

Wellington heritage festival, October 18, 2023, opening event:

The Challenges for Heritage in a Changing Economic and Social World in Greater Wellington

Chaired by Dr Roger Blakeley, chair of the Wellington Heritage Festival

Speeches have been transcribed and summarised by Richard Norman, with Grace Ridley-Smith and Nikau Wi Neera providing speech notes. This is a draft report and open to change.

Laurie Foon, Deputy Mayor, Wellington City Council.

You couldn't have picked a better or more beautiful place to hold this event than the Old Public Trust hall. I acknowledge the work of Maurice and Kaye Clark. Maurice has already had a big day, this morning they also opened the social housing at Frederick Street to home 75 vulnerable people. You do great work for our city.

Council plays a major part (in heritage) around the city - archives, preservation of the St James, and a very big project in the town hall.

I want to acknowledge the collective intelligence in the room in making this happen, as with the amazing range of events and stories. Councils play a mighty part in heritage through to the story telling on signage through to the archives that we preserve, to the preservation of buildings like the St James and as many of you know a very big topic on our minds this is the Wellington town hall. This doesn't come lightly so I really appreciate hearing any views on that from the panel tonight which might help make our decision next week a little easier. Looking at the festival events being held right across the region, that is a really big wow. The organisers need to be congratulated for the really hard mahi you have put into telling such wonderful stories. Heritage is an important but personal thing. What one person may treat as a taonga, another may dismiss. That's why it is crucial that a heritage festival cast its net widely. I think you really have.

One of my faves is the fabulous Carmen Rupe tour. Wellington's roaring twenties – I need to know more. To tip toeing through tombstones. To visiting the ANZ bank archive and to Roger's recommendation an ode to Te Rauparaha. It really does seem like all bases are covered, so well done. It's going to be a great two weeks when Wellingtonians and visitors alike can get in touch with the very fabric of the capital's past and let's acknowledge that it is what it makes us what we are today and helps us have some of the vibrant conversations we continue to have. I know I'm speaking to the already converted but I do encourage all of you to get out and enjoy the festival.

Maurice Clark, ONZOM, Owner and Managing Director, McKee Fehl Constructors Ltd.

.. the biggest problem of heritage buildings in Wellington is resilience. The ability to strengthen them, maintain them and then to find a use for them. To get all those factors together is quite difficult. A lot of the buildings I've worked on have been either council or government funded, a couple are my own funding, this one in particular. It is hard yakka to express it in construction terms.

Resilience covers a lot of things. It is the ability of the building to survive an earthquake and to be reusable fairly soon afterwards without major reconstruction. One of the most interesting buildings is the old government building – what I like about the story is that it used to be where the shoreline was. They dumped a lot of Australian hard wood on the beach.

There was an agricultural downturn, a lot of farmers came in and picked it up and they built the building. It was originally meant to be of stone so you have the stone like panels. The hard wood which we had to drill or nail in was almost impossible. The kauri was unbelievable. Needless to say the farmers didn't do a particularly good job but there were a lot of English joiners at the time and all the joinery was beautiful, windows, doors.

Hunter building – to even imagine they wanted to knock this down is unbelievable. When we got in there to strengthen it, it was a brick building full of unreinforced masonry walls. The design was to convert it into a stiff box. We sprayed with concrete everything internally – it was an adaptive reuse. It is strong and it has stood the test of time.

The Tower building, now the Chartered Accountants building. It was an old Government Life building, built after the Napier earthquake. They did it in steel and with riveted plates, fortuitously a very strong. The plates gave flexibility. Prior to my owning the building it was tested by the Ministry of Works, and we didn't have to do a lot of work to get to resilience.

The Ministry of Defence building sat empty. Noone was sure what its strength was. It was a similar building, designed by the Ministry of Works, similar to the Tower Building, but it was steel, welded steel. They couldn't rivet it because it was too close to the old government building. Fortuitously it was done just prior to the depression. There were a lot of English shipyard welders out here. They were very good welds.

The Maritime museum or Wellington Museum, this was sitting on rotten wooden piles so we literally went underneath and lifted in on piles and put in new foundations. It was a very early crude base isolation methodology which seemed to work during the recent Kaikoura earthquake.

