



In the second semester of 2011 the third year Bachelor of Environmental Management and Planning students taking the Professional Practice course (SOCI 314) were set an assignment to write a short, topical article of local interest. This related directly to the content of the course SOCI 314, which provides a critical study of issues in the provision of professional services in environmental planning, design, social sciences, tourism, sport and recreation. As part of the assessment the articles were subject to the LPR review processes.

Proposed Highfield Subdivision Development.

By Craig Davison

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Background:

The recent earthquakes in Canterbury have left thousands of Christchurch residents' homeless or facing the possibility of homelessness. The New Zealand Government, so far, have announced that 5,100 homes in Christchurch will have to be abandoned as a result of earthquake damaged land (Christchurch City Council, 2011). They have been zoned red on the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) map and there are another 10,000 that have been zoned orange, awaiting a decision (Christchurch City Council, 2011). This situation has placed pressures on land developers and local authorities to speed up the process associated with the development of proposed subdivisions in Christchurch to accommodate residents in this situation (Tarrant, 2011).

Highfield Park:

The proposed Highfield Park subdivision is one of more than 15 new subdivisions in Christchurch and surrounding areas including Prebbleton, Lincoln and Marshlands (McDonald, 2011). The developers, Highfield Park Limited, have identified a site known as the Mills Hills block for the development and have the option of purchasing 90 percent of the land from its 15 individual owners (McDonald, 2011). The land in question is larger than Hagley Park comprising a 180 hectare semi-rural block located to the north of central Christchurch. It borders Redwood to the west, Hills and Hawkins Roads to the east, the Styx River to the north and Queen Elizabeth Drive to the South (McDonald, 2011). The site comprises elevated land that has been zoned green on the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority map (Highfield Park, 2011). There has been no occurrence of liquefaction from the recent earthquakes in Canterbury at this site and the land will be engineered prior to the building of houses with the most up to date compaction and fill techniques (Highfield Park, 2011). The developers are endeavouring to have the land, presently zoned rural, rezoned for housing and obtain the relevant resource consents (McDonald, 2011). In 2009, the site was deemed suitable for new housing by Environment Canterbury. It has been approved, but not yet zoned for residential housing (Tarrant, 2011).

It has been confirmed that there is enough potential land for development in Christchurch to provide up to 6,000 homes (Christchurch City Council, 2011) and Highfield Park, would account for 2,400 of this. The developers are optimistic and are expecting the first packages to be available within the next 12 – 18 months (Highfield Park, 2011). The Highfield Park plan (Figure 1) will include a diverse range of housing, and offer a variety of living options that are designed to cater for different market requirements. The design includes a mixture of housing densities, a retirement village, open space, including central reserve with a swale and ponds to manage storm water, and four commercial areas including shops, cafes or childcare centres (Highfield Park, 2011). Prices would start from \$275, 000 to \$1,000,000 plus.



Figure 1: Highfield Park Master Plan (Source: Highfield Park, 2011)

Planning Issues Surrounding Highfield Park Development:

The proposed Highfield Park development, if approved, would require the extension of the boundaries within Christchurch’s urban development strategy, *The Greater*

Christchurch Urban Development Strategy, and the *Proposed Change 1 to the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement* (McDonald, 2011) because Mills-Hills block/Highfield is located outside the present urban growth boundary (Figure 2). The prospect of the subdivision has also met with opposition from the residents and community in the surrounding proximity of the development site (McDonald, 2011).

Main Issue – Urban Growth Boundaries:

The Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy 2007:

In 2007, Environment Canterbury, Christchurch City Council, Selwyn District Council, Waimakariri District Council and the NZ Transport Agency produced *The Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy* (Tarrant, 2011). It is an approach to growth management with an emphasis on transportation and land use planning (Environment Canterbury, 2007). It is an attempt to address the problems that are caused while Christchurch and greater Christchurch continue to develop and expand. Its purpose is to manage the growth that is expected in the region by 2041 sustainably (Environment Canterbury, 2007). The Strategy has a vision for Greater Christchurch to have enhanced lifestyles, enhanced environments, prosperous economies, managed growth and integrated and collaborative leadership (Environment Canterbury, 2007).

