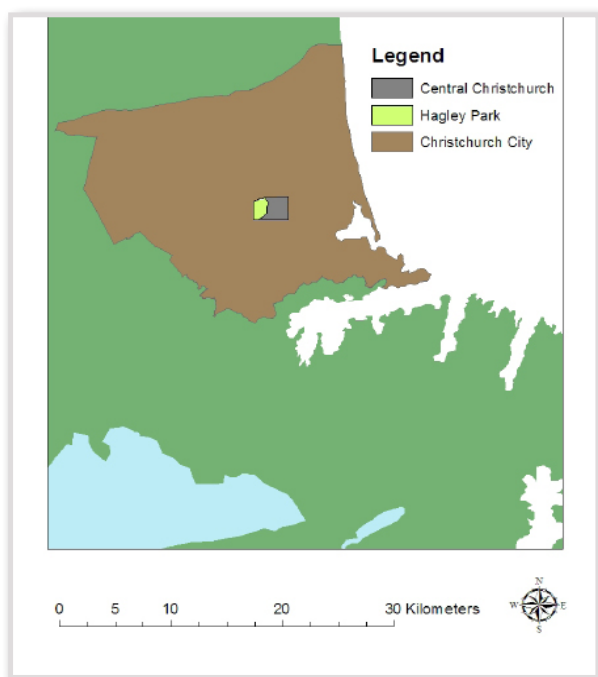


# Hagley Oval: Canterbury's Future Home of Test Cricket?

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## Introduction

The provision of recreational facilities is among the more important functions of local government. Their scale and location are often controversial as they can have significant positive and adverse effects on a community. Cricket is traditionally New Zealand's summer game, often televised and contributing to the culture of the nation through the deeds of its top players (including Sir Richard Hadlee, a Cantabrian who was knighted for his services to cricket), and controversies like the under-arm bowling incident (Australia vs NZ, 1981). It should therefore come as no surprise that seeking a new home for test cricket in Christchurch has created significant debate and been a subject of great interest for planners. This article places the issue in historical context and briefly reviews the range of options considered before evaluating the final choice based on the relevant planning matters.



*Hagley Park location map in relation to Central Christchurch and Christchurch city proper.*

*Source: Mark Burgess*

## Background

January 1930 was the first occasion that test cricket was played in Canterbury, with England beating New Zealand by eight wickets at Lancaster Park (Cricinfo, n.d.). Since this time, Lancaster Park (more recently known as Jade Stadium and AMI Stadium) has been the one and only home of test cricket in the area. However, since 2007 New Zealand cricket has opted to allocate test matches solely to smaller, more open and user-friendly grounds (such as Wellington's Basin Reserve, Napier's McLean Park, Hamilton's Seddon Park, and Dunedin's University Oval). This decision is based on dwindling support for the longer form of the game and the embarrassing television pictures which often highlight empty stadiums. Canterbury Cricket's search for a more appropriate venue for test matches dates back to well before 2007 (Longley, 2008). This search has been somewhat ad hoc, with no apparent formal evaluation process. Several possibilities have

been identified, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, but a final decision has now been made.

## The major contenders

Canterbury Agricultural Park (Curletts Road) became the location of choice for the previous Canterbury Cricket Chief Executive Richard Reid (Longley, 2009a). The proposal involved developing a completely new cricket ground within a facility that is currently used for livestock and horse sales and the Canterbury A&P Show. The major downfall of the proposal however was the estimated \$10million required to carry out the project (Longley, 2009b)

- The Village Green (QEII) is currently Canterbury Cricket's primary home ground for all forms of the game (Longley 2009a). This location was known to be the preferred choice of the Christchurch City Council (CCC) as recently as 2008 (CCC, 2008). The mix of modernised clubrooms and an open and relaxed atmosphere made the Village Green a strong candidate; however issues surrounding its small field size and location in relation to QEII Stadium (likely to create traffic congestion and limited parking during simultaneous events) were very apparent.
- Without doubt, Hagley Park (as a whole) is Canterbury's busiest and most important cricket ground with its first use dating back to the early 1850s (Wilson et al., 2005). The premier cricket facility in Hagley Park is Hagley Oval which has been used since the 1860s. It has hosted nearly every form of the game with levels ranging from junior cricket right up to international tour matches. Major strengths of this location are the existing facilities at the ground, the relatively cheap conversion cost, and the history and relaxed atmosphere it encompasses. The most talked about planning issues relate to parking, traffic, the right of the public to use the park, the building of permanent structures/landscape alterations, and effects on the three cricket clubs currently based on the Oval (Longley, 2009a; Longley, 2009b; Longley, 2008).
- The idea to develop the Christ College grounds directly opposite to Hagley Oval became popular in 2003 (McConnell, 2003). Other areas of South Hagley Park were also thrown up as possibilities but the major downfalls of these ideas were cost and size (Longley, 2008).

