



CHRISTCHURCH 2009

PUBLIC SPACE PUBLIC LIFE - A Summary

GEHL ARCHITECTS



“Christchurch is a beautiful planned city with access to the river and the surrounding parks. Now it is time to understand the true value of the city’s great potential as an attractive living city for the 21st Century, and develop beautiful public spaces that will increase the number of people living in, using and caring for the city.”

Jan Gehl
Urban Designer

Public Space Public Life Study

In 2009 Danish urban designer Jan Gehl of Gehl Architects undertook a Public Space Public Life Study of Central Christchurch.

The study focused on the area bounded by Kilmore Street, St Asaph Street, Rolleston Avenue and Madras Street.

It considered how people used Christchurch's Central City spaces and streets, assessed the quality of the spaces in the Central City, where people walked and how public spaces could better sustain public life and create a better sense of community.

Similar studies have been undertaken in a number of the world's greatest cities – Dublin, Copenhagen, London, New York, Prague and Sydney.



Public space in the 21st Century

World-wide there has been a loss of valuable public space, the result of increased vehicle numbers, suburban sprawl and increased commuting.

Many public spaces have lost their original function, such as market places and places to meet. Increased space for cars has squeezed out “soft” social activities and public life has diminished along with it.

Cities which want lively, vibrant public spaces need to provide the space and put the needs of people first.



Stationary activity

The survey of stationary activities showed that sitting and standing were the most popular activities. Only Cathedral Square was found to have a reasonable amount of cultural and small scale commercial activities happening in the space. Few children were reported playing in the public spaces.

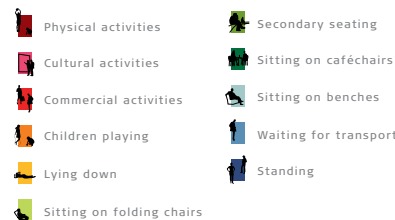
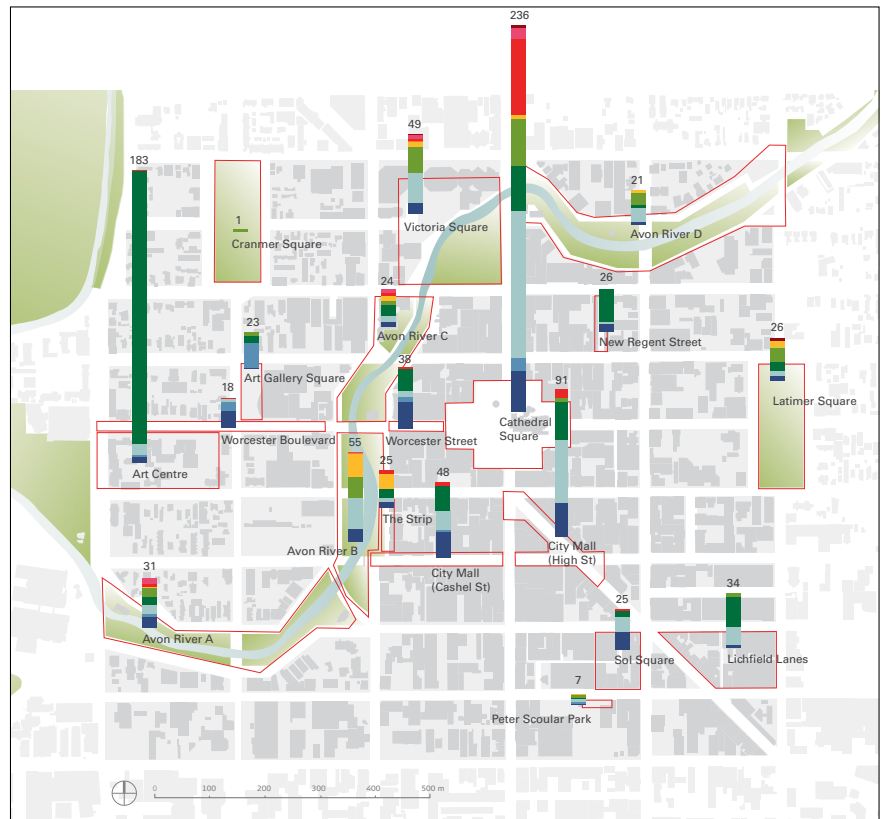
Other factors that influence the generally low number of people in the public spaces:

- Low pedestrian movement counts
- Quality of the public space
- Poor connectivity
- Low range of activities to partake in
- Low existing user population doesn't encourage more users; people are attracted to more people.

