

NEED-TO-HAVE TRUMPS NICE-TO-HAVE

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While central city Christchurch is being addressed through its own planning process, a different model is required for its suburban centres. Timeframes are shorter and community issues are more immediate; two of the hardest-hit centres – Sydenham and Lyttelton – serve as exemplars for the recovery and regeneration of others.

Post-disaster requires a different planning response

Conventional centre-based planning is usually undertaken in a context of economic and social stability, with security of funding and governance, but without the same degree of urgency. Communities often enjoy a broad base of amenity or activity to build or improve on. As such, planning endeavours can be directed to creating a popular vision, designing quality environments and stretching budgets for various nice-to-haves.

In a raw and fluid post-disaster environment, the focus of centre planning shifts to initiatives that provide immediate support to those in urgent need. Getting existing businesses and public facilities up and running, providing confidence to investors and encouraging people back to the centre in ways that are strategically advantageous become overriding priorities. Fundamental core elements of the centre have to be fixed before aspirational or nice-to-have initiatives are applied.

Key differences of planning in a post-disaster environment are proposed below.

Master Plan elements	Typical attributes	Post-disaster differences
A strategic framework	A clear vision, strategic goals and supporting baseline information and evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to incomplete or technical information
A spatial proposition	Plans, cross-sections and visualisations. Landscape, land use and transport design proposals or frameworks. The design process generally selects strategic sites that make the most sense to develop in an 'ideal' order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleared sites offering fresh redevelopment opportunities. • Extensive property damage and continuing building demolitions. • Some negative perceptions about the centre's prospects • Future circumstances which cannot be predicted. • More difficult design proposals. Sites needing urgent change may not necessarily be those which offer the greatest strategic benefit.
An implementation plan	A staged programme delivery mechanisms, priorities, setting out roles and responsibilities and financial costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolving governance structures. • Uncertain or limited funding sources. • Community uncertainty to commit in the face of the sheer number of possible projects. • Fitting in with the bigger decision-making loop across the sub-region, city, Central City and other individual suburbs.
Nature of consultation	Greater risk, especially in times-of-plenty, that processes become focused around motivated, vocal interest groups or key stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole community involvement and interest in all stages.

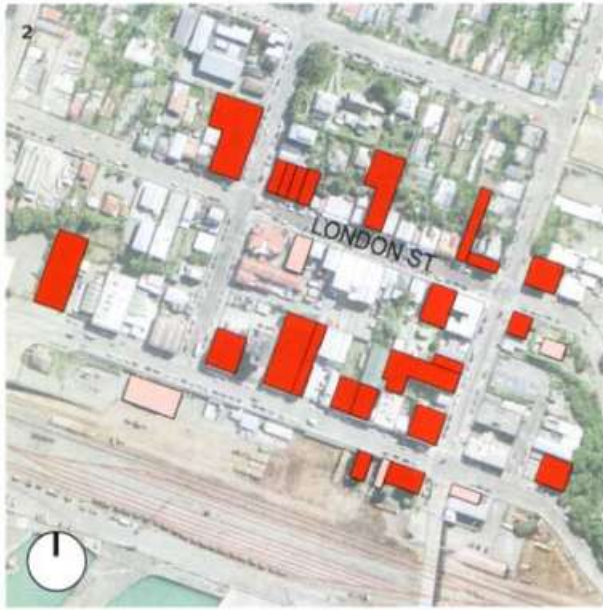


Figure 1: Demolished buildings in Sydenham (red) and buildings pending demolition or repair (pink)

Figure 2: Demolished buildings in Lyttelton (red) and buildings pending demolition or repair (pink)

The extraordinary post-quake context

Readers are well aware of the impact of February’s earthquake and subsequent aftershock events on the central city. What many may be less aware of is the shattering scale of physical and emotional loss suffered across Christchurch’s lower-profile suburban centres. Sydenham and Lyttelton have been assessed as two of the more vulnerable commercial centres and are the first to go through a master plan process.

