

## **Responses to Chamber of Commerce questions for Councillor candidates**

**From ICC Candidate Darren Ludlow**

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### **1. Please outline your vision for Invercargill city in 2011**

My vision is for a city where there is continued growth in both population and economic prosperity, and for continued development of our District Plan that clearly defines where certain activities (domestic, commercial and industrial development) can occur.

### **2. Name three key issues you support and will campaign on?**

- (as mentioned) Continued development of our District Plan to ensure controlled development
- Continued support for services for youth that are not in direct competition with existing businesses
- Support for improvements in air services from our airport – both for the development of domestic competition (and more reasonable airfares) and the establishment of a permanent trans-Tasman service.

### **3. Please outline the specific initiatives you will support to ensure that Invercargill has a business friendly environment**

- Continued regular liaison with Vibrant Invercargill
- Continued high level of consultative service we already provide to any new business or industry looking as establishing in the city
- A strategy that ensures the vitality of our CBD
- Continuation of rating relief for new business during the period of construction/development

### **4. Name five key priorities you see for infrastructural investment in the city over the next five years.**

- Strengthening of the city's sewerage treatment capacity
- Improved inner city parking facilities
- Development of the Southland Museum and I-Site
- Improvement to the inner city cleaning programme
- Improvement of the water supply line to Bluff

**5. Do you support the use of public-private partnerships when council is looking at building, operating or maintaining infrastructure?**

Yes – models used in Brisbane show there are significant cost savings that can be made with these partnerships, particularly when it comes to controlling budget over-runs. I don't see why this couldn't provide the same benefits here.

**6. What are your views on the council's use of debt to fund projects? Do you think the council has an appropriate level of debt?**

Two questions here. I am quite comfortable with using debt to fund projects, provided the project has on-going benefits. For example, with a project that has intergenerational benefits it is appropriate to spread the cost over those who continue to make use of it. With regard to debt level, I feel the city has the capacity to service a higher level of debt than we have at present.

**7. What is your position on whether Council should free up more land for residential housing?**

This is really a matter for developers. Council should ensure residential development takes place in areas where the capacity of infrastructure can cope. For example, some developers' desire for increased residential development in North Invercargill is not prudent as it would require an upgrading of water, drainage and sewer capacity. Development contributions are one way of facilitating this desire, but these would need to be significant and this may deter some developers.

**8. What is your position on climate change and carbon neutrality?**

Sure – as good global citizens we should be aware of the claims regarding climate change and make reasonable steps to reduce our carbon footprints. However, some claims regarding climate change are extreme and biased. Let's be more careful, but not go overboard.

**9. Do you think Councilors should be paid in proportion to the number of meetings they attend, or through a fixed annual fee, or in some other way?**

I'm a supporter of a fixed annual fee after being previously targeted by the media for the amount of meetings fees I received during my first term (which, by the way, was because I attended a lot of meetings). Morally, it also applies pressure to attend the required meetings or risk being labeled as a "passenger".

**10. What are your views on Council ownership of non-core assets including trading enterprises of Council i.e. those assets that are not essential to run local government? What do you regard as core strategic assets and why?**

Three questions here. I am quite comfortable with Council operating trading enterprises. While, in some cases, it can be seen as competing in the open market, it is also an opportunity for us to look at other revenue streams and provide some form of rate relief. Core strategic assets include water, sewerage and drainage, regulatory operations, our airport, forestry and electricity line companies and our public-private partnership in BCL. Why? They all give Council the opportunity to maintain control of some assets (water, sewerage, drainage, regulatory), play a leadership role in maintaining access to our province (airport), and potentially gain revenue for rate relief (forestry, electricity, BCL).

**11. Do you agree that trading enterprises should be governed by a commercial board of directors and such businesses should be run on a commercial basis?**

Yes, and I believe they are. Current directors have strong business skills. I believe there is also room for some voice from those who are sympathetic to the needs of ratepayers on low incomes or benefits, but this shouldn't mean they deviate from good business practice.

**12. Do you consider there is a further need for local government reform? If so, what are your reasons?**

No – not at present. If it means less interference from central government, I'm in favour of it. The requirement for an LTCCP is quite overbearing and expensive, and unfair when such measures are not imposed on central government itself. Yes – there needs to be long term planning, but tempered with room for variance the further into the future you move. Prudent governance means Council should look constructively at opportunities of shared services with other local authorities in the region on a case by case basis, but not total amalgamation.

**13. What are your views on combining local authority service delivery, and amalgamations with neighbouring authorities?**

See previous answer.

**14. Name three actions that you will take to ensure Invercargill city delivers better service and value to ratepayers.**

This is a flawed question. It is not possible for one candidate to “ensure” anything apart from putting their viewpoint forward. All decisions are based on a majority vote and therefore it is impossible for any candidate to “promise” change. I believe the city council examines opportunities to improve service and provide better value each year through the Annual Plan process. Because this is a consultative process, sometimes the plans Council has may be changed by the public will – where it is clear. The one thing I can “ensure” is a personal commitment to always look for and support opportunities where we can clearly improve service and provide better value.

**15. Would you support a rates target so that council’s rates income does not exceed the combined rate of inflation and population growth per year?**

No (and I know that’s not a popular answer, but it is practical). In the works area, for example, there have been increases in costs from contractors (in the free market) which have been considerably higher than the CPI. If we were to support a rates target we would also have to consider cutting services in some areas, or increasing some charges for profit instead of simply covering costs.

**16. Do you support the use of differential rates whereby business rate payers pay more than residential ratepayers per dollar of rateable land?**

Yes. There are some things business ratepayers can do that residential ones can’t – for example: claim back the GST (which should not be applied to rates in the first place, but the Government disagrees with this). Security and cleaning are examples services required by some business ratepayers as distinct from domestic. Residential ratepayers are also not using their properties (in the main) as a method of running a business and making money.

**17. What are your views on council use of fees and charges?**

In the main, I think they are fair. The aim should to be to get as close as possible to user pays, although there are some instances where fees can acknowledge a general public good. Some fees are governed by statute and council merely administers them, sometimes at a loss (for example, liquor licensing – which Government should address).

**18. Do you think the community should pay for its own water on a user pays basis?**

Not at present. It's a possibility this could be examined in the future I guess (like many other local authorities). Essentially, I think there would be a general ratepayer revolt if we examined this without just cause.

**19. Please identify three courses of action you would want to promote to ensure a vibrant CBD.**

- Continued regular liaison with Vibrant Invercargill (which perhaps the Chamber of Commerce might like to join in on)
- Improvements to inner city surveillance
- Improved late night toilet facilities

**20. List five key issues that you consider need addressing by the Council in the next three years.**

- A review of Zonings within the District Plan to clearly indicate where development is wanted.
- The introduction of Development Contributions from developers
- Addressing sewerage treatment capacities for new industries establishing
- Upgrading of the water supply for Bluff
- Campaigning for improved air services (passenger and cargo) from our airport

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