Absent user groups

The survey found a City primarily inhabited by young and middle-age people. Children and elderly are poorly represented.

This could be attributed to a lack of interesting destinations for these age groups, along with a lack of a coherent and easily accessible pedestrian network.



The average number of Stationary activities found between noon and 4pm at the surveyed locations on a summer weekday.



Percentage of people in public spaces by age.

Traffic volumes in Central City

“Visiting Christchurch today it is evident that there is a gridlock to be solved regarding priorities in the street user hierarchy.”

Traffic is especially heavy on the north–south one-way streets and Cambridge Terrace. These streets act as barriers for pedestrians, with up to 20 per cent of the traffic estimated to be through traffic.

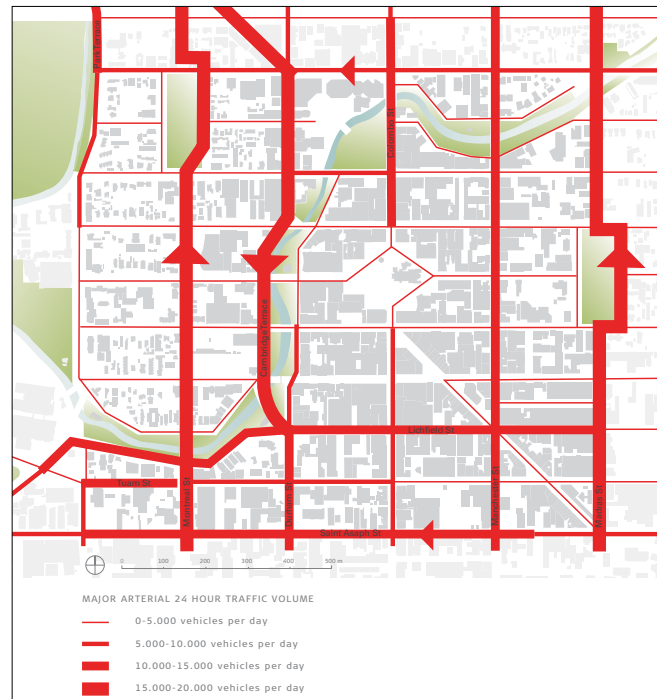
The Central City suffers from heavy through traffic, resulting in a decline in the quality of public spaces.

Hard times for cyclists in Christchurch

“Cycling is all about opportunities. Cycling is an attractive alternative transport mode – cheap and an excellent way of exercising. In cities world wide, cyclists increase in numbers where conditions for cycling are safe and attractive.”

Unfortunately, the cycle network in the Central City is incomplete, making it unsafe to bike, since a cyclist may be riding in a cycle lane for a couple of blocks and then find they are riding in-between moving cars again.

The painted line denoting a cycle lane provides questionable security for cyclists. Cycle lanes separated from moving traffic with a kerb provide more security.

