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For Immediate Use

Group launched to make city centre fit for future

Using every tool at the Council's disposal to ensure Timaru City remains a vibrant hub for the community long into the future is the aim of a new steering group.

Councillors yesterday voted to create a project steering group to develop its City Hub Strategy.

Timaru District Mayor Damon Odey said that the changing nature of cities and the challenging retail environment underlined that simply updating and refreshing council street furniture wouldn't be enough to ensure long term sustainability and vibrancy.

"I'd like to acknowledge the work of The CBD Group in identifying that the scope of previous refresh projects wasn't enough to ensure the long term attractiveness of our city and setting us down this path," he said.

"Timaru is lucky in that it still has a busy and vibrant main street. It would be the envy of similar sized towns, and we need to work to make sure it stays that way.

"What we learn through the creation of this strategy will also benefit the district's other towns. Temuka, Geraldine and Pleasant point all face similar challenges in keeping a vibrant hub at the centre of their communities, and the strategy will ensure all our centres remain vibrant and fit for purpose.

"Council has decided to take the lead on this work as it encompasses nearly everything we do from infrastructure to community facilities to the regulatory environment.

"However, we will also be casting the net wider to bring in stakeholders such as The CBD Group, hospitality, retailers, inner city residents and the community to ensure we're all working towards the same goal.

"It's in everybody's interest for Timaru to be a vibrant, interesting place. It helps boost investment, brings in tourism and gives local people places to go and more to do.

"At the moment we have lots of separate things happening such as the start of regeneration work on south Stafford Street, the existing money put aside for cosmetic upgrades and a growing local economy, but the city also faces challenges such as the earthquake prone building remediation and the rise of online retailing.

"For this to work we need everyone working together for the common good. Getting us all round the same table will ensure that we create a shared vision for the city to make it fit for the future."

The City Hub Strategy Steering Group will consist of elected members, council staff and community members. The creation of the strategy will be funded from the council's Economic Development special reserve fund, which is money set aside for economic development support.

"This is an incredibly exciting process to be at the start of," said Damon.

"There aren't many times in local government where you can step back and look at the very fabric of the city and see if it's up to task. We're really wanting to bring the community along with us as well and get their input and give them a central role in developing and implementing the Strategy.

"We can have all the infrastructure in the world, but a city can't thrive without people and we need to make sure our people are at the heart of our plan."

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