



22 April, 2013

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Comment on Draft Land Use Recovery Plan for Greater Christchurch

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Draft Land Use Recovery Plan for Greater Christchurch*.

As Children's Commissioner, I have a statutory responsibility to advocate for children's interests, rights and welfare, including advancing and monitoring the application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) the State and other Crown instruments. My powers, functions and responsibilities are contained in the Children's Commissioner Act 2003.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the people who lost their lives and the losses and pain of all people in Christchurch and Canterbury who have suffered as a result of the earthquakes. I note that many children were relocated as a result of the earthquake and many have suffered emotional trauma. There is a chance now, though, for the Greater Christchurch region to rebuild and look to a brighter future. The rebuild and redevelopment of Greater Christchurch is an unprecedented opportunity to incorporate children's interests and wellbeing in a more visionary and integrated way. The *Land Use Recovery Plan* provides one such opportunity.

The *Land Use Recovery Plan* is critical to providing the necessary framework and guidance for how to best resolve the immediate recovery issues of land availability for housing and business and related infrastructure requirements such as transport and community centres.

Benefits of giving consideration to children's interests and wellbeing. Children and young people are important users of local authority services including public transport and recreational and cultural facilities such as libraries and swimming pools. As such children and young people have a strong interest in the design, control and delivery of these facilities and services. Not only do children and young people have a right to a voice in local governance arrangements and in the planning and delivery of services, evidence shows that when they are involved, the resulting policies and services are more relevant, efficient and enduring when their views are considered.

By giving greater priority to the interests and voices of young people (0-18 years), we will help ensure Greater Christchurch is recognised on the international stage as a region that supports and nurtures its youngest citizens. It will be seen as a great place for children, young people and their families to live. This would help attract and retain talented young people, families and investment.

Currently, the *Land Use Recovery Plan* does not explicitly discuss the needs and interests of children.

Incorporating the interests and views of children into your planning processes need not be a daunting undertaking. There are many toolkits and framework already available to support this. For example, the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities/Communities (CFC) framework provides building blocks that you can start with one, and add to over time (see <http://www.childfriendlycities.org/>). CFC translates the process needed to implement the UNCROC by national governments into a local government process while adapting to local conditions. Taking steps to make Greater Christchurch more child-friendly is very achievable and would certainly, in my view, would strengthen the *Land Use Recovery Plan* and the resulting projects.

Recommendation 1: *I recommend that partners of the Land Use Recovery Plan adopt a UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Framework as a way of achieving better outcomes for Greater Christchurch's children and young people.*

Built and Natural Environment. The *Land Use Recovery Plan* has an important role to play to help ensure that the recovery and rebuild supports social well-being and facilitates social cohesion, rather than leads to social polarization. It is essential to have a region that is safe and promotes social cohesion in the population, including children and young people. Societies with better social cohesion have better health outcomes overall (see, for example: www.cabe.org.uk/public-space/spaceshaper).

I am of the view that design assessments for all new public realm projects should be undertaken to assess and consider the needs of children, including disabled children. I recommend that partners of the *Land Use Recovery Plan* establish an process for such assessments, such as an Urban Design Panel. This Panel would have an important role to play to ensure that children's interests are considered and given weight when reviewing major development proposals, and I would support inclusion of a panel member with expertise on child-friendly built environments. I also recommend the Panel include consultation with children and young people in their process.

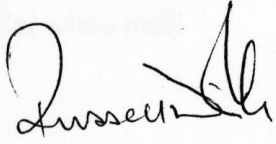
Recommendation 2: *I recommend that design assessments for all new public realm projects are undertaken to assess and consider the needs of children, particularly disabled children.*

As I stated above, there are tangible benefits that result from consulting with children and young people. My office recently undertook consultation with children on their views of actions needed on child poverty. While much of what they said aligned closely to the recommendations of my Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty (see *Solutions to Child poverty in New Zealand: Evidence for Action*, at <http://www.occ.org.nz/>) the children identified an issue the experts missed: it relates to them having the opportunity to play with friends, even if they are poor. This reaffirmed to me the importance of having excellent, free recreation opportunities, especially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and I take this opportunity to share with you.

Recommendation 3: *I recommend that the development of recreational areas and green, open spaces are accorded priority in urban planning.*

Conclusion. As an emerging international region, it is appropriate that the Greater Christchurch region focuses on the future and makes provision for it. Placing children and young people at the centre of policy and planning for the next generation requires forward-looking planning and socially and environmentally sustainable policies. Building toward a child-friendly community benefits all of society, not just the youngest generation, helping to 'future-proof' the city and promotes vibrancy and a sense of community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the *Land Use Recovery Plan for Greater Christchurch*. I am happy to offer the involvement and assistance of my Office to help develop this work and seek the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further. If you require further information, please contact my Senior Advisor, Michelle Egan-Bitran on (09) 3746100 or at m.egan-bitran@occ.org.nz.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Wills". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a distinct 'W'.

Dr Russell Wills
Children's Commissioner