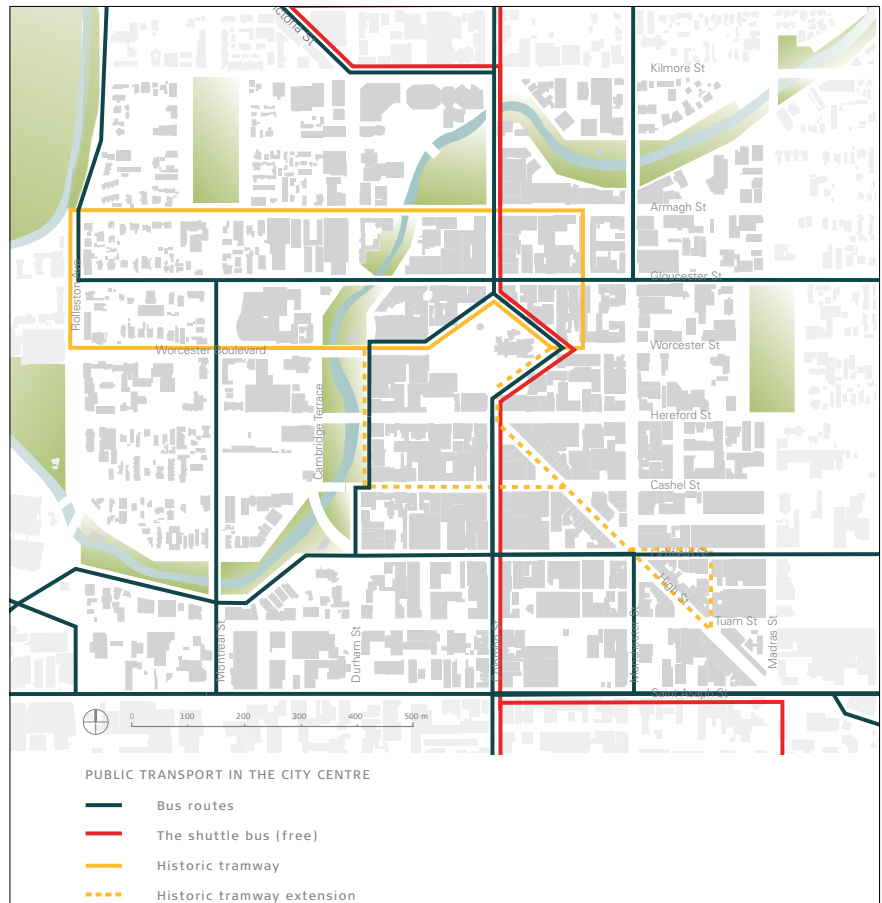


Public transport

“A well organised public transport system can give people the ability to move around in the city without a car and provide seniors and children with a real alternative.”

There are a number of positive features about the public transport system in Christchurch. The free bus service, the Shuttle, is especially good since it offers an easy and dependable way of getting around the Central City.

With the current bus routes, too many buses run directly through the City Centre and several streets are suffering from high bus impact. The high impact of buses and the lack of pedestrian crossings in Cathedral Square create an unpleasant environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

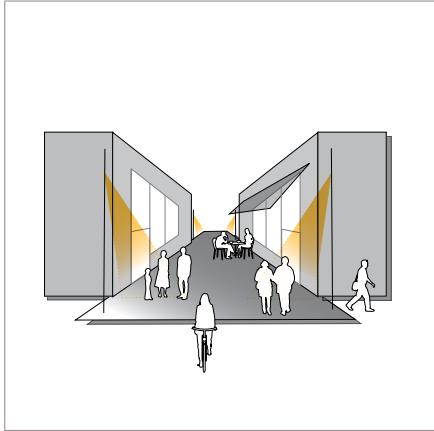


Jan Gehl Architects identified seven strengths in Christchurch's Central City



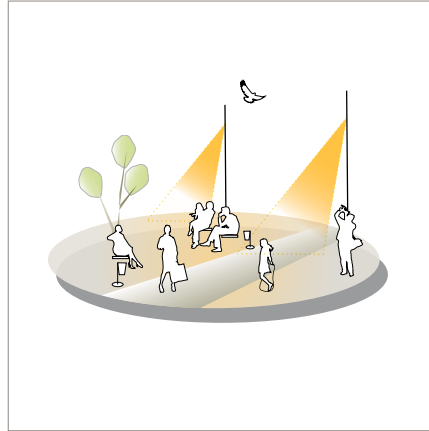
1. Preserving heritage

Christchurch has preserved a large number of heritage buildings and these contribute to the character of the city, although some buildings have been converted as part of major developments and now form awkward juxtapositions between old and new.



2. Lanes: the city's treasure

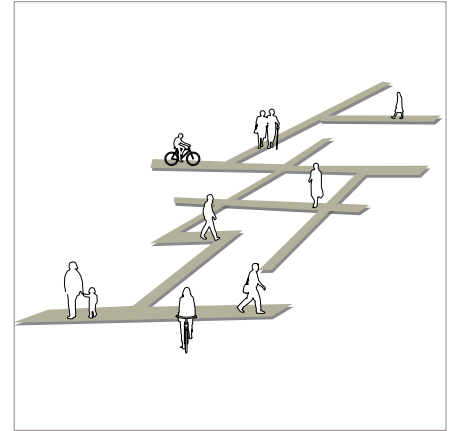
Christchurch has succeeded in developing some of the city's lanes which have the potential to strengthen the public realm and increase pedestrian opportunities.



