

# IN SEARCH OF A PROCESS FOR CENTRAL CITY

## REVITALISATION – THE EXAMPLE OF CHRISTCHURCH

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### Introduction

The research programme reported here is the result of collaboration between Dr Christopher Kissling; Professor of Transport Studies, Lincoln University, Dr Ted Pryor, MBE, recently retired Deputy Director of Planning, Hong Kong; Tim Hogan, Architect and Chairman of the Christchurch Civic Trust; John McDonagh, Senior Lecturer in Property Studies, Lincoln University; Dr Crile Doscher, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Management, Lincoln University, specialising in Geographical Information Systems (GIS); Cao Pei, Masters graduate in Applied Science (Transport Studies) at Lincoln University; and various members of staff at the Christchurch City Council who oversaw contracted work undertaken for the Christchurch City Council (CCC).

The research arises because these multi-disciplinary professionals have a strong desire to see Christchurch's inner-city core sustained as a vibrant and viable centre for the whole of the Canterbury region. The city centre is important. It is as important as the consideration of metropolitan growth under the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy (UDS). The two are inextricably linked.

Degenerating central city functions are not associated with world class cities. Christchurch has a rich cultural heritage and garden city image that provides an environmental and historic foundation for liveability. However, much of the inner-city urban fabric is tired and functionally impaired. Now is the time for well-designed and co-ordinated redevelopment that will enhance the vision and help implement a world class image for Christchurch.

What is needed is a systematic approach to revitalisation that will lead to resurgence in inner-city residential living along with encouragement for businesses and cultural activities that serve the wider region.

Planning that embraces the concepts of mixed land uses, supported by excellence in transport access both within and beyond the central heart of Christchurch, is what is needed. That means a pedestrian friendly core, along with uncongested transport arteries that feed traffic into and out of the heart of the city. Those transport corridors should facilitate movement by private cars and

commercial vehicles, public transport (road and rail), and include provision for the soft modes of cycling and walking.

### Policy Objectives for the Central City

The City Plan, Vol.2, Section 6.2.1, Policy: Urban Growth, says:

*To promote the Central City as the principal focus for commercial, administration, employment, cultural and tourism activities. The Central City is an essential component of a City Council urban consolidation strategy. It is... a converging point of the city's radial road network... and is the most accessible part of the city for most people and also a logical focal point for public transport. Because reducing transport demand is an important long term aim of the City Plan, the continuing existence of the Central City as a socially, economically and environmentally attractive area is important.*

*A further reason for this policy is that the Central City is significant in terms of public and private buildings, infrastructure and amenities. The area provides for the social, economic and cultural well-being of the people of Christchurch (and surrounding districts) to a far greater extent than other business areas. This reflects the greater scale and variety of facilities and services available in the city centre... and is important... to the overall sustainability of Christchurch as an urban area.*

*The policy... recognizes the close links between the Central City, the transport network and the demand that exists for a range of living environments in various parts of the city. The City Plan therefore provides... opportunities for medium to high density residential development around the Central City to enable convenient access for residents, thereby potentially reducing the demand for transport and supporting the Central city by providing it with its own "catchment".*

It is stated in the UDS report that:

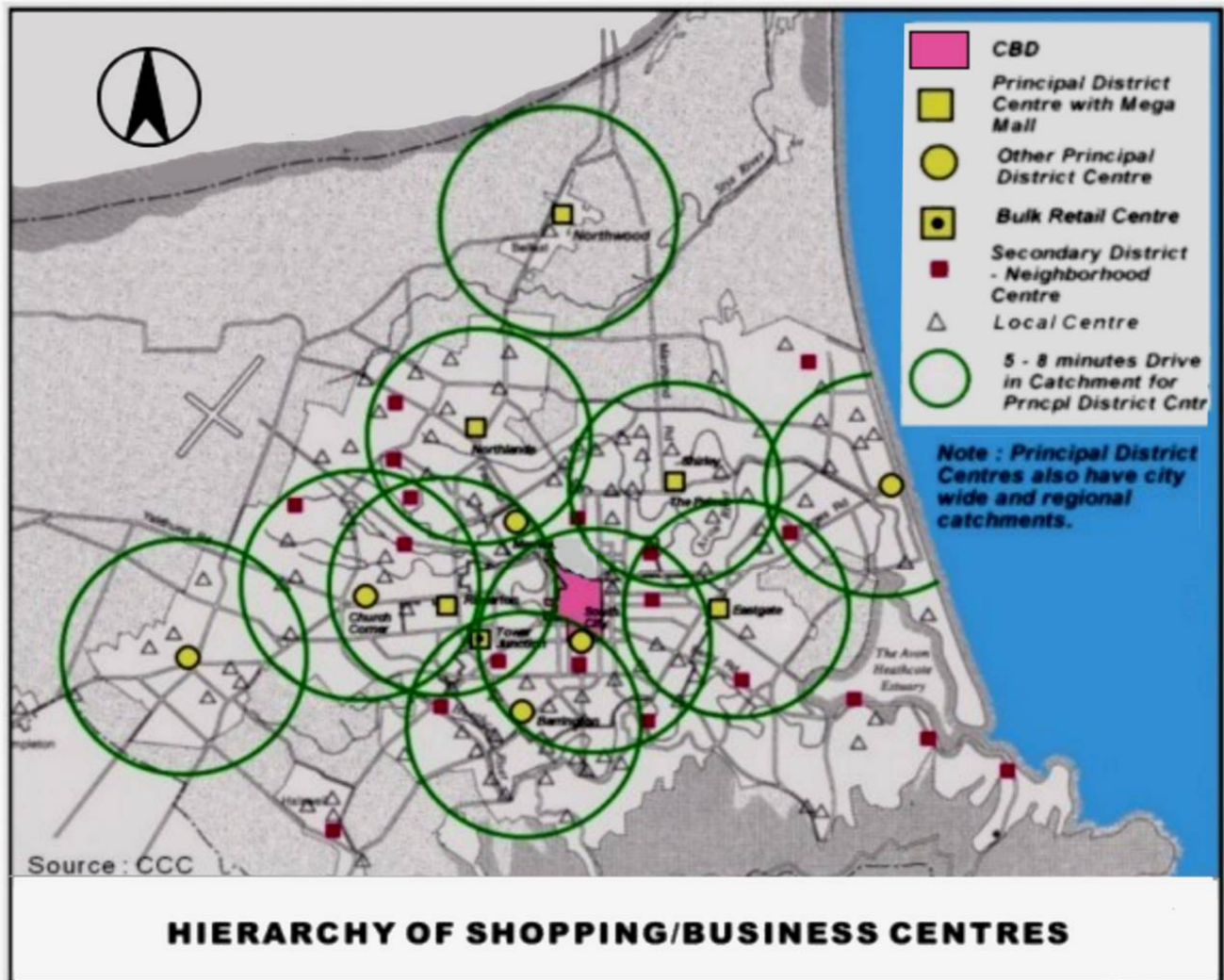
*The success of the Strategy is tied directly to how well the City and town centres are revitalised.... Christchurch's Central City area is of special importance in ensuring that Christchurch and Canterbury continue to function and grow as dynamic places in which to live, work and play. As the centre of the region's economy and gateway to Canterbury, the success of the Central City is intrinsically linked to the success of the region.*

## Key Components of New Urbanisation & Central City Rejuvenation

UDS 2006 – 2041, growth projections anticipate an increase of about 75,000 households within the total UDS study area – including an additional 53,000 households within the City limits.

Within the Central City and parts of other inner suburbs (e.g. Sydenham) there are suitable,

conveniently accessible but ageing properties that can provide opportunities for sensitive upgrading or replacement. Site amalgamations of these properties would favour well-designed higher density multi-purpose development likely to attract people to inner city living as well as the activities to serve them.



**Figure 1:** Distribution of suburban centres in Christchurch  
Plan drawn by E G Pryor using CCC sources on CCC base map

## Competition

The distribution of shopping/business centres shown in Figure 1 indicates that suburban residents need not travel to the central city in order to satisfy the majority of their daily or even weekly needs. Retailing in the inner core of Christchurch is therefore placed under intense pressure with respect to ongoing viability. There are insufficient residents to sustain many retail outlets. Higher order retail establishments must pitch their marketing to the wider community if they are to survive.

