Case study: Developing the Recovery Strategy for Greater Christchurch: Mahere Haumanutanga o Waitaha

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The Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) was set up in March 2011 to lead, facilitate and coordinate the recovery in the greater Christchurch context after the devastating earthquake sequence that began in September 2010.

CERA developed the Recovery Strategy for Greater Christchurch: Mahere Haumanutanga o Waitaha (Recovery Strategy), in close consultation with its strategic partners (see below), government agencies and the community, as the guiding document for recovery.

This case study outlines the background to and process of developing the Recovery Strategy, the intentions behind it, the context it was developed in, how it was used and CERA’s reflections.

1  Greater Christchurch means the districts of Christchurch City Council, Selwyn District Council and Waimakariri District Council, including the coastal marine area adjacent to these districts.
Legislation

The Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act 2011 (CER Act) came into force on 18 April 2011 to provide measures for greater Christchurch to respond to and recover from the earthquakes. As part of the CER Act, CERA’s Chief Executive was required to develop an overarching long-term strategy for the reconstruction, rebuild and recovery of greater Christchurch. A draft Recovery Strategy had to be developed by 18 January 2012, within nine months of the CER Act coming into force.

The legislation set out the scope of the Recovery Strategy, but did not prescribe its content. It states the Recovery Strategy may (without limitation) include provisions to address:

- the areas where rebuilding or other redevelopment may or may not occur, and the possible sequencing of rebuilding or other redevelopment
- the location of existing and future infrastructure and the possible sequencing of repairs, rebuilding and reconstruction
- the nature of recovery plans that may need to be developed and the relationship between these plans
- any additional matters to be addressed in particular recovery plans, including who should lead the development of plans.

The Recovery Strategy had to be developed in consultation with the Christchurch City Council, Environment Canterbury, Selwyn District Council, Waimakariri District Council, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (all of which came to be CERA’s strategic partners), and any other people or organisations that the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery considered appropriate.  

The development process had to include at least one public hearing. A draft Recovery Strategy had to be publicly notified, with the opportunity for the public to comment on it. It also had to be submitted to the Minister for approval. Under the CER Act, an order in council could approve a Recovery Strategy, making it a statutory document once approved. This meant that documents or instruments under certain resource management, local government, transport and conservation legislation had to be interpreted as or applied in a way that was not inconsistent with the Recovery Strategy. If there were inconsistencies, the Recovery Strategy prevailed.

Intentions for the Recovery Strategy

Originally CERA thought that detailed analysis of infrastructural damage would be available before the Recovery Strategy was developed. But because the aftershocks were continuing, infrastructure and land damage changed and worsened, and work to understand its extent and nature had to be updated several times. At the time of developing the Recovery Strategy, the state of the infrastructure was still being investigated and it was not yet known which areas might be appropriate for redevelopment. It was also unclear what recovery plans might be needed.

Given these constraints, the intention was to develop a collectively agreed, high-level guiding instrument that would provide a clear pathway to help the public, CERA and other organisations involved in recovery to take the recovery journey together.

Development context

In 2011 CERA was a small, developing organisation working on a wide range of pressing response activities. It was in a fast-paced, reactive space and, without a guiding Recovery Strategy, did not always have a clear direction for some of its activities. CERA staff were generally implementers, as a result of the situation being dealt with, and were less focused on planning and strategy.

Similarly, many organisations had a role to play in ongoing recovery, but there was no clear or coordinated guiding strategy for how they would contribute. The CER Act required a draft Recovery Plan for the Central Business District and tasked the Christchurch City Council with leading the development of that Plan. This was

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2 Under the CER Act, the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery could direct entities to develop recovery plans for any social, economic, cultural or environmental matter or any particular infrastructure work or activity.

3 The Minister did not formally identify any other people or organisations to be involved in this consultation process.
to be completed within the same timeframe as that prescribed for developing the Recovery Strategy and was to be consistent with it. While both recovery documents were being developed concurrently, both had to be cognisant of each other so they weren’t developed in a way that was counter to each other.

Complicating this situation were the numerous aftershocks that continued to affect the region throughout 2011, making response efforts more complex and drawn out and the situation uncertain. CERA’s offices were also affected by the aftershocks and work groups had to be spread out across several locations for some time.

“I think if we hadn’t had the aftershocks in June and December in particular, the larger ones, it would’ve been recovering. But in fact, we weren’t actually getting into a more stable state until Christmas time 2011, so that’s quite a long time.” Viv Smith, planning manager

Initiating the project

Because the CER Act required CERA to develop a Recovery Strategy, CERA had to simultaneously turn its mind to planning for the medium to long term while dealing with the more immediate response issues.