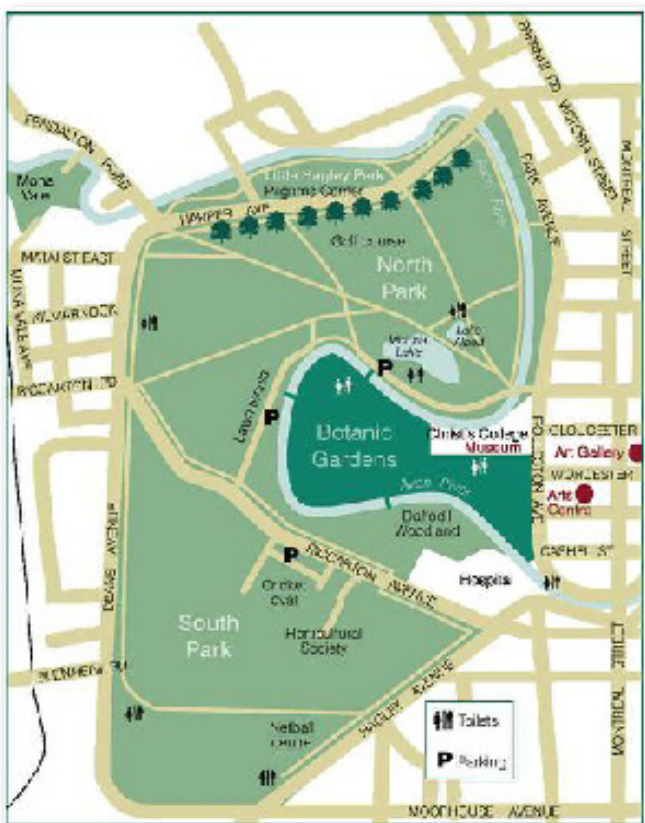
## The final choice

Released in 2009, the Christchurch City Council Long Term Council Community Plan 2009-2019 (LTCCP) was the first major planning document released by the CCC showing consensus support for the development of Hagley Oval. The LTCCP allocates a total of \$954,000 (\$49,000 for 2009 and \$905,000 for 2010) towards the development of the Oval (CCC, 2009). It is expected that this figure will have to be at least matched by the Canterbury Cricket Trust to make proposed designs possible (Longley, 2009b). This represented a significant change in stance by CCC and Canterbury Cricket. Hagley Oval therefore appears to be a compromise solution, but one with strong arguments in its favour.

## Relevant planning documents

The planning issues associated with the ground might appear to be significant limiting factors; however these planning issues are given little regulatory effect in the relevant statutory planning documents.

Hagley Oval, along with the bulk of Hagley Park, is zoned under the Christchurch City Plan as Open Space 2, a zone set aside for areas of 'district recreation and open space'. On the face of it, such zoning might appear anathema to a major test venue, but the move from stadia to more open, family friendly test venues enables the concept to fit the zoning. Also, with very few specific rules relating to the Open Space 2 zone in the plan, and the full backing of the CCC (through the LTCCP), the major aspects of the proposal are likely to cause little concern (despite consents possibly being required depending on the final design). These include renovating the existing Old Boys' Collegians Cricket Club clubrooms, construction of new toilet facilities, laying a new wicket block, the creation of a small raised grass embankment, the generation of traffic, and putting in place temporary fencing and seating for the duration of matches (Longley, 2009a). The public however may have a different view on things, especially if there are diggers and trucks continually shifting equipment, undertaking earthworks, and other construction activity (concerns that were expressed during the LTCCP submission process).



Hagley Park. Source: [http://resources.ccc.govt.nz/files/hagley\\_park-popularparks.pdf](http://resources.ccc.govt.nz/files/hagley_park-popularparks.pdf)

The other most relevant planning document is the Hagley Park Management Plan 2007, which is prepared under the Reserves Act 1997. This Plan outlines the goals and intended uses of the different areas of Hagley Park. One of the major components of

this document is the emphasis placed on ensuring public access to the park is kept to the maximum. However, the Plan does also recognise the important use of Hagley Oval for organised and recreational sporting activities (CCC, 2007).