Suburban malls have ample free parking. The inner-city charges for on-street and off-street parking with only the city controlled off-street parking facilities offering the first hour free. Public transport (PT) access to the inner city provides an inferior service when compared with private motoring as PT shares the same congested road space and buses do not yet have right-of-way when rejoining traffic streams after stopping for passengers.

## Christchurch City Plan – relevant policy and institutional related aims

The approved City Plan became effective in November 2005. Some of the relevant policy- and institutional-related aims for this analysis are:

- Implement the Christchurch Central City Revitalisation Strategy by providing information and incentives to promote the number of people living in the central city;
- Establish a dedicated City Urban Regeneration Agency to formulate and administer target-led programmes;
- Assemble key redevelopment sites;
- Tender land for composite redevelopment proposals;
- Policy 12.2.2 addresses Consolidation – To encourage the intensification of activities and land with significant redevelopment within the existing area of the Central City... (wherein)... there is a large amount of land with significant development potential.
- Policy 12.2.4 addresses Diversity – To provide for a wide range of activities within the Central City... to accommodate... activities which are compatible with the unique environment found there i.e. business related, residential, recreational and cultural activities... tourist attractions and accommodation for transient visitors.

These policies and objectives are to be brought to fruition through the CCC Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP). CCC actions with respect to the purchase of the D. Henderson properties in 2008 can be seen in

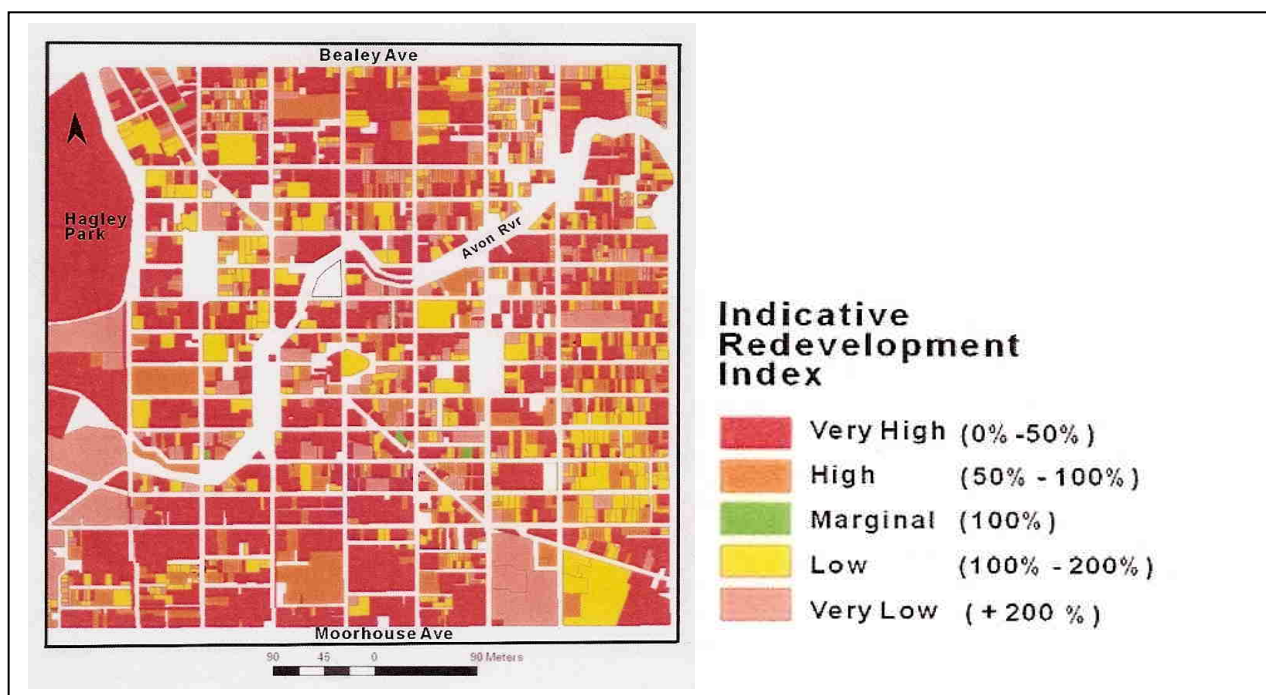
the light of the CCC looking to ensure developments on those sites are in accordance with these general principles contained in the City Plan and in successive LTCCPs. The CCC has published its proposals for a Central City South Precinct as a composite development project involving City-owned property in the main.

