

Christchurch - A city reborn?

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Seven years on from the Canterbury earthquakes, the region is in the midst of the largest regeneration opportunity in New Zealand. It is apt that the legislation underpinning this process is called the "Greater Christchurch Regeneration Act 2016" and a key entity tasked with change, "Regenerate Christchurch".

Regenerate means to "create again" but in this case it is more fitting to use an alternative definition of "restored to a more worthy state". Our recovery involves more than rebuilding. The Regeneration Act recognises this involves the improvement of the "environmental, economic, social, cultural well-being, and the resilience of a community". It is encouraging that the Local Government (Community Well-being) Amendment Bill specifies a similar purpose for local government.

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The original elements of the city are being enhanced and Christchurch is building on its reputation as the "Garden City". The Christchurch City Council has invested in the expansion of purpose built cycle-ways to provide a sustainable transport option for commuters. The Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor is a major Regenerate Christchurch project that will create a restored native habitat and complement the city's existing parks and reserves. The Corridor together with developments such as the Christchurch Adventure Park and the Margaret Mahey and New Brighton Playgrounds, provide more opportunities for leisure. They also support economic and social wellbeing by attracting international and domestic visitors to the region and providing improved recreational facilities for residents.

The decision in April to fast-track a new multi-purpose arena and metro sports facility signifies a major milestone for sport loving Cantabrians. While controversial, once completed, these sports facilities and the Christchurch Convention Centre will hopefully provide Christchurch with the ability to host a wide range of events. Recreational activities are vital for a sense of community and the economic loss of not hosting international events cannot be underestimated.

Enhanced opportunities for study should increase the numbers of international and domestic students. Ara Institute of Canterbury is undertaking significant redevelopment work to enhance delivery of vocational training and the University of Canterbury has been able to modernise its teaching and research facilities as part of the rebuild effort.

In the wider region, Rolleston has established itself as a major regional manufacturing, contracting, warehousing and logistical node. The Central Plains Water Scheme is also scheduled for completion by the end of 2018. The Scheme is providing run-of-river water with storage to an area of 45,000 ha of arable land, supporting increasingly diverse and sustainable farming practices while adopting leading nutrient management systems and reducing the draw on Canterbury's aquifers.

While the above initiatives illustrate substantial positive change has already taken place, there is still work to be done. There are unresolved commercial and residential insurance claims with increasingly entrenched positions being adopted. The increased demand for mental health services caused by the earthquakes strain available funding. The emotional and financial toll that these unresolved issues continue to have on residents cannot be underestimated. It is not until the entire community is able to move on that Christchurch can claim it has been truly restored to a more worthy state.

This article was written by Susan Rowe for the NBR (May 2018).

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