“I remember it being difficult that there were parts of the team working on this strategy but on the other hand response needed to happen right now and we ‘didn’t have time for strategy’.”
CERA Advisor

“So we were trying to do some high-level strategic thinking looking out five years whereas almost all of the community, and rightly so, were focused on the here and now and what was happening for them. It was quite difficult.” Viv Smith, planning manager

CERA assembled a small team with diverse experience to begin thinking about a process for developing a Recovery Strategy and what it could look like. The team began by thinking about the definition of recovery† and workshopping ideas on potential frameworks, the potential components of a Recovery Strategy and the process needed to develop each component. As the strategy development process had to be collaborative, a steering group was set up which included the strategic partners. CERA also liaised with key central government departments, business interests and other stakeholders.

“This isn’t really just a normal strategic planning or policy project. This is really about people’s lives and livelihoods and the things that are precious to them. You get caught up in that emotional problem as well as the literal, how do we solve this and how do we plan our way into a future?” Donna Caddie, senior advisor

International experience and frameworks

To inform the strategy development process, CERA looked for international or national recovery strategy frameworks, approaches or models that might be useful. What it found were examples of response frameworks or very detailed plans related to rebuilding, infrastructure development and population resettlement. It discovered very little material about recovery and few examples of recovery strategies.

Another challenge was to find examples that could be adapted to New Zealand’s planning and institutional frameworks and the complex situation greater Christchurch faced.

“It wasn’t a single disaster. It was a series of events that continued to occur. I didn’t see anything about that in international experience.” Donna Caddie, senior advisor

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† The CER Act defined recovery as including restoration and enhancement.
Consultation with the community, government and partners

Broad consultation with the community and a range of organisations and interests was considered crucial for the Recovery Strategy to be widely accepted and followed.

“You couldn't have just had four or five people sitting in a room to develop the Strategy without understanding what was important to people who were going to be living in the community.” Rosalind Plimmer, inaugural general manager policy and recovery strategy

One of CERA’s concerns was how it could meaningfully engage with the public given the conditions at the time. Local authorities were involved in designing a process to get input from their communities. Social scientists from the Institute of Environmental Science and Research were involved in developing this community engagement process. As Christchurch City Council was progressing its ‘Share an Idea’ process as part of developing the draft Recovery Plan for the Central Business District, ideas from this were also fed into the development of the Recovery Strategy.

“Having the local authorities involved with us in setting those up, running workshops with city councillors as well as with communities, we were trying to get ownership and input from the people for whom the recovery was about. It wasn’t an academic exercise only, as some strategies can be.” Rosalind Plimmer, inaugural general manager policy and recovery strategy
There were two rounds of consultation. First, a series of eight early consultation workshops during June and July 2011 gathered ideas on what people wanted to see in a Recovery Strategy, based on the five categories identified at that time: community wellbeing; culture and heritage; built environment; economy; and natural environment. Participants discussed what recovery meant, how they viewed greater Christchurch’s future, priorities, new opportunities, timeframes and what was important for different recovery agencies to work on individually and together.

“What we were asking them to do was think differently; not to think about the current circumstances but to think about the community and city they wanted to live in.” Rosalind Plimmer, inaugural general manager policy and recovery strategy

This consultation exercise was delayed by the major aftershocks on 13 June 2011. Finding suitable community workshop venues was difficult due to earthquake damage and CERA was concerned that it would not be an appropriate time to engage.

“We had to pull the pin because we thought, actually people can’t be asked to come and talk about strategy for the future when they’re literally bailing silt out of their homes. It wasn’t appropriate to talk to the community then.” Caroline Hart, general manager recovery strategy and planning

After the community workshops were eventually held, ideas from them were brought together into a database of ideas, and key themes analysed. This material shaped the development of a draft Recovery Strategy. Understandably people were often focused on immediate priorities rather than a long-term vision for greater Christchurch. Any detailed feedback was analysed along broad themes. These comments were useful for more detailed work that came later – for example, the Land Use Recovery Plan.

The draft Recovery Strategy went through Cabinet approval, was publicly notified on 10 September 2011 and was available for public comment from 12 September to 30 October 2011. This second round of consultation included four information meetings and the public could provide written feedback through the post or the website. A total of 463 individuals and organisations provided written comments. Strategic partners oversaw the review and analysis of the written comments, as well as the response to them. The Community Forum was consulted throughout the development process.

The Recovery Strategy was amended in response to the written comments and Cabinet considered the final version. On the Minister’s recommendation, the Governor General approved the Recovery Strategy by order in council in May 2012.

