

CHRISTCHURCH 2011 – VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A year after the September '10 earthquake, *NZRetail* asked leading Christchurch business people to describe their vision for their city's future – and tell us what is needed to achieve it.

In the October 2011 issue of *NZRetail*, Martin Craig reported on the opinions of several prominent businessmen and women on the situation in Christchurch one year on from the first quake. In this issue, he investigates the visions for the future and ways to achieve them.

Firstly, we thank the following people for their time and input into this Q&A update.

Our thanks to:

Steve Anderson, chief executive, Foodstuffs South Island.

Mary Devine, managing director, J. Ballantyne & Co..

Evan Harris, director, Colliers International.

Rick Hellings, managing director, Smiths City Group.

Nick Hopper & Julie Webb, owners, Caravan, Camping & Marine.

Paul Lonsdale, manager and project manager for the Central City Business Association ReStart Project.

Marion McKellow, owner, Marion McKellow Jewellery.

Peter Townsend, chief executive, Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce.

Q: What is your vision for the rebuilt Christchurch 2.0?

Steve Anderson: "After the earthquake it went through my mind – what's the point of Christchurch? Do you need to rebuild it? And quite clearly, after the earthquake, its reason for being is still there. It's the logistics hub in terms of the port and the airport. It's got a rural hinterland around it and those cows are still being milked. Tourists are still coming – not in the same numbers – but the South Island is just as beautiful as it was. So, there's every reason to reinvest and feel positive about the future of Christchurch. Its reason for being is just as valid as it was prior to the earthquake."

Paul Lonsdale: "The CBD is the heart and, without a heart, how do you know who you are? It's a centre of arts, culture, sport – and

brings people in for all those reasons. People say we could just build a mall in the CBD and that will solve it, but that's not a CBD. A CBD does have a different offer to a mall. We will incubate that and start with unique boutique retailers and bring in the entertainment sector.

"The CBD's got to be accessible, with a supply of good parking. It's got to have a denser retail offer – and a precinct mentality would be a good fit. The aim is to make each area more vibrant with a concentration of different activities in each area.

Evan Harris says the predicted residential growth areas will be in Christchurch's north and south-west towards Rolleston. "Colliers just did

terms of buildings. It will have better flow to Hagley Park and, where there can be no rebuilding, will be parks – and that will occur organically over time.

"There will be a strong emphasis on clustered development and we're already seeing an IT cluster and a health cluster. We will see iconic retail centred on Ballantynes with high-quality office accommodation above the retail. There will be residential properties inside the four Avenues in a way that hasn't occurred in the past. The river will be a focal point to the city in the way that heritage was iconic in the past."

Rick Hellings: "By 2020 we will be well down the track for a

"...there's every reason to reinvest and feel positive about the future of Christchurch. Its reason for being is just as valid as it was prior to the earthquake." – Steve Anderson

a survey of displaced businesses and 76 per cent of them said they would go back to the CBD. So, you will have a CBD but it will be a lot smaller. You'll have a concise retail heart centred around Ballantynes and going out for a couple of blocks.

"I hope they don't say we can never have high-rise, because nobody was killed in any of the high-rises. They did get damaged but they did what they were designed to do and saved lives. In 15 years, if someone wants to build a high-rise, if it's safe and tenants want to go into it, why shouldn't they? I hope the Council don't say five or six storeys forever because that would make a boring city from an appearance point of view."

Peter Townsend: "In five to ten years we will have a downtown – I won't call it a CBD, it will be much less densely populated than it was in

unique city experience. There's no one else who's had the opportunity to do what we're doing here. There would be no excuse if we got it wrong. And, in the meantime, it will be a great place for people to live – especially for talented young people with lots of work in a beautiful environment.

"There will some areas that need considerable planning ... Sydenham, for example, was predominantly old buildings and cheaper rentals and it will be rebuilt with new ideas. That gives an opportunity – do young people want to live in the suburbs, or in apartments near the central city? That in itself creates a hub of excitement.

"We don't want the city to miss the opportunity; for bickering or infighting to get in the way of the vision. We have the opportunity to

make something special – we owe it to the poor people who lost their lives to make it unique and special. That's the vision across the city. It's about building something for 50 years' time, not rebuilding what we had before."

Mary Devine: "You look at your business and ask: how do you de-risk going forward? We will look at other [site] options – and not only in Christchurch. When we do something, we want to do it for the long term and do it in a Ballantynes' way, so we don't want to react for a short-term need.

"The investment coming into the city over the next five-ten years is significant. If we can all harness that as a city – as a region – to optimise that investment is very important. You can't look at the CBD on its own; you've got to look at the prosperity of the city and the region – and what's going to drive the economic value is fundamental.

"The CBD had become very spread out and we're encouraged it will be smaller and more open to the Avon. Access and car parking is something we've been conscious of; over time, there will be an increase in public transport but it won't be immediate and I think you've got to have the right services to cater for the need that is there."



