

18<sup>th</sup> April 2016

## Summary Report: Research Insight into Cathedral Square and Surrounds

### **1. Introduction**

Regenerate Christchurch is working with its statutory partners - Christchurch City Council, the Crown and Ngāi Tahu - as well as a range of stakeholders to develop a regeneration strategy and action plan for a defined area of the central city. The area of interest (the Area) is broadly bounded by Hereford Street to the south, Cambridge Terrace to the west, Manchester St to the east and Kilmore Street to the north.

This exercise identifies how the people of Christchurch would like to see the Area developed. It was conducted by Opinions Market Research and is preliminary and exploratory in nature. The findings will be used to inform and guide the content for a wider engagement plan. The research methodology and sample structure have been designed to ensure a good representation of the community and community's interest.

### **2. Research approach**

A series of three group discussions with Christchurch residents aged 15 - 70 was completed in February 2017.

The group discussions were structured by three life stages. Other demographics factored into the research were gender, ethnicity, socio-economic level/ occupation, location of residence and length of time living in Christchurch. Current behaviour in relation to the central city was also considered.

### **3. Key findings**

#### **3.1 Role of the Area**

The Area is described as 'the heart of the city' and is key to Christchurch. It plays an important role in its contribution to the ambience and function of Christchurch city as a whole. Healthy connectivity with the community is important.

#### **3.2 Community engagement**

Community engagement is welcomed as Cathedral Square and the surrounding area are considered to be 'owned' as spaces by the community. Perceptions indicate a desire for there to be a 'healthy connection' for residents, and for its development and use to be driven by the community.

A multi-faceted communication and engagement approach is identified as most appropriate.

### **3.3 Connection to the Area**

Those who have visited the Area commented there has been significant progress in more recent times, including some 'really cool things' happening in the wider central city such as the Margaret Mahy Family Playground, Restart Mall, New Regent St, Theatre Royal, street art, dance-o-mat, the super street arcade game on the Vodafone building and developments along the Avon River.

People's length of relationship with Christchurch often affects expectations of the Area. Those who have lived in Christchurch long term typically have a strong affiliation with the Area.

Most residents expect or seek activities and entertainment, a historical and cultural experience and new innovative facilities. Pre-earthquake users of the Area seek a connection to their past, to their memories and to a sense of who they are as a person.

From a cultural perspective, it was identified that Māori and European culture is strongly connected to historical aspects as well as celebrating and sharing culture. For other cultures the emphasis is primarily on sharing and celebrating.

### **3.4 Opportunity for the Area**

Fundamentally, the Area is described as a space for interaction between people, for enjoyment, relaxation, socialising, cultural appreciation and sharing, historical as well as innovative experiences, exploring and discovering, unique events and activities.

A strong voice was expressed about making it uniquely Christchurch as the heartbeat of the city and to ensure a character that is intrinsically Christchurch rather than an international, generic style city.

A general consensus emerged to retain remaining 'old/historical' buildings instead of demolishing and replacing them as they form an important part of who we are as people, as a community and as a city. Adding new innovative infrastructure by figuratively building on and creating a layer around the old/historical buildings gained favour.

There is a strong desire for unique activities that are not available elsewhere in the city. Those identified to have strong appeal in the short term were events, festivals, celebrations, and specific activities with elements of interactivity and social focus to facilitate interaction and connection to other people.

Events, celebrations and activities that change over time, for example with seasons or annual cultural celebrations, were popular.

There was support for a continuation of elements that have been happening over recent years such as the 185 white chairs installation, the piano, book fridge, street art, dance-o-mat, chess and games.

There is also a desire to see lanes again, in the style of Chancery Lane, Lordships Lane, Poplar Lane, Lichfield Lanes, with European style restaurants, cafes and bars flowing on to the street in these and other areas including Cathedral Square.

The natural environment is considered to be important as a scene setting backdrop which is layered with features and activities that create an ambient space for people to interact.

Celebrating and connection to culture is welcomed, including with Māori and ethnic groups e.g. a marae, ethnic food, music and dance performances.

Celebrating and connecting to historical roots and how we have been shaped as people and as a community also featured as an important consideration.

Weather proof options are considered important, especially to provide shelter from the sun, wind and rain and, let the sun in during winter.

Expectations are for different experiences across different times of the day, night and days of the week.

Participants described their expectations of low rise buildings in this area that complement the historical buildings rather than overpower them. Low rise buildings were also considered important to let the sun in and prevent wind tunnels. The participants described a relaxing, social, cultural and historical ambience to the Area which is surrounded by more commercial activity.

A quality area that encompasses spaces, experiences, buildings and enhances people's behaviour to 'showcase the city and region' is something that the participants wanted. This is alongside being 'accessible and affordable for day to day visits by residents' and not exclusive.

Having an innovative, sustainable and environmentally friendly city is important to residents.

It was clear among participants that this area is not one homogenous area and that it could best be developed as a series of distinct spaces, each with their own character, purpose and ambience and that are functionally linked.