Changes over time

Several aspects of the draft Recovery Strategy changed over time as the thinking about it evolved. During the early consultation round, there were five categories of recovery, as outlined above. These categories evolved in the draft Recovery Strategy to become: leadership and integration; economic; social (sports, recreation, arts, culture and heritage); built; and natural.

Some feedback emphasised that the categories lacked an explicit community focus, that the connections between the categories were not clear and that the different aspects of recovery had to be grouped together in workable ways. The community and agencies also questioned why arts and culture were placed within the social ‘petal’, wanting to see a distinct cultural aspect to recovery so it would be visible and valued. As a result, the final Recovery Strategy included a separate cultural ‘petal’, which is unique to this framework, and reinforced the place of the community at the heart of recovery.

“Good cultural outcomes would impact on social outcomes, and vice versa, but you wouldn’t want to have the cultural stuff subsumed within the whole range of social issues that had to be addressed. It enabled the right group of people to be around the table having the conversations.” Maree Brown, Ministry for Culture and Heritage

5 The components of the Recovery Strategy are referred to as petals, reflecting the way they were presented in the key ‘components of recovery’ diagram.
The community were keen to see different recovery organisations working together in a coordinated way. This feedback flowed into focusing more strongly on leadership and integration and identifying governance arrangements with the strategic partners whose roles continued after CERA was disestablished.

“The community was very keen that the different organisations that had different responsibilities for recovery weren’t falling all over each other and ended up not being effective because they were not coordinated. I think that was really important and that resulted in a very strong arrangement with the strategic partners.” Caroline Hart, general manager recovery strategy and planning

The draft Recovery Strategy had proposed developing a number of statutory recovery plans and non-statutory recovery programmes. One key change in the final version was that only non-statutory recovery programmes were to be developed. It was considered too early to determine the best tools for progressing recovery across areas, and non-statutory programmes of work would be more flexible than recovery plans. Many issues might be resolved without a statutory tool.

“It was a practical assessment that we didn’t need the legislative power behind some of these things … No point using a sledge hammer if an ordinary hammer would work.” Jason Dowse, principal advisor (education, sport and heritage recovery)

“We didn’t want to leap to a tool before we had a clear understanding about what the problem was for each of these areas. The Recovery Strategy required a number of programmes to be developed which would then enable those agencies to do some proper analysis about what the real problem was and what tools and mechanisms might be most relevant or useful to solve some of those problems.” Viv Smith, planning manager

Another change was to describe some recovery programmes in more detail, including which agencies would be involved. A requirement for geotechnical investigation and assessment of new subdivisions was also added.
Form and function

During its development, three options for the Recovery Strategy’s form and function were considered and analysed. As detailed in the Regulatory Impact Statement, these options were:

- a fully statutory Recovery Strategy that addressed all the matters in the CER Act (outlined above)
- a brief Recovery Strategy supported by material that would have no statutory effect
- a fully statutory Recovery Strategy containing the range of material that was included in the draft Strategy released for consultation.

The options were analysed against the criteria that the approach should:

- enable a planned and coordinated approach to recovery activities
- insert necessary provisions into planning instruments
- avoid complexity or confusion, and unintended effects
- not pre-empt or constrain future decisions.

CERA and its strategic partners recognised that the more statutory detail the Recovery Strategy included, the more difficult it would be to anticipate its effects and the less flexibility agencies would have to change the approach, if required. Many details of how to address recovery issues were also not yet determined.

Another consideration was that agencies would be able to resolve many earthquake-related difficulties by using existing statutory provisions rather than needing special recovery powers. Because of these factors, CERA and its strategic partners agreed it would be preferable to limit the number of sections of the Recovery Strategy that would have statutory effect. The final Recovery Strategy therefore consisted of two types of sections:

- those that had a statutory effect (sections 4–8) – vision and goals; priorities; phases of recovery and milestones; requirements for recovery programmes; and monitoring, reporting and review
- those that provided information only – what is the Recovery Strategy?; guiding principles; what is recovery?; pace of recovery; financial impact and funding; and implementing the Recovery Strategy (including sections on each of the recovery petals).

The final Recovery Strategy contained six components of recovery:

- leadership and integration – research and information, communication, funding and finance, and the governance, coordination and project management of recovery activities
- economic recovery – investment, business, labour and insurance liaison
- social recovery – education, health and community support services
- cultural recovery – the arts, culture, heritage buildings and places, and sports and recreation
- built environment – land use, housing, buildings, transport and infrastructure
- natural environment – air quality, biodiversity, the coast, land, groundwater and surface water quality, and natural hazards.

