

Submission PR250/16

Beacon Pathway Submission to the Christchurch City Council Draft Central City Plan

Date	5 September 2011
Author	Nick Collins
Position	General Manager

What is Beacon?

A shared vision of the potential benefits of improving New Zealand's homes has brought together interested stakeholders to form an Incorporated Society, Beacon Pathway Incorporated. The Society's objective is to transform New Zealand's homes and neighbourhoods to be high performing, adaptable, resilient and affordable through demonstration projects, robust research and a collaborative approach to creating change.

Beacon Pathway Inc builds on the successful research programme completed by Beacon's original consortium which developed a whole-of-house approach to improving the performance of both new and existing homes, using demonstrations and monitoring to provide proof of the benefits of improving New Zealand's housing stock.

Beacon's Members include: New Zealand Steel, Fletcher Aluminium, Certified Builders, Insulpro Manufacturing, Resene, EECA, and Christchurch City Council.

Further information is available at www.beaconpathway.co.nz

Nick Collins
General Manager
Beacon Pathway Incorporated
PO Box 74618, Greenlane, Auckland 1546
Business Phone: (09) 522 5170
nickc@beaconpathway.co.nz

I am happy to be contacted about our submission. As we are largely in support of the draft Central City Plan, we do not feel it necessary to present in person.

Overview - Beacon's perspective on the Draft Central City Plan

Beacon congratulates the Council, Council staff and community of Christchurch for preparing a dynamic and robust plan that encompasses many of the aspects required to create a vital, resilient and sustainable city of the 21st century.

In addition, we congratulate the Council for running an innovative consultation programme that delivered over 100,000 unique ideas. The ability to access and analyse these ideas from the community using the NVivo system means that Council has a very strong and clear mandate from the community for the majority of the direction of the Plan.

In summary, Beacon is a very strong supporter of the Plan, and the work that Christchurch City Council and the community have done in pulling this together in a very tight timeframe under extraordinary circumstances.

Beacon's submission on the Draft Central City Plan

The following more in-depth submissions relate to those aspects of the plan that have particular resonance with our programme of research and demonstration activities. As the projects are so intertwined with the main chapters, Beacon has prepared this submission following analysis of the chapters with each of the projects of interest highlighted within each chapter.

Submission on the Chapters and Projects

Beacon would like to congratulate the Council on the overall structure of the Plan. It provides a coherent framework for the community to engage with the rebuild of their city. In particular we strongly support the overall focus on The Green City, The Distinctive City, City Life, Transport Choice and Market City as the five central themes. 'Bookending' this with the 'Remembering/Maumaharitia' section and the 'Transitional City' approach to implementation is both sensitive as well as indicating the 'active' nature of the plan. It engenders empathy and leadership which Beacon considers crucial in rebuilding a stronger Christchurch.

We also strongly support the Big Picture outlined on page 1 of the Plan, particularly the focus on the "bold commitment to urban sustainability" and the desire for "a low-rise, resilient, safe and sustainable city". This is a bold and exciting vision supported by excellent visuals and clear focus on consultative process through the 'share an idea process', which is also beautifully represented in the visuals and branding throughout the Plan.

Beacon strongly supports the top ten changes outlined in the Big Picture on page 1. However, the development of more mixed use with a higher density of residential dwellings in the city is omitted from the key changes described within these top ten (although this theme comes through strongly in other aspects of the plan). Beacon recommends that this omission is rectified – bringing the prospect of higher density mixed use urban form that supports residential needs and a live/work/play environment into the themes of the top ten changes that the community can expect to see happening.

Beacon strongly supports the five key initiatives outlined on page 7 to ensure that the city is redeveloped to be a strong, resilient, vibrant and economically prosperous city again.

We also strongly support the retention of the historic urban fabric represented in the grid layout of the City as mentioned on page 10.

Beacon strongly supports the five guiding principles outlined on page 12 with recognition of the special importance of taking a long-term view of the future. However, it is not only natural disasters and climate change that are of concern to the resilience of the city. Beacon recommends that energy / water security and issues such as peak oil are highlighted more strongly within the plan in respect to delivering a sustainable and resilient community.

Beacon commends the Council on the interpretation provided for the Past, Present and Future sections, as well as the inclusion of strong connections and partnership with Tangata whenua and Ngai Tahu.

