

# A public consultation process for Christchurch Botanic Garden

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## Abstract

A unique public consultation process was recently undertaken for the draft management/master plans for the Botanic Gardens in Christchurch, New Zealand. This process also highlighted the measures necessary to bring these Gardens up to an international standard that contributes to achieving the objectives of the *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation*.

## Christchurch Botanic Gardens

The Gardens will be 150 years old in 2013 and the planning undertaken, the development of facilities and functions during the coming years will mean that the City of Christchurch will have a proven world class facility that is fully 'botanic' without loss of its garden beauty.

The Gardens is located in an 'enclave' defined by the Avon River within Hagley Park, less than one kilometre west of Cathedral Square in the City of Christchurch on the east coast of the South Island of New Zealand, latitude 43°, 31', 48" S, longitude 170°, 37', 13" E (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Hagley Park with the Christchurch Botanic Gardens at the centre

## **Master Plan Approach**

The separate areas of land administered by two unique management plans quickly highlighted the range of issues that needed to be discussed, addressed and resolved.

Visions were developed, “For Hagley Park to remain an iconic inner-city open space for the City of Christchurch - a place for present and future residents and visitors for recreation and enjoyment”, and “The Christchurch Botanic Gardens is foremost to celebrate and present plant diversity through collections and programmes, including promoting the relationships that people have with plants”.

The drivers for change came from a need for effective and up to date planning documents. This included an obligation for the Council to implement stated management policies and actions in a reasonable space of time, implications of adjacent land use planning and development, ensuring an acceptable public experience, recognition of environmental and wildlife values, recognition of heritage values, best practice management, changing needs of partnerships, and bringing the Botanic Gardens into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The master plan document integrates both the Park and Gardens planning, and lists significant projects impacting on both.

Strategic planning was needed to address the Gardens existing state, and the adjoining Hagley Park, as well as other adjacent land e.g. road networks. Beginning in 2004, a planning exercise was undertaken to evaluate the gardens, and examine its current functions with the intended purpose of enhancing the visitor experience, developing plant conservation strategies, developing research programs, and address infrastructure issues.

The Master plan provides strategic direction and vision, while the Management Plan provides policy and guidance to the ongoing management of the Gardens.

The Gardens strength, without a doubt, lies in its amenity and horticultural elements, developed by successive Curators and staff since 1863. The plan aims to reinforce these elements, but importantly indicates that the future direction of the Gardens will be to increase and strengthen science, research, conservation and education.

## **Why Public Consultation?**

Protected under central government statute - the Reserves Act 1977, the area is classified as Local Purpose (Botanic Garden) Reserve.

The Gardens are zoned in the City of Christchurch City Plan as Conservation 2.

The Christchurch Botanic Gardens are administered by the Christchurch City Council, and are solely funded by rates, with an operational budget of NZ \$3,000,000 per annum.

While there is no statutory requirement under the Reserves Act to have a management plan, the plan is used to communicate the functions, direction, and management, of the Gardens, and is reviewable every 10 years.

Public consultation allows for open dialogue with key stakeholders, assists in providing direction, and increases ownership within the local community.

## **Significant differences to previous plans**

The late Dr David Given, undertook a strategic review of the gardens, highlighting its current function and evaluating its strengths which include: around 35,000 accessions, comprising 6,500 catalogued species and cultivars, as well as around 2,500 conservatory specimens: large annual visitor numbers, (last year above 1.5 million, made up of three quarters of Christchurch residents and about 250,000 international tourists).

The Gardens are part of the cultural precinct of inner city Christchurch. This includes the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch Art Gallery and Christchurch Cathedral. The temperate climate permits a wide range of plant material displaying the changes over the four seasons. This allows for a wide range of material to be displayed within easy reach of residents and visitors.

The review highlighted several deficiencies: a very limited range of functions based on living collections, conservation, education, and research. There is a herbarium onsite, though small. Education programmes are delivered to a limited extent, and there is a desire to enhance the education opportunities provided.

Conservation programmes are limited, and the threatened plant collection is in need of refurbishment and enhancement. There is no active participation in the recovery of threatened species.

The infrastructure is inadequate providing little available space for the existing library. Added to this is the absence of a seed bank or germplasm facilities.

