Dunedin – one of the world’s great small cities

(Dunedin – Monday, 26 June 2017) Around six years ago, the Council adopted an overarching vision: ‘Dunedin – one of the world’s great small cities’.

How do we realise that vision? Who is responsible for getting us there? Does this mean we won’t grow?

The vision certainly isn’t about stymying growth.

On the contrary; in order to have a sustainable community and a sustainable economy, we need more people of a working/family age to fill the gap between the large number of 18 to 25 year olds (mostly tertiary students) at one end of the demographic spectrum and our ageing citizens at the other.

That fits with the city’s Economic Development Strategy to increase the number of jobs and businesses in the city and lift the average income. To do that, we need to provide opportunities for graduating students and attract new residents to the city.

Many of the things that will provide new job opportunities in Dunedin will come from the output of our two fantastic tertiary institutions – the University of Otago and the Otago Polytechnic. They provide graduates and research. Both lead to innovation in many sectors.

The kinds of businesses they can productively feed into fall into two broad types. First, high-tech and innovative products such as ICT, bio-medical and design. Secondly, added value to primary products – agricultural, lumber and food.

The Council cannot create jobs by itself. But we certainly play a role with an enabling approach in our planning and consenting functions, investing in new and renewed infrastructure, supporting business development initiatives and promoting the city to investors and skilled workers.

We are also keenly aware that a city doesn’t attract new businesses and jobs if it isn’t vibrant and attractive to both employers and employees.

So Dunedin’s “liveability” is enormously important. That’s what attracts people here. And who do we need to attract? Skilled people who are used to international standards, facilities and offerings. People with an international outlook and high expectations of where they live.

They are attracted here for lifestyle reasons even if they could have a potentially ‘better’ job or higher salary elsewhere. Dunedin has a huge amount to offer those people. We are blessed with a rich heritage and stunning natural environment; a vibrant, high quality arts and culture scene; world-class sporting, recreational and cultural facilities; the best educational choices and standards in New Zealand, at all levels; and a wonderfully diverse and supportive community.

All those, coupled with the job opportunities our city can provide, will play a crucial part in redressing our demographic imbalance. But they need ongoing investment.
As a Council, we have to weigh costs against value gained and to balance savings with strategic investments that enhance and improve the city so it continues to attract and retain the people and businesses we need to keep Dunedin vibrant and developing.

To keep our city on track, the DCC has worked with community stakeholders to develop a strategic framework that sets out the key priorities for development and investment. We used to have over 50 disparate strategies but have reduced that to eight – all interconnected.

That has given us a clear framework encompassing our values, our strengths and our aspirations – who we are as a city and a community – and, as importantly, who we want to be.

To be a great small city we need responsible environmental stewardship and the ability to respond and adapt to change. We need a vibrant arts and culture scene. We need efficient, contemporary infrastructure. We need enlightened, forward looking spatial planning and integrated transportation provision. We need a supportive business environment, accessible recreation opportunities, and a safe, well connected and supportive community. We need to be internationally connected and future focussed in a fast changing world.

These things are all mutually dependent and the Council won’t achieve them alone. That’s why partnership and consultation have been integral to developing our strategic framework. Our strategies are not Council owned. They are community owned.

As the Council begins drafting our Long Term Plan 2018-28, we will ask what the community wants to focus on over the next 10 years – what projects, and what should the Council do more or less of in the future?

The Long Term Plan sets both the strategic direction for the Council and detailed planning on the services and activities required, how much they cost and how they will be funded.

It is essential to work with our community to plan for the city’s future. As we do, we develop an even clearer view of our strengths and challenges and continue to cement a growing sense of city identity, achievement and aspiration.

This all brings our community closer to realising the vision for Dunedin – one of the world’s great small cities.

Dave Cull  
Mayor of Dunedin