

Promoters of river park extend petition deadline



Red zone restoration: Evan Smith of the Avon-Otakaro Network displays the brochure detailing the group's vision.

Christine de Felice

THE group wanting to see red zone land along the Avon turned into a river park hopes to add more impetus to its petition by extending the deadline to March 31. The original close-off date was January 15.

The Avon-Otakaro Network (AvON) had gathered almost 10,500 signatures since the petition was started some 10 weeks ago and believed it could triple that number over the next two months or so, spokesman Evan Smith said.

The vision of the network members, many of whom were red zone residents, was to see the 350 hectares of red-zoned land adjacent to the Avon River transformed into a recreational and ecological reserve, Mr Smith said.

"This area is twice the size of Hagley Park and with 5000 households moving out and the area becoming an eyesore, it's important

that it's turned into something positive for people living in the surrounding areas and for the whole city."

Mr Smith said the vision had the backing of more than 50 organisations and Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker had publicly expressed the council's support.

The petition had received overwhelming support when it was circulated at recent public events and in the Re:Start Mall on Boxing Day. However, the initiative was limited by the number of volunteers' available to collect the signatures, Mr Smith said.

The network planned to collect signatures at the Buskers Festival, at Classical Sparks on February 5, and at the Chinese Lantern Festival on February 11 and hoped more volunteers to collect them could be recruited.

Supporters of the vision keen to volunteer to collect signatures at any of these events or elsewhere were asked to register on the AvON website, www.avonotakaronetwork.co.nz.

When the petition closes, AvON will present it to Parliament.

The network believed there was a "high likelihood" of the project going ahead, Mr Smith said.