

Places and Spaces: Public Libraries for the 21st Century

A citywide network of libraries contributing to Christchurch City's community outcomes.

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Introduction

Christchurch City Libraries, Nga Kete Whananga-o-Otautahi, Christchurch City Council, has been fortunate enough to open several new libraries in the past decade, with two new libraries opening in the past seven months. This city-wide network includes 18 community libraries (having recently acquired four additional small rural libraries), a mobile library and a central city library.

Throughout this paper, and the accompanying online power point¹, I am pleased to be able to share some of our service and building design successes.

My plan is to link our library services and, in particular, the experiences we want our customers to have when they walk into our buildings to Christchurch City's Community Outcomes. I would like to share some of the strategic decisions we have made which have informed our building and service planning. If you are able to refer, online, to the power point you will view photographs of some of our more recently designed buildings. Throughout this paper I comment on some of the special architectural features of our library buildings. I also introduce you to our cafes, learning centres and the new Upper Riccarton Community and school library, which we opened less than two months ago.

Christchurch City²³

(Slide 3)

Christchurch, known as the garden city, has beaches to the east, hills to the south, and mountains to the east. Christchurch is a sister city of Adelaide.

¹ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/bibliofile/2006/adelaide/>

² <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/>

³ <http://www.localeye.info/>

(Slides 4 – 7 : These photos taken at Parklands Library the day before the official opening of this new library last August.)

Christchurch City Council's Chief Executive, Dr Lesley McTurk, is truly behind what we are doing. Having the support from the leaders of our organisation for what Christchurch City Libraries is trying to achieve - makes a big difference. In slide 5, Lesley is to the left of the picture, with the Deputy Mayor beside her, and the chairperson of the community board opposite. We were having a talk about the formal ceremony and drinking the first coffees made from the café machine.

Lesley is quoted in the draft strategic framework for public libraries of New Zealand: Public Libraries of New Zealand: A Strategic Framework 2005 to 2015⁴. This document is due to be released in final format on 1 May 2006.

Importantly, Lesley is quoted as saying:

"In Christchurch city we believe libraries are about more than books and buildings. Libraries are at the hub of our communities. No longer places where everyone has to be quiet, today's libraries are busy information centres focusing on customers and offering a place to meet friends for coffee, surf the net and, of course, find the latest thriller. The benefits to our communities are well worth the ongoing significant investment. In the future we anticipate even more innovation in the way libraries help create inclusive communities, and are centres for lifelong learning, fun and creativity."

"Libraries are at the hub of our communities ..." It is with the support of the Chief Executive and elected councillors over recent years, that we have been able to achieve so much. That support, coupled with the vision and enthusiasm of my colleagues. Certainly, one team working together to make these things happen. Considering how a new library will impact on its community is key to our planning - not just thinking about what the building will look like architecturally, but also what it will do.

Then there's the challenge – that we can always do better!

Community Outcomes

(Slides 8 – 27)

Christchurch City has adopted a series of Community Outcomes which describe the kind of society, community, environment and economy that the people of Christchurch want to live in.⁵ Christchurch City Council led the process to find out what the community wanted for Christchurch now and in the future. The outcomes belong to the people of Christchurch – they were identified by, and belong to, the community. I find it useful to link the work we

⁴ <http://www.lianza.org.nz/community/pub-sig/framework/>

⁵ <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/LTCCP/CommunityOutcomes/>

are doing in our libraries, both in service design and service delivery, to four community outcomes in particular.

A city for recreation, fun and creativity ... recreational activities contribute to our economy, identity, health and well-being

Having a good time in libraries ... we want people having a great experience when they visit our libraries. This particular outcome has helped guide our planning for our use of spaces and the experiences we offer in our libraries. The challenge is to continue to offer more experiences which encourage people to participate in leisure activities associated with their library, and to encourage people to “think library” when they are considering what to do with their leisure time. We have been keen to make our libraries accessible, relaxing, exciting, vibrant destinations. Importantly, we are competing with a huge range of activities available in Christchurch city.

The second of those four community outcomes is **Christchurch as a city of lifelong learning ... learning opportunities help us to participate in the community and economy**

Christchurch City Libraries supports learning by offering library facilities and services which encourage and promote learning. We provide computers for use and learning and we work with, and support, educators. Our Lifelong Learning Strategy ([Christchurch City Libraries: A Lifelong Learning Strategy, December 2003⁶](#)) guides us in our future planning - not only in planning our services but also in thinking about how we want our buildings to be used.