3. Introducing design codes

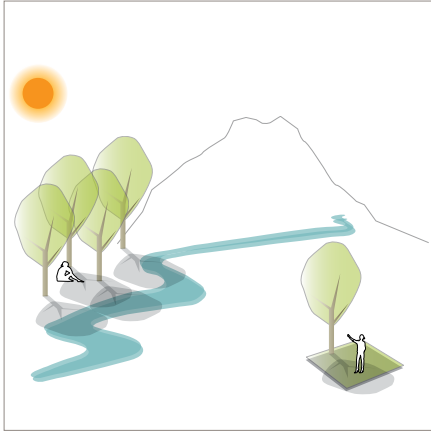
Christchurch has developed a Draft Central City Streetscape Plan (2008), providing guidelines for appropriate design, development and management of the Central City streetscapes.

The challenge is to expand the programme to widen footpaths in selected streets and develop a public space plan for renewal of public spaces. This should include plans for integrated public art.



4. A city for walking and cycling

Christchurch's street grid makes a rational, flexible and efficient urban structure; the flat wide streets provide the perfect setting for a culture of more walking and cycling in the Central City.



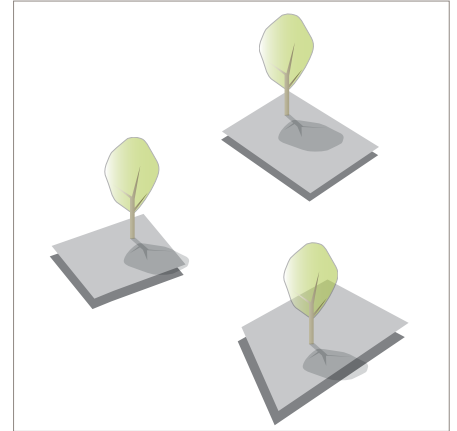
5. A fantastic setting

Christchurch's Central City is a good size to walk about, with many amenities within easy reach. The city would benefit from connections being created between amenities and combining the city's attractions with the natural environment.



6. Active during work hours

Christchurch is active during work hours. The Central City could be made inviting and people encouraged to stay longer by providing attractive public spaces and facilities for Central City residents and a wider range of users.

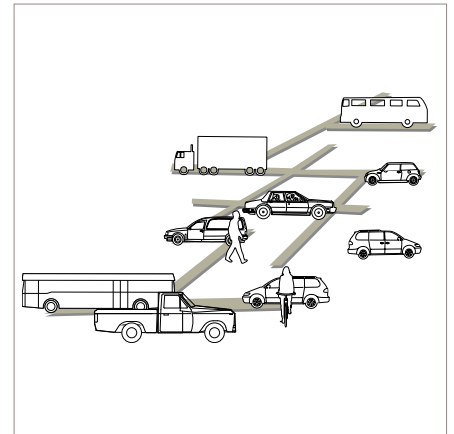


7. Public spaces with potential

Christchurch has a good selection of public spaces which have great potential if upgraded and integrated into city life. The city also needs to strengthen the walking links between key public spaces.

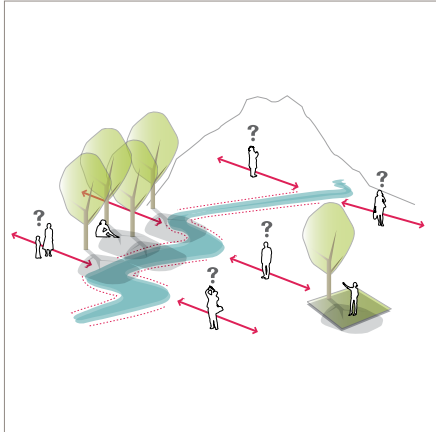


The four key challenges facing Christchurch's City Centre



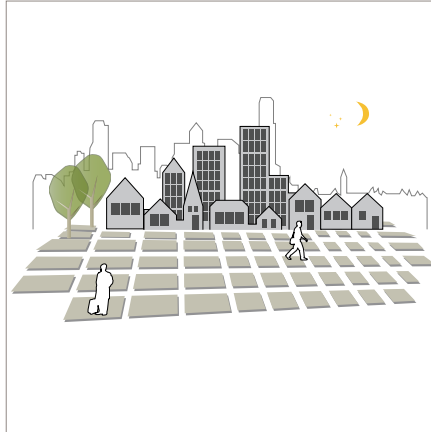
1. A traffic dominated city

Traffic dominates Christchurch's City Centre. The streets are dominated by car parking and relatively high traffic speeds contribute to the unpleasant environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The city lacks an attractive, safe pedestrian/cyclist network connecting important destinations.



