staff who are or have been involved in the earlier stages of redevelopment, and operation of the Square
- letter sent to property owners, occupiers and tenants of buildings adjoining the Square inviting comment.
- Appointments made and detailed discussions held with most of the occupiers/owners of Cathedral Square buildings. This was to ascertain requirements, desires, and future plans in respect of their property/business, with particular regard to the effect on the Square. (List of those we met attached as Appendix 2.)
- A campaign organised by the Press newspaper ("Fix It") which has given the exercise a high profile and generated a good deal of interest and response. A detailed listing of the more than 200 submissions received appears as Appendix 3 and the highlights are indicated below.

The "Fix-It campaign was launched by the Press on March 31, with a 5 page article and editorial describing the history of the Cathedral Square, and the story of its redevelopment and the perceived problems which now exist. Submissions covered a wide range of topics, from the Police kiosk to outdoor cafes and from one or two lines to detailed statements including sketches or plans. The submissions will be tabled at the meeting. In summary, while there was no general consensus, other than a view from most (though not all) that some elements needed "fixing", a number of areas stood out as evoking the most interest.

These included:

1. Traffic, vehicle and pedestrian issues, with people being divided about whether traffic and parking should be encouraged, tolerated or removed (114 comments).
2. Flowers, grass, greenery and trees, where there are strong but not unanimous views that more green areas, and colour, in the form of flowers is needed to combat the "dreariness" of the granite pavers. (138 comments)

3. Need for a water feature. Thirty-five people suggested or supported the idea of a water feature, ranging from a reflective pool to an interactive fountain
4. The Police Kiosk aroused much interest with 76 plus a petition of 46 names being received. 20 plus the petition wanted no change to the kiosk, with a further 13 supporting its upgrading or replacement on the same site, 18 sought to have it relocated the edge of the Square with a further 14 seeking other sites or not specifying.
5. People recognised the importance of the buildings and activities around the periphery of the Square, with 57 comments received, including ideas for new uses, ranging from the Council offices and library to a department store and supermarket, and 28 submissions seeking outdoor cafes, restaurants or bars.
6. On the question of the market and stalls, there were mixed views with more opposing than supporting these being in the Square.(22 comments)
7. People recognised the need for attractions to encourage people to visit the Square, with 26 comments received.
8. 26 comments were received generally supporting the provision of more sculptures and other art in the Square, with a few not in support of the soon to be erected Chalice.

FINDINGS OF THE TEAM

Preliminary conclusions and concepts have been developed by the team, starting with the overall context ("The Square in the City") moving on to the buildings around the edge ("Round the Square"), to the largely completed parts of the Square ("In the Square") to the 'Stage V' area ("After the buses – the NW Quadrant"). In the presentation there will inevitably be overlaps, as all these parts are interdependent on each other. Diagrams and sketches prepared by Ian Athfield and James Lunday will be displayed at the meeting and copies are attached in Appendix 4.

THE SQUARE IN THE CITY

Cathedral Square cannot be considered in isolation. As the premier public space in the central city the Square is very dependent on the dynamics of the CBD generally, the other key people attracters ("honeypots") fringing the city centre, including the linkages from those areas, and the buildings and activities within them immediately adjacent to the Square.

The Worcester Boulevard makes a good connection to the museum, arts centre, gardens and art gallery, but the pedestrian public realm is incomplete and there are relatively poor linkages with the town hall, bus exchange, casino and centennial pool.

Stitching the city's assets together by creating an enhanced and co-ordinated people friendly public realm is a priority in inner city revitalisation. Cathedral Square then returns to its original function of hub – with the public realm connecting/stitching together the city's people "honeypots".

It is also important that vehicle access around the city is clear and readable and that buildings and activities around and near to the Square can be easily accessed. Areas to the East and South of the Square could be linked better to the Square by extending the tram route.

