

Friday, 27 March 2026

Christchurch City Council  
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By Email: [cccplan@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:cccplan@ccc.govt.nz)

### **SUBMISSION ON THE CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN 2026/27**

Business Canterbury welcomes the opportunity to submit and engage with the Council on its Draft Annual Plan 2026/27 and would welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission through an oral hearing.

Business Canterbury is a not-for-profit membership-based organisation that has been the home and voice of business in Canterbury since 1859. We are the second-largest Chamber of Commerce in New Zealand and the largest business organisation in the South Island.

With more than 2,800 member businesses across all sectors and sizes, Business Canterbury advocates for policies that help shape and enable a business environment which supports innovation, productivity and sustainable economic growth. A strong economy underpins employment, affordability, resilience and community wellbeing, and local government decisions play a critical role in enabling this.

#### **General comments**

1. For many businesses, councils are the most frequent and influential regulatory touchpoint. Through planning rules, consenting processes, and compliance, councils directly shape the cost of doing business and the speed at which they can invest, grow and respond to opportunities.
2. Alongside this regulatory role, councils also provide the essential infrastructure and services fundamental to economic activity. Over many years, Business Canterbury members have been clear about the core priorities for councils. These are:
  - 2.1. Reducing compliance costs
  - 2.2. Investing in infrastructure (both maintenance and new ahead of demand)
  - 2.3. Economic development and destination management
  - 2.4. Sustainable rates rises
  - 2.5. Faster, more efficient and consistent consenting processes
3. The Christchurch City Council also has an important leadership role to play in a Canterbury and South Island context. As the economic anchor for Canterbury and the South Island, and as the country's

second largest city, Christchurch's infrastructure and regulatory decisions have wider implications for economic performance and productivity.

4. Looking ahead, the private sector has a strong and optimistic vision for the future of the region, one centred on our environment, lifestyle and innovation-led growth. Businesses are ready to invest and adapt, but this ambition relies on local government settings and investment that enable rather than constrain growth.
5. Through its role in the Canterbury Mayoral Forum, the Christchurch City Council has been part of the development of the Canterbury Ambition (attached), and Business Canterbury looks forward to the Council's continued support, and planning which aligns activity with the ambitions of the private sector.
6. To provide the runway for growth, and the Canterbury Ambition, councils need to invest ahead of demand, protect Christchurch's competitive advantage in housing affordability and quality of life, and ensure regulation is aligned across the region and capable of keeping pace with innovation.
7. This requires not only financial discipline and prioritisation, but also a continued shift in mindset. In Business Canterbury's view, there remains scope for Christchurch City Council to more clearly see its role as an enabler of growth, rather than primarily as an enforcement or compliance body. In practice, this means being a champion for business success, starting from a presumption of "yes" in decision-making, and using Council capability to actively guide and support businesses to grow.

#### **Proposed changes to rates**

8. Business Canterbury recognises that the Council, like businesses, has faced increasing cost pressures since the adoption of the Long Term Plan, and even since last year's Annual Plan. Inflation, insurance and construction costs continue to affect the operating environment.
9. However, continued increases in rates, particularly increases that exceed what was forecast in the Long Term Plan, have a real and compounding impact on businesses. Rates are a fixed cost that cannot easily be mitigated or easily passed on, and unanticipated increases undermine business planning, pricing decisions and investment confidence.
10. Predictability in rates is as important as affordability. Businesses make long-term investment decisions based partly on expected costs, and deviation from plans creates uncertainty and risk.
11. Business Canterbury welcomes the proposed change to the business rate differential. This has long been a position held by our organisation and our members. A fairer differential recognises the significant contribution businesses make and moves closer to a cost which more accurately reflects the services businesses receive from the Council.
12. We look forward to seeing the Council continue to ensure all future decisions are weighted accordingly based on the additional rates the private sector contributes, and the role they play in driving our local economy and providing the livelihoods of local rate payers.

