

Media statement – 2pm, 24 April 2012

Orion buildings to be demolished

Due to major damage caused by the Canterbury earthquakes, two administration buildings owned by local power lines company Orion are to be demolished. Both buildings are located at 218 Manchester Street at the west end of Orion's central city site (see attached map) and were used as offices for the company's 150 employees. They also formed the nerve-centre for Orion's electricity distribution network.

"We moved out of the buildings immediately after the 22 February 2011 earthquake because they were unsafe, and have worked from a temporary back up site around the corner in Armagh Street ever since," says Orion Chief Executive Officer Rob Jamieson.

"Any further damage to these buildings may put our back up site at risk. Our priority is to keep the power on and keep our staff safe while doing this, so the decision has been made to go ahead with demolition."

"We're a 24 hour essential operation and this site has to be safe for as long as we continue to work from here. The proximity of the damaged buildings to our back up site is a risk that we need to mitigate. If we don't demolish them they could interfere with our ability to keep the power on, and that's unacceptable to us," continues Mr Jamieson.

After assessing the risks of natural disasters, Orion set up its back up network control centre and 'hot site' in 2007.

"Our control centre forms the 'hub' of our operations – it's where we coordinate our employee and contractor teams and network control systems to restore power supply as quickly as possible. When the February earthquake happened, we were able to relocate quickly to our back up buildings and this helped us to focus on power restoration for our customers and community. We need to ensure we can continue to respond effectively," says Mr Jamieson.

One of the buildings, located at the corner of Manchester and Armagh Streets (see attached photograph), was built in 1939 and has a Historic Places Trust category II heritage classification, which is the lower of the trust's two heritage classifications. It has a Group 3 listing in the Christchurch City Plan, which is the second lowest of the four categories in the plan.

"We've been able to save many of Orion's heritage substation buildings due to our very successful seismic strengthening programme which we started in the 1990s. While we would very much like to be able to save the Manchester Street buildings, in the end safety and risks to our operation of the power network were the key factors in our decision."

"Even without the risk the buildings pose to our operations, we believe the cost of trying to fix the buildings would be too high when we still have much work to do to repair Christchurch's electricity network. Independent engineering assessments have shown that it's uneconomic to repair either building, and the demolitions have been approved by the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority," concludes Mr Jamieson.

ENDS

For further information contact Rob Jamieson, Orion Chief Executive Officer, 0274 324 367



Map of Orion site in central Christchurch



Orion buildings at 218 Manchester Street in central Christchurch