Our research outlined a methodology for identifying sites ripe for comprehensive redevelopment. The action taken by CCC with respect to the D. Henderson and other Council owned sites fits reasonably well with our analysis. Our approach was to expand upon the pioneering studies by the late Dr L. L. Pownall (1960). He looked at property values in terms of their unimproved and improved values to derive an indicative redevelopment potential index.

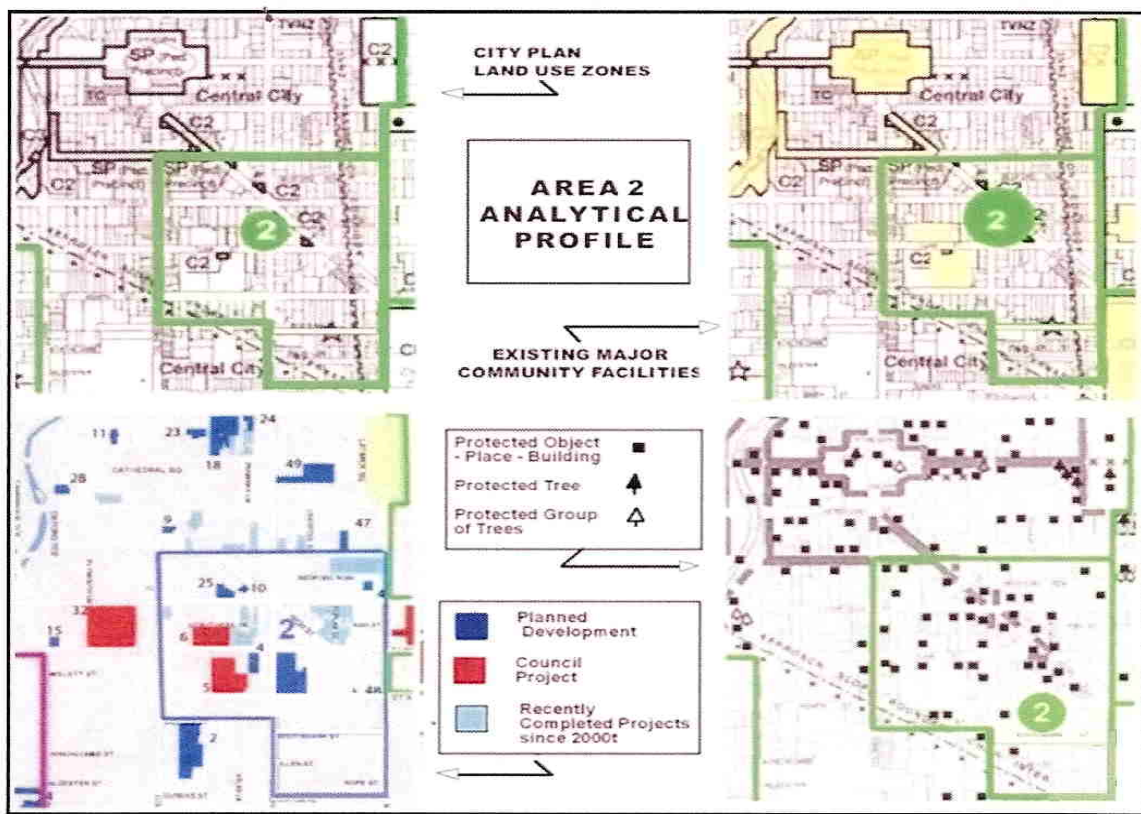
$$\text{Redevelopment Potential (RP)} = \frac{\text{Assessed Value of Improvements}}{\text{Land Value}} \times 100\%$$

Assessed values take into account use, design, size, construction materials, age, and physical condition on the one hand, with zoning, location, title conditions, site dimensions, topography, climate and visual outlook on the other.

