

**SUBMISSION TO**

**WCC DRAFT BUILT HERITAGE STRATEGY dated 15 Nov 2004**

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**The Wellington Civic Trust also wishes to make an oral submission.**

This is the submission of The Wellington Civic Trust.

The submission follows the format of the questionnaire issued by the Wellington City Council. Supplementary comments (where necessary) are included in each section.

**What is your main interest in the draft Strategy?**

The Wellington Civic Trust, by its constitution, is established to inspire citizens to take an informed interest in important issues confronting Wellington City and to promote the development of a civic environment which benefits all citizens of the city. The preservation and promotion of Wellington's history is an essential part of this function.

The Wellington Civic Trust has no commercial or pecuniary interest in any issue associated with this strategy and makes its submission in the public interest.

## What are the key heritage places you would like to see listed in the District Plan?

### 1. *Surviving elements in the Central Business District of the wooden 19<sup>th</sup> century city.*

There remain within the core CBD certain important historical relicts of the wooden commercial and public buildings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century city, for instance in

Willis St (between Manners St and Dixon St, eg 'The Settlement'),  
Taranaki St, (the 'Walrus Gallery')

Dixon St (the former Church of Christ)

Buildings of this type are exceptional survivors. Despite their often-decayed state and despite the cost and difficulty associated with preserving them, they should be given very high priority for protection. We note that for example, the former Church of Christ building in Dixon street is already included in the heritage list. What we are emphasizing here is the need to preserve these buildings - not merely to list them.

### 2. *Suburban shopping centres*

A highly-significant part of Wellington's character derives from the individual 'villages' of the early suburbs. This feature of its growth and history is clearly readable in the shopping centres at, for instance

Brooklyn

Newtown

Wadestown

Hataitai

Berhampore

Khandallah

Other suburbs also contain this core which provides the essential centre to the surrounding area. The importance of preserving this element of character is evident when suburbs which have entirely lost this anchor (eg, Johnsonville) are considered. It is worth noting in this context that London, despite its enormous size, is still characterised as "a city of villages". Loss of the village character in the older suburbs would be extremely damaging to the quality of Wellington life. (Conversely, retention of the character enables key areas to survive extreme pressure. The shops in Majoribanks St do much to support the special nature of Mt Victoria).

### 3. *Corner shops*

Another group of survivors that tell much about the history and development of the city are the old corner shops that once existed in isolation all over the city. Examples are those in

Moxham Ave, Hataitai

Rongotai Rd, Kilbirnie

### 4. *Fitments and ornamentation*

A concerted effort should be made to find and protect unusual survivors of surviving 'features' once common. For instance, in Manners St, opposite Te Aro Park, one of the shop verandahs is still supported on decorative cast iron posts. It was once common to protect basement windows with decorative iron grilles, as on the AMP building. Features such as these need to be identified and their protection taken in hand before the last of them has gone.

## Do you think the current rules are effective in protecting heritage places?

No. The rules are deficient in many areas. Particular examples that can be called to mind are:

1. *Failure to protect small detail.*  
Much of Wellington's heritage is modest. Small changes to a 'protected' building can have very deleterious effect (eg, inappropriate windows, decks, openings, carports, or the use of 'unhistoric' materials). The progressive erosion of character from the group of Charlesworth houses in Oriental Parade and the highly-significant group of houses in the monastery precinct of Mt Victoria are clear examples of the inability of the present rules to provide adequate protection.
2. *Failure to prevent inappropriate additions*  
Failure to prevent additions which diminish and demean the historic character of significant buildings - the addition to the roof of the old BN building on the corner of Cuba and Manners Streets is an example of this failure.
3. *Failure to protect the overall 'feel' of an historic area*  
Cumulative minor changes to unimportant buildings in areas that preserve an historic character can be extremely damaging to both the overall character of the area and to individual properties of recognised heritage worth in that area. The long fight by both Mt Victoria and Thorndon to gain some protection from this process demonstrates that the threat is not imagined. Suburbs currently at great risk from this process include Mt Cook, Newtown and Berhampore. The damage being done by this process to the *nationally*-important heritage area of the first State Houses in Miramar is alarming.
4. *Failure to distinguish between genuinely-preserved heritage material and bogus heritage.*  
Examples of bogus heritage are:
  - The recent shops built in Thorndon in 19<sup>th</sup> century style.
  - The construction of a spurious 'heritage' building around the frame of the former NZ Shipping Co building re-located to Wellington Waterfront.Failure to distinguish false from true, cheats the uninformed and robs Wellington's children of their real heritage. It can be argued that the increase in height of almost all buildings in the Blair-Allen St Precinct (although readily-detectable) is an instance where genuine heritage buildings have been rendered somehow less than genuine.

## What other mechanisms do you think could be used to protect heritage places?

Individual heritage places deprived of context are impoverished representatives of the very values for which they have been protected. The city should identify areas of broad historic value and designate these areas as sensitive. This would serve two purposes: the case for protection of an individual building within the zone is strengthened and individual buildings of merit within the zone retain an appropriate

context. Such zones have been identified in the past. The concept should be extended throughout the city. The designation should not be designed to choke off future development of the area but to ensure that future development is in harmony with the existing character. This broad 'character' protection, used sensitively, could do much to preserve Wellington's special atmosphere.

