

Site out of action? Create an attraction!

A guide to improving your vacant site

All cities have vacant sites, but in Ōtautahi-Christchurch post-earthquake demolitions left us with a lot of them. Some of these have now been redeveloped, but many remain.

Like you, we want to see under used and vacant sites redeveloped, but we understand that, for a variety of reasons, this can take time.

Vacant unimproved sites and derelict buildings present a negative perception of the city's appearance. We know from our community surveys that vacant sites make people feel uncomfortable, vulnerable and unsafe, especially at night. We're keen to encourage owners to improve the appearance of their vacant site. Small improvements can make a big difference, adding to the city experience which will attract people back more often and encourage new investment.

ccc.govt.nz/vacant-sites



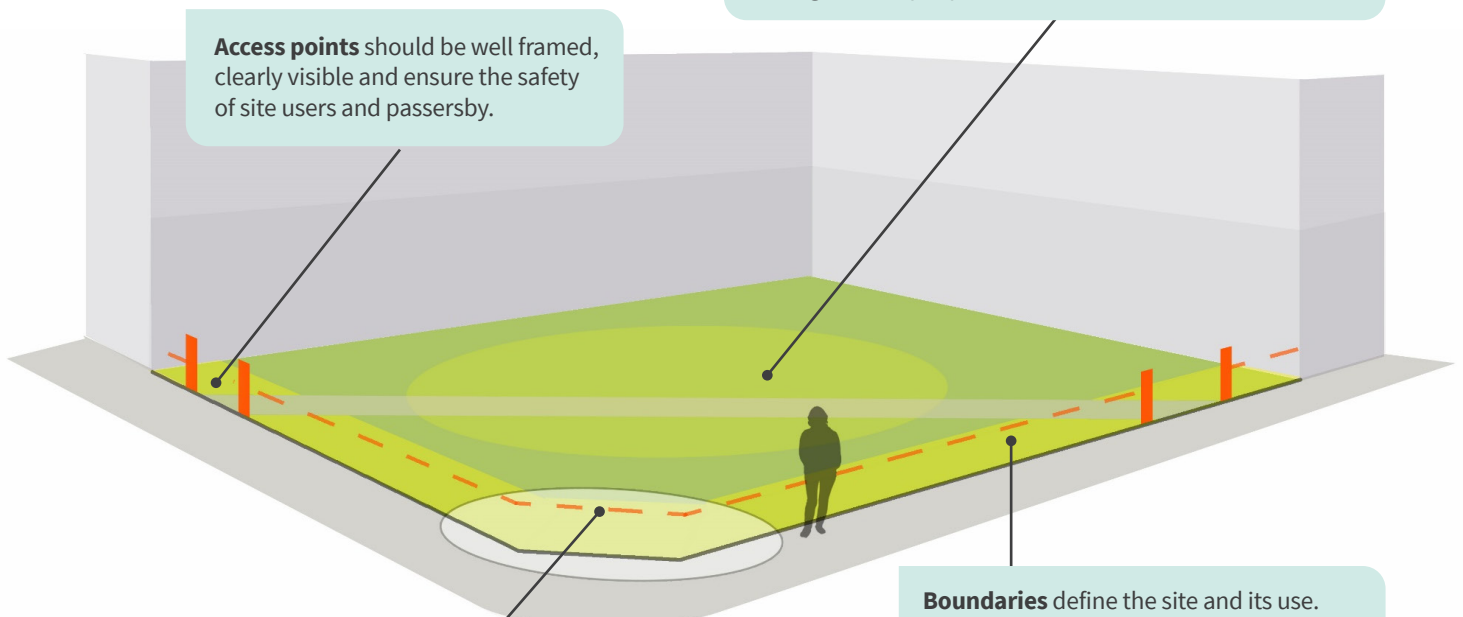
Quality spaces add to great places

Site improvements are temporary, but by following principles of good urban design they can:

- be a good fit for the surrounding area
- engage people and build awareness of the site's previous use or cultural context, through landscaping, information and wayfinding
- improve safety using crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) to:
 - ensure clear sightlines
 - give good levels of lighting
 - avoid creating potential entrapment areas



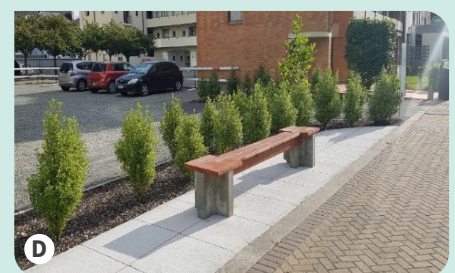
Internal layouts can be designed in response to a site's shape, context and microclimate. If public access is allowed, consider opportunities to provide convenient connections through the site, plants to add greenery and shade, or seating to draw people in.