The mapped indices shown in Figure 2 provide a first cut to isolating sites with redevelopment potential. The following map shows the pattern inside the Four Avenues for inner Christchurch.



**Figure 2:** Redevelopment potential  
Source: Cao Pei



**Figure 3:** Sample area filtering

At first glance it would seem that there are many sites with very high RP indices, but it must be remembered that most sites have redevelopment potential. Subsequent steps take those parcels of land identified with very high RP indices and subject them to further analysis, screening out public spaces (e.g. Hagley Park), heritage sites, and those sites that would be difficult to merge with others. Adjacent sites with one owner are more suitable than small fragmented sites. Industrial sites are better candidates than existing residential sites as their current functions can often be relocated more readily

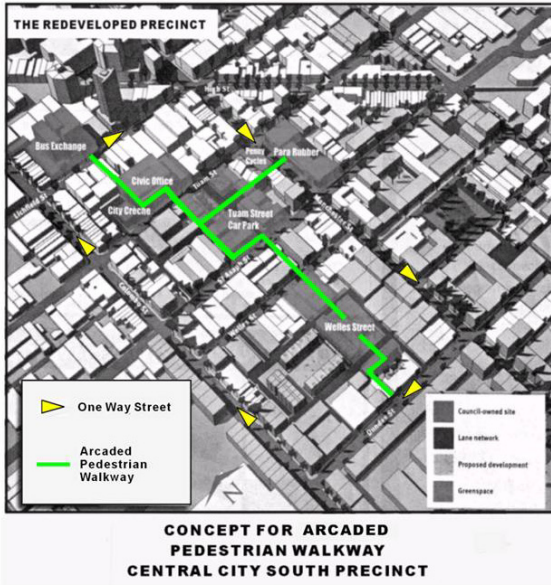
and they are usually bigger sites in the first place. Sites need to have excellent transport access to amenities, and connection to Greater Christchurch. Figure 4 shows a concept scheme for two hybrid inner-city shuttle-bus routes; a possible route for a train-tram that could link satellite settlements such as Rangiora, Kaiapoi, Rolleston and Burnham to the heart of the city in similar fashion to the train-trams in Karlsruhe, Germany.



**Figure 4:** Concept for inner-city shuttle bus and regional train-tram connections  
Source: C. C. Kissling

Once the potential sites are reduced to a smaller number, some areas stand out as good candidates for site amalgamation with a view to comprehensive redevelopment. These are further subjected to market analyses calling upon the expertise of real-estate analysts familiar with the Christchurch scene. We are then left with a small number of truly outstanding potential redevelopment areas.

Determining which of these high potential sites should be chosen for “flagship projects” that will galvanize similar redevelopments boils down to the politics of where in the inner-city the stimulus is most needed. Further, the question needs to be answered whether these sites should be promoted by the CCC itself, private developers, or jointly in public-private partnerships.



**Figure 5a:** Central City South Precinct Concept  
Source: CCC, Central City South Master Plan, May 2009.

Adjacent properties may be encouraged to become part of the design



**Figure 5b:** Central City South Precinct Concept – walkways and ring road  
Source: CCC, Central City South Master Plan, May 2009.

Christchurch City Council South Precinct Concept as published in local newspapers in June 2009

### Central City South Precinct (CCSP)

Steps are now being taken by the CCC to revitalise the Central City South Precinct (CCSP) by means of new composite forms of inner-city housing, along with other appropriate land uses. Enhanced accessibility is also needed, for which new measures could be to:

- Create a clearly delineated one-way ring-road system around the CCSP (i.e. Lichfield- Manchester- Dundas- Colombo Streets), at the same time providing enhanced access to/from elsewhere in the city;
- Provide, where practical, an inter-connected, weather-protected walkway system within/between buildings (at ground and first floor levels) providing enhanced safety, convenience and amenity for pedestrians;



**Figure 6:** Pedestrian arcades and covered walkways at first floor level  
Source: E G Pryor

- Provide well located off-street parking buildings accessed from Tuam, St Asaph, and Welles Streets;