Green City Chapter

Beacon strongly supports the focus on delivery of a Green City as a key central theme of the Plan. Sustainable homes / neighbourhoods and buildings are important to Christchurch's position as a thriving and resilient city. Healthy, resource-efficient homes within connected neighbourhoods contribute to the city's ability to attract and retain talent. The quality of our homes and neighbourhoods will also be a critical determining factor in how well we are able to respond and adapt to future changes (e.g. climate change and rising fuel prices).

Beacon strongly supports the majority of the projects outlined in this chapter and provides the following additional commentary:

Project 5 Community gardens – this is an innovative idea that is gaining significant momentum overseas and it is particularly pleasing to see it showcased in the Plan. There may be additional opportunities to tie the community gardens into the economic and tourist heart of the city by providing local food to local restaurants.

Project 6 Pocket parks – where possible, Beacon would also suggest food-producing trees are utilised to provide the potential for local produce for consumption.

Project 8 Eco streets –this feature will add significant benefit to the overall water cycle in the city and we look forward to further details in the master plan.

Project 9 Greening the roof – Beacon supports the inclusion of ‘green roofs’ through demonstration projects and best practice guides. However, living roofs (as they are more accurately known) and living walls require considerable maintenance and this can lead to significant cost and upkeep. Whilst the benefits are numerous, these should not be over-stated and should be weighed against the durability of the building and whole life cost calculations.

Project 10 District heating – Beacon is delighted to see the inclusion of a feasibility study to look at aspects of district heating as well as the stated desire to adopt a localised approach to energy so that “Christchurch can become a low carbon community, create a more secure and clean energy future and provide a strong proposition for attracting reinvestment in the city.”(page 42). Beacon has been interested in aspects of neighbourhood energy generation within its programme of research and commends the Council for examining this with the potential for an installation in New Zealand. In addition, Beacon recommends that Council also explores other methods of localised neighbourhood generation, including the potential for smart grids and local combined heat and power for apartment and commercial buildings.

Project 11 Green pledge – Beacon commends the Council on its commitment to design and build new 5 star (or above) Green Star-rated buildings. Buildings commissioned and occupied by Christchurch City Council, such as the Council’s own building and the South City Library, provide the perfect opportunity to highlight the leadership role of Council.

Project 12 Build it back green – Beacon supports the principle of a new simplified assessment tool for building back green and can see how this might be used to streamline developments. However, care will be required if achieving a pass allows commercial developments to become a permitted activity (page 44). How, for instance, would the Council react should a developer wish to build a 6 star rated casino in the City Centre? Does this automatically gain permitted activity status? In addition, whilst the Green Star system is a tried and tested methodology in NZ and Beacon fully supports its use, it is primarily an environmental rating tool – and there are other aspects that would need to be considered in the development of the urban fabric (particularly social and other sustainability aspects). Some additional clarity around these issues would be welcomed.

Distinctive City Chapter

Beacon strongly supports the development of a strong and resilient city through the aspects discussed in this chapter and we are especially supportive of the development of a low rise, human scale urban form, which embodies the key aspects of exemplar urban design as outlined in the Plan. The illustrative way that the concepts in the Plan are communicated is very effective, particularly in indicating the benefits of this scale and form of development for Christchurch.

City Life Chapter

Beacon strongly supports the focus and ideas provided in the introductory discussion of the City Life chapter. The Council has developed an exciting and broad range of key projects to capture the desires of the community that were made explicit during the consultation process. Beacon strongly supports the majority of the projects outlined in this chapter and provides the following additional commentary:

Section: A Place for everyone and the Beacon Neighbourhood Sustainability toolkit (page 78): A neighbourhood analysis needs to include how both buildings and the spaces around them work together and their impact on the activities that take place within them. It must consider the state of the infrastructure systems and services available, such as public transport. The design, quality and aesthetics of the buildings and spaces all work together to shape the neighbourhood and influence how people behave and get together as a community. In turn, this develops local social and cultural identity.

By understanding the nature of sustainable neighbourhoods, Beacon wants to help developers, planners and those in the building and construction industry to better understand and develop the designs and construction (techniques, products, materials) to build neighbourhoods that last. Beacon's Neighbourhood research team has developed a framework and tools to measure the sustainability of New Zealand neighbourhoods and we look forward to assisting Council in utilising this tool to aid the recovery and rebuild of the central city. Beacon is currently working on ways of utilising the framework as a community engagement tool.