Corners are prominent reference points. Try to emphasise them with physical features or signs for wayfinding.



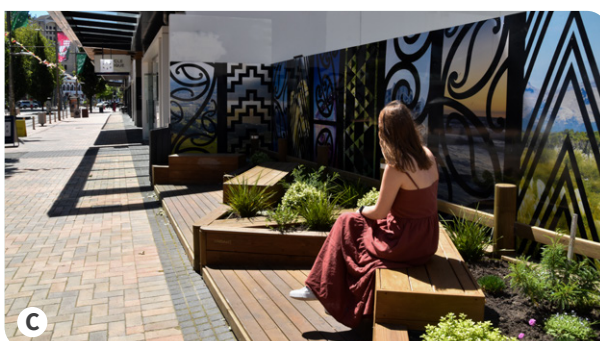
Boundaries define the site and its use. They should enhance the site edge but be low enough for passersby to see into the site (below waist height is best).



Setbacks, landscaping and fencing should reflect the site's use and its effect on the street.



Narrow deep sites can pose a safety risk, especially if between buildings. Artistic hoardings, seating and planting can be effective in hiding narrow 'gaps' in busy streets.



Cost effective, low maintenance options

Council is considering charging additional rates on unimproved vacant sites. By improving your site this added charge could be waived, through a remission, provided the site remains well maintained.

In this guide we have set out simple, cost effective ways to improve sites that allow owners to claim that rate remission.

At the very least we expect owners to improve the site surface and boundaries. This is an easy way to make a big difference.

Grassed or gravelled surfaces, as in the examples below, will lift the appearance of a site and can provide relief from the greyness of neighbouring car parks, buildings or footpaths.



Photo locations

Cover: 9 Cathedral Square (Nexus Point Ltd).

A: 9 Cathedral Square (Nexus Point Ltd).

B: The Commons, 70 Kilmore St (CCC/Gap Filler).

C: 240 High Street (CCC/Glassons).

D: 56 Worcester Street (MI Clifford Trust).

E: 134 Peterborough St (Forte Health).

F: Adj. The Piano, 144 Armagh (CERA/CCC).

G: 46 Hereford Street (Ngāi Tahu Property).

H: 108 Stanmore Road - Tiny Shops (CCC, Te Whare Roimata).

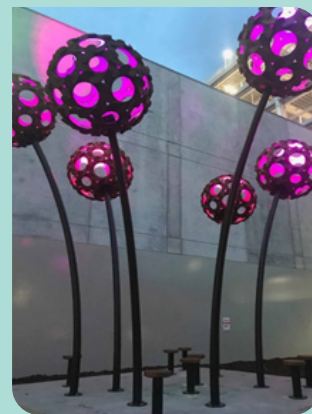


Bringing your site to life – activation

As well as making simple site improvements, we'd like you to consider bringing life to your site. Activation can really improve the vibrancy of an area, by creating a sense of place, new points of interest and encouraging new business activity.

- Seating, pathways and spaces for commercial or community activities change the way people interact with a site and the surrounding area.
- Artwork, lighting, wayfinding and other installations enhance the identity of the area, improving the way people feel about being in that area at any time of day.

A chat with neighbouring businesses and local community groups is a good place to start. They may benefit from your site improvements and be willing to help you look after it.



Life in Vacant Spaces (lives.org.nz) works to connect site owners and project partners to activate sites, and can help you identify options for bringing your site to life.

Whether you work with the community, Life in Vacant Spaces or directly with us – there's help available. Our commitment to supporting owners of under-used sites is outlined in our Enliven Places Programme (ccc.govt.nz/enliven-places-programme) and our advisors can help you identify partnership opportunities and funding options.