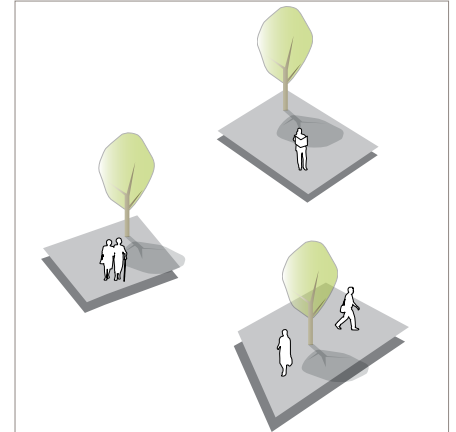
2. Weak connections to amenities

The Avon, Hagley Park and Botanic Gardens are great recreational spaces but the links between these spaces and the city are weak, creating barriers for people to using these spaces. The promenade along the Avon is not continuous, being interrupted at road crossings.



3. Monofunctional city life

Large parts of the city are only active during work hours, closing down in the evenings and weekends, leading to a perceived lack of safety in the City Centre.



4. Lack of public space attractions and identity

Some public spaces are under-utilised offering few reasons for people to spend time in them. Many of the public spaces have similar layouts and activities.



Gehl Philosophy

Gehl Architects promotes “people as the generators of spaces”. They say good cities take time to develop. Putting “people first” should be the core principle of any planning process.