Section: Living in the City

Beacon strongly supports the initiatives outlined in this section of the City Life chapter and agrees with the key statement that for the central city recovery to be successful it will require a significant residential population. Recent results from the 48 Hour Design Challenge series indicate what can be achieved in a short time frame using local talents.

Affordability is another key issue and Beacon welcomes the initiatives dealing with residential incentives. We would be eager to assist in the potential for further developments of these packages. We also recommend that the definition of affordability also takes into account future running costs (operational energy and water costs / maintenance costs etc). To be truly

affordable, housing must not only seek to achieve an affordable capital cost but also deliver acceptable whole of life costs.

Beacon also draws the Council's attention to the potential of reduced initial capital costs in relation to innovative shared equity schemes such as those pursued by organisations such as the New Zealand Housing Foundation. These 'third sector' partnerships show great promise in delivering new models of ownership and Beacon would be happy to assist Council in developing relationships with potential delivery partners.

Beacon commends the Council on the commitment to repairing and re-instating its stock of **social housing**, as well as the indication that the Council will integrate these within new planned developments in the City Centre. Beacon also strongly supports the goals of making housing more affordable in the Central City and commends the Council on exploring new housing solutions that demonstrate best practice and mixed use designs. Undoubtedly there will be detractors of these policies – no doubt describing the Council's role as 'social engineering' and interfering with the marketplace. Beacon extends our support in standing alongside Council to defend the stance on these issues. The market delivered few good examples of affordable mixed-use developments of quality – and the Council's bold policy on this issue will encourage a vibrant and robust City Centre.

Beacon strongly supports the Council's commitment to **neighbourhood initiatives** and recommends that the Council utilise many of the formal and informal neighbourhood alliances that have arisen as a result of the earthquake. The community voice has become much stronger in Christchurch since the earthquakes as neighbourhoods deal with shared issues – and this is becoming a defining feature of residents as well as a source of strength and pride. These foundations should be supported, encouraged and developed.

Project: Living in City - Housing Showcase

Beacon strongly supports the initiative set out under the heading of the Housing Showcase. This project has the important function of being able to make tangible many of the principles and policies described in the plan. The Housing Showcase should naturally build off work already completed for the Council in preparing the City for the challenge of re-establishing housing in the Central City.

Beacon recommends that the Housing Showcase project is linked to the following other aspects of the plan:

- The Staging overview (p.125) - to indicate the importance of this project as a catalyst project delivering a new form and functionality within the central urban fabric.
- Monitoring & review (p.129) – to allow a 'proof of concept' of high quality affordable medium density / mixed use development in the Central City. Beacon recommends post occupancy monitoring and evaluation that looks at performance against high standard of sustainability targets and specific neighbourhood outcome goals (as set out in Beacon's

research and available from http://beaconpathway.co.nz/being-homesmart/article/beacons_hss_high_standard_of_sustainability and http://www.beaconpathway.co.nz/neighbourhoods/article/our_research_defining_and_measuring_sustainable_neighbourhoods)

- Incentives (p.131) – including but not limited to the opportunity to deliver to affordable housing incentives as covered elsewhere in this submission.
- Linkages also need to be integrated with other aspects of the plan – notably:
 - Green City chapter and in particular
 - Greening the roof
 - District heating
 - Green pledge
 - Build it back green
 - Incentives for Green Star
 - Distinctive City chapter and in particular
 - Strong resilient buildings
 - Height and human scale
 - Good urban design
 - Strengthening the grid
 - City blocks, lanes and courtyard
 - Precincts and neighbourhoods
 - The remainder of the City Life chapter which can be delivered through housing showcase
 - Piloting residential incentives
 - Living in the City and demonstrating new housing choices and changing lifestyles
 - Transport choice – integrating housing types and location with transport choice.
 - Market City – delivering the compact city (p.105)
 - Transitional City – as a key project to demonstrate the transition process.

In short, Beacon very strongly supports the Housing Showcase idea as the project provides so many opportunities to link to and demonstrate the other components in the plan.

