

Christchurch Long Term Council Community Plan Submission

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This submission relates to “Central city revitalisation”

Parking

A key part of getting people to use the central city is ease of access, and for many people this means parking. Many women (especially) find car-parking buildings scary and intimidating, and I have been assured by a present car-parking attendant that they are less safe because more deserted than a street.¹ That leaves street parking, which is only one hour in a rather large CBD; in other words, not nearly enough time to go shopping (especially with children in tow), let alone have lunch or go to a movie. This is very off-putting, especially when compared to malls. I was recently approached in Durham Street by baffled American tourists who asked if there was any longer parking. I directed them to the Lichfield Street parking building, but they looked less than happy.

It could be argued that street parking is already fully utilised and so no more people would be attracted into the city, but this is partly due to the ever-diminishing number of street parks provided. This policy is partially based on the idea that people will use the central city if they can walk around in pedestrian-only areas, but these areas merely reduce access and more often than not attract anti-social activities. Getting rid of cars is a town-planning fad that needs to be reversed.

Eliminating the stretch of Worcester Street through Latimer Square is just one example. I used to drop into town and be fairly certain there would be a parking space around Latimer Square, but now that has gone for the sake of a few more square metres of under-utilised park. Plenty of people use the central city at night, but you need to give people some reason to use the retail shopping during the day, and eliminating parking and making sure what is left it is not long enough are very counter-productive policies in this respect.

The top part of Cashel Street near the river has doubtless been affected by the building of the tram line, but I have been assured by long-term retailers that the shops started closing well before that (I counted five empty premises today, 19 March). So closing traffic off did not result in a vibrant area. It created a dead zone and a sick city feeling. This did not happen straightaway, back in the 1980s: it happened with the flourishing of the suburban malls, for the simple reason that if you create a mall-type area in the city, it puts it in direct competition with the malls in the suburbs, and

¹ Thieves find it easy to check if anyone is around, some know where the camera blind spots are, and a generic pair of jeans, a “hoodie” and avoiding looking at the camera nullify the effects of the surveillance.

therefore vulnerable to any economic downturn or change in shopping patterns. (The same thing applies to Shades Arcade.)

Consider, too, the problems created by the "Hac" area of High and Cashel. The examples in Christchurch are obvious enough, but think too about Wellington, where Manners Mall is an appalling part of the central city.

Another reason for eliminating cars is doubtless the environmental push, both to decrease Christchurch's pollution and the global greenhouse gases, and therefore to encourage public transport, cycling and walking. But consider who does a lot of shopping: women, including women with children, and it is just not reasonable to expect a mother with children to use public transport or ride a bicycle around the central city. Any obsession with greenhouse gases and making the central city people-friendly needs to be balanced against the hard fact that people go to malls because they can park (for free) where they shop, they can take the kids, they can feel safe, and they can spend a reasonable amount of time doing it all.

Recommendations:

- 1) Convert one-hour parks to (at least) two hours and two-hour parks to (at least) three hours.
- 2) Don't create any more no-parking "dead zones" for the sake of pedestrians.
- 3) Don't let systems of public transport eliminate hundreds of parking spaces, as is happening with the tram route and the way Lichfield is organised around the bus station.

Turner and Growers site

This is obviously a crucial part of the revitalisation process, and it should continue to be facilitated and progressed as quickly as possible. Having a large number of people living in the central city will mean they will shop there rather than go to the suburban malls.

Recommendation: Facilitate progress on the Turner and Growers site as much as possible.

Odeon Theatre

The saving and refurbishment of the Odeon Theatre should be high on the list of priorities for heritage protection. It is a magnificent building, and refurbished as a fully functional theatre (now made more viable by the planned closure of the Rialto cinemas in two years' time) it would become a focal entertainment point for the area, encouraging cafes and restaurants. This would both complement the nearby South of Lichfield area, and hopefully spread to Manchester Street, to help counteract the tendency for it to be something of a run-down red-light area.

I understand that the present owner is moving ahead with the development, which is now out of the Council's hands, but the Council could still assist with refurbishing the street façade, for example, which will greatly add to the amenity of the area.

Possibly any such assistance would be unpopular due to the negative opinion held by many of the developer in question (Mr Dave Henderson), but I think it is obvious to anyone not encumbered by a huge bias that the lanes areas have immeasurably improved Christchurch's inner city. I congratulate the Council on buying the buildings it did from Mr Henderson in order to continue the progress made, and the Council should continue to encourage entrepreneurs who use the old buildings to create interlinked areas that enhance the city's heritage, draw locals into the city and attract tourists. On a larger stage, the US and EU are tackling the recession by supporting large businesses rather than individual taxpayers, based on the reasoning that this will do more to encourage prosperity, and the same thing applies here. Christchurch needs to encourage hands-on investment from people on the spot who care about how the city develops.

Recommendations:

- 1) Facilitate the refurbishment of the Odeon Theatre, especially the façade, which will add greatly to the amenity of the area.
- 2) Continue to support the development of Christchurch through the use of old buildings and the various lanes developments, as exemplified by South of Lichfield (SOL) and Lichfield Lanes.

Heritage buildings

An excellent trick if you want to overcome any restrictions relating to a heritage building is to generate time-consuming obstacles, leave the building empty and with poor security, and wait for the street kids to take over and burn it down. Or, if that doesn't work, don't maintain it and leave it until it goes beyond the possibility of repair. Some finesse is required, to avoid insurance problems, but it is still a ploy that works very successfully, and the Council needs to act to ensure this is not a viable option.

It could be argued that the Odeon Theatre is a good example, owned by the same Mr Henderson whose vision I have been praising, but the same point applies: heritage buildings should not be permitted to degenerate or be left insecure, and if there are "unforeseeable delays" to the use or sale of a heritage building, the owner should be required to maintain and secure it. The definition of "heritage" would need to be extended beyond those buildings listed on the Historic Places Trust register, especially when, for example, there is a group of heritage buildings, not all of which are of particular historical significance, but which en masse enhance the amenity of the area. There is nothing sadder than a single remaining building, as with the old John Burns a& Co. (C1 Coffee) building on Lichfield Street.

Recommendations:

- 1) Require owners of unoccupied heritage buildings to maintain them to a level where no further deterioration occurs, and ensure their security against break-ins and arson. It may be possible to work with the insurance industry to achieve this, and assist enforcement.
- 2) Provide a maximum time unoccupied heritage buildings can be left unoccupied.