

246 HIGH STREET**Hearing: Wednesday 15 February at 2.15pm****Summary**

The building that was situated at 246 High Street was a three storey unreinforced masonry semi detached structure (the building).

Immediately next to the building to the north west was 248 High Street which was known as the Link Centre and which ran through diagonally to Hereford Street (152 Hereford Street). It was a more modern building comprising a concrete column and wall main tower on Hereford Street linked to High Street by a two level concrete floor and column structure. A large void to the level 2 floor allowed light from roof mounted light wells into the level 1 ground retail area.

Following the September 2010 earthquake (and prior to the February 2011 earthquake) the Link Centre buildings were green placarded.

The building is very likely to have been an earthquake prone building. An email from the Council to the solicitor of a prospective purchaser in 2006 noted that there was a caveat on the title, this being one of the worst risk category (A) buildings.

Christopher Chapman from Harcourts Commercial, had managed the building for its owners, Shugborough Properties Ltd. He has advised that Harcourts had managed the building for at least the six years he had been employed by Harcourts and that no structural strengthening had been carried out in that time, although he believed that some earthquake strengthening had been undertaken in relation to the ground floor and basement areas prior to Shugborough Properties Ltd purchasing the building.

After the September 2010 earthquake, a Level 1 Rapid Assessment by the Council resulted in the building being green placarded.

On behalf of the owners of the building, Harcourts retained the services of Holmes Consulting Group who conducted a Level 2 Rapid Assessment of the building on 10 September 2010. That inspection found damage to a parapet and chimneys. The building placard was changed to yellow and the City Council were advised.

A further inspection on 15 September 2010 by Alistair Boys of Holmes Consulting Group noted damage to the southern boundary wall chimneys and parapet. Mr Boys also inspected the north-west wall adjacent to the neighbouring building – the Link Centre and found that it did not display any evidence of damage. Make-safe work for the south wall was designed by Holmes Consulting Group and carried out by contractors under their direction. Following a further inspection by Mr Boys on 21 September 2010 the building was again green placarded.

A Council Level 1 Rapid Assessment carried out on 26 December 2010 following the Boxing Day aftershocks recorded damage to the building as “minor/none”. However a level 2 assessment was recommended with a note to “check rear walls given age”.

There does not appear to have been any level 2 assessment or further Council inspection before the February 2011 earthquake.

Harcourts, for the owners did not carry out any further inspection following the Boxing Day aftershock, but relied on the Council inspections.

In the February 2011 earthquake the building was severely damaged. In particular the north west side wall collapsed down to second floor level, rubble and building material collapsed onto the roof of the adjacent Link Centre atrium, and into the link area accessed by pedestrians.

Joseph Pohio was having his lunch in the Link Centre at the time of the 22 February 2011 earthquake. He was trapped by rubble approximately 5 metres inside the High Street entrance to the Centre and then dragged clear by members of the public. CPR was performed but he could not be revived and died at the scene.

Proposed Witnesses:

1. Peter Smith, Spencer Holmes Ltd, structural engineer
2. Christchurch City Council
3. Christopher Chapman, Harcourts, property manager
4. Holmes Consulting Group

Likely Issues:

1. Application of the Council's earthquake prone policy to the building.
2. Assessment of the building after September 2010, and after the Boxing Day aftershock.