



Submission to the

**Local Government and Environment
Select Committee**

on behalf of

Avon-Ōtakaro Network

“We respectfully ask the House of Representatives to work with the people and local authorities of Christchurch to ensure that the Avon River red zone becomes a reserve and river park when the home owners have to leave.”

We respectfully request that we also be permitted a verbal submission to the Select Committee in support of this.

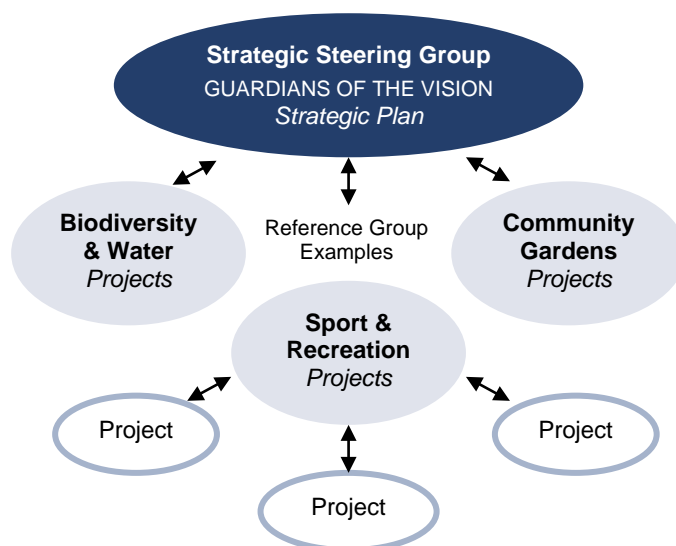
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Executive Summary

- 1 Avon-Ōtakaro Network (AvON) is an umbrella network of many different interests that share a common and popular vision to turn the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone lands into an ecological and recreational river park when the home owners have to leave.
- 2 About 400 hectares of land along the Ōtakaro-Avon corridor has been zoned red because “it is not feasible to rebuild on this land at the present time”. These properties are currently in the process of being purchased by the Crown and the lands cleared.
- 3 The AvON vision encompasses a number of areas of recovery and redevelopment:
 - River Health and Environment
 - River Culture
 - River Recreation: “place of the game”
 - River Sustenance: food for body, mind and spirit
 - River Communities
 - River Economies
- 4 A central tenet of the AvON vision is the establishment of a broad, continuous and self-sustaining natural corridor of indigenous habitat sufficient to restore water quality, manage waste water, provide flood protection and enhance biodiversity allowing native wildlife to re-establish and flourish.
- 5 The historical, cultural and heritage significance of the river in the life of the city is incorporated within the vision.
- 6 The vision includes the establishment of a ‘recreational precinct’ in the east based on the lower Ōtakaro-Avon corridor, estuary and beaches with a primary focus on family recreation on and around water. The potential for a flat water sporting facility and a network of interconnected bike trails and walkways is envisaged.
- 7 Provision is made for community gardens, restoration of mahinga kai, natural learning environments and places of spiritual renewal.
- 8 The vision provides comfort, hope and wellbeing for communities and opportunities for rebuilding strength and resilience.
- 9 The vision provides a framework for the economic recovery of the eastern communities with training and employment opportunities, tourism and business potential, urban renewal and restoration of property values. Wealth generation and savings on health, water management and land remediation and redevelopment can potentially offset the costs of such a project.
- 10 Community engagement with regard to the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone, must be community-driven, genuine and meaningful and permeate all plans and programmes throughout all steps along the recovery timeline. AvON supports the CanCERN Charter of Community Engagement Principles.
- 11 AvON works through a process with diverse communities of interest leading to an integrated package of projects and visions and a service for networking and engaging with communities of interest.
- 12 The AvON vision can provide a fundamental connected physical and thematic framework for the development of an integrated recovery plan for the eastern communities. The river provides the lifeline and the back bone upon which the recovery of the east can be built.
- 13 Specific requests are made for greater community involvement in planning and strategy decisions, avoidance of short-term decisions that compromise the vision, retention of heritage items, productive community-based short-term uses for the lands and definitive and timely decisions regarding the long-term use of the lands.