## **Climate resilience**

13. Climate resilience funding is only effective when commitments are made and maintained over time. Repeatedly proposing to pause or defer funding undermines confidence and long-term planning. If resilience is a priority, it needs to be embedded consistently in financial decision-making.
14. Business Canterbury supported the Climate Resilience Fund in principle last year, and we reiterate the importance of prioritising the protection of the city's most critical assets, particularly economic growth-enabling assets such as the Port of Lyttelton and key freight and transport corridors. These assets are fundamental to the region's ability to grow sustainably and recover from shocks.
15. Business Canterbury therefore supports the ongoing funding of a Climate Resilience Fund, with the following caveats:
  - 15.1. The fund's objectives, intended outcomes and investment priorities are clear, transparent and regularly reported on through a robust governance structure (including a business voice).
  - 15.2. The fund should be a resilience fund, not narrowly limited to climate change, to ensure flexibility in responding to future shocks.
  - 15.3. Governance arrangements should provide certainty and discipline, with clear criteria guiding investment decisions rather than ad-hoc political discretion.
  - 15.4. The fund should explicitly recognise businesses, supply chains and freight corridors as beneficiaries, reflecting their central role in economic resilience and recovery.

## **Council-owned assets**

16. Business Canterbury supports the disposal of Council-owned properties where appropriate. However, we believe that funds raised from asset sales should not be used for operational expenditure but instead treated as capital to be reinvested in other assets and infrastructure that support growth and productivity.
17. What is noticeably missing, and which we expect to see addressed in the next Long Term Plan, is a clear and evidence-based strategy for the Council's strategic assets. Avoiding or deferring this conversation limits the city's growth potential.
18. There is a need for robust and transparent discussion about return on capital, alternative ownership or governance models, and whether there are better ways for the Council to maximise returns on strategic investments while unlocking capital to fund future growth. Without compromise and commercial thinking and discipline in this area, Christchurch risks constraining its long-term competitiveness, limiting our growth and making Christchurch a less attractive investment destination for both commercial investors and central government if we are not investing in our own backyard.

## **Restoring iconic buildings**

19. As with other strategic assets, the restoration of iconic buildings should be assessed through a clear return-on-investment lens, including economic, cultural and tourism benefits.

20. While these buildings are highly valued as landmarks, businesses are increasingly concerned about ongoing delays, cost overruns and start-stop decision-making. Projects that fail to progress to completion erode confidence in the Council's ability to fund, oversee and deliver complex capital works.
21. These challenges impose real costs on ratepayers, including businesses, and risk diminishing returns where escalating costs exceed the economic and development benefits that projects can realistically deliver.
22. What is not clear is how the restoration of iconic buildings has been prioritised over and above other needed infrastructural investments.
23. There is also reputational risk for Christchurch if these projects continue to stall. Business Canterbury seeks a clear, fully costed and credible plan to complete these projects, including funding pathways, as part of the Long Term Plan process. This will enable informed debate and confident decision-making.
24. This position does not diminish the importance of these buildings. But rather, it reflects the need for certainty, discipline and confidence once decisions are made so we aren't having this same conversation in another two- or three-years' time.

#### **Economic development**

25. It is important that as Christchurch continues to grow, the Council is clear on its economic development priorities and desired outcomes, and that they are front of mind and part of all decision making for the Council and Councillors. Business Canterbury believes the City's economic development priorities should be informed by the Canterbury Ambition referred to earlier in this submission – and in regular and robust engagement with the business community.
26. Business Canterbury also strongly supports maintaining alignment between event attraction, destination management and economic development. It is important to recognise that Christchurch is on the cusp of having a fully functional, high-quality entertainment and cultural offering. To maximise the return on investment in facilities such as Te Pae, Te Kaha and Parakiore, sufficient and sustained funding must be dedicated to attracting and retaining major events.
27. Other main centres, including Auckland and Wellington, appear to commit significantly higher levels of funding to major event attraction. As Christchurch prepares to compete more aggressively for events once Te Kaha comes online, a corresponding increase in bid and attraction funding will be essential to realise the full economic benefit of these investments.

#### **Local government reform**

28. Business Canterbury would welcome clarity on whether a dedicated budget or project is being established to respond to significant local government reform, including water services reform and other structural changes.

29. Given the scale and impact of these reforms, businesses need confidence that core services, particularly consenting, will continue to be delivered efficiently and within statutory timeframes, that timelines and impacts are well understood, and that the Council has a clear plan to manage reform while maintaining service quality and responsiveness.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Leeann Watson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Leeann Watson  
Chief Executive Officer | Business Canterbury

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