Both centres had iconic heritage and character buildings constructed out of unreinforced masonry. In Sydenham, around one quarter of buildings along the Colombo Street retail strip have been demolished. The Lyttelton township, an area awarded NZHPT Category 1 historic area status, has lost one third of commercial buildings on London Street. The Lyttelton Port of Christchurch, public facilities, churches and the arts and entertainment scene sustained particularly heavy damage. In the town centre some businesses are operating out of caravans and containers while others are in the

process of being rebuilt. Other cleared sites have an uncertain future and as a stopgap, are being used as new public spaces.

Both centres also face other challenges, many traffic-related. The Colombo Street spine is a strategic connection between the southern suburbs and central city. The closure of the central city has decreased the amount of daily bus and vehicle traffic, resulting in a corresponding reduction of passing trade for Sydenham-based retailers. Similarly the Lyttelton town centre has taken an economic hit. It is not uncommon for visitors to have fears about going through the Lyttelton Tunnel and Evans Pass Road as an alternative route from Sumner remains closed.

Responding to heightened expectations and urgency

Speed is an important factor in suburban centre recovery. This requires striking a balance between getting strategic planning right, and getting it done quickly. Initial project consultation through to approval by the council to consult on both draft master plans occurred over a five-month period (May to October). To meet this compressed time frame, the process needed to be flexible and highly interactive. The design process was anchored around one large-scale, four-day workshop which addressed both centres. The workshop concentrated on the complex centre-based issues but allowed for continuing conversations with technical and stakeholder groups afterwards.

Local people are living with the everyday reality of the situation and need to be meaningfully involved in this planning. Initial public participation occurred via targeted focus group sessions and at hands-on community design workshops. In Lyttelton over 500 people from a total residential catchment of 3000 attended these sessions – a ratio of 1:6, unprecedented for many New Zealand communities. Participants reflected an even cross-section of the community – from children through to older people, workers to business owners, residents to out-of-centre visitors to the area.

The post-disaster process is at high risk of raising public expectations and not delivering on them. This requires the project leaders to be disciplined in their communication with the community to establish and maintain trust around realistic options. The Sydenham and Lyttelton process included an additional formal opportunity for public input prior to the preparation of the draft master plans to canvass opinion about specific proposals.

Pin-pointing early measures that provide immediate support

Providing immediate help to businesses and the community may take many forms, from fast-tracking the regulatory process through to the offer of advice to financial support. Two immediate-action projects found within the master plans are the appointment of a centre-specific case manager, and aligning resource management processes to support rebuilding efforts.



Figure 3 (above): A Lyttelton community workshop in action

Figure 4 (left): Artist perspective of a laneway redevelopment

A Lyttelton and Sydenham-specific case manager will provide a face of recovery to quake-affected property owners and businesses. This person may be involved in helping people access available financial assistance and support services, co-ordinating council advice across departments, or advocating for asset repair works.

In undertaking research for these two master plans, the council identified that district plan compliance is discouraging development, to the detriment of community well-being. The council is concurrently reviewing district plan standards as these master plans progress to ensure they overcome any development barriers.

Using empty ground for temporary landscapes

Post-quake, several new community organisations have been formed with a goal to make the most of prominent but now-empty sites in both centres. One successful collaborative project being advanced in the master plans is by organisations Greening the Rubble, Gap Filler and Make-SHIFT. After obtaining agreement from property owners, the groups utilise community design and construction personnel to create innovative temporary landscapes. While these are temporary solutions, in the post-disaster

context they become critical imperatives. Spaces give the community a sense that rebuilding is underway, they celebrate the resilience of the community and, in a small but real way, contribute to the centre's vitality and morale. Careful landscape design (including planter boxes, public furniture and shipping containers that can be re-sited elsewhere in the city) ensures that money is not wasted once the spaces are replaced by buildings once more.

Re-housing displaced community activities

In Lyttelton over a dozen community groups and numerous local performers have been displaced because the buildings they used sustained earthquake damage. The process revealed a particular need for mid-sized meeting spaces for 30-50 people. The plan proposes to reorganise council-owned land and property assets in the town centre to re-house some of these activities. Interim accommodation for Lyttelton Plunket and the Toy Library for instance is possible through the conversion of a residential property. Effort has been taken to ensure all temporary homes make long-term strategic sense to the Lyttelton community. Locations have been pragmatically selected to be central to town centre amenities

and to nurture a hub of community services around the Recreation Centre.

