

3. "OUR CITY" - AN ENVIRONMENT CENTRE FOR CHRISTCHURCH

Officer responsible Environmental Policy and Planning Manager	Author Kerry Everingham, Environmental Promotions Officer, DDI 371-1779
Corporate Plan Output: Environmental Promotion	

This report has been written to further progress the establishment of "Our City" and to table for discussion the Business Case written by Rob McDonald of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu. This business case was written in response to the following resolutions:

Strategy and Resources Annual Plan 16 – 28.6.2000

- (a) That funding for the existing Environment Centre be continued on a pro-rata basis within current funding provisions, pending the development of a new centre.
- (b) That the existing Environment Centre be invited to participate fully in the planning of the new centre.
- (c) That the Council confirm that the new centre is to be developed and operated within the financial allocations already made.

Council 6.7.2000

- That, in addition to the three recommendations made by the working Party, a further recommendation (d) be added providing that before any commitment is made by the Council to a building to house an Environment Centre a full proposal and business plan for such a centre be submitted for approval and adoption by the Council.

INTRODUCTION

The committee members will be well aware of the recent history relating to the proposed "Our City". Support for a community-orientated centre is recorded in the reports of The Multi Agency Working Group Report (spring 1999), the final report from the focus workshop held in 1995 and The Feasibility of an Environmental Education Agency for Canterbury Report. As you will recall the most recent Council report (May 2000) led to the above resolutions.

BACKGROUND

In addition to the past reports it is worth recording the Council's major commitments to environmental education and promotion as outlined under 2.3 (page 3 of the attached Business Case).

Environmental education and promotion is an investment in our future and has been recognised as such by central government. Progress in this area and the City's involvement has been outlined in a recent report to the group reviewing the Councils outputs and standards. If Christchurch is to have a sustainable future, increased understanding of the environment and environmental decisions is essential. It is a rapidly evolving field where what takes place is influenced by the local situation and by the values of all those involved.

"Our City" is the vehicle through which all of the relevant objectives and adopted philosophies and frameworks (as noted above) can be raised and promoted. One of the major contributions the proposed "Our City" facility will add to environmental promotion is the opportunity to provide the general public with a one stop shop.

"Our City" is now included in the CCC Plan (2000 edition). It states:

The Council believes that if the city is to remain a good place in which to live and work then it must move to be environmentally sustainable. There are a number of moves in this annual plan which contribute to that. These include:

The Environment Centre. The Council has been working with a number of groups with an interest in the natural and built environment, to establish an environment centre. This will be a public information and education centre where groups can showcase new initiatives and innovations that will improve the environment of Christchurch and to move Christchurch towards being an environmentally sustainable city.
.....

PROPERTY CONSIDERATIONS

A number of sites have been suggested and considered. These include:

- the Star/Lyttelton Times Building,
- the Avon Theatre,
- The Civic of Canterbury,
- Chief Post Office,
- Regent Buildings,
- the former Municipal Building,

While the use of any one of these buildings would secure a heritage building, all but the former Municipal Chambers are privately owned. The leasing of these buildings would require substantial rents of around the order of \$150,000 to \$200,000 pa. In some cases the Council would be required to make a commitment to a long term lease agreement of around 15 to 20 years. A number of the buildings would have had to be purchased by the Council for the site/s to be secured. Some are in need of major renovations. Others do not have the prominence and history of visitor use. Therefore, apart from the Municipal Chambers, which is owned by the Council, all the other buildings would require considerable capital outlay.

Recommendations on the suitability of all of the buildings investigated for the "Our City" centre were based around the criteria which were identified as the key issues for the purpose of the centre in the report to Council, February 1999 and are noted within the business case (2.4 Page 4).

After consideration of the range of alternatives, it was considered that the former Municipal Chambers is the best option.

THE BUSINESS CASE

The business case has been written with the former Municipal Chambers in mind, which means the majority of costs are specific to that site. The Property Unit is in the process of investigating the potential uses for the recently vacated former Municipal Chambers Building and the outcome of its findings will not be known until November.

In summary the business case shows the costs and expenses as follows:

Forecast Cashflow for "Our City"			2000/1	2001/2	2002/3
			<i>6 months</i>		<i>and later</i>
Funding	Council	- Capital	\$150,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
		- Operating	\$100,000	\$140,000	\$140,000
	Other	- Rental - Second Floor	\$6,300	\$12,600	\$12,600
		- Display etc	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
		- Recoveries	\$850	\$1,700	\$1,700
		- Ancillary Retail Activities	\$2,500	\$5,000	\$5,000
	Total		\$269,650	\$209,300	\$209,300
Outgoings	Initial Set up		\$150,000		
	Ongoing Development			\$30,000	\$30,000
	Property Costs		\$64,650	\$129,300	\$129,300
	Operations		\$76,238	\$152,475	\$152,475
	Own Displays/ Exhibitions		\$10,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
	Total		\$300,888	\$331,775	\$331,775
Net Surplus (Deficit)			(\$31,238)	(\$122,475)	(\$122,475)
Additional Funding Required			\$31,238	\$122,475	\$122,475
Note - additional setup and development funding has been applied for from MfE, Community Trust, etc					
-Council has made budgetary provision for operations in 2000/1 & 2001/2, and capital in 2000/1					

This indicates that "Our City" requires additional operational funding of approximately \$120,000 per annum to break even. Other avenues of funding sources that should be investigated further include the central governments "Green Budget" and the "Sustainable Management Funds". An application has been made to the local Community Trust and the outcome of this should be known by December of this year.

Notwithstanding the deficit, the concept “Our City” is well supported and meets a number of the Council’s objectives, including the Council’s commitment to “Seeking Community Views”, “The Triple Bottom Line” initiative and “Community Governance”.

The principle of an environment centre “Our City” has been around for a number of years. For “Our City” to work it is essential that it is professionally outfitted, demonstrating quality displays and that it maintains a high standard throughout. We need to move forward on this project and take advantage of the availability of the former Municipal Chambers as it clearly meets the necessary criteria identified for such a centre as it was built for a civic purpose, is Council owned, is well located and is a heritage building.

Recommendation: That the use of the former Municipal Chambers for “our City” be endorsed and additional operational funding be sought for the year 2001/02 year during the Council’s budget round.

Chairman’s

Recommendation: That the report be considered in conjunction with the further report by the Property Projects Officer, referred to in clause 4.