Avon-Ōtakaro Network

- 1.1 Avon-Ōtakaro Network (AvON) is a network of individuals and organisations advocating turning the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone lands into an ecological and recreational river park when the home owners have to leave.
- 1.2 We wish to establish a community-driven science-informed living memorial to rejuvenate and nurture the long-term environmental, economic, community and spiritual wellbeing of the eastern suburbs and of those living throughout greater Christchurch. Our aim is to turn a tragedy into an opportunity, a polluted drain into a vibrant river system, and exhaustion and despair into hope and inspiration.
- 1.3 AvON is an umbrella network of many different interests that share a common vision. We currently have 200 registered individual members and more than 50 organisations represented at our membership forums. Moreover our Facebook page has almost 2,000 followers and our recent petition attracted over 18,500 signatures.
- 1.4 The AvON vision has provided a beacon of hope and comfort through the heartache, frustration and angst of the here and now challenges of the earthquake recovery. It has captured the imagination of people because it offers respite from the present and hope for the future. It promotes a wonderful legacy for generations to come and the potential to build prosperity for the region. Such visions are exceedingly important to restore confidence in the future of the city and bolster the strength and resilience within communities to work through the current phase of the recovery.
- 1.5 The full AvON membership meets every quarter in a forum. Our strategic steering group provides overall leadership. This group meets each fortnight and includes people from all the main interest groups. It is the 'guardian' of the AvON vision and is responsible for helping the many different projects integrate their aims to achieve as many benefits as possible.
- 1.6 We also have reference groups of members who share a common interest. These groups help set up or carry out projects within their particular realm of interest. Projects are often fully managed by autonomous member organisations while still falling within the general framework of the Network.



Background

- 2.1 On 18 May 2012, Minister Brownlee announced the last of the red zone decisions along the Ōtakaro-Avon River and estuary. This brought the total of Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone residential properties to about 5,900.

- 2.2 This represents about 4.5% of the households in urban Christchurch and almost 400 hectares of land (about two-and-a-half times the size of Hagley Park).
- 2.3 The logic behind the zoning decisions was outlined in media releases at the time of the first announcements in late June 2011:

The criteria for defining areas as residential red zone are:

- There is significant and extensive area wide land damage;
- There is a high risk of further damage to land and buildings from low-levels of shaking; and
- The success of engineering solutions would be uncertain and uneconomic; and
- Any repair would be disruptive and protracted.

"It is not feasible to rebuild on this land at the present time," Mr Brownlee says.

"Such wide scale land remediation would take a considerable period of time, and the social dislocation of such massive works would see people out of their homes for at least three years, and in some cases more than five years. In some areas we're talking about the need for up to three metres of compacted fill to bring the land up to compliant height, along with many kilometres of perimeter treatment.

"Repair in all the red areas would not only require raising the height of the land but also a complete replacement of essential infrastructure like sewer, water, electricity and roading." Mr Brownlee says.

Media Release July 2011 following the first Avon River Red Zone Announcements.

- 2.4 Residential red zone properties are currently in the process of being purchased by the Crown under one of two options. Once in crown ownership the intention is for these lands to be cleared if this has not already been undertaken by insurance companies prior to purchase.

- 2.5 According to CERA:

"There will be a two-phase process, which will reduce disruption to neighbours and be more efficient in terms of cost.

- Phase 1: Built structures such as houses and garages will be cleared.
- Phase 2: Remaining fences, vegetation, driveways and paths will be cleared.

Established trees may be left because they might help stabilise the soil. However, the long-term use of the land is still to be determined."

CERA Booklet: <http://cera.govt.nz/sites/cera.govt.nz/files/common/residential-red-zone-property-clearances-information-for-neighbours-20120309.pdf>

- 2.6 With respect to future use, the Government's current position remains that the lands will be left cleared for a period of years pending "detailed engineering investigations" to determine land remediation options for potential redevelopment for residential use.
- 2.7 We recognise that at this point there may be other reasons why Government is not willing or able to consider any alternative proposals for the long term future use of these lands. These might include the need to allow red zone residents time to make their decisions and the need to maximise compensation receipts from re-insurers.

