

# How Hawera got a new heart

Two and a half years ago, the South Taranaki District Council and the Hawera Business Association commissioned a strategy to redevelop Hawera's town centre. The Campbell Lane project has revitalised the town centre and re-energised private sector investment.

The town's retail tills are busier than before. And Campbell Lane is just the start.

**H**awera, in the South Taranaki district, is similar to most towns across New Zealand that were first developed nearly 100 years ago: the lifestyle and expectations of residents have changed but the physical layout of the town centre has largely remained the same.

With a population of around 12,000, Hawera sits at the heart of the district economically and geographically – 75 percent of Taranaki residents live within 20 minutes of the town. In recent years it had become increasingly clear that for Hawera to thrive, the current town centre needed to be upgraded and redesigned to better meet the needs of residents and visitors.

For John McKenzie, South Taranaki District Council's environmental services group manager, there was another major concern. "I was living in Ashburton during the 2011 earthquakes, and when I looked closely at some of the older buildings in the Hawera town centre, I knew we had to come up with a comprehensive plan for the future."

Two and a half years ago, the South Taranaki District Council (STDC), in partnership with the Hawera Business Association, commissioned a strategy for redevelopment of the town centre. They engaged consultants Boffa Miskell to assess the existing town centre; and advise on, design and help implement the actions within the resulting strategy.

"I'd worked with Boffa Miskell on the Ashburton Town Centre plan," explained McKenzie. "I was confident that they'd be able to help STDC create a strategy for Hawera."

## CONCERNS

Some key issues with Hawera town centre were identified:

- Lack of clear vision and strategic direction within the Taranaki regional context, lack of distinctive character that provides a basis for promoting and encouraging investment.
- Increasing building vacancies and limited demand for additional floor area.
- Lack of quality public open space, including green space,

to provide amenity. Poor-quality development that had detracted from streetscape quality.

- Poor or unclear connections between key facilities and anchors, public spaces, parks and parking areas. Difficult wayfinding for visitors into the town centre from main roads.
- Many older buildings, some of which have heritage values, were earthquake-prone.
- Hawera Library was too small for the community it was servicing.

To address these issues, the existing values and dynamics of the town centre – such as parking, public use, retail spending and heritage values – were analysed. From that, four design principles emerged: Consolidate; Connect; Culture + Community; and Coordinate.

Among Hawera town centre's positive aspects were a good arrangement of key retail anchors at opposite corners of the city centre. However, poor pedestrian connections to the main street meant that any benefit to other businesses was minimised. The strategy also identified a strong need for a new library and community centre with a civic greenspace.

## THE BIG PICTURE

The council committed to a long-term redevelopment plan with key proposals:

- Improving pedestrian and carpark connections with the High Street retail centre, and redesign of traffic flows to encourage better use of the town centre.
- Lighting improvements to highlight Hawera's heritage buildings.
- Redevelopment of the existing town square, and development of a new civic greenspace.
- Building a new Civic Centre (currently referred to as "CHALCI" – Centre for Heritage, Arts, Library, Culture and Information) to serve as an anchor for the revitalised town centre.

Community consultation included two public open days.



The new Campbell Lane design features paving and green space.

Feedback indicated there was overall support for a new Civic Centre, along with support for council to provide assistance to owners of earthquake-prone heritage buildings – but only if those owners were committed to Hawera in the long term and if the buildings were identified as having a significant contribution to the character and identity of Hawera.

Boffa Miskell partner, urban planner Marc Baily said, “Community consultation is important on so many levels. As planners and landscape designers, it helps us deliver a successful outcome; but more importantly, it helps create consensus between residents, local business and the council.”

## CAMPBELL LANE

The first phase of the larger Hawera town centre strategy to be completed was Campbell Lane. Landscape architect Brad Dobson and urban planner Fiona Whyte, both from Boffa Miskell, were deeply involved in the project.

“Creating Campbell Lane made a great pedestrian connection from the Cornish’s car park, though to the High Street retail area,” said Brad. “Our design includes a combination of paving and greenspace, which is enhanced by trees, seating, entrance pillars and lighting columns.

“Although we had to demolish the old, earthquake-prone Campbell Building on High Street, we kept the name alive, and heritage aspects of that building are strongly referenced in the aesthetics of the new Campbell Lane,” he continued.

“Paying consistent attention to those finer design details – the materials, the colours, the fixtures and plantings – is what will create a distinctive character within Hawera town centre.”

Hawera Town Centre project coordinator Phil Waite says the public response to Campbell Lane has been very positive and the project has been a good example of collaboration between the council and the neighbouring property owners.

“Property owners on either side of the new lane have made major improvements to their buildings, and several other significant commercial developments are now underway in the town centre.

“This is great to see because one of the key goals underpinning the town centre redevelopment strategy was that it would be a catalyst to drive change and to encourage private enterprise to invest in the town centre – and that is what we are seeing happen,” he says.

According to financial data independently sourced by Marketview for Venture Taranaki, retail spending in South Taranaki grew 8.9 percent in the first six months of 2017, compared to the same period last year. That is well up on regional growth of 5.7 percent and national growth of 4.8 percent.

A total of \$98.11 million went through South Taranaki tills in the first half of the year, peaking at \$17.11 million in May, followed by \$17.02 million in June.

“This sends a very positive signal about the economic



health of the district,” said South Taranaki mayor Ross Dunlop. “It also gives us confirmation and confidence that the investment the council is making upgrading the central business area is the right thing to do and it is also encouraging private sector investment.”

KORIMAKO LANE

The next phase of the Hawera town centre redevelopment is another open-air walkway which will be named Korimako Lane.

“We consulted with local kaumautā, and they put forward a few suggestions,” explains Phil. “Korimako is a bellbird, which is culturally significant to this region.”

CBD properties have been purchased and plans for the new Centre for Heritage, Arts, Library and Culture and Information and the adjacent civic greenspace are currently in the detailed design phase with Boffa Miskell and architects Warren & Mahoney.

“There’s a real air of positivity in Hawera, and around what council is doing,” Phil says. “We’ve talked about this for a long time, and now residents are seeing some action, and good outcomes as a result.”

“It’s exciting stuff,” says Marc Bailly. “We’re working with about six other towns that are the same size – and facing the same challenges – as Hawera. This kind of collaborative



Hawera town centre development draft plan.

approach brings about what I call an ‘inspirationally realistic’ way forward that everyone can get behind and make happen.”

John McKenzie agrees. “Working with consultants to create a comprehensive strategy has been a good focus for business owners, for the wider community, and for council itself. Opening Campbell Lane started the ball rolling in Hawera, but it’s just the beginning.” **LG**

