

3 August 2005

**Re: 61 Molesworth St, Thorndon**

Jo Wallace  
Wellington City Council

Dear Jo

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to I.C.I. House in Molesworth Street. It is our belief that this proposal ought to be publicly notified in order for public views and wider discussion to take place.

I.C.I. House is a rare example of a modern podium-tower building in Wellington. The design dates from 1961 and is contemporaneous with Shell House, a landmark building in New Zealand architectural history (not least for being the first air-conditioned building in New Zealand, and thus the first fully curtain-walled building in the country). Like Shell House, I.C.I. House was designed by Stephenson and Turner. As alterations to Shell House mean that it can no longer be pointed to as a fully original work from this era, I.C.I. House's importance as representative of modernist commercial buildings from this era in Wellington and New Zealand's history has increased. In addition to its local significance, I.C.I. House in Wellington was one of a series of internationally commissioned buildings for Imperial Chemical Industries throughout the world in the 1950s and 1960s, of which I.C.I. House in Melbourne is also an outstanding example. These buildings are characterised by fine detailing, and an attention to townscape.

I.C.I. House in Wellington has particular attention to its detailing, especially the articulation of the façade, and fenestration details. Its careful consideration of massing and orientation is sympathetic to the neighbouring cathedral and the building was planned to prevent as much obstruction of sun and outlook from other buildings as possible. It stands as an elegant structure in a well proportioned streetscape context. It was these considerations which convinced the council at the time to allow the building to exceed then height limit (25.6m), increasing the heights of the office tower to 35m and the service tower to 40.5m. This was at a cost to the total allowable floor area for a shorter building. If the tower had used the maximum allowable site coverage the floor area would have been 12,300 m<sup>2</sup>, instead the current floor area is 7,800 m<sup>2</sup>.

While the current building exceeded height limits after negotiation and careful consideration of the neighbour and townscape, we do not see this level of consideration in the proposal for alterations to the building. Rather this design appears to be largely driven by uncompromised commercial gain without regard to the building's neighbourhood context. While the proposed scheme takes into account the value of Jim Allen's mural, we do not believe that, the proposed alterations will offer a better solution than the existing building from a public point of view.

We are concerned about the negative effect that the proposed building will have on its neighbouring buildings and open spaces. The open space opposite (102 Molesworth St) is well patronised by the public, even though at times the wind conditions are not always ideal. An increase of negative wind impacts on this site may render it unuseable for a great part of its current occupation. While there have been alterations to the initial



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proposal to ameliorate wind effects, we believe further wind testing is needed to verify the suggested improvements.

We are also concerned about the negative shading effects the proposal will have on its neighbouring buildings. The cathedral, a major public building and an important part of the Wellington streetscape, has substantial stained-glass windows at the end nearest the proposed building. This altar end of the church is important ecclesiastically, and it is likely that at significant parts of the day, particularly during winter, its new neighbour will cast shadow, rather than coloured light into the cathedral's interior. The bulk of the proposed additions are insensitively modelled next to this important public building, but the cathedral is not the only one which will suffer the impact of extending the I.C.I. building out to the full extent of the site footprint. Set on the hill behind the I.C.I. site are several small wooden houses. The increased bulk of the proposed building will block sun to these residential sites, thus potentially rendering them damp and unappealing, and affecting their desirability.

The proposed building is in extreme contrast to the elegance of the existing I.C.I. House. It is a cumbersome design which will negate positive aspects of the current streetscape. Its facade is harsh in relation to the neighbouring buildings, and it seems to rely heavily on the reflection of these buildings to provide any level of detail appropriate to the neighbourhood in its elevation. The proposed building is cold and uninteresting in this context of carefully detailed buildings (e.g. the cathedral), and as such it will stand out as an uncomfortable anomaly in this street. The proportions of windows have been altered detrimentally, and the emphasis placed on ameliorating the wind tunnel results have resulted in the curved facade being added, which significantly detracts from the building's urban form.

In conclusion, we are very concerned that the proposed building with its expanded building envelope and largely homogenous facade will have a detrimental effect on the streetscape. This is not a good example of new architecture engaging with an existing building, and it is possible that a sophisticated and nuanced building design could address issues of streetscape and external appearance in a productive and much more appropriate manner. This is not a publicly generous building and we strongly urge that the proposal be notified to allow wider comment.

Yours sincerely

Christine McCarthy  
President  
The Architectural Centre