ROUND THE SQUARE

It has become very apparent to the team that the Square is much more than just the "carpet" and the "furniture". A key ingredient is people and a key element in attracting people is the buildings around the edge and the activities in those buildings. Importantly also, the nature of the activities in the buildings can have a major impact on the use and arrangement of that part of the Square adjacent to the buildings.

Neither should the buildings be considered in isolation. Getting adjacent owners to work both together and with the Council in private and public partnerships, with perhaps some incentives provided by the Council to encourage appropriate development (eg ground floor retail, on street cafes etc) should be a priority. The team believes there should be on-going discussions with key parties such as the BNZ and ANZ, to encourage ground floor people related activity, such as retail, indoor/outdoor cafes etc.

IN THE SQUARE

The need to complete the Stage V area, occupied until the end of April 2001 by the interim bus terminal, has been a major focus of the study. But it is also apparent that the already "redeveloped" part of the Square is not quite as it should be, at least as perceived by public opinion. The results from the "fix-it" campaign have indicated a significant desire for at least refinement of and additions to the plan as so far developed. But it should be noted that there are also views that there is not much if anything wrong with the Square! While there have been many comments comparing Cathedral Square with Victoria Square, the team notes that the characteristics, location and functions of each are quite different and rejects the view that Cathedral Square should attempt to be a copy of Victoria Square.

The team acknowledges and respects the integrity of the design as developed by Sheppard and Rout and the then Council team. Most of the objectives of the original vision were achieved, although in some areas, such as the laying of the granite pavers, the quality of construction and even the suitability of the pavers for the task gives cause for concern. Neither were all the elements completed, lighting being a particular example.

The team believes that some carefully designed additional features can be successfully added to the original design without loss of its basic integrity. These can assist in the provision of some of the elements requested by submitters (eg colour, greenery, water feature), as well as assisting in providing better identification and control of spaces (eg bollards for parking). In some key areas (eg near the entrances to the Square, where the tiles are not bearing up well to traffic conditions, some special treatment, with another material, may be warranted. These points are illustrated in the attached plan drawings.

AFTER THE BUSES: THE NORTH WEST QUADRANT

The removal of public transport bus stops from the north west quadrant opens up opportunities for both completing the layout of the Square and providing for a range of additional activities. There has been some risk that the area could quite quickly fill up with other vehicles such as tour coaches, shuttles, cars and taxis. Interim measures were suggested by the team to place some limitations, and these are now in place. With the future of one major building (ex Tower Insurance) still undecided, there does need to be some flexibility in how the area adjacent is treated.

Traffic Movement

Part of the task in this area was to work with the Cathedral Square Traffic Management Subcommittee of the City Services Committee to consider the options for road access through the NW quadrant. These options ranged from a full two-way road, to no road at all.

The option favoured by the team, and endorsed by the Traffic Management Subcommittee, is a slow, northbound one way road, located adjacent to the tram track. This has the advantage of providing appropriate access through the Square for tourist vehicles, while retaining the tourist coach stops on the north side of Worcester Boulevard west of the Square, as desired by adjacent occupiers. Short term coach/shuttle pick up and drop off is suggested on the north side of the road, convenient to and visible from the Visitor Information Centre. Access to buildings can be provided in an informal manner, similar to that for the BNZ car park in the SE quadrant.

Parking

The western end of the NW quadrant becomes the "Western Grove", incorporating some 19 trees, to enhance and add to the "greenery" of the Square. The trees will be located to allow flexibility in the provision of drop off and short term car parks, which may vary over time, affected for example by changes in activities in the adjacent buildings (see Appendix 4 - plan drawing 3A).

Market Square

The eastern end of the NW quadrant becomes the "Market Square". This will extend northwards the Square's principal public space, and will provide a three-dimensional grid for the Cathedral Square markets. Shelter and windbreaks can be included, and the relocation of the markets will reduce growing congestion and competition for space in the area in the vicinity of the old Chief Post Office. Again design flexibility will ensure that adjacent buildings can be serviced by access and parking as necessary (see Appendix 4 - plan drawing 4a).