The draft plan had four sections for consideration:

1. an underlying principle for the Botanic Garden in Christchurch, considering the history, development and nature of botanic gardens
2. the significance of botanic gardens in the contemporary world
3. an examination of resources and issues affecting the gardens currently; the present and proposed management goals, objectives, and policies
4. an issue and action that provides direction for the future of the Gardens is promoted. This includes a discussion of issues, resulting in an action plan to address deficiencies

## **The consultation process**

In October 2006, the “Christchurch Botanic Gardens Management Plan”, a “Management Plan for the adjacent Hagley Park” and a Master Plan for both areas were presented to local residents for consideration and requesting their submissions (Christchurch City Council, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). A series of public meetings, and media communication were undertaken resulting in 600 submissions on the combined plans. Hearings were undertaken in front of a panel comprised of local elected officials. Consideration of submissions and recommendations are to be presented to the local authority council for ratification.

## A time of change

Basic botanic garden activities, such as education, conservation and research, are not yet well catered for in Christchurch. They are becoming recognised by the City as significant botanic garden functions that need to be considered in any redevelopment.

The City asked residents the following questions:

1. Does the collection make a significant contribution at any scale to scientific knowledge and research, or does it provide important research material?
2. Does the collection preserve threatened species, provide material for restoration projects or in any other way facilitate the achieving of biodiversity conservation?
3. Does the collection make a significant contribution to regional or national cultural needs, including providing a source of materials for cultural use and training?
4. Does the collection contribute to formal education or more informal awareness of botanical and ecological principles, plant knowledge, conservation biology, horticulture or relationships between people and plants?
5. Does the collection contribute to raising awareness of the role of amenity horticulture, lead to providing training and capacity building of people working in the horticultural field, profile new plants (including trialling) and provide sources of acceptable plant material?
6. Does the collection contain species that are of known economic value and does it provide an opportunity for the trialling of plants that have proven or potential economic value?
7. Can the collection be readily maintained, given present facilities and climatic/soil conditions, or is it likely that such conditions and facilities can be acquired within the foreseeable future?
8. Is this a collection that will have high value as a primary collection not held elsewhere or are there numerous duplicate collections (and should the Gardens support those other collections instead?)?

## Conservation Strategy

Within the plan a conservation strategy is proposed. This includes a list of goals to be achieved to contribute to the *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation* (GSPC) (CBD Secretariat, 2003). The explanation “Conservation means ensuring that a range of plants, especially those that are threatened in some way in their natural environment, are protected in collections.” It was followed by the objective, “The Gardens will contribute to the conservation of global and regional plant diversity through collections and genetic banks, education and awareness, and practical conservation action, while also setting high standards in biosecurity, energy and waste conservation, wildlife habitat maintenance and environmental health.” A series of goals and actions form the body of the conservation strategy.

Subject groupings and the action points state how this is going to be achieved. Goals include the role the Garden will take in maintaining collections of threatened species both within the gardens and wild populations. This includes an advocacy role, a source of information for biological conservation, a targeted biosecurity policy, and external strategies on conservation to be adopted. Importantly this contained the following action point:

“The Gardens will support and actively promote the *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation* under the Convention on Biological Diversity, including achieving national targets, and apply the framework for good

conservation practice by botanic gardens as promoted in the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation* [Wyse Jackson & Sutherland, 2000].”

## **The way forward**

After having reviewed the existing plans, setting forth clear directions and objectives, and seeking the mandate from the local community for the proposed changes and developments, through a public consultation process, the Christchurch Botanic Gardens is clearly seeing the need to increase its current range of functions. Conservation, research, education and, enhancing the visitor experience are at the forefront of future developments and planning. Providing these raises the questions of implementation, and it has been clearly communicated that partnerships with existing institutions will be considered as a way of achieving mutually beneficial results.

The Christchurch City Council have provided funding for infrastructural changes to staff work areas and visitor facilities, including increased library, herbarium, research and education facilities. Currently discussions are being undertaking in setting up a joint appointment between the Christchurch City Council and the University of Canterbury for the position of Curator.

These initiatives are an indication of the direction and desire for the Gardens to contribute to the international botanic community, to provide resources and facilities for education, contribute to the conservation and research of plants, while still maintaining an environment that allows for people to develop relationships with plants, in an aesthetically pleasing setting.

## **References**

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