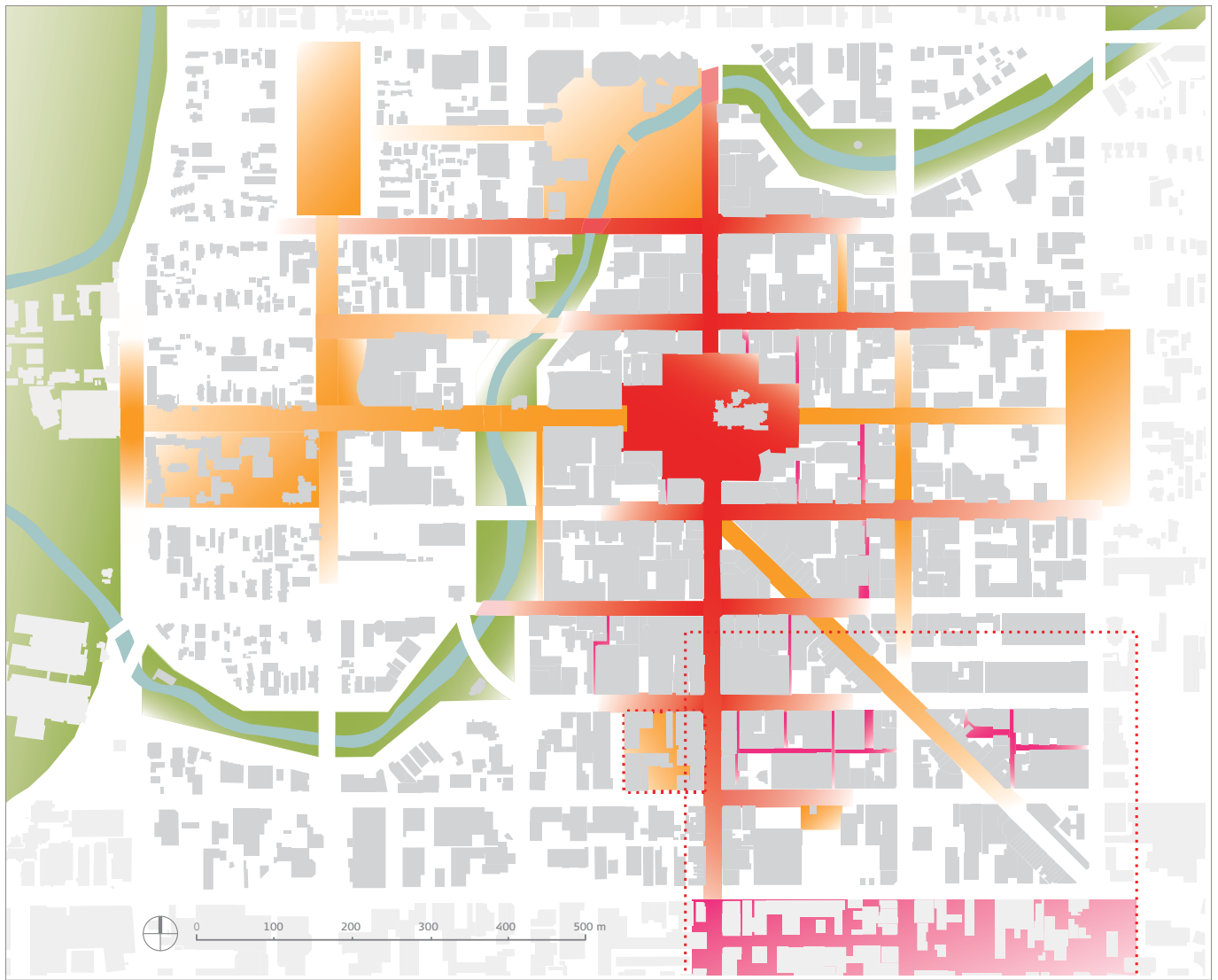
Great potential

Christchurch already has a “fine template for an active, healthy city centre”. The river bank provides opportunities for recreation and spontaneous and unplanned events. The urban structure has room for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and private vehicles.

“Christchurch has great potential to become a truly vibrant and liveable city.”
Jan Gehl - Urban Designer

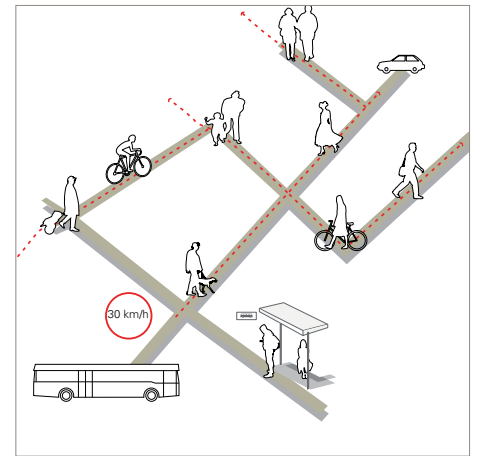
The vision for the future public space of Christchurch

- A City with a strong heart
- A City Centre with human pace
- A Garden City that celebrates its amenities
- A City with a wide range of people and activities
- A City with attractive and inviting public spaces



The 'Glowmap' shows the vision for the future city centre of Christchurch. The spaces that 'glow' more than others are particularly active and have a distinctive profile.

Overview of recommendations



Christchurch's potential: a city for walking and cycling
Christchurch's challenge: a traffic dominated city

Recommended:
A city centre with "human pace"



Ensure a City Centre with a 21st Century traffic system introducing pedestrian and cycle priority

- a better city for walking
- a better city for cycling
- a better public transport network
- a traffic calmed city centre



Key is to develop a pedestrian network of high quality and attractive walking links within the Central City where pedestrians are given priority.

It is recommended:

- Create a central high quality walking link along Colombo Street, connecting Victoria Square, Cathedral Square and the new Transport Interchange, while also linking in to the Central City South development.
- Colombo Street becomes a combined public transport, walking and cycling street, removing private vehicles.
- Develop a dedicated cycle network with signage and cycle parking is established in the Central City, making cycling a desirable, alternative mode of transport.
- Provide a strong public transport network as an alternative to cars.
- Introduce dedicated bus lanes to ensure the frequency and reliability of the bus service.



- Develop a centralised Transport Interchange on the periphery of the city centre and improve the facilities at bus stops to make waiting for buses a more pleasant experience.
- Reduce traffic volumes in the Central City to achieve a healthy balance between various transport modes.
- Convert some of the one-way streets into two-way streets.
- Consider a parking zone in the City Centre which offers only short-term on-street parking and review on-street parking prices.

Overview of recommendations



Christchurch's potential: a fantastic setting
Christchurch's challenge: weak connections to amenities

Recommended:
A Garden City that celebrates its amenities



Ensure a City Centre that capitalises on its amenities

- Enhance east-west streets as green connectors
- Celebrate the river



Key is to develop a network of green east-west routes linking with the public spaces and pedestrian network.

