

Submission to the Dunedin City Council's 9-Year Plan (2025-2034)

Date: March 27, 2025

Subject: Proposed Initiatives for Middlemarch & The Strath Taieri.

Introduction:

The Strath Taieri Connect Charitable Trust (STCCT) is a Strath Taieri based organization situated in Middlemarch. Our mission is to enhance community well-being through fostering connections, engagement, and developing competencies. Since our inception in 2021, the STCCT has successfully implemented numerous community-led initiatives and projects. To date, we have secured \$371,649 in grants to benefit the extensive Strath Taieri community.

The funding from the Dunedin City Council (DCC) Place Based initiative, along with contributions from two other funders, has enabled us to operate and employ a part-time community coordinator. The effective multiplier from the funding received has resulted in at least a fourfold financial benefit to our community. Without the security of the Place Based funding, our work in the community would face significant challenges, as few funders cover operational costs. The STCCT advocates for an increase in funding, as more community groups are eager to join the Place Based funding pool.

The STCCT is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Dunedin City Council's 9-Year Plan. Our proposals aim to assist and encourage the transformation of Middlemarch into a destination enriching the current suite of opportunities across the greater Dunedin area by enhancing infrastructure, aesthetics, recreational facilities, and community connectivity between Dunedin City and the Strath Taieri region.

The outcome we are seeking is to provide greater opportunities within the area thereby enhancing the wellbeing of our community through enabling new initiatives and opportunities for wider community engagement and connection across our area. This will add to and enhance the wellbeing of our residents.

1. Refurbishment and Maintenance of Middlemarch Train Station:

Middlemarch Train Station, built in 1891, holds significant historical value. The STCCT recommends and encourages the following actions to preserve this heritage site:

- Restoring and maintaining the station building and toilets to ensure safety and functionality.
- Refurbishing the turntable and water tank to preserve their historic integrity.
- Enhancing the station's appearance and signage to promote its heritage significance.
- Developing the area as a heritage attraction to draw railway enthusiasts and tourists.

Preserving Middlemarch Train Station will strengthen its role as both a functional and historical landmark. Furthermore it will provide a clear visitor focus for groups visiting the area as well as enabling the buildings to be utilised as functional living sites of significant human interest. Opportunities for turning this into a combination self guiding information centre and community craft hub abound.

2. Maintenance of the Railway Track from Dunedin to Middlemarch:

The Taieri Gorge Railway is a significant asset, offering tourism opportunities and potential commuter benefits. The STCCT supports allocating funds to ensure the safety and operability of this railway, recognizing the Council's previous considerations, such as the proposed \$20 million grant over ten years for track maintenance. Investing in the railway's upkeep can stimulate local tourism and provide alternative transportation options for residents.

Undertaking this work is highly desirable both for our community and the wider Dunedin tourism market.

3. Beautification of Middlemarch Township and Entrance:

We all like to feel that the area we live in is cherished and cared for. That is a key component of the health and wellbeing of any community.

Enhancing the visual appeal of Middlemarch through gardens and landscaped areas can foster community pride and attract visitors. The STCCT recommends:

- Planting native flora along the township's main thoroughfares and entrance points.
- Creating more artwork and murals within the township.
- Installing signage that reflects the cultural and historical significance of Middlemarch.

4. Upgrading the Middlemarch Playground:

Limited opportunities exist within our community for our younger generation. Creating the feeling of belonging within a caring community helps in ensuring our rangatahi bond to and care for our shared spaces. The Trust is very keen to ensure as far as possible that our younger generations' needs are catered for and that they develop positive relationships within our community. Specific spaces allocated for their skills and relationship building development is fundamental in raising well adjusted future adults. We recommend the provision of enriched recreational opportunities for children and families. Accordingly the STCCT strongly recommends upgrading the Middlemarch Playground to include:

- A flying fox (zip line) for adventurous play experiences.
- A half basketball court to encourage physical activity and social interaction among youth.
- A skate park/area for youth to enjoy, coinciding with visitors from the Rail Trail.

These additions can serve as focal points for community engagement and promote healthy lifestyles.

5. Creation of Public Transport Options from Middlemarch to Dunedin:

Establishing reliable public transport services between Middlemarch and Dunedin would greatly benefit residents, particularly those without access to private vehicles. Potential options include:

- A scheduled bus service operating at convenient times for commuters and students.
- Working with Otago Regional Council to help fund a Community Vehicle Trust that operates on a volunteer driver basis.
- Exploring the feasibility of utilizing the existing railway infrastructure for passenger services, thereby maximizing the use of current assets.

6. Development of a Community Hub:

The STCCT supports the Community Boards long term desires to create a community hub large enough to host indoor sports and provide rooms for hire. This hub would serve as a central gathering place for various activities and events, fostering community engagement and providing a versatile space for residents as replacement for our large old community hall.

7. Support for Local Businesses and Attracting New Families:

To keep local businesses running and supported, the STCCT suggests implementing strategies to attract more families to the community. This could include:

- Offering incentives for new businesses and families to settle in Middlemarch.
- Providing support and resources for existing businesses to thrive.
- Developing marketing campaigns to highlight the benefits of living and working in Middlemarch.

8. Continued Funding for Place-Based Community Groups:

Place-based community groups play a crucial down to earth role in fostering local initiatives, providing services, strengthening community bonds and providing a complementary supplement to the formality of Community Boards. Sustained funding for these organizations is essential to ensure the continuation of valuable projects and services that might not otherwise materialize. We urge the Council to increase financial support for these groups, recognizing their contribution to the social fabric of our communities.

Conclusion: The implementation of these proposals will contribute to the overall well-being and development of Middlemarch and its connection to Dunedin. By investing in infrastructure, beautification, recreation, transportation, and community organizations, the Council can enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. The STCCT appreciates your consideration of these initiatives in the formulation of the 9-Year Plan.