Reclaiming Civic Infrastructure

The Time for Change is Now

The Reality of Everything — Ōtautahi Perspectives | July 2026

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WHY MOBILISE? WHY NOW?

Christchurch is at a turning point

DP World bid to control Lyttelton Port raises key question:

Who should control our essential infrastructure?

X Global capital?

✓ Or democratic stewardship on behalf of the people of Christchurch?

How did we get here?

The Rise of Financialisation

YESTERDAY		TODAY
Public systems	→	Financial assets
Stewardship	→	Investment management
Community wellbeing	→	Commercial returns
Democratic ownership	→	Capital recycling

The question changed:

“What does society need?” → “How can this asset maximise financial returns?”

Shifting

from financialised ownership to public stewardship

Strategic assets stop being ends in themselves — and become a means of supporting resilient infrastructure systems, community wellbeing, environmental wellbeing and economic prosperity.

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The core shift

From managing commercial assets to stewarding strategic systems

FROM		TO
Portfolio of commercial assets	→	Strategic infrastructure systems
Responsible ownership	→	Public ownership stewardship
Financial return as primary measure	→	Capability, resilience, access and wellbeing
Community as indirect beneficiary	→	Present and future residents as purpose

A constitutional change should make this shift durable — not dependent on goodwill or wording in a single Statement of Intent.

Why the constitution matters

The board of Christchurch City Holdings CCHL acts within the Statement of Intent and the constitution

CURRENT LEGAL FRAME

- CCHL's constitution was registered in 1997 and no longer carries a clear stewardship purpose.
- LGA and Companies Act duties operate through objectives, SOI and constitution.
- Shareholder expectations need to become explicit, enforceable governance direction.

THE GOVERNANCE PROBLEM

- Consultation language is not enough if it carries no statutory weight.
- A public asset can remain public while control is hollowed out through leases, ownership reviews or commercial strategy.
- Constitutional purpose is what directs future boards when pressure increases.

The question is not only: "Who owns it?"
It is: "What purpose governs it — and what cannot be traded away?"

The immediate gap

The draft SOI does not fully reflect the public stewardship direction

- No explicit commitment to retaining public ownership
- No recognition of Council opposition to outsourcing or leased port operations
- Weak incorporation of mana whenua partnership expectations
- No reference to unions, collective bargaining or workforce partnership
- No clear commitment to enhanced reporting and Council engagement

The most consequential gap: no explicit commitment that CCHL will manage the portfolio consistent with continued public ownership on behalf of Christchurch residents.

Therefore, the Constitution and Statement of Intent need to do more than describe good intentions. They need to constrain future decisions.

Proposed purpose

A stewardship purpose for CCHL

To act as steward of Christchurch's strategic infrastructure systems and invested capital on behalf of present and future generations…

Balance	economic, social, cultural, environmental and financial outcomes
Maintain and enhance	long-term capability, resilience and accessibility
Contribute to	economic prosperity and community wellbeing
Reframe assets as	means of sustaining resilient infrastructure systems

This purpose changes the board's decision test from shareholder value to long-term public capability.

Pathway for change

Short-term focus, medium-term constitutional shift

SHORT TERM

- Amend the Statement of Intent so Council's expectations are explicit.
- Build public support for CCHL constitutional change.
- Strengthen Mana Whenua–union relationships around port stewardship.

MEDIUM TERM

- Shift CCHL from "responsible ownership" to public ownership stewardship.
- Recognise Mana Whenua and Combined Unions as strategic partners.
- Develop board pathways for stewardship-aligned candidates.

Strategic decision test:
Does this improve the long-term capability, resilience, accessibility and public benefit of Christchurch's strategic infrastructure systems?