The Lifelong Learning Strategy supports a vision of inclusive education and learning opportunities in formal and informal settings. Our libraries provide opportunities for getting information, communicating, and working collaboratively with others. The planning for our library spaces includes the development of learning spaces and electronic opportunities for learning and providing environments where people can read in comfort. We are enhancing the full range of our resources to support literacy learning throughout life.

A prosperous city ... investing in ourselves and in our future

The city values the investment libraries are making in learning for the future, supporting people to achieve their goals ... regardless of age, or role in society.

The fourth Community Outcome is: **A city of inclusive and diverse communities ... all people feel a sense of belonging and participation in the community**

⁶ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/Bibliofile/Reports/LifelongLearningStrategy/Strategy.pdf>

When we are designing our buildings we're conscious of how the community will use them - either as individuals or as part of a group. This is always an important part of the planning process and is described in the vision for each new project, Dr Lesley McTurk's words, "Libraries are the hub of our communities" provide a great starting point for planning, describing the vision, and then preparing the brief.

We know that library customers bring their friends and family to show them their library. We hear them refer to the library as "our" library and show it off with pride. It is perfect feedback to hear those comments after months / years of planning, construction, selecting furniture and doing the final set up. The experiences we offer ...the comfortable furniture and flexible spaces, the open, curved desks without barriers, the café's, accessible meeting rooms, and lounge areas all help people feel welcome and at ease in our buildings.

Library Architecture

Now I want to show you some of our more recent architecturally designed buildings.

New Brighton Library⁷

(Slides 28 – 41)

- Opened July 1999
- 970m²
- Ave monthly visitors – 30,000
- Ave monthly issues – 30,000
- Collection size – 55,000

At this point I need to say that it doesn't matter how stunning the building is, it is the architecture combined with the location and the experience we offer that makes that library successful. Opened in 1999, New Brighton was, and still is, a great success. We were offered the best location possible – land on the New Brighton beach sand dunes. The community had successfully raised funds for a new pier and we were offered the opportunity to be part of the building which would join onto the pier. The architectural firm, Warren and Mahoney, designed this award winning building. Making best use of the location, they built it with a ship theme in mind.

Part of our vision for this library was to create experiences which would not only appeal to the local community but which would draw visitors from across the city. We saw this very much as a "destination" library – open seven days per week. Certainly we have achieved our vision. The number of visitors is higher at this library, in relation to the number of issues, in comparison to most of our other libraries. That is, people are visiting this library to relax,

⁷ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/NewBrighton/>

enjoy the view and take time out, as well as using it for information and lending.

The entrance is from the road side, café to the left and library to the right on the ground floor, or via a glass lift to the second floor of the library or café. The sails have worn well – only just now needing minor repairs after nearly seven years. They create a stunning feature. Inside it is quite industrial looking with a bold use of raw materials – metal, concrete and glass. Apart from the statement this makes when you enter the building – we are finding the building is wearing very well – given the heavy visitor numbers.

The “pipeline”, an area where we have games PCs, playstations and Sky TV, is on the first floor. The idea was to attract youth to the library. This has really been a successful initiative. The upstairs seating has stunning views out to sea.

In summary, certainly the location for this library is perfect. The building has attracted considerable national and international interest. This was also the first time we invested in quality and adventurous, rather than conservative, furniture. The feedback has been consistently positive. The downside - the easterly beach facing windows do get very dirty, and can leak in a heavy easterly rain. Fortunately rain from that direction is rare and we make sure the windows are cleaned regularly.

South Library, Learning Centre and Service Centre⁸

(Slides 42 – 62)

- Opened August 2003
- Catchment population of 45,000
- 2,500m²
- Average monthly visitors – 35,000
- Average monthly issues – 55,000
- Collection size – 75,000

The South Christchurch Library, Learning Centre and Service Centre, also designed by Warren and Mahoney, won the supreme award for New Zealand architecture in 2004. Attracting around 35,000 visitors each month, this 2,500 square metre community facility has exceeded the community’s expectations of what they could find in such a facility.