The vision is “Greater Christchurch recovers and progresses as a place to be proud of – an attractive and vibrant place to live, work, visit and invest, mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei – for us and our children after us.” Supporting this vision are goals related to the six components of recovery. The community is at the heart of the vision and the success of recovery.

The Recovery Strategy identified various recovery programmes as necessary to progress recovery under the six components and signalled the lead agencies for these programmes. Lead agencies included CERA, Christchurch Central Development Unit (within CERA), Ngāi Tahu, Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education Commission, Canterbury District Health Board, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, and Environment Canterbury. Partnership agencies included economic stakeholders, local councils, Land Information New Zealand, Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team, sports and culture agencies, the Department of Building and Housing (now part of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment), the Earthquake Commission and insurers.
Use and Implementation

Developing the Recovery Strategy helped anchor CERA’s role in overall recovery and differentiate its role from that of other recovery agencies. For CERA, the Recovery Strategy became the framework for how it was structured and how it organised its programmes of work. The Recovery Strategy petals became the portfolio areas, with recovery programmes and projects sitting under portfolio. Using the Recovery Strategy framework, CERA could also look at the work it was involved in, see if it aligned with the framework and prioritise its activities.

“If we were doing a project and it had no linkage to the Strategy, the question was why were we doing it, because we’ve got limited resources and limited time.”
Steve Law, Partner Deloitte

The final Recovery Strategy provided a useful tool for agencies to progress recovery in their sectors and to encourage them to work together. Other successful outcomes of its development were that agencies formed and strengthened relationships with each other and the strategic partnership concept was established, which then flowed into governance arrangements.

As a statutory document, the Recovery Strategy has also been used to promote the redevelopment of greater Christchurch by supporting activities with recovery objectives. Some activities would have been non-complying under the Resource Management Act 1991, but the Recovery Strategy has allowed developers to make a stronger case to do things differently where necessary for recovery. For example, resource consent was granted to build a supermarket on a new location on the same site while the existing supermarket continued to operate during construction. These activities would have been non-complying activity in relation to the City Plan. This decision was explicitly linked to the need of one community due to earthquake circumstances, based on its alignment with the Recovery Strategy.

In 2015, the Recovery Strategy was given the number one ranking in the Government Department Strategies Index New Zealand, as it demonstrated the six elements identified by the McGuinness Institute as useful in a strategy document. Caroline Hart, General Manager Recovery Strategy and Planning, notes, “It has been one of the most effective strategies I’ve seen in my career. It did actually drive the entire way CERA and other government departments organised their thinking in the space and has endured. It’s pretty amazing it has that effect.”

Monitoring, reporting and review

The Recovery Strategy committed CERA to developing a monitoring plan in consultation with strategic partners and government agencies. The resulting plan was signed off by Cabinet and published in June 2013. It included monitoring indicators for strategy goals, monitoring progress towards the goals, and financial monitoring and reporting by central government and local authorities. Identifying clear measures for the monitoring plan that aligned with the goals and targets proved more difficult than originally anticipated. It would have been easier if further thought had been given to monitoring requirements while the Recovery Strategy was being developed. The governance groups that the Recovery Strategy identified were the overall monitors of recovery, while CERA coordinated reporting to these groups.

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6 The City Plan is the name given to the district plan for Christchurch City
7 The McGuinness Institute is a Wellington-based non-partisan think tank working for the public good, contributing strategic foresight through evidence-based research and policy analysis.
Transition to regeneration

The Recovery Strategy was revoked and the CER Act was repealed in April 2016, by the Greater Christchurch Regeneration Act. This came fully into force on 19 April 2016, and includes the ability to develop Regeneration Plans.

The Greater Christchurch Group (GCG) was formed on 1 March 2016, as part of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Its role was to lead and coordinate central government's on-going role in the recovery and regeneration of greater Christchurch, with continuing the vision for greater Christchurch to be viewed as an attractive and vibrant place to live, work, visit and invest - mō tātou, ā, mō, kā uri ā muri ake nei – for us and our children after us.

Reflections and identified lessons

It was crucial to include the perspectives and experience of local and central government agencies, iwi, the business community and the public in developing the Strategy. CERA found a number of other skills useful during the strategy development process, some of which were in house and others contracted in. These included knowledge of frameworks and community engagement expertise. The project team did not have previous experience in disaster recovery so they reviewed the literature and engaged with external experts in this area.

CERA faced a number of challenges while developing the Strategy, in addition to those already identified.

