

## **Towards the Revitalisation of New Brighton Mall**

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## Contents

Contents .....	2
Executive Summary .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Background .....	4
Literature review .....	5
Regeneration Projects: Failure vs Success.....	5
Franchised Based vs Locally led Approaches to Regeneration .....	6
Culture-led Regeneration .....	7
Methods.....	7
Primary research .....	8
Secondary Data .....	8
Data Analysis.....	9
Discussion.....	9
Sense of community .....	9
Land banking .....	10
Appearance .....	11
Perception of safety .....	12
Connecting with Businesses.....	13
Recommendations for Regeneration .....	13
Conclusion.....	15
Acknowledgements.....	15
References.....	16

## Executive Summary

Within New Brighton, there is immense potential for revitalisation of the suburbs retail centre. Working with ChristchurchNZ, this project explored what opportunities could best reinvigorate economic conditions in New Brighton and provide for community needs while retaining its identity. A mixed methods approach was incorporated to investigate this project. The methods used included surveys, interviews, observational research, and data analysis. The research allowed for key themes to be identified. Key themes included sense of community, land banking, safety concerns, appearance, and fragmented business environment. Upon reviewing the key themes, our group concluded that spending leakage is driven by the variability of retail at outside shopping centres and the absence of a sense of safety. To activate the revitalisation of New Brighton, the creation of a business association, the introduction of chain stores, council interventions such as targeted rates on vacant land, business, and community encouragement. Suggestions for future research that was not touched upon within the project could include the effects of sea level rise towards the planning of New Brighton revitalising.

## Introduction

Effective urban revitalisation projects can create opportunities for a town to realize their economic potential. Understanding community perspectives is a key part of ensuring the success of these projects. An opportunity to review the mainstream methods used for redevelopment is present in the suburb of New Brighton, Christchurch. Currently, the purpose of the New Brighton commercial centre is to provide goods and services for locals, however the occurrence of spending leakage to surrounding commercial centres has prompted an investigation into whether the needs of residents are being met. Spending leakage occurs when residents are spending their money outside of their own retail catchment, the geographical area from which a centre draws its customers from. This research project has been initiated alongside ChristchurchNZ to answer the following research question: What opportunities could best reinvigorate economic conditions in New Brighton and provide for community needs while retaining the suburbs' identity? This will be completed by collecting and reviewing information from surveys and interviews of New Brighton residents to understand the viewpoints and values of the community. These findings will be used to identify potential methods of regeneration that could be implemented in the New Brighton Mall.

## Background

New Brighton (figure 1) is a coastal suburb 8 km west of Christchurch city. Its location near the Avon-Heathcote Estuary (Ihutai), the Avon River (Otakaro), and the sea provide its unique character and appeal. The population of New Brighton is diverse demographically, with a higher population of Māori compared to Christchurch City. Ngai Tuahuriri hapu, a subtribe of Ngai Tahu, hold mana whenua status in the area. New Brighton was once a flourishing urban centre home to the New Brighton Mall, which was the only retail centre in Christchurch where Saturday trading was permitted pre-1980 (Morgan, 2002). The introduction of seven-day trading resulted in a rapid decline of economic activity in New Brighton throughout the 1990s, which resulted in the closure of many local businesses. The 2010-11 Christchurch earthquakes had a compounding effect on the already struggling town, with red zoning and displacement in suburbs around the Avon River and New Brighton resulting in a loss of consumers in the retail catchment of the New Brighton Mall (Colbert et al, 2022).



**Figure 1** New Brighton boundary in relation to Christchurch City

## Literature review

Spending leakage is a common issue facing satellite towns. When the needs and wants of residents are not met by the services that their town centre provides, residents are likely to spend more of their money outside of their retail catchment, reducing reinvestment into the local economy. Satellite towns are towns located on the periphery of cities and emerge due to a demand for a better life at a lower cost (Świątkiewicz et al., 2021). The economic and social environments of these towns are often dependent on the inner communities' connections. The reliance on these connections causes satellite towns to be vulnerable to mass migration, urban shrinkage, and shop vacancies. Vulnerability can be triggered by external shocks such as deindustrialisation as seen in many cases-studies throughout France within medium-sized towns (Haase et al, 2017). Despite these vulnerabilities, satellite towns can work alongside cities to create co-benefits for residents of both. A large-scale example of such benefits can be seen within India where the introduction of satellite towns allows for efficient land use, economic development, decongestion, and environmental protection (Krishnan & Sujith, 2021).