The Police Kiosk

The team considers that the present kiosk building is inappropriate, and not well suited to its current purpose. It accepts the need for a Police presence in the Square, and while believing that a peripheral building location would also be satisfactory, is proposing a new very transparent multipurpose building (the northern pavilion). This would incorporate at first floor level, a small Police presence, with the community volunteers, a 24 hour café, toilets, chess set storage and shelter for tram passengers at ground level. This is illustrated in Appendix 4 - plan drawing 6A. It is suggested that this no longer be the base for the entire City Beat section of the Police, as at present. The team believes that the Council and the Police should consider the location of the Police in possibly a number of locations in the city centre.

Water Feature

A significant water feature is proposed, utilising the existing "bridge" just to the east of the western grove (see Appendix 4 - plan drawing 3B). Play facilities for children are also proposed.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

There are a number of suggestions for areas beyond the NW quadrant, including the other Square entrances already referred to. Other areas include the following:

Southern Pavilion

This is a proposal to group all the stall holders together in another very transparent structure, located east of the old Chief Post Office building. A stage for entertainers would be on the roof, and the pavilion could incorporate two unisex toilets. This together with similar toilet provision in the northern pavilion could then reduce or eliminate the need for the present toilet building adjacent to Strand Lane and may encourage more appropriate activities to develop in that area (see Appendix 4 - plan drawing 6B).

A Garden of Four Seasons

The area around the Citizens' War Memorial, currently partly in grass, would be formed into a garden with plantings that change and provide a variety of colour and experiences over the four seasons. A pathway to the memorial would be incorporated together with an area of water (see Appendix 4 - plan drawing 5).

Bollards

The team believes the present slim but expensive bollards are not particularly effective in controlling vehicles and proposes instead some very large, but relocatable bollards which can have a variety of other uses (from rubbish holders to lamp standards). These would be used throughout the Square (see Appendix 4 - plan drawing 7).

Lighting

There is a need to continue to develop and improve lighting, including the peripheral buildings (need for owner/Council co-operation/partnership).

The Silent Cinema Screen

A screen located in the vicinity of the old Savoy theatre able to be viewed both by patrons of the new Warners garden bar and others out in the Square.

Lanes into the Square

Dialogue with the owners/adjacent users to encourage enhancement of the various lanes into the Square.

Peripheral Buildings

Continue dialogue with adjoining property owners, occupiers and their neighbours to encourage activities and quality, economic development. This may involve Council incentives such as allowing for colonnades or balconies to protrude into public space.

SUMMARY

The process of this investigation has been one of constructive dialogue with the many stakeholders. This has led to a conservative surgical approach rather than a comprehensive rationalisation.

It has been identified that:

- Some areas are not working as planned due to change of uses in buildings around the Square.
- There are many redevelopment opportunities that will also change uses around the Square.
- There is a demand for colour, activity and softening.
- People want trees, water, art, and cafes.
- There is a need to provide a guide for a suite of street furniture, and system of signage.

The way forward is to move deliberately and incrementally, adding features and functions where necessary; redesigning areas to accommodate changing uses; keeping an element of flexibility in the new spaces created.

Just as important is the need to keep talking with the stakeholders. One possibility is to form a stakeholders group to manage the promotion of the Square and to foster appropriate uses to move into the Square.

NEXT STEPS

This scheme for the Square gives a framework for the way forward. It is the start of an ongoing process of consultation and concept development and implementation and not a final design solution.

The package presented seeks Council agreement to:

- a continuation of the framework already in place
- a robust and flexible base to enable additions and changes to be made
- recognition of some immediate remedial work
- extending the awareness of the Square by dealing with the north and south entrances
- buying into specific areas such as traffic arrangements, removable bollards, planters, signage, extra lighting
- further developing and consulting on, costing and seeking funding for such proposals as the pavilions, the garden of all seasons and the water feature
- continuing a dialogue with adjoining owners, developing relationships with their neighbours
- looking at initiatives which will improve activity at ground level
- respecting the public feedback and views