Embracing unique post-disaster opportunities

The master plans identify regeneration opportunities which have arisen as a consequence of earthquake events. Sites which have been levelled and are pending rebuilding decisions offer particular opportunities – creating new or safer public spaces, acquiring land for a much-needed activity, or negotiating a previously unattainable connection.

One Sydenham-based example is within a central block focused on 11 titles in private ownership. This block was originally a heritage-listed parade but it now sits as a cleared site stretching a considerable 80m along Colombo Street. The Plan emphasises a redevelopment project which aims to bridge relationships between the council and the multiple landowners involved. This includes:

- Reaching decisions about remaining party-wall foundations between neighbours
- Addressing differing levels of funding from insurance payouts between owners
- Providing advice on the use of co-operative development mechanisms



Figure 5: Artist impression of Lyttelton township post earthquake and medium term proposals

- Providing economic advice on the economies of scale associated with comprehensive development
- Acquisition opportunities for a laneway linking the main street and a neighbourhood park to the rear of the site
- Urban design advice around building scale, creating a quality interface, and ways to take design cues from the former parade

Lessons learned

As the Sydenham and Lyttelton Master Plan process and proposals demonstrate, planning in a post-disaster environment is far from “business as usual”. While Lyttelton and Sydenham are referred to as master plans, their process and content demonstrate a far broader strategy where principles and possibilities are formulated, as opposed to fixed-solution concepts.

Key lessons learnt include:

- More than ever, being adequately adaptable to respond to future circumstances which cannot be predicted
- In the interests of rebuilding, making sure plans are not too focused on pragmatism and expediency. Plans need to act quickly but set up a strategic logic to allow a comprehensive view of a centre’s potential to be taken and developed in a considered and integrated manner
- Involving the community from scratch, being frank in communication, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation in projects going forward
- Consulting with the community and stakeholders on the basis that projects will be tackled together over the next decade
- Delivering more with less funding given the nexus between the national economic climate,

a post-disaster environment and the sheer number of commercial centres competing for recovery planning across Christchurch

Implementation

The success of any centre-based planning process depends on the strength of its implementation plan and how well it can deliver on the desired outcomes.

The stability afforded through having a generally settled 10 year public investment programme is missing in Christchurch. Consequently the Sydenham and Lyttelton Plans will continue to evolve as central and local government planning and decisionmaking takes place. At the very least, similar master plan regeneration exercises must be completed in other significantly damaged suburban centres. All actions should be understood and sequenced in the context of a bigger decisionmaking loop across the sub-region, city and individual suburbs. The timing of the upcoming general election and the 2013 local body election further complicates resolution of these issues.

This does not mean that Lyttelton and Sydenham will be waiting until strategic decisions are resolved. The plans have dealt with added uncertainty through the pragmatic inclusion of a split delivery programme. The 30 actions found within each master plan are divided into two groups: immediate actions which more straightforward with shorter lead times, and second tier actions which will take longer to get off the ground and may require substantive financial assistance. The implementation plans designate lead and partner roles, assign tasks and estimate the overall funding requirements.

Many actions within the plans provide for ongoing direct involvement, in a more intimate way, by local professionals and the wider community. It

is essential that their talent and knowledge inspires outcomes with strong community identity and ownership. In some cases local input is provided for via council conduits such as a design expo, case manager, or the Christchurch Urban Design Panel. Other actions, such as amendments to town centre and business zone provisions, are best progressed within a broader programme of action, such as the comprehensive review of the City and Proposed Banks Peninsula District Plans.

The final important implementation factor relates to private sector, market-led issues. In this case the master plans are less about specific development propositions and instead focus on whole-of-market actions which are designed to encourage people to reinvest in suburban centres.

Epilogue

Consultation on the Sydenham and Lyttelton draft Master Plans is about to take place (November – December). ■

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