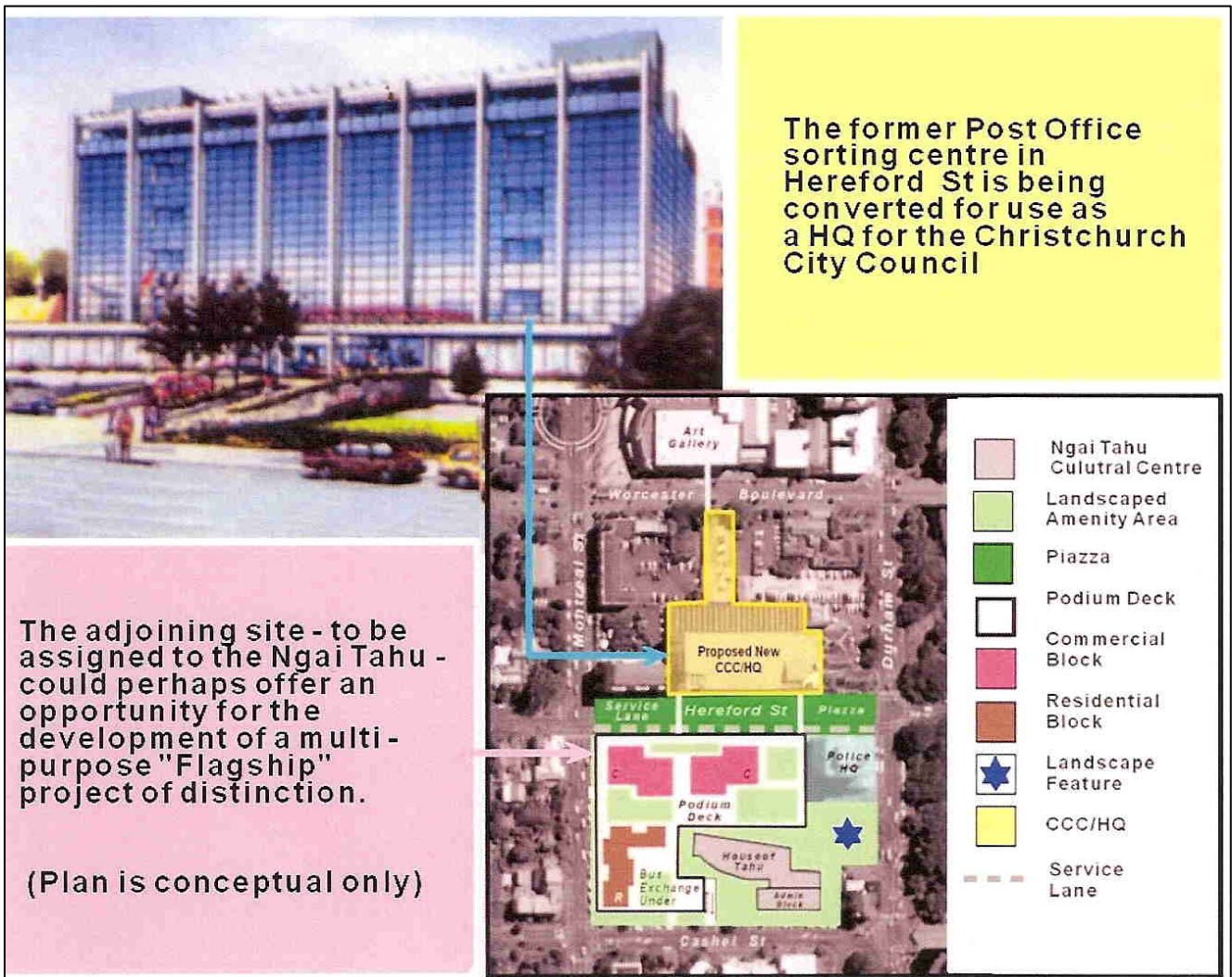
- Adapt streets for landscaped (open-air) pedestrian links - especially on east-west alignments;
- Provide escalators/lifts to access higher levels; and
- Roof-tops, landscaped where possible, allowing for open-air activities and communal residential gardens.