The success or failure of satellite towns is strongly influenced by transport connections. Factors that could influence the success of satellite towns include mixed use zoning, urban design and walking, micro mobility, transit-oriented development (TOD), and local transport planning opportunities. Mixed use zoning has proven to increase the viability of transport lines by combining more people in a smaller vicinity, creating incentives for greater frequency and coverage of transport lines (Filion, 2001). Related to this is TOD, which can create a virtuous cycle of environmentally responsible mobility where compact developments around transit stops inspire a modal shift from cars to walking and transit and vice versa (Bertolini et al, 2012; Cervero & Sullivan, 2011; Stojanovski, 2020). Micro mobility can enhance the viability of both transport routes and the retail environment by providing cost-effective last mile transportation between a person's transport stop and their destination (Abduljabbar et al, 2021; Christchurch City Council, 2023; Shaheen et al, 2020). Establishing connections between the city and satellite towns are crucial for their success. In New Brighton, Christchurch City Council are planning to upgrade Pages Road which will provide a stronger link between the suburb and the city centre. This development will feature a shared path for pedestrians and cyclists, increasing accessibility to the eastern suburbs through safer active transport (Christchurch City Council, 2023).

### Regeneration Projects: Failure vs Success

Regeneration projects are often used in urban development to revitalise economic opportunities and the quality of towns that have seen a loss of vitality in the socio-economic environment. The aim of regeneration is to improve the physical and built environment in an attempt to improve the overall quality and appeal of the area. Successful regeneration projects have the potential to drive community

cohesion, economic prosperity, and create a sustainable future in a town which once faced decline. However, without proper consideration of all factors at play, including environmental impact, community attitudes, and the sustainability of the methods can cause these projects to fail in the long-term. Learning from the perspectives of existing communities in the regeneration process is crucial for these projects to succeed in the long-term, as gaining a holistic understanding of the wants and needs of a town can ensure that the correct development decisions are made. Failed projects are often the result of poor planning and low commitment from key stakeholders, as explained in the following section.

The Kanazawa 'City Centre Revitalisation Plan' project was set in Japan which started during the 1990s and is still in place today it is intended to follow a bottom-up approach to retail regeneration. The 'bottom-up' approach is centred around mobilising individuals within a community to participate in regeneration methods. This project operated from an environmental perspective, intended to reduce motorised transport through infill development methods and conservation activities in the city centre (Balaban & Puppim de Oliveira, 2014). However, the presence of several stakeholders with differing intentions for the project meant that the overall impacts of the Kanazawa revitalisation plan were relatively minor (Balaban & Puppim de Oliveira, 2014). The developers focus on profits as well as weak commitments from central governments to pursue climate change solutions was a root cause of this. To generate a sustainable outcome from community participation, their mechanisms require additional political support. This is a key factor that should be kept in mind when considering retail regeneration within New Brighton.

Perkins et al. (2019) highlight how successful regeneration towns attract investors into the property sector by encouraging local businesspeople to invest. Ashburton and Timaru both had plans put into place that aim at the creation of multi-use shopping centres and multiple social services which should lead to an increase in foot traffic in the area which in turn should increase local spending.

### [Franchised Based vs Locally led Approaches to Regeneration](#)

A second key aspect of urban regeneration includes franchised based and locally led regeneration which become extremely relevant to New Brighton given its strong sense of community. One study compares franchised-based urban regeneration, as seen in the redevelopment of Manchester City Centre with major retail brands, to locally based approaches. The former was found to result in the expansion of franchise outlets and a higher proportion of expenditure being directed away from smaller communities (Instone & Roberts, 2006). However, the authors discuss the importance of "differentiation," involved in locally led regeneration. Differentiation focuses on offering goods and services which are not provided by mainstream retail, exemplified by initiatives like the 'Balti Triangle'

in Birmingham, which is a function centre that incorporated a variety of retail opportunities which in turn increased spending by catering to local and ethnic needs (Instone & Roberts, 2006). This perspective suggests that New Brighton could address its spending leakage issue by focusing on what major retail environments are not providing, such as services for local and ethnic communities.

