7. CENTRAL CITY AVON RIVER PROJECT

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The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress on the Avon River (Central City) Strategy and to endorse the report for release for public consultation.

For some time now there has been a commitment by the Greenspace Unit to produce a strategy for the Avon River from Antigua Boatsheds to Fitzgerald Avenue. Committee members will have received a copy of the draft Avon River (Central City) Strategy which is now in a form that can be circulated to interested parties and the wider public.

BACKGROUND

A strategy for the Avon River within the four avenues was requested by the local branch of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects in 1998. It has since been highlighted as an integral part of the central city and in public response to the "Heart of the City" consultation document.

Preliminary work on the strategy was carried out by staff in the former Environmental Policy and Planning Unit and when this unit was restructured the project was transferred to the Parks and Waterways Unit (now called the Greenspace Unit).

Feedback from past consultation, which comprised a display in Our City and the circulation of a questionnaire, has formed the basis of the document, together with:

- Avon Riverbanks Tree Replacement Strategy by Dieter Steinegg (2002)
- Avon River Trout Spawning Survey by Mark Taylor (2002)
- Ecological Assessment of the Avon River Mainstem by Shelley McMurtrie and Mark Taylor (2003).

From the consultation it was established that priorities centred around improving water quality and encouraging wildlife by cleaning up the river. Residents' ideas included:

- Having a river festival day or carnival
- Having an area like the Strip which is alcohol–free for families
- Returning carols by candlelight to the river
- Creating a wildlife reserve in the city
- Light the river and highlight the bridges as monuments.

Themes for the river suggested by some respondents were "An emerald necklace to the sea", "The aorta of life through the city" or making it central to the "city of romance".

While people generally did not want to see too much change, many believed pedestrian and cyclist circulation along the river could be enhanced and more, low-key events and activities could occur.

Areas identified for improvement were parts of Oxford Terrace which have diminished appeal due to the presence of service lanes, high building facades and car park entrances. Some respondents noted that the buildings near the Public Library and between Colombo and Manchester Streets had "turned their back" on the river corridor instead of capitalising on their northerly aspect and river environment. Many residents were concerned about decline in water quality and lack of trout and believed that polluters should be identified and prosecuted.

THE STRATEGY

The Avon River (Central City) Strategy (circulated prior to the meeting) has incorporated these views and noted them as areas for improvement. Common themes throughout the document are:

- Retaining the existing character of each identity area along the Avon River but establishing some unifying themes, such as a definite design guide for park furniture and structures
- Reducing the presence of car parking activity along the river edge
- The need for improved connections across the busy streets that cut across the Avon and highlighting these, especially where bridges occur, as gateways to the city

- The establishment of a clearer and safer pedestrian and cycle route along the Avon, even through the development of a wide promenade
- Highlighting areas of particular cultural and historic significance.
- Improvement of the diversity and quality of in-stream habitat for both trout and native fauna

Overall the strategy will promote the Avon River as a key component of Christchurch's identity and highlight ways to further its enjoyment by residents and visitors. This has been outlined in the strategy within the Objectives and Guidelines section of the document. These aim to set the parameters by which the character of the Avon River environment can be protected and the potential for detrimental activities on or alongside the river to be minimised.

The parameters are reinforced through the development of landscape plans for some areas needing enhancement and action points for all stretches of the study area. It is anticipated that by taking the improvements down to action point level a comprehensive programme of work can be developed for the next ten years. The programme can be developed once the draft strategy has been circulated for public comment and the feedback analysed. Priorities and funding can then be allocated to the proposed programme of work.

It should be noted that some areas of the document are incomplete due to the need for quite specific consultation with tangata whenua, civic and heritage groups. This consultation can run in parallel with the wider public consultation. It is recommended that a series of workshops be held as the best approach to consultation for both interest groups and wider public.

CONCLUSION

The Avon River (Central City) Strategy is an evolving document, now ready in draft form for public consultation.

Staff Recommendation:

1. That the information be received.

2. That the draft Avon River (Central City) Strategy be released for public comment.