



Workers wait to start demolition for the Invercagill CBD development

By Louisa Steyl

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Kaumātua Michael Skerrett, of Te Runanga o Waihopai, blessed the site where demolition work on the Invercargill CBDI development was due to begin on Monday.

Standing in the gutted Cambridge Place Arcade, Michael Skerrett performed a karakia on Monday morning at the site where the demolition for the new Invercargill Central development was supposed to begin.

Christchurch-based Ceres New Zealand was due to begin tearing down the building this week but work was halted after property manager Gaire Thompson filed an interim injunction in the High Court at Invercargill before Christmas.

In the meantime, the block designated for demolition has been stripped of its water and electricity connections.

Stores have been emptied, with many of the floors removed.

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A team of heritage consultants had been in to identify materials of historical significance - like an art deco-style store front - and these have been salvaged so they can be included in the new building.

"The buildings aren't usable anymore," HWCP project manager Geoff Cotton said.

He said they had low earthquake safety ratings.

Thompson has applied to judicially review decisions by the Invercargill City Council not to notify an application by HWCP to vary the conditions of resource consents for the demolition, alteration and development of a block, and to grant that application.

He was concerned about changes in the finance clause and how it may affect ratepayers.

One of the changes was that HWCP no longer had to provide council with written confirmation from a registered bank that funding for stages 1-3 of the development had been obtained before proceeding.

This came after investor Geoff Thomson pulled out of the project in November 2019, leaving HWCP with a \$21 million shortfall to address, in terms of the overall \$160m needed for stage one, two, and three of the development.

Thompson owns the Invercargill buildings leased by the Warehouse, Farmers, Smiths City, and Noel Leeming, as well as the Cue and Menzies buildings.

He had previously told *Stuff* that he was concerned the CBD project would create more vacant retail and office space, adding to the existing surplus.



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Ceres operations manager Swaroop Gowda, Kaumātua Michael Skerrett, HWCP project manager Geoff Cotton and Invercargill City Council chief executive officer Clare Hadley check out what remains of the inside of the Cambridge Place Arcade in Invercargill.

The matter will go before a judge on January 21 and HWCP director Scott O'Donnell has said he's confident demolition will begin soon after.

Cotton reiterated this sentiment on Monday. "Let's hope it's just an interruption," he said.

The Ceres crew, who have rented a house in Invercargill for the duration of the demolition work, will keep themselves busy with asbestos removal and further heritage salvage work.

"Then we wait," Ceres operations manager Swaroop Gowda said.

Cotton said the building on the corner of Tay and Kelvin streets did not fall under the injunction and HWCP was investigating the possibility of starting demolition there while the company waits for the results of the hearing.

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Kaumātua Michael Skerrett, of Te Runanga o Waihopai, said the Invercargill CBD development was the dawn of a new era for the city.



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A team from Ceres New Zealand and HWCP will continue with heritage salvage work while they wait for the go-ahead to begin demolition.

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