



Submission on the Te Ngākau Civic Precinct Framework

This submission is from the Newtown Residents' Association. We wish to speak to our submission.

Introduction

The Newtown Residents' Association is the Incorporated Society representing Newtown and the surrounding area. We are an active local group of residents and businesspeople, concerned with maintaining and improving our suburb's liveability, connectedness and sustainability and working to make our community a thriving, diverse, great place to live.

Submission

Usually we make submissions about proposals that directly affect the Newtown environment. However the future of the Te Ngākau Civic Precinct is, or should be, the concern of all Wellington residents. It is of interest to us and of course of particular interest to the residents of Inner City Wellington. In this submission we agree with and support the views expressed in the ICW Submission.

We have chosen to make a narrative submission because the questions in the online submission form ask for opinions on a statement of a vision, and 5 objectives, all of which sound very admirable. We would support all of them, but there could be many ways of achieving these objectives. Approving of these objectives doesn't automatically lead to approval of the proposed Framework as outlined in the documents.

The Vision

Te Ngākau is the beating heart of our capital city: A thriving neighbourhood where creativity, culture, democracy discovery and arts experiences collide on the edge of Te Whānganui-a-Tara.

The implication in the Framework document is that the current Te Ngākau Civic Precinct doesn't reflect that vision, and yet the images that illustrate the document show large crowds making good use of the current space before so many of the buildings had to be closed. We believe that the vision was already being realised, and a complete rebuild is unnecessary to achieve this in future.

The Draft Framework

The document has little detail about the possible future design of Te Ngākau, talking instead about a 'strategic direction'. However there is a concept drawing in Section 7 and proposals and policies in Sections 8 and 9 that indicate a strategic direction that raises serious concerns.

The ICW submission addresses their concerns, primarily about the future of the Jack Ilott Green and the City to Sea Bridge, and we agree with their views.

We also have concerns about almost all the current area, including the car park beyond the Michael Fowler Centre, being designated 'an area of change'.

Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment

This was of course foreshadowed in the Long Term Plan 2021-2031 consultation, with the Councillors agreeing with the proposal that the Municipal Office Building (MOB) and the Civic Administration Building (CAB) be demolished and that future rebuilding be funded by the sale of a long-term ground lease and private funding to develop the replacement building.

Our submission to the LTP said "To demolish both buildings and start again is a huge undertaking, and it is hard to approve of this, even in principle, without having much more clarity around the parameters for the final design." This is still our position, held even more strongly when such a large area is seen as having the potential for redevelopment.

We have a fundamental objection to the idea of privatising a public asset. This aspect of the possible future direction is missing from the draft paper.

There is also no mention of the probable effects on the environment of widespread demolition and rebuilding. An interview on RNZ with Jasmax architect Chris Scott, and Andrew Eagles, the chief executive of the Green Building Council, was clear that the key to reducing carbon emissions in the construction industry will be to repurpose existing buildings, rather than building new structures.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2018797027/greening-the-construction-industry>). This needs careful consideration in the light of the WCC Policy 'Te Atakura – First to Zero'.

Green Space in the precinct

There are several statements in the draft Framework about the need for green space. For instance – Policy 5.1: An increase in the quantum of green space in the precinct is to be achieved through site re-design.

However in the concept drawing the only green space is in three small circular areas, and the existing green space of Jack Ilott Green is within the 'area of change' zone. We fully support the ICW submission that calls for this space to be protected.

The City to Sea Bridge

This is an iconic Wellington structure, but in this proposal it is to be removed. It is regarded as a barrier to connection with the waterfront. However it is also a connection in itself, and provides an experience of transition from one area to another, and views of the harbour, that couldn't be replaced by the proposed pedestrian crossing across a busy street. The current difficulty with access for people with mobility problems is caused by the lift being shut off, and this doesn't have to be a permanent situation. We advocate for protecting this bridge. Indeed it's not just a bridge, it should be recognised as a major work of art and sculpture.

In conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We request that there is a much more extensive process of public consultation and co-design before any decisions are made about this precinct.

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