It is recommended:

- Develop Worcester Boulevard/Street as a Garden City Boulevard.
- Celebrate the main parks, Hagley Park and the Botanic Gardens as grand spaces and unified parklands that connect with the Avon.
- Create better connections by providing more pedestrian entrances to Hagley Park and the Botanic Gardens.
- Create a continuous walk along the Avon by providing direct crossing points at intersections with roads.
- Use under-utilised spaces in the city's lanes to create new "green lungs".



BARBER SHOP
THE DEN
Miss Old
Vintage

roomfinder.co.nz

LOVE
LIFE

Beautiful
New
DRIGS
& Papers

Blue jeans
Black shoes

White banner

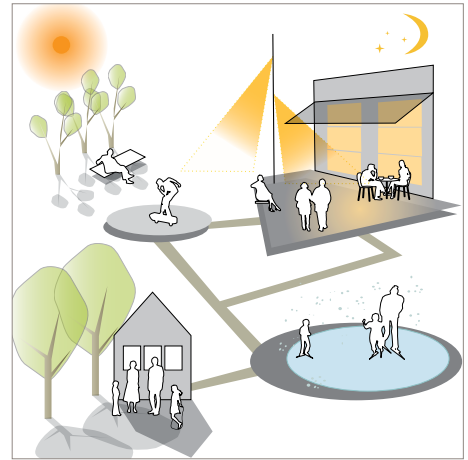
Woman in black

Woman in green dress

White van

Planter box

Overview of recommendations



Christchurch's potential: active during work hours
Christchurch's challenge: monofunctional city life

Recommended:

A city with a wide range of people and activities



Ensure a City Centre that is liveable and viable

- Create a diverse and safe city alive 24 hours a day.
- Invite all ages and user groups and encourage more inner city residents



Key is a well functioning network connecting public spaces in an attractive and inviting way.

It is recommended:

- Develop a high-quality public art culture.
- Celebrate and protect the city's heritage.
- Ensure ground floors of new buildings are designed to provide interest and a human scale.
- Provide more public seating for people to linger.
- Create a child friendly city.
- Expand public transport to support a 24-hour city.
- Create opportunities to strengthen the range of activities in the Central City – more places to play, more physical activity, more culture and art activities, more evening activities and winter activities.



No Entry

WALTON

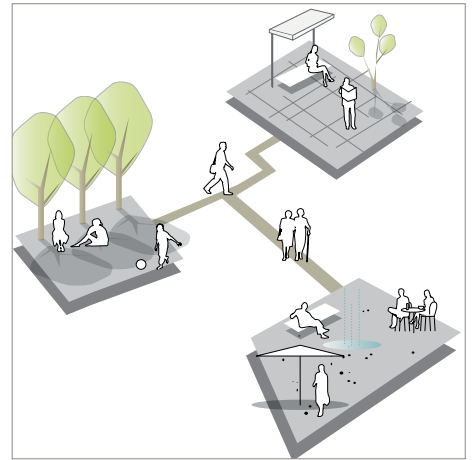
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Overview of recommendations



Christchurch's potential: public spaces with potential
Christchurch's challenge: lack of public space identity

Recommended:

A city centre with attractive and inviting public spaces



- Ensure a city centre that has a strong identity that caters for all user groups throughout the year.
- Introduce a public space hierarchy with different kinds of public spaces to accommodate various activities.



Key is upgrading existing public spaces and strengthening their individual characters.

It is recommended:

- Establish a hierarchy and clear profile for each public space.
- Encourage more and better opportunities for resting and relaxing in the public space network.
- Create a network of public spaces which invites people from one space to the next.
- Provide a wide variety of attractions and events which invite broader groups of residents and visitors to the City Centre.



ST'S BOOKS ON

John's Books

MARKET

Acknowledgements

Gehl Architects conducted its trademark *Public Space Public Life Study* of Christchurch, developed the analysis of the Central City's existing streetscape and public realm and has provided a wealth of experience and ideas to Christchurch City Council.



www.gehlarchitects.dk

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“Christchurch is a vibrant and vivacious, yet relaxed and friendly city with many great qualities on which to build its future development.”

Jan Gehl
Urban Designer

GEHL ARCHITECTS
URBAN QUALITY CONSULTANTS

Christchurch
City Council 