



A long way south, but with Mid Canterbury firmly in mind. Somerset Ashburton Trust's new \$8 million Invercargill commercial property is now open, with income from the DOC-tenanted building ultimately helping fund organisations, projects and people back in Mid Canterbury.

A southern money-spinner



A bold move beyond its usual boundaries is now delivering on a long-term vision for Braided Rivers Community Trust, as Daryl Holden reveals.

by Daryl Holden

Sometimes you have to look a long way from home to find a way to give more back to it. The Somerset Charitable Trust (SAT), part of the Braided Rivers Community Trust Group (BRCT), has done just that, going about as far south as you can to Invercargill. Its \$8 million commercial central city Invercargill property is now finished and officially open, the Department of Conservation southern team having moved in. And that means the investment can now start doing what it was bought to do by generating more money for Mid Canterbury. For Braided Rivers Community Trust's chairperson Gerard Rushton finally walking through the completed state of the art building brought home what had previously existed largely in plans, numbers and artists' impressions. "We were excited to be in Invercargill and to diversify our assets in a way that helps ensure the Trust's sustainability across generations," said Rushton, who was joined at the opening by current and former SAT and BRCT trustees. He said for those who had been involved in the original decision to make the investment, as well as those who have helped guide

it through to completion, being present at the opening was a special moment. "It was an investment made with the future in mind, diversifying our assets and creating a strong, long-term income stream that ultimately comes back to support our Mid Canterbury community," he said of the Ashburton-based Trust, which supports organisations, projects and individuals across Mid Canterbury through funding grants. And while Invercargill might seem an unlikely place for an Ashburton charitable trust to invest \$8 million, there's a clear reason for looking beyond its own backyard. SAT bought the development as part of a strategy to spread its investments geographically, reduce risk and, crucially, increase the money available to support Mid Canterbury. The deal was struck with Mackersey Property in 2024 when the building was still a development rather than a finished investment, with the tenant having not been publicly named. Now DOC has shifted about 60 to 80 staff from its long-time Don Street Invercargill base into the slick new building, giving the Trust the strong, long-term tenant it

wanted from the outset. And Rushton said that mattered. "Supporting community organisations is important to us, and having a strong tenant is critical," he said. "DOC makes the build viable, reduces risk, and, as a tenant, is a major partner in the project." The significance of that goes well beyond having somebody paying the rent in Invercargill. When the investment was first announced, then SAT chairperson Rob Harnett said it was expected to generate "significant additional funds" for community grants, with the potential for those returns to grow annually. The income it generates will strengthen the Braided Rivers Community Trust Group's ability to support the organisations, projects and the people of Mid Canterbury. And that's why Rushton sees the Invercargill investment as being about considerably more than bricks, mortar and rental returns. It's about ensuring there's money available not just for today's community, but those that follow. "We're excited to be in Invercargill and to diversify our assets in a way that helps ensure the Trust's sustainability across generations."



Quite the backdrop: Somerset Ashburton Trust and Braided Rivers Community Trust representatives got their first look inside their completed \$8 million Invercargill investment, including the striking artwork that features throughout the new DOC building.

THE \$8M LOWDOWN

- The story:** Somerset Ashburton Trust's major investment is now complete.
- What:** It owns an \$8 million purpose-built commercial property in Invercargill
- The tenant:** About 60 to 80 Department of Conservation staff have now moved into their new digs.
- Why buy in Invercargill?** To diversify the Trust's investments and create long-term income
- Local benefit:** Returns from the investment will help fund Mid Canterbury organisations and projects
- Who is Somerset Ashburton Trust?** A charitable trust within the Braided Rivers Community Trust Group.

Art of the investment

This isn't your average office block. Step inside Somerset Ashburton Trust's \$8 million Invercargill commercial investment property and there's plenty more to it than desks, meeting rooms and workers getting on with their jobs. Among its standout features are murals created by local contemporary Māori installation artist Steve Solomon, with stories, symbolism and hidden details worked into his art throughout the building. "Together with features, such as the mauri stone incorporated into the building, the artwork adds something incredibly special to the new space and was certainly a highlight of our visit," Braided Rivers Community Trust's chairperson Gerard Rushton said. And while the artwork catches the eye, the practical side has been carefully thought through too. The building includes shared spaces, meeting rooms, collaboration areas and phone pods, designed around the way DOC's teams work. For Somerset Ashburton Trust, those finishing touches have helped turn an \$8 million investment on paper into something considerably more tangible. "But for us, this milestone is about much more than a new building," Rushton said.