### Culture-led Regeneration

A method of regeneration that is based around strong community involvement is culture-led regeneration (CLR). As government and private entities responsible for facilitating urban development become more concerned with creating sustainable and resilient environments to serve all people, CLR has become commonplace in urban planning frameworks (McElduff et al, 2013). CLR has been identified as an approach that could increase the sustainability and longevity of development projects by facilitating more community involvement (Paiola, 2008; Chiu et al, 2019). Real world examples of culture-led regeneration typically follow three models: culture and regeneration, cultural regeneration, and culturally led regeneration. Culturally led regeneration methods often result in the most positive and long-lasting outcomes for towns. These methods are highly collaborative and follow the characteristics of 'bottom-up' regeneration practices. A study of the organisational methods used for Festivo Filosofia, a cultural event in Modena, Italy from Paiola (2008) demonstrated the importance of creative exchange and networking between community groups to give a town a competitive advantage. With more community involvement, cost barriers to development are lowered as more sources of funding can be identified. A more developed communication network means that the cultural values of most community members can be represented throughout the development project (Paiola, 2008). Culturally led regeneration is also effective at mobilising community members with a strong sense of neighbourhood attachment to make a change in their town (Zhu & Ye, 2022).

Despite their intentions, some culture-led redevelopment projects can fail to carefully consider the perspectives of the community. This issue is most often seen in projects that follow the culture and regeneration model. These approaches are often driven mostly by economic gain, and their benefits to the community are short-lived. These methods are labelled as 'top-down activation' in Piaola (2008), which discusses the implications of events-based regeneration when creative and financial decisions are left to just a few entities that supply most of the funding for these events. With this method, there is a risk that the funding partners may lose interest in the project, halting development efforts and creating attitudes of disdain within the community (Zhu & Ye, 2022).

### Methods

Within this project, multiple methods were deployed to better understand the wants and needs of the New Brighton community regarding regeneration opportunities. Primary and secondary methods were

used to collect relevant information. Primary methods included surveying, observational research, and interviews, while secondary methods included the use of peer reviewed sources and other trusted literature.

### Primary research

Three separate surveys were conducted to ascertain community sentiments from three different groups: the New Brighton seaside market attendees, residents, and business owners. The market survey was conducted in-person on paper, in contrast to residents and business surveys which were conducted online and distributed through the local New Brighton Facebook group. All surveys were composed of open and closed questions, with open questions limited to make analysis less time-consuming while still allowing for qualitative answers as recommended by Porter (2004). Only one survey was conducted in person which reduced the cost of surveying as distributing paper versions and requiring respondents to mail them back would be costly in both money and time as indicated by Porter (2004). Nulty (2008) investigated response rates between online and paper surveys and found that paper surveys received higher response rates which was reflected in our survey results.

Informal observational research was performed during the initial stages of the project with the aim of developing our research question and the initial direction of our project. This consisted of a casual site visit by all members of the group to New Brighton Mall and the surrounding area with the primary goal of understanding what the built environment characteristics were like, what type of atmosphere New Brighton Mall had, and how people interacted with the environment.

A low response to our business survey led to the initiation of interviews. This method consisted of a semi-structured format allowing for real-time information to be acquired during the interview which could then be further asked about during the interview. This contrasts with survey questions which do not allow us to investigate previously unknown information or engage with social cues in real time as highlighted by Opendakker (2006).

### Secondary Data

Our secondary data consists of journal articles, government reports, census data, Police data and Council data. Sources were searched for using Google Scholar and the UC library with peer-reviewed articles targeted to ensure data and analysis were of high quality. Other secondary data sources we used are government census data from Statistics New Zealand which we used for demographic data on New Brighton. Police data was used for crime statistics for both Christchurch and New Brighton. The council provided us data on a range of factors such as building consents and spending data for the New Brighton area. Finally, both local and central government reports were used for assessing government project direction.

