

## Working together for the good of Christchurch

As the restrictions of our pandemic response are gradually lifted, it's critical that Christchurch is ready to create opportunities under new economic circumstances.

The country is bracing itself for an economic downturn and it is going to be tough for many local businesses. As a city there are steps we can take to support growth, taking a new approach to old problems and creating possibilities for Christchurch. There's an argument that we're better placed than many cities for recovery. We've learned the hard way what recovery means and our people are used to innovative and agile approaches to economic issues.

Before the pandemic, our city was in a tough situation. The insurance money that fuelled the earthquake recovery was largely spent and it was becoming more challenging to develop infrastructure to support growth. Christchurch had reached a point where growth – the steady and stable increase of population, supporting business and economic opportunity – had become fraught with financial risk and high uncertainty for investors.

We had reached a point where we needed a new approach to infrastructure and development. This situation has only been exacerbated by the pandemic and, now more than ever, innovative ideas are needed. Are we open to change and doing things differently?

The price of continuing to persevere as we have always done is that we may fail to meet our full potential. It is true that many aspects of Christchurch have changed over the last nine years; we do have new buildings and the central city is a clean, modern and increasingly attractive place to be. We lost some communities, but we also welcomed many new citizens, creating new hubs while protecting the wellbeing and prosperity of our people.

To continue on this trajectory and support our city in its pandemic recovery, we need to be open to new ideas. This requires prioritised investment that assumes an ambitious level of medium-term growth supported by good policy frameworks – we must continue to back our potential to succeed.

As with the Government's proposed national infrastructure programme, the spending decisions of our city, district and regional councils will support our economy through the recovery. Supporting sensible policies and making it easy for business to flourish is critical. Christchurch has a lot to offer – great communication and transport links, well-priced housing, ownership of city assets – that make us a competitive option for external investors. But to improve prosperity, we need to set a stretched level of ambition and we need to back ourselves to achieve it.

When the public sector funds big projects, it supports local businesses and contractors. This benefit can be increased in the way the public sector approaches the project: by being a good client, working more closely with business, giving early visibility of work programmes and operating innovative procurement processes that have a local focus.

City planning and policy rules can be adapted to make it easier for local developers and investors to make projects happen. Actions, like taking an enabling approach to planning rules and extending consent notices to give the private sector more space to do its thing, will allow greater development outcomes. Public-Private Partnerships – where large public projects like schools are developed with a private investor taking a share in the cost – could be embraced in Christchurch. Done well, these partnerships move risk to the private sector and preserve upfront capital for other public sector projects.

When the national call went out in early April for regional 'shovel ready' infrastructure projects that could be funded by Government under a pandemic recovery package, DCL spent a lot of time talking to the private sector about local opportunities. Plenty is happening around the city and, with the right support and incentives, projects like central city hotels, building developments and even a local film studio campus, will provide jobs and prosperity for local people.

Being clear in our vision and confident in our own ability, as a city, to meet ambitious targets will help inspire confidence for investors and businesses. Investment, both in the form of money and in people, can create a steady level of growth that will drive a prosperous recovery. A positive and ambitious approach will benefit all of our citizens and the ones yet to discover Ōtautahi, Christchurch.