Funding support is prioritised for partnership projects on vacant sites in the central city's busy areas (the Central City Business Zone and the South Frame Zone) but support may also be available to improve vacant sites in suburban centres. If you have an idea for activating your vacant site, please get in touch. We can help you bring it to life.

Practical matters

We are keen to support you, and any contractors you engage, in improving your site. Before starting any site works, there are some important things to know.

You may need a consent

Temporary site landscaping, including earthworks, does not usually need a consent. To confirm this, all we need is a simple site plan, a quote for the work setting out the types and volumes of materials to be used, and the construction method to be used.

You will need a consent if you plan to:

- **Use asphalt, concrete or any other hard surface** that will not allow water to filter through it.
- **Install large signs on the site** – we encourage wayfinding signs and information panels, but consent is needed for advertising and large signs.
- **Disturb any contaminated land** or potentially contaminated land. We have to assume a site is contaminated until we have proof that it isn't. (See 'Dealing with contaminated land')

There are some other reasons for needing a consent, so it's always best to check with our duty planner to be sure. (dutyplanner@ccc.govt.nz)

What will it cost?

We've investigated costs for site improvement works. The following estimates, based on real examples of 100 square-metre and 1,000 square-metre sites, are for grass or gravel surfaces similar to those shown in the photos in this guide.

	100sqm	1000sqm
Grassed (includes cutting and watering for six months)	\$5,400	\$28,800
Gravelled (includes 20% laid out as paths for public access)	\$4,050	\$18,500

Please note the estimates assume the site is level and needs little groundwork, and do not include the cost of fencing, boundary definition or landscaping.

Maintaining a great-looking site

It's the land owner's responsibility to maintain the site, including watering any grass or plants. This guide focuses on low-cost, low-maintenance improvements.

You may want to consider partnering with the owners of other vacant sites or negotiating with our contractors to attend to maintenance.

If improving your site benefits neighbouring businesses, you may be able to come to an agreement with them to help with some of the day-to-day site upkeep.

Dealing with contaminated land

We assume all undeveloped vacant land in the central city is contaminated until an assessment from a qualified expert states that it is not. The contamination may have been there before the earthquakes, but may also be from materials moved around during post-earthquake demolition work.

This is not as bad as it sounds – a contaminated site can still be improved, so long as the ground is not disturbed.

The best way to avoid disturbing the contaminated ground is to cap the site, leaving it as it is and covering it with layers of soil or gravel.

If you do plan to disturb the contaminated ground you'll need expert advice about doing this safely and in a way that meets National Environmental Standards. Call our Environmental Health Team on 03 943 8999 or a suitably qualified expert.

If you intend to have plants on your site, any materials you add will also be considered contaminated unless separated from the ground by a membrane or a stand-alone structure such as a planter box. (See 'Landscaping the site')

Landscaping the site

It's important that landscaping on the site is suitable – low maintenance and will quickly improve the look of the site. The plants selected need to establish quickly, be hardy and able to survive without much attention.

Information about surface treatments, plant selection and construction standards is available at our website (ccc.govt.nz/vacant-sites).

More information

In this guide we have summarised why vacant sites should be improved and how this can be done in a cost-effective way. We hope you'll consider your site and how you could make it more interesting and appealing, and how it could contribute to the immediate neighbourhood and the wider city.

Another option is to make your land available for temporary commercial uses. If this is something you have in mind, whether by yourself or with a partner business, get in touch with our duty planner (dutyplanner@ccc.govt.nz) to get advice about the consents you might need.

We appreciate land owners' efforts to ensure vacant sites contribute to the city in a positive way that supports the rebuild, revitalisation and regeneration of Ōtautahi-Christchurch – a great place to be.

You may find our central city map (ccc.govt.nz/central-city-map) interesting. It tracks undeveloped sites in the central city and will help you see what's happening. It may also suggest options for the permanent development of your site, and options for investing, leasing or buying in the area.

If you can't find what you need in this guide and want to know more about how we can help you, or you'd like to discuss a particular property or project please email us at urbanregeneration@ccc.govt.nz

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