The Trust strongly supports the submission made by the Mt Victoria Residents Association that the remains of historically significant buildings or other built structures should be recorded on a single map that is publicly available for reference purposes.

### **Do you think a heritage fund for owners of heritage buildings will help protect heritage places?**

Yes, for the following reasons:

1. Even modest support can have significant impact in encouraging owners to take a positive attitude to the preservation of their property. Surprisingly small sums can frequently tip owner attitudes from hostile to supportive.
2. The Council should be seen to 'put its money where its mouth is'. Even heritage-friendly owners can be resentful when they are left feeling that they are to carry a burden imposed on them by parties (including Council) who bear none of the cost. A demonstration of Council's willingness to share the load sends powerful messages to the individual owner and to the community at large.
3. There are occasional cases where the merit of the building is agreed and the owner is supportive of preservation but simply incapable of meeting the cost of appropriate work. Subject to proof of this incapacity, Council should be willing to provide exceptional levels of support in certain instances. It would be inappropriate, as well as uneconomic, for this support to be frequent but (just as above) a well-demonstrated willingness to support would send a powerful message that difficult cases are not necessarily hopeless cases. Such a message may of itself make the difference between a decision to demolish now and a decision to defer demolition. This is very important. It is surprising, in heritage issues, how often a solution eventually appears from a totally unforeseen quarter. (The recent salvation, at the minute before midnight, of the Tonks homestead, even though it was in a desperate condition, is a case in point). The only heritage building that cannot be saved is the one that has been destroyed, so maintaining an owner's optimism about the structure is critical.

### **Are there other ways that Council can identify and protect heritage places in the city and suburbs?**

1. The example of the Thorndon Society in issuing plaques to buildings of heritage worth is one that should be emulated throughout the city. A scheme similar to the London "Blue plaques" would provide interest to visitors,

encouragement to owners and an education in heritage and history to the citizens. The scheme should be set in motion without further delay.

2. In certain areas, the Council already has a series of historic signboards explaining the city's heritage. These boards are highly popular. They are particularly valuable in enhancing the tourist experience of visitors to the city. The programme should be extended.
3. Subject to agreement by tangata whenua, the series of *pou* already erected in the city should be supplemented by discreet explanatory markers, indicating why the position is significant. Again, this would be highly popular with visitors to the city.
4. The recent amendments to the Resource Management Act have raised the status of heritage to one of "National Significance" under the Act. It would be an appropriate gesture for Council to make a similar statement of significance in the District Plan, thereby enhancing the moral case for heritage preservation.

### **What do you think should be the priority tasks?**

*(These priorities reflect the statements already made).*

1. Protect the last survivors of the wooden buildings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CBD.
2. Protect the 'core' of historic suburbs by protecting the features (usually, but not always, the shopping centre) that establish the character of the village.
3. Establish a mechanism to protect the *overall* character of older, sensitive, areas.
4. Establish mechanisms that prevent the piecemeal erosion of character from heritage buildings and which protect small detail.
5. Re-set the rules for grants from the Heritage Fund, to
  - a. establish a broader, general discretion, and
  - b. enable larger sums to be given in special circumstances
6. Make a statement of Heritage Significance in the District Plan, along the lines of that in the RMA.
7. Extend the present system of heritage noticeboards in the city.
8. Establish a system of individual plaques for buildings of heritage significance
9. Enhance the explanation of Maori heritage.

### **Do you have any other comments?**

1. The Wellington Civic Trust believes that the present rules have not proven adequate to give effective protection to Wellington's heritage. We are particularly concerned at what we perceive to be an absence of "whole of picture" approach to protection. Too often, heritage buildings are treated in isolation from their context.
2. We have seen no evidence that Council has an overall view of what it wants to preserve and how. Despite the very significant commitment to heritage made in recent years and the considerable achievements made, we are still left with the impression that heritage preservation is still essentially ad-hoc and often reactive in nature. The Civic Trust believes that work should be undertaken to establish what are the special features of Wellington's heritage that go to

define the city, in particular the patterns of heritage discernable over extended areas, and that this work should be used to inform Council's overall approach to preservation.

3. Because of the format of the questionnaire, this submission has tended to focus on deficiencies. While believing that significant additional work remains to be done, The Civic Trust wishes to acknowledge that Council has already undertaken much excellent work in the area of heritage preservation and has been prepared to fund heritage initiatives generously.
4. We commend this attitude and wish to encourage Council to further efforts, because the benefits to our city extend well beyond the comparatively narrow confines of heritage. The extraordinary enhancement of the cities' broader appeal to visitors which is derived from the restoration of the St James Theatre or the Wooden Government Building flows directly to the bottom line.
5. The Civic Trust congratulates Council on undertaking this review of Heritage strategy. We hope that our comments prove useful to your study.

Di Buchan  
Chair  
Wellington Civic Trust