VISIONS OF CITY'S FUTURE

- A concise retail heart centred around Ballantynes.
- Great place for people to live.
- Smaller, more open to the Avon.
- Clustered development.
- Unique city experience.

Marion McKellow: “I would hope there would be a rebuild around a theme that would be attractive to the city. I really hope we don’t see oddball buildings and shops popping up with no attention to the design. We’ve got some great architects with very good plans and ideas put forward and I really, really, hope enough time is taken – so the rebuild is so attractive that people want to come to Christchurch and see what we’ve done. That will be when Christchurch thrives.

“I would hate to see the city the way it was, because there was room for huge improvement. We didn’t actually have a style at all and I would hate to see Christchurch be style-less. We don’t want to see a Square like it was before, with a whole lot of concrete – with these stalls stuck in the middle of it, because it was very unfriendly. We want to feel safe. We don’t want high-rise buildings, we want lower buildings – and I think a mix of retail and living and coffee shops to plan for would be a great combination.”

“... a mix of retail and living and coffee shops to plan for would be a great combination.” – *Marion McKellow*

Q: What will it take to achieve the vision, starting from here?

Julie Webb: “The first thing we need is for the aftershocks to stop!”

Peter Townsend: “Realistically, we are looking (at) 20 years to rebuild the city. If we took a ten-year time frame to recover the central city, and you wanted to replace all the commercial buildings that have been destroyed, we would have to open a commercial building every three days for ten years. Now we don’t need to replace all 1300 buildings but, whatever way you look at it, it’s big.

“One of the conundrums is that we are one of the best-insured cities

ever to have a disaster of this proportion anywhere in the world, which is great because Christchurch will be the recipient of this huge cash flow.

“Delay is the cancer that eats away at recovery because the longer the delay, the more difficult it is to recover. The delay is caused by land stability, insurance and by aftershocks – 7700 of them. My insurance company isn’t interested in repairing my house until the aftershocks have finished, even though I’m on green zone land – and that is typical of all of us.

“In the third quarter of 2012, the reconstruction will require an additional 30,000 labour units and that’s something like 50,000 people coming to Christchurch. It’s a sort of a gold rush and it will have an enormous economic impact on the city.”

Steve Anderson: “One of the biggest risks we have is that, in time, both businesses and individuals will get paid up and get a big cheque in the mail. We need to do our utmost to help them to reinvest in

Christchurch. We need to be very careful we don’t add additional costs through bureaucracy and the like so people don’t take the money and go to the North Island or Australia.

“There’s another 6-18 months of survival and planning mode and then we’ll be almost in the opposite mode – where everybody’s going to be working flat tack. That will bring its challenges because we are going to need new people to come in and bring the skills; and it’s going to cause skills shortages in other areas. If an unskilled worker can get a job on a building site and be trained-up at higher rates, then that’s going to



cause issues for us as employers.”

Mary Devine: “We know we can pull a significant number of customers through our doors so, if we can nurture that for other retailers around us, it gives a degree of protection. I’m confident there will be a strong inner city retail business again. Commercial businesses are dying to get back into the inner city – the novelty has worn off.”

Marion McKellow: “It will take time for people to know whether they can get reinsurance. The challenge, I feel, is getting everyone to agree, –because there are so many good ideas and so many different landlords and insurance companies. It is about trying to come to an agreement about what we are going to do and how we are going to do it, rather than going off on our own tangents. It’s really being able to tie the whole thing together. It’s been achieved elsewhere; surely it can be achieved here for the good of a well-designed city and a city that functions.”

Rick Hellings: “Our CBD store was 9000 m2 and will be half that when we reopen. We own the land and are insured to rebuild, so we have many options with what to do. People like us, with a \$21m investment in the land, are not going to be rushed. We’re going to rebuild but the redevelopment is going to be a more patient issue. The total opportunity is bigger than

replacing what was there before.

“As we move forward, it’s up to leaders to ensure that we have a coordinated approach. I think the CBD IT hub is a fantastic effort with huge potential. And there’s no reason why we can’t get legal and accounting centres of excellence, too.”

Paul Lonsdale: “There needs to be a moratorium on retail space in the suburbs – for a period – to allow the CBD to get back in there. We’re not saying don’t allow the suburbs to expand, but don’t allow more growth for the next five years.

“We won’t rebuild on our own; we will need foreign investment. That’s just the reality today, just look at our population. If they can invest in our community and make it better, we can’t turn away from it.

“I think New Zealand has a role to play in the rebuild. Christchurch is critical to the viability of New Zealand and we all have a role to see our second largest city is back functioning sooner rather than later. We need the support of the New Zealand public to help us make that happen.

Christchurch still has a lot of struggle to go through.” ■

□ **Martin Craig** is a marketing strategist, researcher, business writer and owner of Splash Communications: splash@actrix.co.nz. He is a regular contributor to NZRetail magazine.