### **3.5 Positioning of the Area**

The Area is considered to be a community space, with a community sense of ownership and belonging and a showcase for Christchurch and Canterbury, a place to feel proud of and to show visitors. Communication and engagement with Christchurch residents is key in this respect.

It is envisaged that while this part of the city is surrounded by a vibrant commercial centre and larger chain stores, it is about social interaction, relaxation, enjoyment, entertainment. It is a celebration of who we are, and there is a strong sense of pride and community ownership of the Area.

Developing the Area with unique spaces, each with a different character, is important and connectivity is a functional layer on top of this.

### **3.6 Accessibility of the Area**

Accessible transport for all is important to make the Area inclusive and importantly to encourage people to re-engage and visit this area. Accessible transport means provision of a significant amount of parking at the corners/edge of this area as many people will not visit unless it is accessible by car.

Many, including those with mobility issues themselves or with family with mobility issues, stated that requiring a shift in transport modes at this time will not assist with attracting people to use this area.

Younger people were the most supportive of facilitating and promoting pedestrian and cycling modes of transport in the Area.

In terms of accessibility of use, it was identified that encouraging use of this area is best achieved through unique experiences, events and activities as these will act as a catalyst to attract people into the Area. It will also expose people to other possibilities in this space.

It is considered important to offer free as well as paid for activities, especially for youth, students and families with dependent children.

### **3.7 Communication of the Area**

Participants gave feedback that there is a lack of communication and information about what is happening in the Area rather than a disinterest on their part. Rather than actively seeking out information, a preference was given to having information put in front of them.

Communication is essential to build visitor traffic to the Area as people do not have an awareness or connection to it at present.

Key locations were identified by participants for effective communications. These are largely associated with the sites being restored or developed and through outdoor media, including in the suburbs.

Participants are most interested in what Cathedral Square and the surrounding area has to offer now in terms of “what can I do today/ this week?” The future is viewed differently and some do not see a reason to connect with future opportunities given the authorities are developing the Area and they perceive that the authorities know what the community wants which, in reality, is not necessarily the case. For some younger people and the elderly they do not see the future as relevant to them as they will not be in Christchurch.

From a communications perspective this means that designing communications that take milestones into account is important as these make it relevant and easy to follow: now- today, this week, in the next 6 – 12 months, in the future – a year or more and the next generation.

### 3.8 Share an Idea findings explored

The key 'Share an Idea' themes appear to remain relevant. However, in the intervening time people's thinking has evolved and developed and with this there is a shift in the context of the ideas and their potential application, for example:

- Limited if any use of the Area for six years – a disconnect, an embarrassment, reduced trust in government agencies, and a sense of loss.
- Demolition of many buildings and spaces – a greater sense of loss, displacement and disorientation.
- Unresolved situation with Christ Church Cathedral – a greater awareness of the Cathedral's value as a remaining icon to connect to. There is a wide and strong wish for the Cathedral to be kept, others are more passive in their wishes. Distress around the inertia is more evident now.
- Developments in other cities: ideas that could be introduced, other cities moving forward faster.
- Increased development and use of technology – opportunities to introduce virtual reality.
- Move towards more environmentally sustainable transport, buildings – this is an expectation.
- Change in the cultural makeup of Christchurch – celebration, sharing and connection with others.
- Lack of quality social opportunities in Christchurch to meet others makes this area more important as the premier social centre for all – especially, important for youth and singles.
- There is a fondness around memories of activities in this Area – and the desire for reminders of these memories to remain.
- Desire for remaining historical buildings and features to be restored and retained.
- A strong connection to the post-quake art and activities in the Area and a desire for these to continue as part of the fabric of the city.
- An excitement about the future and the mix of these elements into a unique, Christchurch central area.

**Key aspects identified for this Area and related to Share an Idea key themes are:**

- Heartbeat of the city, a showcase, the jewel in the crown of Christchurch, sense of pride in the people of Christchurch and the city.
- Uniquely and intrinsically Christchurch.
- Ambience being calm, enjoyable, relaxed, entertaining and a social environment.
- A backdrop of the garden city, the river, trees, grass and flowers and remaining historical buildings and features alongside new innovative elements.
- Celebration of cultures, including significant Māori and European history, through activities, events and festivals that bring continued interest and encourage repeat visits.
- Visual art has an important role including the influence from post-quake elements to be retained, street art, art works and fountains.
- Performing arts are key to interaction; a microphone/ open stage, dance-o-mat, silent disco, buskers etc.
- Retail is expected to be boutique and quirky, including night markets, flea markets, local arts and crafts.
- Innovative – new quality facilities and buildings that are sustainable.
- Community space that is inviting and accepting of all people, for the locals and for visitors alike, a social and entertainment hub.
- Affordable for all, accessible to all. Access to the edges of the Area by all transport means with parking provision.
- The character of this area is not so much about being ‘vibrant, busy and commercial’ but an ‘entertainment, enjoyable, cultural and historical, quality, social centre’.