## Data Analysis

Graphing key themes from the survey results allowed for easy visualisation of the collected data. Our open-ended survey questions from all three surveys had to be grouped into key themes for analysis as these responses were often long and wordy. In contrast, data collected from interviews was better analysed through the formation of quotations through key themes. Observational research being informal did not produce sufficient findings to analyse. Like the primary research, secondary research was also analysed through key themes identified within the literature. Data visualisation and collation tasks involved the classification of survey results and graphing results to visualize the key themes.

## Discussion

This research has identified five key themes that explain how New Brighton residents view their suburb, and the most prominent issues they believe should be addressed in a regeneration project. Some of these themes are focused on the quality of the built environment, including its appearance and the issue of land banking. Other themes were more complex and focused on the social and perceptions from the community. These themes included the sense of community, perceptions of safety, and the fragmented business environment. Without consideration of these themes, regeneration efforts may be ineffective at reducing spending leakage from the retail catchment of New Brighton. The following section will expand on the specifics of these themes, and why they need to be understood when considering the type of regeneration projects that could be implemented in New Brighton.

### Sense of community

Despite facing many challenges over the past few decades with changes in retail law and the Christchurch earthquakes, the New Brighton community believes that the community is vibrant, friendly, and communal. Figure 2 shows that New Brighton residents really like the market with 21% of attendees at the Saturday seaside market indicating that they liked the sense of community that the market creates. Figure 2 also shows that 27% of market attendees also liked that the market connects the community. The keen sense of community was also revealed to us in our interviews with local business owners who highlighted the number of community market events organised by local business owners which brought 100s of members of the community together.

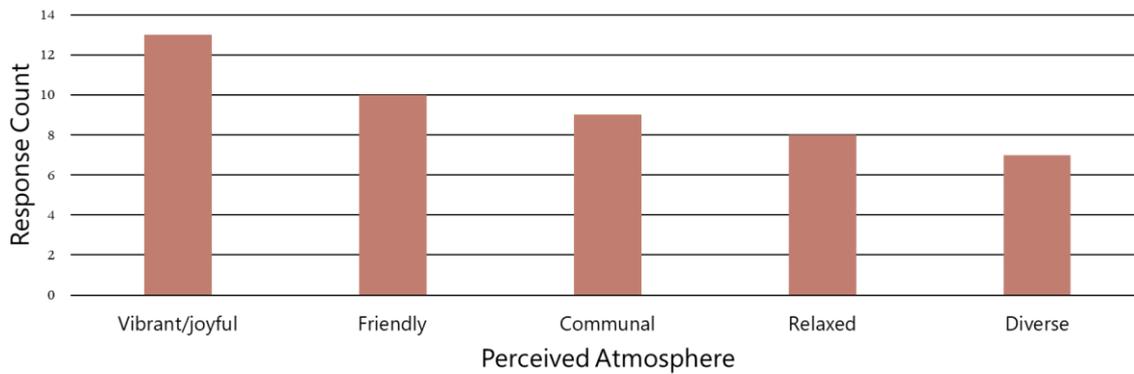


Figure 2: Responses from the market survey. Responses were prompted by the question, 'How would you describe the atmosphere of the New Brighton Seaside Market?'

Members of the community indicated that they have not been listened to since the earthquakes with the release of the master plan in 2015 that has not come to fruition and numerous groups from the Council, Community board, academics, and civil society groups consulting on and promising improvements that did not materialise. There is a divergence in views between distinct groups within New Brighton regarding any redevelopment of the New Brighton shops. Those who answered the residents survey indicated that there was a strong desire for chain stores such as the Warehouse or Farmers whereas those who answered the Seaside market survey indicated a desire for local independent stores. While greater variety is a strong driver of spending leakage to other shopping centres such as Eastgate and the Palms, there are different preferences in the community over the most desired solution.

