

# Perspective

## We need a united vision for city

Christchurch needs to accept international help to rebuild, urges DAVID KILLICK.

**W**hat Christchurch so desperately needs is a real plan and a real vision.

What it emphatically does not need is an ad hoc, piecemeal approach with individuals squabbling and vying for attention. All voices should – indeed, must – be heard, perhaps by way of a public forum, but with a clear, central focus. Guiding principles must be established. Once action takes place unthinkingly, it will be too late.

One firm offering assistance is the giant multinational Bechtel Corporation. Bechtel is a massive organisation responsible for mega-engineering projects such as the Hoover Dam and the Chunnel, and putting out Kuwaiti oil well fires after the first Gulf War.

Bechtel can help with comprehensive assistance in assessment, clean-up, hazardous waste disposal, infrastructure rebuild, economic assessment, co-ordination with central government, and disaster aid direction. I spoke to a senior Bechtel executive in London, Mike Mix. He told me what the corporation does is to establish a master plan, and then work together with local experts on the ground to create the best outcome.

I forwarded Bechtel's offer to Earthquake Recovery Minister Gerry Brownlee and received the standard acknowledgment from the minister's office: Thank you, we'll get back to you. We figured mayor Bob Parker would also be too busy with day-to-day stuff – but the opportunity is there.

I also spoke to former mayor Garry Moore and MP Jim Anderton. Both men are keen to invite experts from around the country and around the world to discuss where Christchurch goes to now. Moore stresses he has no official role, and any get-together is just a concept at this stage.

But I think it is a brilliant idea, bright, positive, and optimistic. We need experienced people

working together. Forget politics.

A German architecture firm specialising in green architecture, which I visited two years ago, also pledged to help – but they stressed they didn't want to step on any toes, and would work together with local architects, if they were needed.

German architects have extensive experience rebuilding shattered cities, first following World War II and, more recently, rebuilding the former East Germany following the depredations of communism. They do big projects. They are especially adept at creating exciting, innovative urban architecture and areas for community living – a notable example being Berlin, today one of Europe's most exciting cities.

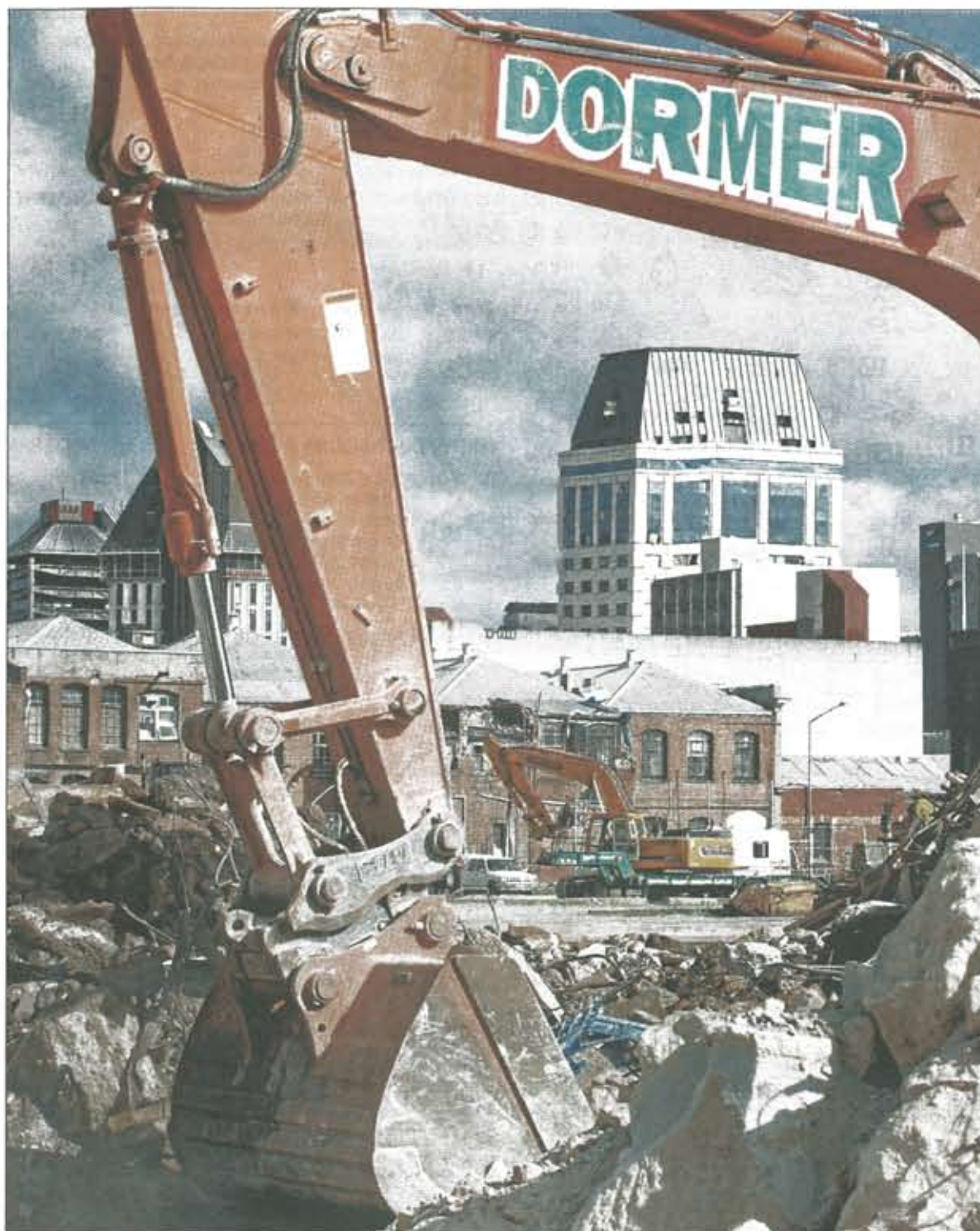
Danish urban planner Jan Gehl came up with an exciting concept for the future of Christchurch in a report that cost Christchurch ratepayers several hundreds of thousands of dollars. It was terrific. But his report seems to have sunk without trace. It is not too late to revive it.