Public Trust was a nightmare to strengthen. It has heavy granite façade. It was meant to be an earthquake strong building designed in San Francisco. It has turned out wonderfully and this hall was an old sports medicine place chopped in half. The process of unwinding it, getting the ceiling up to shape and getting the form back.

[Dr Jamie Jacobs, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga](#)

We are looking to protect as much of the past as possible to help people in the future to understand the past. It's a complicated thing and an honourable thing for people to do. Heritage NZ has well trained and experienced professionals working with owners, iwi, hapu, local authorities, ministries and agencies, universities, and many other interested groups on a range of heritage issues including listing, archaeology, advocating for protections through district plan reviews and providing sensible and tailored architectural advice for recognised heritage places. HNZ believes the best outcomes involved cooperation and partnership with the groups and individuals noted. I highlight also that our organisation operates not only within a formally bi cultural but also has a bicultural governance structure shaping out work that extends back almost to the establishment in the mid twentieth century.

One of the difficulties in NZ for heritage conservation is seeing it is divided into two systems, with some responsibility for processes such as the NZ heritage list and archaeological governed by Heritage NZ's act from 2014 while other protections occur through the resource management act, 1991 which is in the process of replacement. It often means the general public and professionals there is often confusion about who does what and who protects what.

What is heritage?

The full range includes tangible, intangible. Heritage conservation is ever changing and progressive. It always reflects a given age. Currently half our focus is on Maori heritage, and strengthening ties with Maori communities. This is progressing at the same time a focus on the rainbow community and well as efforts to continuously change the list to reflect an increasingly multi cultural Aotearoa NZ.

Four points on some hot button issues:

The cost of heritage. We are all aware of the fire at the Toomath building in Ghuznee St. Many will be aware of the back story of the need for earthquake strengthening, legislation which does not adequately address the problem of deferred maintenance and the issue of owners who are unwilling to appropriately care for their buildings. Heritage NZ oversees a varied portfolio of 43 buildings including 12 in the central region most of which are in greater Wellington. I want you to all be aware we are intimately aware of the costs and care of buildings and we bring that insight to any interaction with members of the public.

Climate change. The environmental dimensions have not been emphasised in the sector or by owners and developers— heritage conservation is inherently green. An existing building, no matter how much work is needed to adapt is always better for the environment as it contains embodied energy from past materials. I don't think anyone in this room would not agree that Wellington has what is fast becoming a crisis of affordability quality and availability of housing, however the destruction of heritage precincts and neighbourhoods is not the answer. Heritage NZ firmly believes in conservation and adaptive reuse are not mutually exclusive and can occur hand in hand. Heritage conservation is not a zero sum game or an outmoded idea. It is ever expanding and in constant change. In total it reflects the beliefs and priorities of the past and present and analysis allows us to plan for a future that is more meaningful and relevant for the world we live in and the world that will come to be.

Grace Ridley-Smith, "local concerned about future of our City"

Prepared speech notes:

I want to make 3 points: heritage buildings and precincts have a cultural value; they have environmental value; and they have economic value.

The cultural value is best understood.

Heritage buildings are a physical embodiment of our social, collective history. They tell stories about our past and connect us to timescales that "surpass the scope of an individual life" (Juhani Pallasmaa¹). It seems to me that in an increasingly fast paced, digitised, globalised world, having a physical symbol of memory and identity that creates a sense of place and belonging should not be undervalued.

Environmentally

Heritage buildings represent a huge amount of embodied carbon and offset waste. Carl Elefante, of the American Institute of Architects, said: "The greenest building is the one that already exists".

- A report by the US National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2016 found "it takes between 10 and 80 years for a new building that is 30 percent more efficient than an average

building to overcome the negative climate change impacts related to the construction process’.