### Land banking

An issue raised during interviews and survey responses was the presence of vacant sites and fragmented land ownership. Much of the property in New Brighton's retail centre was purchased by property developers when the area was seen as economically prosperous during the retail boom in 1980. The valuation of these land parcels has decreased significantly since the introduction of 7-day trading. Interviewees mentioned facing difficulties with current landowners who are reluctant to sell for a negative return, but also do not see the value in investing in developing their own land. The issue of vacant land became more prominent after the 2010-11 Christchurch earthquake sequence. Not only did this result in property damage in the mall, but red zoning and the loss of population around the Avon River caused a drop in consumer demand. A review of the New Brighton commercial zone by Christchurch City Council in 2017 showed that vacant floor space had increased from 1798m<sup>2</sup> to 4167m<sup>2</sup> between 2010 and 2016 (Christchurch City Council, 2017).

Without active care from owners, these plots of vacant land are left to deteriorate, and can have negative impacts on community. In surveys and interviews, residents raised concerns about the dilapidated nature of the carpark situated between Countdown and Hawke Street on the northern side of New Brighton Mall. This carpark is divided into 13 plots of land, each with different owners (Canterbury Maps, n.d.). Residents mentioned that some significantly damaged areas of the carpark had resulted in injury and damage to personal vehicles. As a solution to this issue, community board members have recommended increasing rates on vacant land in efforts to encourage landowners to develop or sell. Fragmented land ownership is not only a barrier to development, but also greatly effects the appearance and perception of New Brighton Mall.

### Appearance

Another significant factor that was repeated through both the market and resident surveys as well as general discussions was the appearance of New Brighton. Community members expressed that the derelict buildings and empty storefronts created an uninviting perception of the environment for both community and noncommunity members. The general dilapidated look of the shop fronts and carpark was noted across our research as being a significant factor in people not shopping in New Brighton. However, the New Brighton Outdoor Arts Foundation (NBOAF) plays a crucial role in the appearance of the community, which was highlighted during a semi-structured interview with a local street artist. The underlying philosophy of the foundation is to inspire local communities whilst simultaneously bringing vibrancy to both vacant and derelict sites in New Brighton, using murals. It was acknowledged that community involvement is a major component of NBOAF. For example, the design concept behind one mural included a Moa which was driven by local perspectives.

This engagement has been instrumental for surrounding businesses, as both local and non-community members are coming to visit certain murals which then influences them to venture into New Brighton Mall. It was also expressed that to sustain the appearance of New Brighton and the flow-on effects on retail expenditure, stronger engagement from businesses is required. For example, one business owner was initially opposed to a mural being painted within proximity to their business. The local artist indicated to us that this mural has resulted in countless people stopping to visit the mural and visiting the business. Overall, this demonstrates the potential of artwork to improve the appearance of the New Brighton shops and encourage regeneration.