It was in the design phase of this project that we really started to understand the benefits of community consultation. We shared our vision for this facility with numerous community groups and used the ideas gathered from these forums to shape the more detailed design brief. The benefit of this approach is that we generated considerable excitement in the community and felt shared pride in the outcome. The results of this consultation, and the consultation we

⁸ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/South/>

undertook during our next two building projects, are recorded on our website. Also there are photo galleries of each project.⁹

If I summarised my learning about preparing for building projects in recent years I would suggest the following:

- Do your research about the community needs thoroughly
- Invest time in describing your vision
- Stick with the vision and keep referring to it through the project
- And wait for the best location you can possibly get. Don't settle for anything less than what you had imagined.

The riverside location is superb and the design of the building really met our vision. The facility is rather like a village square – the open entry for greeting, gathering, performing, with the café adjacent, the spaces for meeting, for interacting with Council elected members, places for learning (throughout the library and the learning centre) and for recreation.

The community is also proud of the fact that they have one of Christchurch's first sustainably built public buildings. A diagram explaining the sustainable features, with comment about the actual workings of the building, is on our website.¹⁰ The rainwater gathers in the moat and is used to supply the toilet cisterns. (We have notices informing customers that they shouldn't be concerned at the colour of the water in the bowls). The moat water also helps cool the building – through the low floor level windows. The building has no air conditioning and is very pleasant to be in, year round. Under slab pipe work provides heating or cooling from heat pumps which draw on energy from the aquifers. In slide 48, you can see:

- the moat which surrounds the building
- the wide eaves
- and the use of glass where ever possible

The building also has several easily accessible outdoor areas. The water in the moat is quite shallow and, while we have had no problems with security of library stock, (contrary to early speculation) we have had to alter the way the river rocks were laid in the moat. They were originally concreted in the moat so the surface was raised and irregular, and this made cleaning very difficult. Also there was not quite enough slope in the levels to allow the water to move. Recently all the rocks were removed and replaced with an exposed aggregate surface, and we now have a clean and freer flowing moat. The reflections from the moat help create a relaxing feeling inside the building.

Dedicated lounge seating areas are located throughout and are positioned to make an effective connection with the outdoor environment. The walkway from the street and the carpark is covered and well structured – the river stones and planting connecting to the moat and leading to the entrance.

⁹ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/Bibliofile/2003/South/Planning/ConsultationThemes.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/South/Building/>

The café is directly in front of you as you enter the building. The free standing customer desk, to the right of the entrance area, is circular in design and copes well with busy times. The lounge area, with double sided TV and listening posts, has been successful, apart from anything else, in convincing reluctant library visitors that this is a good place to be. If they are waiting for someone - by the time they have watched the golf on TV, flicked through a magazine and had a coffee they are more than happy to get a library card and make regular visits to the library. The seating is comfortable and well worth the investment in quality furniture. The café serves coffee to all parts of the building. Wide aisles, tiled rather than carpeted, allow for easy movement throughout the building.

Perhaps the one downside to this successful facility is that people are staying for hours – putting pressure on the carparking ... results from recent surveying indicated that is common for people to spend far more than two hours at a time in the building.

Parklands Library and Learning Centre¹¹

(Slides 63 – 66)

- Opened August 2005
- 400m² with a catchment population of 10,000
- Ave monthly visitors: 12,000
- Ave monthly issues: 22,000
- Collection size – 25,000

Essentially, we converted a church into a library and café. My colleague, Sally Thompson has prepared a conference paper, Eels and Wheels¹², which gives an in depth view of this library.

Upper Riccarton Community and School Library¹³

(Slides 67 – 112)

- Opened January 2006
- Partnership between Christchurch City Libraries and Riccarton High School
- Community catchment population around 35,000 and school population of 1100
- Monthly visitors to be around 30,000
- Collection size around 60,000

¹¹ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/Parklands/>

¹²

¹³ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/UpperRiccarton/>

This is our most recent project. More than 3 years in the planning, the Upper Riccarton Community and School Library has been built in partnership with Riccarton High School. There had been a new community library planned for this part of the city for more than 10 years. We undertook considerable research before we decided to look for land in the suburb adjacent to where we had originally planned to locate the library.¹⁴ Finding land was proving difficult – until the high school approached us. The principal was wanting to involve his school more in the community and Christchurch City Libraries were keen to make a stronger connection within the education environment. The partnership began.