- 2.8 We also recognise that the red zone decisions have left many residents devastated and their communities decimated. The ongoing uncertainty about the future use of the red zone lands (in some cases family homes for a number of generations) contributes to the lingering anxiety, distress, ‘paralysis’ and grief experienced by a significant number of households within and neighbouring the zone.

The AvON Vision:

“That the Avon River red zone becomes a reserve and river park when the home owners have to leave”

- 3.1 The AvON vision is that the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone becomes a publically owned ecological and recreational reserve and river park, linking with the proposed Papawai Ōtakaro-Avon River Park in the CBD and continuing through to the coast.
- 3.2 The AvON vision encompasses a number of areas of recovery and redevelopment:
- River Health and Environment
 - River Culture
 - River Recreation: “place of the game”
 - River Sustenance: food for body, mind and spirit
 - River Communities
 - River Economies

River Health and Environment

- 4.1 A central tenet of the AvON vision is the establishment of a broad, continuous and self-sustaining corridor of indigenous habitat appropriate to the historic ecology of the Ōtakaro-Avon River and its catchment, including Te Ihutai/Estuary.
- 4.2 This includes environmental enhancements to the river and riparian zone to naturally restore water quality, treat storm water through wetland systems, collect sewage overflows before discharge to the river and provide appropriate flood protection. In this we are advised by the Waterways Centre for Freshwater Management.
- 4.3 It also includes provision for significant enhancement of indigenous biodiversity, both aquatic and terrestrial, allowing native wildlife to re-establish and flourish to greatly enrich the ecology and life of the city. A number of ecologists and conservationists from the Universities and Landcare Research advise us on these matters, while the Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust, Forest and Bird and Conservation Volunteers NZ also contribute expertise.

River Culture

- 5.1 The river has played a central role in the history of Ōtautahi Christchurch. The AvON vision acknowledges this and celebrates it. AvON is committed to ensuring that the cultural heritage and values of Ngāi Tūāhuriri and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu are incorporated within the development of an Ōtakaro-Avon River Park.
- 5.2 AvON also acknowledges the heritage value of sites along the river that post-date early European settlement. This includes recognition of historic homes, mature exotic trees and gardens of heritage value within and alongside the red zone and the need to make provision for inclusion of these where possible in ‘oases’ of exotic parkland within the river park. These cultural values are embraced by the proposals of the Lower Avon Heritage Recovery Trail Group, a member of our

Network. In this we are also advised by the Canterbury Horticultural Society and the Christchurch Botanic Gardens.

- 5.3 We ask the Government to commit to saving assets of value (eg heritage, cultural, community value) where they provide key foci for the recovery and implementation of the AvON vision.
- 5.4 AvON also recognises the multi-cultural nature of modern Christchurch and the need for provision of spaces within the park that reflect this cultural diversity. The Places of Tranquillity project led by Greening the Rubble and Healthy Christchurch is an example of this.
- 5.5 The significance of the river as a venue for showcasing contemporary culture and arts is also recognised within the vision, with potential provision for sculpture gardens, exhibitions, concerts and festivals. Organisations such as the Ministry of Awesome and River of Arts are working on initiatives in this area.

