

18th February 2005



the architectural centre inc.
PO Box 24178 Wellington

Re: WCC Proposed Built Heritage Strategy

This submission is from the Wellington Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design, and in the promotion of good design in Wellington.

Support for the proposal

The Architectural Centre strongly endorses the council's initiative to have a Built Heritage Strategy and appreciates the acknowledgement that "protecting the city's built heritage is not about locking it up. The continued use of a heritage building is essential" (p. 1). We are conscious that issues of built heritage in a growing and changing city are complex and at times contradictory, and we believe that the strategy needs to explicitly consider the relationship between the production of new heritage and existing heritage fabric. As both the heritage criteria in the Wellington City District Plan (pp. 20/2-20/3), and the heritage definition in the Resource Management Act 2003 demonstrate, heritage is not simply historic. This issue is an especially important one in relation to proposed alterations and additions to existing heritage sites. There needs to be a balance achieved between the heritage values of new architecture and the heritage values of historic building fabric to prevent a narrow policy which is detrimental to the development and production of new and future built heritage in the city.

1 – Recognition

The Architectural Centre supports the suggestion that the criteria in the District Plan be reviewed, especially in relation to the definition of heritage in the Resource Management Act 2003. We also support the council's intention to list more recent heritage sites, in particular post WWII architecture. It is critical that resources are provided to ensure that the District Plan heritage listings are an appropriate representation of Wellington's built heritage. In addition the listings in some cases (e.g. the National War Memorial) have been found to have needed to be more comprehensive, or to be more specific in exactly what is intended to be protected. The Architectural Centre encourages attempts to redress this.

2 – Protection

The Architectural Centre supports the suggested strengthening of the rules in the District Plan so that additions and alterations to a heritage building or structure or to buildings or structures in a heritage area, would become a discretionary activity, and that the demolition of a listed building or structure would become a non-complying activity. We would also note here that it is important that serious consideration be given to the heritage value of the alteration or addition as the production of new heritage which might also make an important contribution to the city's built heritage.

3 – Public Awareness

We support the council's intention to increase public awareness of Wellington's built heritage and also support strategies which encourage awareness of Wellington's built heritage beyond the local (i.e. national and international awareness) where appropriate. We appreciate the suggestion of a heritage award, as distinct from the more narrow idea of a conservation award. This annual award needs to reflect the different and sometimes contradictory aspects of heritage in its broadest sense (as reflected in the definition of heritage in the Resource Management Act 2003). In addition to providing guidelines for adaptive reuse of heritage sites, we would also encourage the council to also publicise excellent examples of adaptive reuse.

In addition to developing promotional activities, and, we also see the council as having a critical role in facilitating broad debate about the role and worth of heritage and

conservation across a range of avenues (e.g. public forums, exhibitions, publications). We are also pleased to note that the council intends to contribute to Wellington Architecture Week to increase public awareness of Wellington's built heritage, and we look forward to working with the council to achieve this.

5 – Sustainable Economic Use

We find "Sustainable Economic Use" an unusual heading for this section as it currently stands. With the exception of the proposed regional and urban planning study on financial benefits, little material in this section appears to be about sustainable economic use of built heritage. Given this, we suggest that the content of this section referring to the financial support for the conservation of heritage sites (e.g. the proposed Heritage Incentive Fund to fund conservation work), the accelerated approval processes for listing heritage buildings, and other mechanisms for improving protection of heritage places be moved into sections titled "Conservation" or "Protection." The proposed Heritage Incentive Fund might also be used to fund heritage research (e.g. research grants, post-graduate scholarships etc.)

We were also surprised that there was no mention of tourism or mention of marketing of heritage in this section.

6 – Council Effectiveness

We support the ongoing training of council staff to develop council expertise in this area.

Conclusion

The Wellington Architectural Centre supports the draft Heritage Strategy. We see this as an important document. As recent events surrounding Futuna chapel have demonstrated, the current council strategies for protecting Wellington's built heritage are not working. In addition to issues pertaining to maintenance, actions by owners of heritage sites which exacerbate the decline of heritage sites must be deterred or penalised, and the council's ability to enforce the District Plan in this area needs to be strengthened. We encourage further work in this area.

Yours sincerely,

Christine McCarthy
President
The Architectural Centre