The CCC can also lead redevelopment in conjunction with the refurbishment of the former Post Office sorting centre in Hereford Street (see Figure 7) as its new civic headquarters. There is adjacent land beckoning for comprehensive improvement.

In spatial terms, the Central City has a substantial reservoir of under-utilized land potentially suitable for comprehensively planned development projects. There is scope for a combination of higher density residential

and other compatible uses that could generate a range of economic, social and environmental benefits. Site amalgamations would be required to facilitate comprehensive development, possibly using powers of acquisition available for works relating to public projects.

Analysis is required of the open-market demand for accommodation arising from the formation of new households; the costs of development; and the degree to which households would be able to afford to purchase and/or rent either new accommodation or refurbished stock. The spectrum of households in need of housing can be expected to cover high, medium and low income households of varying sizes, ages and health.



**Figure 7:** Scope for extending the impact of the New Civic Office Precinct  
Source E G Pryor

Substantial areas within the Four Avenues are currently devoted to light industrial uses. These areas have relatively low occupant intensities. Many industrial buildings in the Central City area are becoming functionally and economically obsolete, thereby lending themselves to redevelopment for housing and other compatible uses.

It must be noted that parts of existing residential areas display a chronic need for redevelopment. They contribute now to the diversity of the City in meeting basic housing needs, particularly at the low-cost end, for both rental and owner-occupiers. Costs and risks for developers need to be minimised if rents are to be affordable to a wide cross-section of the community (J. McDonagh, personal communication).

There is a framework under the current Urban Development Strategy for Greater Christchurch; the City Plan; the Central City Revitalisation Strategy; and the City Council's current LTCCP, for encouraging the phased implementation of "Flagship Projects" in the Central City involving areas identified for Comprehensive Housing Improvement. The primary aim is to boost population growth and associated socio-economic activities within the Central City as a viable alternative to peripheral green field expansion of the city.

### **URBAN REGENERATION AGENCY**

An Urban Regeneration Agency (URA) as agreed in principle by CCC in 2008 should be established and funded as soon as possible. The URA would be the agency that could harness and combine the skills and resources from within and external to the CCC to initiate, design and implement phased 'flagship projects' that will accelerate the revitalisation of the Central City of Christchurch.

The primary roles of the Urban Regeneration Agency are to:

- (i) Act as a champion and partner for urban regeneration in Christchurch;
- (ii) Initiate, design and implement projects that lead to investment and redevelopment in Christchurch's intensification areas and activity centres as identified in the UDS;
- (iii) Eliminate and overcome development activities that run counter to the Council's regeneration objectives and policies such as detrimental land speculation and (incompatible) pre-existing uses;
- (iv) Foster public-private partnerships that maximise shared resources and generate a

balanced mix of economic, social and environmental benefits;

(v) Be a positive force in the development of a community that does not duplicate current successful market activity and exits projects when the Council's regeneration objectives have been achieved;

(vi) Ensure protection of the heritage buildings and sites listed in the City Plan;

(vii) Ensure that the Urban Regeneration Agency works with a well constituted Urban Design Team and an Urban Design Advisory Group.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article promotes a methodology for assessing, systematically, the redevelopment potential of sites in the inner-city area as part of a Central City revitalisation programme. This approach could be used as a planning tool to help evaluate alternative options for Christchurch and elsewhere.

There is a need to activate the proposed Urban Regeneration Agency (URA) and give it a mandate to explore the best options within the framework of a master plan. Properly resourced and led, an Urban Regeneration Agency could gather together a powerful team comprising the best available brains from a number of relevant disciplines to chart an exciting future for Central Christchurch. The URA may also need to act in the marketplace to facilitate joint venture schemes between public and private developers to ensure that the vision for a vibrant Central City is pursued with vigour.

The opportunity to make the proposed Central City South Precinct an exemplar project capable of stimulating further sympathetic rejuvenation is too good a challenge to ignore. It could be fruitful to use design competitions involving diverse talents to promote the transformation of the Central City of Christchurch.

References:

Pownall, L.L.,(1960). Low Value Housing in Two New Zealand Cities. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 50(4), 439-460.

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