

## **Plan Change 48: Central Area Review. Further submission by the Wellington Civic Trust**

The Wellington Civic Trust was established over 25 years ago and currently has 272 financial members. The objectives of the Trust relevant to this Plan Change include:

- (1) to promote a civic environment for the benefit and enjoyment of all Wellington citizens;
- (2) to stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the city;
- (3) to promote high standards in architecture, landscape management, building, and town and country planning.

The Trust has always taken a keen interest in the Council's planning role and considered this Plan Change to be of particular importance to the future of the city.

For some years the Trust has been concerned at some of the poor quality of development in the Central Area and the current Change indicates that Council shares this concern. The Trust appreciated being involved in early discussions with Council officers as to how the planning "rules" could be modified to secure improvements not only in respect of buildings themselves but also their effects on neighbours, traffic, pedestrian comfort and convenience, and the general pleasantness of the Central Area.

The Trust made a submission on several aspects of the Plan Change and welcomes this opportunity to emphasize some of the points at this hearing.

At the outset the Trust would like to say we believe the officers responsible for advising on the change made heroic efforts to consult widely and believe this has resulted in a workable and practical set of policies and rules aimed at making significant improvements. In general terms we applaud their efforts and any reservations expressed are intended to be constructive.

Having seen the range of submissions received by Council on the Plan Change we urge Council not to put too much weight on those who argue that the Change is not necessary or claim that the proposed new rules are too onerous. In this context please refer to the cross submission by the NZ Property Council which strongly supports the Trust's submission in its entirety. We believe this to be a more representative view of the sector than that of any individual developer or critic.

### **Urban Design**

It is difficult to legislate for good design, but there are other ways in which a Council can encourage good design and make it plain how important it is in promoting civic well being and pride. We are pleased to see that a new design guide has been incorporated in the Change and hope it will act as a positive stimulus and be more successful than the one it replaces. We believe the Council could do more by establishing a Design Review Panel to assess proposed developments that are likely to have a significant impact on the city. We envisage that such a Panel would have a non-statutory, advisory role which would complement the normal scrutiny by Council officers. We note that the Officers Report does not endorse this suggestion on the grounds that it is proposed to revamp the internal design assessment process within Council which will involve peer review, closer liaison with developers, and use of outside expertise where warranted. The Trust's concern is to see a much higher quality of building design than has been apparent over recent years. If the structural changes outlined

for the Council's building assessment process achieves this then our concerns will be met. In the meantime we will keep a "watching brief" on this issue.

### **Building Mass**

Many submissions have focussed on the proposed reduction in building mass to 75 per cent site coverage in place of the current 100 per cent. No one can say at this stage whether 75 per cent is the ideal yardstick or whether 75 per cent will produce a better outcome than, say, 70 per cent or 80 per cent, but the Trust strongly supports a significant reduction. The 100 per cent coverage has proven too often to have resulted in over-bearing, bulky site development, and adverse consequences for neighbours through loss of views, sunshine and ventilation. The reduced mass limit will not only lessen these effects but will give designers greater flexibility to create designs more sympathetic to the streetscape and to neighbours. We hope that with the encouragement of Council and staff developers will be keen to showcase more stimulating and attractive buildings.

We cannot accept the statement in the Officers Report that it is not feasible to assess the effects of increased mass on neighbouring properties. Such an assessment is surely expected under the RMA's Assessment of Effects requirement. Protecting the amenity of neighbouring properties from adverse effects of new developments is one of the cornerstones of sound town planning.

### **Pedestrians and "Pocket" Parks**

Wellington is greatly admired for its compact nature and the ability to walk to most destinations within the central areas of the city. Over 90 per cent of all trips within the CBD are made on foot and even motorists once they find a park become pedestrians. The basic requirements for pedestrians and a pleasant city are safety, convenience, protection from the weather and a traffic free environment. While the Central Area Review does in some respects acknowledge these needs of pedestrians, we believe more could have been done and we focussed particularly on the lack of small "pocket" parks within the central area.

Several of these "sitting" areas have disappeared over recent years and now virtually none exist anywhere between the hugely popular Midland Park and the Civic Centre. There is a growing residential and office population in the CBD while Lambton Quay is resurgent as a high quality shopping area. Many of the elderly, "lunch time office workers", visitors, dedicated shoppers, and those with young children in tow badly need well located, sheltered and sunny places where they can sit and rest for a while. It is disappointing that the Review neither recognises these needs nor makes any provision for them.

We note that the Officers Report states that the provision of such parks is not a function of the District Plan. We acknowledge that. What we were suggesting in our original submission was to have the need for a number of "pocket" parks recognised in the provisions for the Central Area. If that was adopted, the other processes referred to in the Officers Report would follow.

### **Parliament Precinct**

In our original submission we considered this precinct to be too tightly defined and should have included such nationally important buildings as the Cathedral, National Library, and the Court of Appeal.

The Officers Report concludes that, on advice, this precinct should be confined strictly to the Parliamentary Buildings and Grounds. While we have a different view we understand that the Council is now proposing a "Capital Precinct" Heritage Area. Presumably the public buildings of national importance that were our concern could be recognised and protected under that plan provision.

### **The “Gateway” entrance to the city**

For several years the Trust has endeavoured to focus attention on the area between the Aotea Quay motorway off-ramp and the Railway Station including the ferry terminal and port area and the whole of the railway marshalling yards east of Thorndon Quay. For convenience we refer to this area as the City’s Gateway being the first view and impression of Wellington for many of those arriving in the city. It is not a pretty sight.

Two seminars alerting the public to the importance of this area and the opportunities to improve it were held by the Trust in the 1990s. A third was held last month to which the public and relevant authorities were invited to discuss the strategic importance of this key area and how its appearance and convenience for other users and the public could be enhanced. A stimulating seminar was held and Council will shortly receive from us a Summary of Proceedings. The seminar aimed to provide an opportunity for those with an interest in the area to make suggestions as to what they considered to be important prior to Toll Holdings and CentrePort finalising their plans for the area. The seminar participants strongly endorsed the need to ensure rail and port facilities were not compromised by any future development. They also emphasised the need for better pedestrian and public transport links between the port and the railway station.

Thank you.

Di Buchan  
Chair, Wellington Civic Trust.

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