## Perception of safety

### Neighbourhood Safety - after Dark

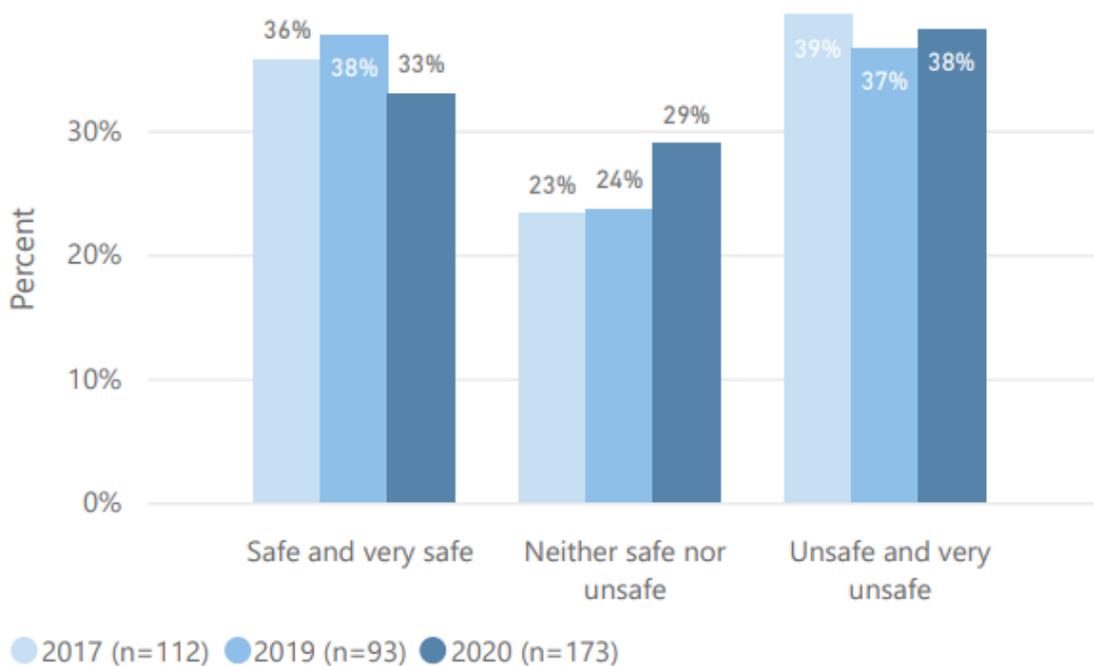


Figure 3: Data describing the safety the neighbourhood feels after dark. Collected from the ChristchurchNZ dashboard.

Figure 3 shows the data from the ChristchurchNZ monitoring Dashboard, from this we can see that the neighbourhood believes that the area becomes more unsafe as years go by. This perception of being unsafe could be due to the lack of lighting in the area. Other reasons indicated throughout our research was that there was a concern about aggressive people who would loiter around the mall and often intimidate both members of the public and shop workers.

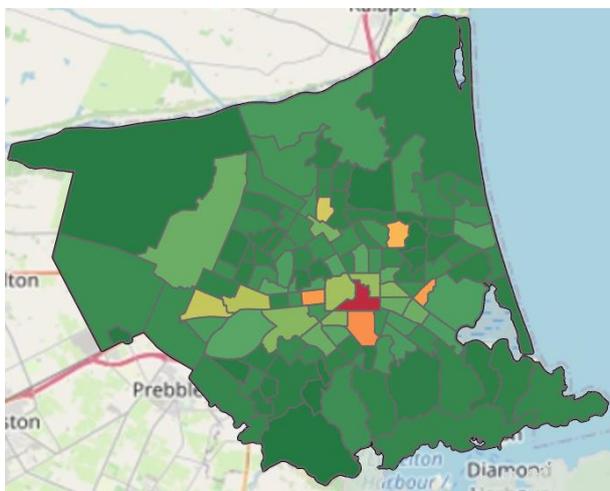


Figure 4: Annual count of reported victimisations in Christchurch City, September 2022-2023

The perception of New Brighton is thought to be unsafe and risky by the greater population of Christchurch and some members of the New Brighton community. The figure 4 annual victimisation counts in Christchurch between September 2022 and 2023 (New Zealand Police, 2023). New Brighton recorded a total victimisation count of 204 during this period, lower than the suburb average. This suggests that the perception of safety discussed in surveys and interviews is not representative of the true nature of the suburb.

To combat these perceptions, the Christchurch City Council is reintroducing the Guardians which is an initiative set up by the Positive Directions Trust, a local organisation that carries out projects to assist communities, and with the New Brighton Community Safety Partnership, to help combat rising crime. With the presence of these people walking about the area it is hoped that they will make the people who wish to cause problems/crimes in the area to stop and think about whether they want to do so with them around. The Guardians movement was first established in 2015 but were discontinued due to lack of funding. However, due to the Positive Direction Trust gaining funding from the Christchurch City Council, the guardians will be operating for 6 months over the summer in an initial trial period with the goal of extending them for an 18-month period.

### Connecting with Businesses

An interview with a local about their thoughts on the business environment in New Brighton portrayed it to be fragmented in the sense that there is very little communication between each business. It is likely that this is due to either a lack of a business association or low interest in the social aspect of a business. The social aspect of a business is believed to be a falling from the older generation of business due to them being unwilling to learn how to apply their business in that direction to being stuck in the past. They see that the newer businesses are doing better than the older shops in terms of people, due to what they believe is their presence on social media.