Canterbury Regional Policy Statement Proposed Change 1 (Urban Development Strategy):

The *Proposed Change 1 of the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement* provides statutory backing to the *Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy 2007*, but it is not yet operative (Environment Canterbury, 2008). It addresses land use and urban growth management in Greater Christchurch for the next 35 years and sets urban growth boundaries to enforce the Strategy (Tarrant, 2011). The Change has been met with appeals and opposition from developers who are seeking to include additional land within the Urban Development Strategy's urban limits (Environment Canterbury, 2011).

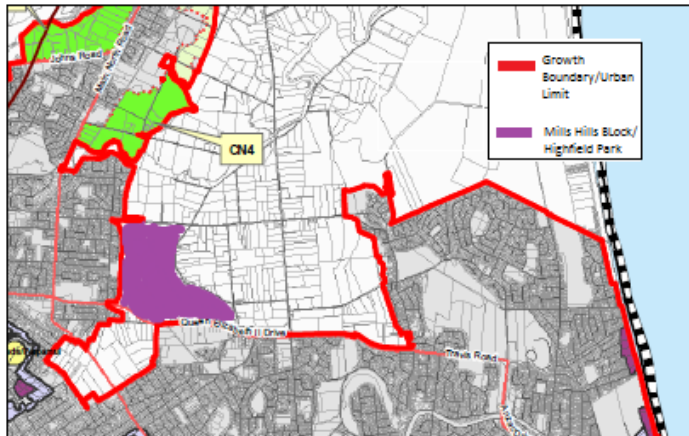


Figure 2: Location of Mills Hills Block/Highfield Outside the Urban Growth Boundary (Source: Adapted from Environment Canterbury, 2008)

Highfield Park Limited has appealed mainly on the basis of the timing that the development in certain areas can occur. Highfield Park is seeking to have land reclassified as residential within the regions urban boundaries (Environment Canterbury, 2011).

Prior to the series of devastating earthquakes that Canterbury has experienced, Environment Canterbury,

Christchurch City Council and other councils in the region, were against the idea of pushing out the urban limits

within the strategy to allow for additional subdivision developments (Environment Canterbury, 2011). Environment Canterbury has made a request to the Environment Court to approve extending the boundaries that are specified presently that restrict new housing development sites to provide additional land for potential developments (Tarrant, 2011). The outcomes will be incorporated into the *Canterbury Regional Policy Statement as Chapter 12A, Development of Greater Christchurch* (Environment Canterbury, 2010). The chapter will provide statutory Resource Management Act 1991 backing for the *Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy*. If the consent is granted, it would extend the boundaries allowing Highfield Park to be developed, as well as additional subdivisions such as Prestons, which is a planned development with 2700 sections in Marshland close to Highfield Park (Tarrant, 2011).

Other Issues:

Opposition From Surrounding Community:

The current residents who live in the semi-rural area are concerned that their relaxed lifestyle will be ruined if the planned Highfield subdivision goes ahead (McDonald, 2011). The development would leave rural residents without the right to have farm animals and other rural benefits. The rezoning would apply to the whole area (McDonald, 2011) and would have implications for local residents who own land within the subdivision land and have no intentions of selling it. They are concerned that the development would increase rates, traffic, and noise and create overcrowding in the area (McDonald, 2011). The development would change the nature of the area, as it essentially means the urbanisation of greenfield land (Environment Canterbury, 2011).

Conclusion:

The Canterbury region has experienced an unexpected series of events which has created an unprecedented demand for additional land and housing developments in Christchurch. This raises some questions about local authorities' degree of readiness for such events with the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy highlighting some interesting tensions associated with strategic planning and disasters. The strategy is based on pre-earthquake collaborative work that identified suitable areas for future development, according to known risks, population projects and the like. Importantly, however, the UDS was not intended to be rolled out so rapidly and with so little regard for the inner city development (which was assumed to be similar). Given all the work and research that went into the UDS, it is difficult to imagine developing such a strategy in the chaotic aftermath of a disaster when time and resources are stretched. Yet many of the assumptions underlying the formation of the strategy no longer apply. Further, there is a lack of co-ordination between inner city re-development plans and suburban growth. Thus, despite the focus of the UDS of managed growth, ironically, we may end up with a hollow centre and a suburban landscape of developments like Highfield Park driving the sprawl the UDS was designed to combat. The alternative of no or slow growth is equally unpalatable given the unprecedented demand for housing following the quakes. The lesson here is to consider this tension between strategy and flexibility in our plans.

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