

Town centre decision next week?

Times-Herald May 7, 1977

On Tuesday evening Christchurch council's policy and resources committee will consider the financial viability of three schemes for the development of the town centre.

And, following the meeting and the consideration of a special report from the Council's chief officers, the committee COULD take a decision that will be the first step towards the new town centre.

A number of plans have been under consideration for many months, and since January this year the contest between New Capital Properties, Cheviot House and Amalgamated Developers has been in earnest.

Now, as the developers told The Times some weeks ago the ball is firmly in the council's court. And it is up to them which scheme, if any, should go ahead and when.

At Tuesday's meeting of the chief officers it was decided to call a special meeting, additional to the regular weekly sessions to draw up a report for the policy and resources members.

This report, in addition to a report on the financial considerations from borough treasurer Mr. Colin Dewsnap, and a confidential report on the meeting between councillors and trustees of the United Reformed Church will be considered in the light of three schemes.

Committee chairman Coun. James Beattie told The Times he did not think any final decision could follow that meeting, but he was hopeful that some steps forward could be taken.

Planning officer Mr. David Pratley said this week that he was strongly in favour of the development of the Saxon Square (south) site first.

IMPORTANT

"It is more important environmentally and economically to the High Street," he said.

He also thought that acquisition of the entire development site by the council would be beneficial to the community in the long run.

Mr. Ray North, whose company (Cheviot House) already owns part of the Bargates site, told the Times: "Because of our land ownership we feel we could make a very early start on the land north of the bypass. I'm sticking my neck out, and I think it could be within six months."

He also felt his company's acquisition of the land confirmed their honest intention to carry out the development.

If Cheviot House is the selected developer, revenue from the land north of the bypass will go to the funders and the developer.

But if another developers is chosen—either New Capital or Amalgamated—the land is expected to be purchased by the Council under the Community Land Act.

BORROWED

This, as Town Clerk Mr. John Macfadyen explained this week, means that money is borrowed from the fund and put into a separate account with the council.

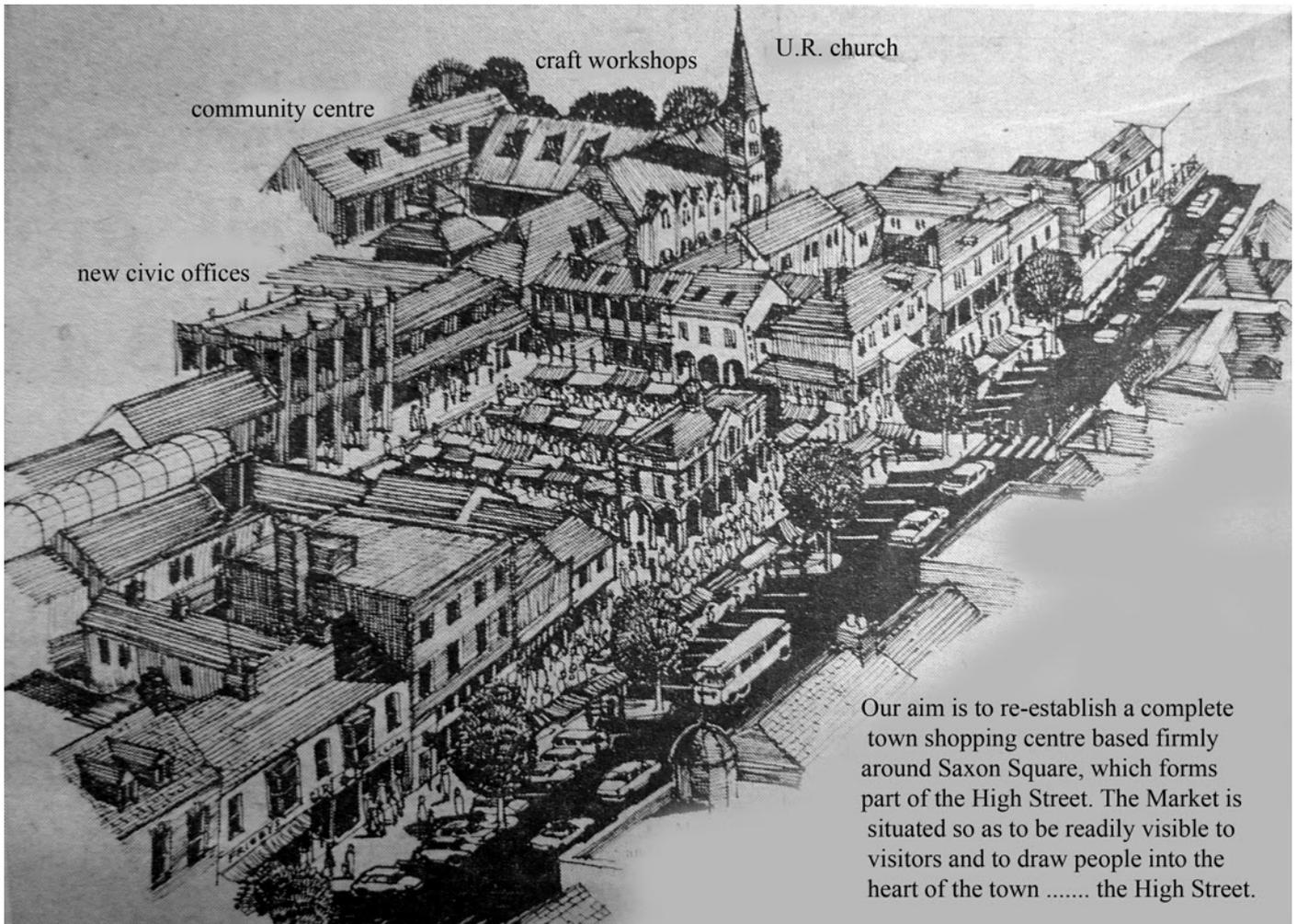
When the money is repaid, 40 per cent goes back to the CLA fund, 30 per cent to a fund for all local authorities in the country, and the other 30 per cent is split (by agreement), 15 per cent to Dorset and 15 per cent to Christchurch.