## Negative aspects

It appears the most significant planning issue that requires further attention is the lack of availability of parking and the subsequent generation of traffic in surrounding areas. The Hagley Park Management Plan 2007 clearly outlines that the Park has insufficient car parks to meet demand, especially when sports or special events are held. Despite efficient public transport being available, the shortage of car parking areas is well known to create high levels of 'indiscriminate' parking and serious impacts on traffic flow (CCC, 2007).

In an article written by Geoff Longley (2009a), CCC manager of sports and recreation John Filsell stated that CCC parking buildings would help cater for cars on the day. This is despite crowd numbers being expected to reach 5000-7000 (Longley, 2009b). Filsell's comments are interesting when you consider that the two parking buildings most likely to be used (Hospital and Rolleston Avenue car parks) have a combined total of 464 available spaces to the general public (and work force) as a whole (CCC, n.d.). Even when combined with the onsite Hagley Oval and Canterbury Horticulture Centre car parks (a total of 235 parks likely to be allocated to players, match managers, corporate guests, and so on), the Botanic Gardens car park (350 spaces), the United car park (200 spaces), and nearby on-street parking (which there is a considerable lack of), the supply is still well short of the possible demand (CCC, 2007). It must be stressed that the car parks mentioned are already at or near capacity on a regular basis.



Hagley Oval. Source: CCC, 2007

The Hagley Park Management Plan makes mention of investigations into developing new permanent parking facilities on Hagley Park land. However, the Christchurch City Council (Reserves) Empowering Act 1971, and a strong body of public support for this Act, has ensured such proposals have not been developed and are not likely in the future (CCC, 2007). No mention has been given to providing parking on grassed areas, a concept that makes many North Hagley events (with crowd numbers well in excess of what is being proposed here) possible. The extent to which such parking on South Hagley would detract from the open space and general public use appears not to have been researched in any depth. However, there appears to be general acceptance of on-grass parking for other events such as the annual Ellerslie Flower Show (North Hagley).



## Positive aspects

Despite its shortcomings, there are many aspects of the Hagley Oval proposal that make it very appealing to both players and spectators alike. Not the least of these is the enforced recognition Hagley Oval will receive as the home of cricket in Canterbury. After a match played between Canterbury and a touring England team at Hagley Oval in 2002, it was reported that, "It defies logic, and the best intentions of the city planners who designated Hagley Park for the community's recreation, that there is no place for a possible representative venue at the Park" (McConnell, 2002).

Hagley Oval is currently the permanent home of two cricket clubs (St. Albans and Riccarton) and the secondary home of another (Old Boys' Collegians), each with their own pavilion on the ground. The Christchurch City Plan and the Hagley Park Management Plan allow for the development of such facilities that may have exclusive and/or specialist use. These agreements are formalised through a lease or licence and are subject to imposed conditions. Support from these parties has been achieved through assurances that the development and use of the Oval as a test match facility will in no way impact on the club cricket schedule or their rights to the facilities (Longley, 2009a; Longley, 2009b; Longley, 2008). Along with the full time caretaker (who lives on the Oval perimeter), the on-site clubs have ensured that the facilities of the Oval are maintained to a high standard, making conversion costs relatively cheap compared to that of other venues (Longley, 2008).



*The historic Canterbury Cricket Umpires Pavilion on Hagley Oval – built in 1864 it is believed to be the oldest remaining sports building in New Zealand. Source: Adrienne Lomax*

## Comment

Is the best of a bad lot good enough in this situation? This is the question the major players have to ponder in regard to this proposal. As a mad cricketer who has clung to a bat ever since I was strong enough to lift one, I believe you would be hard pressed to find majority support within the cricket fraternity for any ground other than Hagley Oval. Despite this, the planner inside me also raises serious questions about the feasibility of this venue. While central locations are home to many major

sporting grounds worldwide, the majority of these grounds survive through much more highly used public transport networks or well designed private transport infrastructure. As outlined above, Hagley Oval is definitely not conducive to major private transport based events. However, it appears the final decision has been made by CCC and we can expect to see test cricket played at the oval in the near future.

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