River Recreation: *Place of the Game*

- 6.1 “Ōtakaro” can be translated as “place of the game” this is very appropriate for the AvON vision as the river has a long history as a place of recreation and sport. Activities range from casual recreationists using the river corridor for walking, jogging, fishing, cycling and, in more modern times, roller blading and skateboarding, to water-based sporting activities such as rowing, dragon boating, canoeing and kayaking, waka ama, sailing, wind and kite surfing. Events such as the Christchurch Marathon and City-to-Surf have also passed through what is now the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone. The river and estuary also has a long history as a prime location for recreational bird-watching.
- 6.2 The AvON vision includes provision for the development of walk ways, dog trails, cycle ways and bike trails from city to sea along the river corridor. Safe cycle commuter routes could be readily incorporated into these networks. There is significant capacity to link up with other planned and existing networks of cycle and walk ways such as the proposed Papawai Ōtakaro-Avon River Park in the CBD, Coastal Pathways, Burwood Forest, Styx River and Waimakariri River Regional Park. Such a continuous network within and around the city has tremendous tourism potential.
- 6.3 AvON recognises the opportunity to address the previous overcrowding and safety issues at Kerrs Reach and the need to replace the Kerrs Reach amenities that were recently destroyed by fire. There is now the potential for a flat water sports facility within the proposed River Park and an associated Avon hub supporting complementary sporting interests such as biking. Some of the redundant roading network within the red zone could be also re-developed as a safe road training circuit for cyclists.
- 6.4 The AvON vision would enable the establishment of a ‘recreational precinct’ in the east based around the lower Ōtakaro-Avon corridor, estuary and beaches with the primary focus here on family recreation on and around water, rather than on competitive sports, although the latter would be very much part of any proposed flat water sports facility.
- 6.5 We are supported in this area by the various sporting bodies represented in the Avon River Corridor Users Group and Sport Canterbury.

River Sustenance: *Food for Body, Mind and Spirit*

- 7.1 AvON recognises the excellent fertility of the soils in much of the red zone and the need to make provision for food production and to promote food resilience and sustainability by means of local community gardens and allotments. Canterbury Community Gardens Association provides expertise in this area.
- 7.2 The AvON vision recognises the value of the river and estuary as a food-gathering resource of particular cultural significance to tangata whenua, but also valued by whitebaiters and shell fish harvesters of all cultures. The proposed vision has the potential for the restoration of mahinga kai within the Ōtakaro-Avon River system including Te Ihutai-Estuary.
- 7.3 The AvON vision provides multiple learning environments for school students at all levels, including postgraduate research, in the fields of ecology, horticulture, geology, history, food

production, gardening, tourism, urban renewal, etc. The proposed river park is a natural field classroom and a living laboratory. Our vision is endorsed by the Enviroschools Foundation and the New Zealand Association for Environmental Education. We are also supported by staff from both Canterbury and Lincoln Universities.

- 7.4 The spiritual significance of the river for all cultures is also recognised in the AvON vision. The river has been used by many as a place of tranquillity, refuge, peace, comfort and spiritual renewal for countless years. The vision seeks to restore and enhance this. River of Life is a founding member organisation of the Avon-Ōtakaro Network.

River Communities

- 8.1 It is well recognised that the earthquakes have taken a terrible toll on communities, particularly those in and adjoining the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone. Some communities are fast disappearing, others have been split in two, and others find themselves alongside a large tract of land with an uncertain future. There is much exhaustion, anxiety and despair in these communities.
- 8.2 Despite Minister Brownlee's expressed concerns regarding the sensitivities of those still making decisions regarding the vacation of their red zone properties, our experience indicates that the vision of a river park provides enormous comfort and peace when dealing with the grief of having to leave the family home. Certainty about the future use of the lands would make the decision to move on much easier.
- 8.3 To this end, we ask the Government to make definitive and timely decisions regarding the long-term future use of residential red zone lands as soon as practically possible to provide certainty, comfort and confidence for those having to abandon the lands and those living in adjoining communities. In the interim we ask that nothing is undertaken that precludes the use of the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone lands as a river park and temporary public use of the lands should be permitted when they are safe for access for short term community development projects.
- 8.4 The AvON vision promotes the reserve and river park as a permanent memorial to those who lost their lives and homes in the earthquakes. The inclusion of memorials within the park and the retention of community landmarks are seen as positive attributes that allow the expression of grief, hope, identity and community connections. Commemorative events based on the river such as the River of Flowers organised jointly by Healthy Christchurch and AvON in February 2012 are also recognised as critical to the healing process for communities.
- 8.5 The AvON vision also supports opportunities for communities to gather and regroup and refocus on the positive. It provides important respite from the present and hope for the future and as such regenerates community wellbeing, strength and resilience. It enables the establishment of new connections both within and between communities and the maintenance of old connections within the remaining communities and those that are now dispersed. It also provides a shared vision that re-unites communities from the east and west of the city in a common purpose.
- 8.6 Healthy Christchurch, One Voice *Te Reo Kotahi* and CanCERN support the AvON vision by providing the networks and expertise in the realm of community development and wellbeing.