There was no set period of repayment, said the Town Clerk, but before the loan from the CLA fund could be made the local authority had to satisfy the Department of the Environment that the property in question could be dealt with "fairly quickly."

The council has already served notice of intent to purchase all property needed, both south and north of the bypass, under the Act. This was a formality, and had to be done within two months of receiving an application for the land — in this case from New Capital Properties.

Mr. Mike Huxtable, managing director of New Capital, told the Times this week:

"There will be an annual income from the Bargates site of between £60,000 and £70,000, ad infinitum, and of course increasing. This will either go to the private developer or to the town.



Our aim is to re-establish a complete town shopping centre based firmly around Saxon Square, which forms part of the High Street. The Market is situated so as to be readily visible to visitors and to draw people into the heart of the town the High Street.

"The basic stipulation of the developer's brief was Saxon Square. It could be a viable entity phased very carefully. It has always been our contention that it should be developed before Bargates to allow it to get established.

"If the Bargates scheme is done first it will prejudice the success of Saxon Square shops.

"We could get phase 1 (the part of Saxon Square already in the ownership of the council) going, with about 20 shops, the two larger shops, and replacement offices for the planning, engineer's and borough solicitor's offices.

But without the added, and more lucrative site north of the bypass, some of the non-profit-making elements of our schemes, designed by Gordon Robbins, might have to be abandoned."

Trusts choice

The Christchurch Conservation Trust has written this week to Coun. James Beattie, chairman of the policy and resources committee, putting its preferences for the development:

We are very much in favour of the development of the Saxon Square site. We feel this will revitalise the town centre and form a link between the present principal shopping magnet—i.e. Sainsburys—and the High Street.

"Of the three schemes submitted we unanimously favour New Capital Properties' proposals, prepared by a local architect. These show imagination, ingenuity, and would blend admirably with the existing character of the town.

"We are most concerned that the first phase of the development should be south of the bypass, and only when this has been completed and its effect on shopping and traffic movement observed should the most expedient use of the land north of the bypass be determined."

Coun. Beattie promised a public meeting on the subject of the town centre when he spoke to Christchurch Citizens Association on Monday.