We invited Dr Alan Bundy and Prof. Larry Amey to spend a few days with both partners, and that experience was very valuable in terms of understanding each party's expectations and laying the foundation for the future joint community and school library relationship.

Alan and Larry encouraged us to address the following points as part of our planning:

- *Location – ensuring a high profile from the street which ensures community ownership.* This library, also designed by Warren and Mahoney, has a strong profile from the road. The location of this community and school library is on a main road, on the edge of the school playing fields. The library connects well to both the community and the school and it has a strong profile from the road. Essentially it is a long building, slightly raised in height to increase its presence in the community, with a shared entrance way at the south end, and an outdoor café / study / seating area to the north - with views over the school playing fields.
- *Very good signage is necessary.* Signage for this library is large and bold and similar to the style we use throughout the library network. The high take up from the community in the first month of opening suggests the visibility is high. As well as the static signage, four newsletters were sent to 30,000 households prior to opening day.¹⁵ (Also see slide 133)
- *Opening hours reflecting the needs of the community.* The Upper Riccarton Library team all work five days over a seven day roster as the library is open from 9am until 8pm each weekday, and from 10am until 4pm on Saturday and Sunday.
- *Physical facilities should be appropriate to the profile community.* There is a 100 m2 community meeting room and the exterior area outside the community meeting room is also proving to be a good gathering point. Elderly people sit and chat. Children from the many schools in the catchment meet here after school. The library has a café, comfortable lounge spaces, quality furniture and equipment, and excellent public

¹⁴

<http://www.ccc.govt.nz/Council/Agendas/2002/March/ArtsCultureHeritage/ProposedLibraryinUpperRiccarton.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/UpperRiccarton/Planning/>

conveniences including baby changing facilities. The school teaching rooms are used by the community outside of school hours.

- *Programmes to meet the needs of the profile community.* This library has a Learning Centre, networked to the South Learning Centre. Programmes are run through this centre for all ages. In addition to this, local groups are meeting, free of charge, in the community meeting room and there are Pre-school storytimes and Babytimes sessions offered regularly each week. Local businesses are using the café as a place to visit during tea and lunch breaks.
- *The library should be as integrated as possible.* Both the school's original collection and the new community library collection are integrated into one. Christchurch City Libraries acquires and processes all of the collection and provides all of the IT equipment. We charge the school an annual fee based on a formula which takes into account the space the school occupies and the number of hours the school uses these spaces out of the total opening hours. Over a full year, the school's percentage of the total occupation is quite small – given that Christchurch City Libraries manages the use of the teaching spaces outside of school hours. The use of these particular areas is great for the community and keeps Riccarton High School's costs down at a manageable rate. We have assumed responsibility for running the building. At this stage the Community Librarian and the School Library Manager are working in partnership. Our goal is to be working as one team within two years. We have established a Management Group, and one of their key tasks will be to help us achieve this goal.

Other features of this building include:

- Sustainable design features: shutters which automatically open and shut to control the temperature of the building; rain water is collected and stored for toilet flushing; a dry garden designed to fill with water when it rains (The rain is channelled off the roof, and from the carpark, onto the garden, where the water is filtered through the gravel); many of the building materials are made from recycled materials.
- Two self issue machines are well positioned on the circular customer service desk. Of February's 44,000 issues – just over 17,000 were self issued. This is around 39% of issues – which is a good figure for Christchurch City Libraries. The location is obviously working very well.
- Wide aisles and light tiles create a very light and open atmosphere. We have had lots of positive comments about how light and spacious it feels.
- The four teaching spaces, one of which houses the young adult collection and another houses the 30 computers – are adjacent to the library collection and have glass doors connecting the various spaces.

We're feeling, at around two months since opening, that the partnership between Christchurch City Libraries and Riccarton High School is going very well.

We had invested considerable time in discussing, agreeing and refining how we will work together. It is not, however until you get into the real situation that you can really tell what the management issues will be.

- Christchurch – City of Lifelong Learning
- City for recreation, fun and creativity.
- City of inclusive and diverse communities
- Prosperous city

Cafes

(Slides 113 – 123)

Our first integrated café was introduced into the South Library. We made this decision in order to add to the overall vision and to enhance the total experience of visiting a library. Importantly our cafes promote the library as a community meeting place and as a leisure destination.