The Housing Showcase has the potential to deliver a new inner-city neighbourhood of medium density and mixed-use homes, based on affordable design principles, to inspire and shape modern urban living in Christchurch. Beacon strongly supports the development of this unique eco precinct which will meet current and future residents' needs through creating homes and neighbourhoods which are great places to live, work and play. It has the capacity to become a model for Christchurch whereby the city could potentially generate more energy than it consumes, conserving / recycling the valuable high quality water from the Canterbury aquifer and delivering living / working environments which are carbon zero and incorporate restorative sustainable design. Beacon recommends the involvement of industry early on to promote industry innovation and learning by providing a living laboratory of sustainable building design incorporating prefabrication, modular designs and green technologies. Beacon also strongly

recommends the early appointment of suitable development partners to allow the final housing showcase designs to be readily constructed.

Beacon recommends that the Showcase be established as quickly as possible and become part of Christchurch City's vision of an exemplar sustainable city, as it will contribute to the tools, incentives and education needed to overcome business as usual. It encourages homeowners to seriously consider central city living, and this will provide an on-going resource for developers in Christchurch.

The development of the Housing Showcase design competition also provides opportunity for central government agencies to work collaboratively with Christchurch City Council in setting standard for residential rebuild and Beacon welcomes the opportunity to assist Christchurch in realising this vision.

International entries to any design competition set up to develop ideas for the Housing Showcase should be welcomed – but it will be important to have these connected to a local partner who can assist with implementable, buildable, affordable and culturally relevant final schemes. It may be necessary to make it a competition requirement to have a well-integrated local partner in Christchurch – and demonstrate strong collaborative working relationships.

The final Housing Showcase design should be bold – and ensure that the resulting development is one of Christchurch City's key catalyst projects for urban regeneration. There will be a necessity for widespread support for the project – in terms of making it well publicised, a talking point etc. and therefore it will also need to be well funded. As International Earthquake Recovery expert Charles Eadie puts it “focus early on projects that establish momentum and will be catalysts for you” (International Speaker Series, Christchurch, August 2011).

Transport Choice Chapter

Beacon strongly supports the goals of the transport chapter which are necessary for achieving and supporting the wide range of projects set out in the plan. Beacon strongly supports the inclusion and priority of cycling, walking, slow streets, public transport, connectivity and concealed parking identified in the Plan. Once again, the illustrations greatly assist with the interpretation of the ideas presented.

Market City Chapter

Beacon supports the main themes presented in the market city chapter and would also recommend (on page 102) that in addition to “partnership between local government, central government agencies, private investors and the international investment community,” redevelopment of the Central City must also include other non-governmental institutions such as Universities as well as the community themselves.

A potential anomaly on page 102 in paragraph 8 refers to the provision of free car parking in Christchurch City Council car parks for two hours. Beacon recommends that this is removed from the plan as it seems contrary to the strong focus on developing alternative modes of transport to the central city. Despite the good reasons given for the provision of this parking, this could be creating a habit that is hard to break for residents - and works against the intention of the Plan.

Beacon supports all other aspects of this chapter with especially strong support for the restrictions on suburban development, land consolidation and acquisition, the International Quarter and the Smart City approach.

Transitional City approach

Beacon strongly supports the transitional city projects outlined in the Plan and commends Council for developing this approach and making it explicit as a strategy within the plan. This conveys a strong sense of leadership and vision as well as a sense of 'getting things underway'. Experience from the International Speaker series suggests that it is vital to get some quick wins and projects underway to engender a sense of positive action.

Implementation and Funding

Beacon strongly supports the statements made in the introduction of the implementation section relating to the requirement for partnerships, and the focus on projects, actions, strength and leadership. To add a greater sense of certainty to the Plan, Beacon recommends that in the summary of projects further detail is provided of potential stakeholders and potential funders for each of the projects.

Beacon would also like to congratulate the Council on the inclusion of a monitoring and review process. Beacon recommends, in addition to this, that further work is done with the key themes from the public consultation process to produce a set of community indicators to track progress against goals in the plan.

Additional ideas / issues

- Beacon recommends that the Council also consider the existing housing and neighbourhoods and integrates a programme of retrofit to upgrade and improve the resilience and sustainability of this older intact housing and neighbourhood infrastructure alongside new build projects.
- Beacon recommends a central 'Rebuild Christchurch Hub' (office) is opened to communicate transparently with the community in relation to how the plan is progressing.