

Media Release

First stage of first anchor project opens

Release Date: 29 August 2013

Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Minister Gerry Brownlee says today's official opening of the first part of the Te Papa Ōtākaro/Avon River Precinct is a significant step forward for Christchurch's rebuild.

Watermark is the pilot segment of the river development situated between the Antigua Boatsheds and Montreal Street. Featuring a boardwalk, new paths, intensive native plantings and innovative LED lighting, the Watermark project gives the public a taste of how the Avon River Precinct will look.

Costing \$1 million, Watermark's construction was not without challenges. Unexpectedly high river flows soon after planting meant some of the new plants were dislodged before their roots took hold, and persistent rain meant it took time for the new path to dry out.

But Mr Brownlee says the deliberate nature in which this part of the wider project was tackled has given great insight into how the river will respond when the substantive part of the precinct gets underway. He says the ecological improvements are already looking promising.

"Changes to the river itself have created special habitats for invertebrates, eels and insects, which in turn mean eels, Inaka [whitebait] and other fish are already returning.

"We know from what's happening in this one small section of the Avon that this will be a fantastic success story for the river.

"Once finished the Avon River Precinct will ensure our river is a much more keenly appreciated part of our new city."

Mr Brownlee says the imminent onset of spring is the perfect time for the public to head out and enjoy the first anchor project's progress.

"We really want the public's views through a digital feedback campaign – once people have experienced Watermark they can text their comments direct to our project team.

"This text campaign will help designers across the next stage of the precinct's development, as they gain an appreciation for what the public likes and what might need to change in future stages," Mr Brownlee says.

Information boards at Watermark explain how members of the public can text the precinct's designers with feedback on the ecology, planting, boardwalk and lighting.

As well as the digital feedback, CERA staff will canvas visitors at Watermark over the next few weekends for their verbal feedback.

The Avon River Precinct will be completed by mid-2015 and will stretch 3.2km along the water's edge as far as Fitzgerald Avenue. Feature boardwalks and tracks, as well as native and exotic plantings and landscaped gardens will ensure residents can enjoy one of the central city's key assets.

As well as providing a contemplative space for visitors to the neighbouring hospital and Botanic gardens, Watermark will benefit commercial operations like the Antigua Boatsheds with more user-friendly space.

“The people of Christchurch have told us loud and clear that they want their city to be clean and green, to inspire and entice the arts and to be accessible.

“The Avon River Precinct lays the foundation for achieving this,” Mr Brownlee says.

The next stage of the Avon River Precinct is in the final stages of design, and construction will begin in December.