This café at the South Library has been extremely successful. The café¹⁶ is operated as a business, independent of the library or any of the other services within the building. It is, however, integrated into the library as part of the overall library experience. The café lease (for 70 m2) is administered by Christchurch City Council.

We now have integrated cafes at South, Parklands and Upper Riccarton libraries. Key learning points for us to date include:

- *Understand the different success indicators of both partners.* Our library success indicators differ from the cafes. The cafes are, obviously, commercially driven and need to sell to hourly and daily targets.
- *Get good legal advice from the beginning* so that your expectations are appropriately documented from the very early discussions and there are no misunderstandings about hours of opening or service standards
- *Minimise smell* by insisting all food is prepared off-site and insist on high quality processing and extracting equipment
- *Ensure top-of-the-line coffee is used by the café.* The food also has to be of high quality. A poor quality café product or poor café service reflects on libraries.
- *Carefully consider viability in terms of visitor numbers.* Café owners will want to ensure library visitor numbers are high and they will expect you to continue to try and lift numbers even if foot traffic exceeds our expectations
- *Think about the location and visibility of the café within the building.* Consider its location in relation to the road and carpark, main entrance, children's area and collections. The café at the South Library has high visibility from the entrance but is seen to be too far away from the

¹⁶ <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/South/red/>

children's area. The café at upper Riccarton is close to the children's area but has lower visibility from the main entrance.

- *Design the café space so that it can be easily transformed into another library space if the café business fails*
- *Relax on rules about food and drink in libraries.*
- *The café needs to be "child friendly". Children and their care-givers are big users of the café*
- *Plan joint marketing (library / café) initiatives – they really do have impact. We have invested in bold signage and joint marketing to ensure the future viability of these cafés.*

Learning centre network

(Slides 124 – 131)

Christchurch City Libraries has established a networked Learning Centre – starting with the South Learning Centre which was partially funded by the Ministry of Education. We employ several teachers to deliver quality learning experiences to the community.¹⁷ The learning opportunities they offer compliment the full range of library services.

In addition to the South Learning Centre, we now have Learning Centres at Parklands Library (10 seat computer room) and at Upper Riccarton (30 seat). These two are networked through the South Learning Centre. This means that we can have a tutor at one site, linked to the other two.

Key success factors:

- Clarity of vision and goals
- Strong relationships with stakeholders (in initial scoping) and those using the services
- Starting small and getting the model right – allowing time for reflection and evaluation, and then making necessary adjustments
- Employing experienced teachers

Range of programmes:

- FIT (Family internet Tuesdays) A theme is chosen each term, eg returning to school: homework help and research skills
- Pet Prowl: families bring along their pets and use the digital cameras to take photos, download and print, advice from a vet, and online research around pet care, breeding etc.
- Digital scrapbooking – intergenerational where people bring along favourite memories and capture these using still images, text and voice stories, or movie making
- Chess evening – virtual chess, or chess inside or outside

¹⁷ <http://learningcentre.christchurch.org.nz/>

Challenges ahead:

- We need to keep on surprising people about what we can do in a library so that it becomes a normal and expected part of library activity.
- Our ideal is to establish a citywide spread of networked library learning centres, possibly run in partnership with other providers

Customer responses

(Slides 132 – 145)

Here's a summary of what our customers think.

Upper Riccarton Community and School Library

- 1700 visitors on the first day – Monday 23 January
- 30,000 visitors in the first month
- 44,000 items issued in February
- 1000 new members in the first 5 weeks

"My child came home and said he just loved the new library and that I had to come and see it"

"This is like being in a NY bookstore!"

"It's like being in a toyshop!"

"It's very quiet..." (They sounded surprised)

"It's nice and light and airy"

"It rocks! It's fun to be in here because there are so many good books and stuff to read" (Year 9 girl)

"Completely satisfying in every respect" (Year 12 boy)

"I'm addicted to this library!" (Year 10 girl)

South Christchurch Library

"On Sunday my husband, son and I went to the library – books for my son, the internet for business purposes for my husband, and a reference book for me. We had coffee together while reading magazines. We bumped into half the neighbourhood. What a fantastic community asset!"