Just how bad is Christchurch? I believe the situation is worse than most people realise. Or want to contemplate. Tens of thousands have left. Without hearing any inspiring vision for the future, thousands more will give up on the city, too.

Here are just a few of the colossal issues to be addressed:

How many old buildings (Gerry Brownlee's "old dungs") need to go? Answer: maybe one in three. Should just a few – the best and most significant – be saved (the most probable scenario)? Of course, many old buildings were very shabby and poorly maintained before the earthquake. But, in rethinking the city, should we just forget heritage altogether?

It is not just old buildings that will have to come down. The Grand Chancellor, one of Christchurch's tallest buildings, will almost certainly be demolished. And what of other



**New start:** What sort of Christchurch city will rise when the Grand Chancellor Hotel and other buildings go? Photo: ROSS GIBLIN

high-rises in which stairways collapsed? Even if declared safe, would you ever want to go back inside one?

People have expressed the

fervent hope that, no matter what new buildings emerge, they be good ones.

That means interesting and innovative buildings – not just

bland, boring warehouse-like boxes. It should go without saying they also must be the best engineered.

Yes, tourists visit New Zealand

for the scenery, not the architecture, but surely we can give them something worth looking at? And, of course, we have to live here.

Does the city need a business centre at all? Is a CBD an outmoded concept? Will more businesses relocate to the outskirts? Given the rise of technology, it is quite possible for people to work from remote locations.

The city will, however, undoubtedly remain a hub for retailing, tourist accommodation, sporting and cultural activities – although, perhaps, not exclusively.

Transport is a big issue: Christchurch streets have become more clogged, even before the earthquake. We will undoubtedly need better public transport links. A tram purely for tourists is surely not a high priority.

We need to rethink where we live and work: in commuter suburbs, or in communities with shared facilities like shops, schools, cafes, and businesses?

There is already talk of moving as many as 10,000 people out of their homes in the worst-hit eastern suburbs and relocating them, holus-bolus, into new, temporary accommodation, perhaps in Rolleston.

Existing suburbs would be grassed over. But is that the best solution? Or would that create a ghetto?

No, the land probably can't be "remediated" – whatever that means. But it may well be possible to build stronger houses with better foundations, even "floating houses" or flexible houses that could withstand earthquakes. Such designs exist overseas, in Europe and North America. These firms, too, have pledged to help.

Self-sufficient houses, with independent solar energy and eco-friendly sewerage systems, are another option.

Yes, building back better – in every sense – will be expensive. But it won't be nearly as expensive as not doing so.

David Killick edits the monthly At Home supplement in The Press. Email david@davidkillick.co.nz

# 150

REASONS TO LOVE  
CANTERBURY

## The Centre Of Contemporary Art/Chch Art Gallery

The Centre of Contemporary Art and The Christchurch Art Gallery are the city's twin cultural hearts, both constant reminders of the power of human imagination and creativity; something which defies overwhelming adversity.

Both have distinctive characters of their own.

COCA gives us an intimate, elegant setting in which to view the full range of the best of contemporary art from Canterbury and New Zealand.

The CAG presents art in a larger, grander cultural arena.

Both place the highest curatorial standards alongside a drive to widen our horizons and, occasionally, a mischievous urge to provoke and tease the mind and eye.

As institutions, they represent a city's growing maturity and standing as a major arts centre.

With COCA closed until further notice and the CAG serving as a base for Christchurch's emergency workers, both are now in an earthquake-induced coma.

But a full recovery is expected.

CHRISTOPHER MOORE

In the countdown to our 150th anniversary on May 25, help The Press celebrate the milestone by sending in your nomination for 150 Reasons To Love Canterbury to [perspective@press.co.nz](mailto:perspective@press.co.nz), by mail to Private Bag 4722 in Christchurch, or visit our website, [press.co.nz](http://press.co.nz).