River Economies

- 9.1 The vision provides a framework for the economic recovery of the eastern communities with training and employment opportunities, tourism and business potential, food production, urban renewal and restoration of property values. New Brighton's prime location at the eastern end of the Ōtakaro-Avon corridor could benefit greatly from the implementation of the AvON vision, with enormous potential to develop as a significant business hub for tourism and hospitality.
- 9.2 Wealth generation and savings on health, water management, land remediation and redevelopment can potentially offset the costs of such a project. There is need for a robust and comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the vision (perhaps using Planning Balance Sheet methodologies) to provide a clear evidential basis for decision making.

- 9.3 To this end AvON has applied to the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust for funding for a postgraduate research project to meet this need. AvON is also liaising with other researchers who can contribute to this analysis.

The AvON Process:

“To work with the people and local authorities of Christchurch”

Engaged Communities Driving the Process: Principles of Community Engagement

- 10.1 AvON endorses and seeks to implement the Principles of Community Engagement as detailed in the Charter published by CanCERN in 2011*, co-signed by a broad alliance of organisations and referenced in CERA’s Recovery Strategy. These include principles of inclusivity, accessibility, local empathy, continuity, efficiency, influence, transparency, accountability and resourcing.
- 10.2 Community Engagement must be community–driven (bottom-up, grass-roots), genuine (have influence), and permeate all plans and programmes throughout all steps along the recovery timeline. We ask the Government to allow networks such as AvON to play a central role as communication conduits/facilitators in these processes.
- 10.3 There needs to be a genuine willingness of recovery agencies, planners, etc to meaningfully engage, liaise and consult with AvON and communities of interest with respect to any project, plan or programme that may impact the implementation of the AvON vision.

An Integrated Package for the AvON Corridor

- 11.1 Using the above engagement model AvON works with all the diverse communities of interest through a process that seeks resolution of conflicting priorities and navigates pathways toward a total integrated vision that provides the most benefits for all concerned.
- 11.2 In doing so we present to recovery agencies an integrated package of potential projects consistent with AvON’s vision, and a service for networking and engaging with communities of interest.

An Integrated Recovery Plan for the East

- 12.1 We ask the Government to ensure an overarching area-wide recovery plan is developed for the eastern suburbs, integrating local plans into a whole rather than taking a piecemeal approach eg the plan for New Brighton should not be developed in isolation, but in the context of this overall plan.
- 12.2 This is particularly important because of the very significant degree to which these parts of the city have been impacted by the earthquakes and because of the diversity of recovery agencies with different responsibilities that need to be coordinated.
- 12.3 The AvON vision can provide a fundamental connected physical and thematic framework for the development of an integrated recovery plan for the eastern communities. The river provides the lifeline and the back bone upon which the recovery of the east can be built.
- 12.4 This plan for the east needs to include all the focal areas of recovery and redevelopment itemised under the AvON Vision above. This plan in turn needs to dovetail into recovery plans and strategies for the city as a whole.

* a copy of the Charter of Community Engagement Principles can be viewed at:
<http://www.cancern.org.nz/our-engagement-model-and-the-charter/>

The AvON Request

“We respectfully ask the House of Representatives”

We respectfully ask the House of Representatives to work with the people and local authorities of Christchurch to ensure that the Ōtakaro-Avon River red zone becomes a reserve and river park when the home owners have to leave: Ōtakaro-Avon River Park.

At this time this specially means:

- Greater involvement of communities in the planning and strategy development of Christchurch's future, including a strategy to implement the vision for the Ōtakaro-Avon River Park.
- No short-term decisions being made now that may compromise the vision for the Ōtakaro-Avon River Park.
- Work with AvON and communities to provide to CERA and insurance companies information on retention of heritage items for incorporation in the Ōtakaro-Avon River Park
- Once cleared and made safe, short-term productive and community-based uses of the land be allowed and encouraged in the interim, including community development events, rather than it being left as an unoccupied waste land.
- Definitive and timely decisions regarding the long-term future use of residential red zone lands as soon as practically possible.

We thank you for your consideration of these requests.