An example of what the New Brighton business environment could be like is found in how the Carnaby Lane group operates. They are a local group run by businesses in Carnaby Lane, which communicate with each other to form events to bring more people together and see that New Brighton is a place where you can go and enjoy your day while doing some shopping. A business association being formed in New Brighton could help solve their issues of communication and help the older business form their presence on social media. The involvement of an organisation called town team is being used to help form a group like a business association and with their help they will hopefully keep the business owners keen on this group running and eventually turn it into a business association.

### Recommendations for Regeneration

Due to our research question offering such as a broad scope, many factors must be considered when offering solutions. One solution will not be adequate, therefore, many solutions must be paired together to address to the key concerns mentioned, while still answering the research question. Key opportunities that are proposed to aid in the revitalisation of New Brighton are: the creation of a business association, introduction of chain stores, council interventions, encouragement, and local events.

Currently within New Brighton there are many small groups of businesses that share information, however there is no overarching association that caters for all businesses. This makes it hard for authorities to send out messages to the business community as it is so fragmented. Introducing a business association would help to revitalise the business community as it would lead to a sense of belonging. Creating a business association could capitalise on the existing sense of community in New Brighton by giving more autonomy for community members to introduce change. A place for business owners to share their ideas and concerns could lead to more positive change to the attitudes of business owners. Christchurch City Council operate the Business Improvement District (BID) programme, which is a public/private partnership encouraging local business investment and joint ventures. This programme has been successful in other Christchurch localities and could be successful in New Brighton if funding is directed to a new connected business association (Christchurch City Council, 2017). Access to funding could help New Brighton businesses realise their ability to make positive changes to their environment, bringing more people to the area who could be converted into customers.

The successful introduction of a business association has the potential to draw new merchants to the New Brighton Mall. Findings from surveys revealed that the New Brighton community was split between wanting chain stores introduced and wanting to retain the local identity. Our surveys also displayed that a key driver to the spending leakage originated from the lack of variety, with residents forced to outsource their money, to areas such as Eastgate Mall. Finding a balance would be key to this solution to ensure that New Brighton's identity is not lost in the process. It is important that only essential chain stores are introduced to ensure that the need of the community are being met, however the introduction of the chain stores should be done in moderation. Only a few chain stores should be introduced over a long period of time to allow for local identity and competition to be upheld. However, these businesses must recognise New Brighton's economic prospects for this to occur. Marketing campaigns directed towards large retailers that highlight the upcoming developments in New Brighton such as Te Pakau Maru (housing) and the appeal of the suburbs natural setting could help to change the perspectives of these businesses.

Intervention from the council is a key solution that would allow for the reinvigoration of New Brighton. A key example included introducing modified rates for vacant land to deter landowners from land banking and letting their property cause burden to the community. This example would be a solution to multiple of the key concerns including, land banking, safety perception and appearance. The Council has strong relationships with active members of the New Brighton community, and these relationships could be helpful when establishing a new business association.

Encouragement of both the community and business owners is needed to work towards the revitalisation of New Brighton. Residents should be encouraged to get amongst the community by supporting local businesses, giving feedback, and showing up to community held events. While the business owners should be encouraged to become more forward thinking and install a drive for community run events such as the dog parade or other types of markets. This paired encouragement from the community and businesses would work to answer all key concerns along with reinvigorating the economic conditions of New Brighton while allowing for its identity to be retained.

## Conclusion

Following the formation of our research question, we identified five sub-themes for our research which were spending leakage within satellite towns; Transport and connectivity; Failure vs success of regeneration; Retail regeneration; And cultural methods of regeneration. Possible methods and data analysis were then explored, resulting in two methods of research and two methods of data analysis. The two methods of research used were primary and secondary data collection. Primary collection consisted of surveying, observational research, and interviews while secondary data was sourced from ChristchurchNZ dashboards. Data analysis was conducted using graphs and thematic groupings. Throughout our research, five key themes of concern were identified which included sense of community, bank banking, appearance, safety perception, and connecting the business environment. These themes informed our recommendations as they illuminated our research question. The proposed solutions aim to address the concerns of the local community while also addressing our research question. These recommendations are as follows, the creation of a business association, the introduction of chain stores, council interventions such as targeted rates on vacant land, business, and community encouragement. In conclusion, key themes were identified to inform and construct recommendations.

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