While strategic partners worked very closely with CERA throughout the strategy development process, the Recovery Strategy was perceived as CERA’s document. This was because the legislative requirement was for CERA to develop it, rather than for taking a more integrated approach in which responsibility was shared with other agencies. The challenge was to ensure strategic partners and other agencies still felt like the document was theirs in practice.

“If you don’t start from day one with a collaborative document that everybody goes, ‘Yes, that’s ours’ and they all use the language of ‘This is ours’, then that’s going to be a very challenging exercise over the next four to five years as you try and implement it.” Benesia Smith, deputy chief executive, strategy and recovery policy

Another challenge was the time pressure involved in its development. Because legislation had set the timeframe, CERA and its partners had less time to think carefully about what needed to be done and the best way to do it. Ongoing aftershocks further constrained development work in the time that was available as it was not appropriate to be consulting on a Recovery Strategy at times when people were responding to more immediate issues.

In addition, the continued aftershocks made it more difficult for people to focus on long-term thinking while dealing with the urgent ‘here and now’. This was a challenge for all levels, including central government, and delayed the approval process.

When advice was prepared on which aspects of the Recovery Strategy should have statutory effect, careful thought had to be given to avoiding any unintended consequences for planning and resource management processes. Another challenge was how to achieve an integrated and cohesive approach to developing recovery programmes and progress recovery after the Recovery Strategy had been approved. This was mitigated by CERA working with the agencies that had been tasked with developing recovery programmes so that they all took an integrated approach to recovery.

CERA identified the following lessons related to developing the Recovery Strategy.

• Having a clear understanding of the pathway and the aims of the recovery effort is absolutely critical. Without these, the work lacks focus and direction. This was important for the community, involved organisations and CERA itself. Carefully consider the right time to do this, to achieve a balance between speed, to make a clear pathway visible as soon as possible, and time for thought, to make the guidance as good as it can be.

“The lesson is you absolutely, from day one, need to be focusing your efforts on thinking about the medium- to long-term effort because that will impact on what you’re doing on a day-to-day basis. If you’re not doing it …. and you’re not looking ahead, you won’t see the obstacles and barriers that
are in front of you, that you need to be working on and addressing so that actually you can move in your efforts.” Benesia Smith, deputy chief executive, strategy and recovery policy

- Get the right people and organisations around the table to develop the Recovery Strategy. Buy-in is needed, particularly from the people who live in the region. Consider having people with previous experience in developing a disaster recovery strategy involved in the process.

  “The fact is that the process involved a lot of consultation in the community and local authority input was probably the most critical part, whichever theoretical model you were going to go to.” Rosalind Plimmer, inaugural general manager policy and recovery strategy

- Use the strategy development process to build strong relationships. CERA, its strategic partners and other stakeholders developed strong relationships, through the collaborative process to develop the high-level vision and goals for recovery. Another approach, under a different legislative basis, could have been to have joint responsibility for strategy development.

- Be mindful of the community’s situation and whether they have the capacity to engage in recovery strategy development. Be prepared to adapt to community needs. Minimise the draw on their time by making the most of other engagement processes that are happening around the same time (eg, Share an Idea, Christchurch City Council’s consultation on the draft Recovery Plan for the Central Business District). Make the most of the engagement with the community – even if they give feedback that is not relevant to big picture strategy, pass on this feedback for other recovery programme leaders to use later.

- Don’t be too prescriptive about what a Recovery Strategy should do and contain. In the face of uncertainty and a continually changing environment, such a document needs to be enabling and be developed so that it is adaptive. As a result of its less prescriptive approach, the Recovery Strategy could provide guidance and direction while giving agencies the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances as recovery progressed. Be aware of the expectations such a strategy can establish.

  “You have to be really flexible. You’re responding to situations that are evolving quite quickly, so I don’t know that it needed more detail. It probably just needed a really flexible approach.” principal advisor, external agency

- Consider the breadth of aspects of the recovery that a recovery strategy needs to include, and focus them on the future. Also consider the most appropriate way to describe and link those aspects. In the greater Christchurch context, cultural recovery was addressed separately rather than subsumed within social recovery, because the community wanted to see a distinct cultural aspect to recovery so it would be visible and valued.

- Think carefully about how to implement the strategy and ensure it is used. Rather than leaping straight to what tools to use to progress recovery, make sure there is a full understanding of the issues and problems. In the greater Christchurch situation, recovery programmes began before decisions had been made on the need for statutory recovery plans.

- Develop and set a monitoring and review framework with clear targets, as soon as possible, so progress can be tracked and it can seen if the recovery strategy needs to adapt to changing circumstances.