- Meanwhile the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in the UK found that 35% of the whole-life carbon of a typical office development will already have been emitted by the practical completion stage, while the figure for residential is 51%.
- According to Ministry for the Environment, “up to half of all waste in Aotearoa is made up of construction and demolition waste”

I’m interested in adaptive reuse – working sensitively with heritage buildings to renovate, restore and find a new economic life for them. I support Mayor Tory Whanau's comments on Monday in relation to the Toomaths Buildings fire, that we need to streamline the consenting process so building owners are able to do this more efficiently. I’d like to see heritage rules that are genuinely protective without being overly pedantic or punitive. We hear a lot from developers that renovating is more expensive than demolition and new build, but I’d like to see the environmental cost quantified as part of this equation. The true cost of demolition isn’t just the price of hiring a wrecking ball. A demolition first attitude seems to me like privatised gain and socialised loss.

Also, there is increasing evidence which demonstrates that heritage buildings yield better financial returns. Which leads me to my final point.

Economically

Heritage buildings are incredibly resilient. PlaceEconomics is an American firm, which analyses the economic impacts of historic preservation. In April this year they compared four commercial heritage areas in Calgary, Canada’s third largest city, with four non-heritage commercial areas.

They found that there is a premium attached to heritage buildings of 36 dollars and 60 cents per square foot. The value of non-heritage buildings inside the heritage areas was enhanced by their proximity to heritage buildings – they called this the “Heritage Halo” effect. And, overall the value per acre is more than twice as great in the heritage areas.

The economic value of heritage buildings extends beyond market value though.

Globally city centres face enormous challenges. If you can order everything online and you work from home, why come into the city at all? Especially if it is more convenient to hop in your car and go to a big box retailer or mall. It’s clear we need to actively entice people into the city centre and offer them something local and unique. We do this by designing our city centres so they are friendly to independent businesses and are human scale – in other words, lots of small businesses in a walkable, compact area.

PlaceEconomics found in Calgary that heritage areas are more economically dense and vibrant. The heritage areas had more than seven times the businesses and more than five times the jobs per acre than the comparable non-heritage areas. While the total value of properties in the heritage areas versus the other areas was approximately the same, the heritage areas were generating that value in half the total area. They also found that the heritage areas were magnets for creative and knowledge sector businesses.ⁱⁱ

This speaks to my own experience of running the McLeavey Gallery in the Berry Building which is occupied by two retail businesses, a gallery, a communication business, several writers and an artist. And in general, upper Cuba Street (the non pedestrianised section) is a bastion of independently owned businesses and is largely made up of low-rise old buildings with small shop frontages.

I am not presenting this evidence to you to suggest that all old buildings should be saved; that we should freeze Wellington in time. Cities are not static; nor should they be. But I hope what I have demonstrated is that old buildings – heritage buildings – have real, quantifiable value and have a role to play in a modern, future facing city.

Footnote: For more on embedded carbon - <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/11794-whole-of-life-embodied-carbon-emissions-reduction-framework>

<https://www.rics.org/profession-standards/rics-standards-and-guidance/sector-standards/construction-standards/whole-life-carbon-assessment>

Cr Nikau Wi Neera. Councillor for Te Whanganui-a-Tara Maori Ward, Wellington City Council.

(Speech notes provided).

I suspect I might be a bit of a **pariah** in this room due to my fairly **pragmatic** beliefs on housing. It's an old **joke** in my circles that one thing more **depressing** than socialist housing is homelessness.

Those in the heritage advocacy community **must understand** the knee-jerk opposition to heritage. People moving to this city, such as students and foreign workers, typically **experience “heritage”** for the first time when they move to this city. Many low-income people's experience of heritage is cheap, cold, damp, poorly-maintained housing in our so-called “character suburbs”. Naturally, they feel equally amused and insulted when they discover their place has heritage status.

I said earlier that I am generally a **pragmatist** about housing, but that's not entirely true. It is my firm belief that this country is sorely in need of some **nation-building**, and I think heritage and landscape architecture has an important **role to play** in making this visible and uplifting its mana. We occupy a unique **intersection** of Europe and Polynesia like nowhere else in the world.

Therefore, there needs to be a **wider view** of what we consider “heritage” architecture.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (**ICOMOS**) speaks in terms of the “**vernacular**”, a general character of how a community chooses to shape its built environment.

A vernacular is defined as:

- a) A manner of building shared by the community;
- b) A recognisable local or regional character responsive to the environment;
- c) Coherence of style, form and appearance, or the use of traditionally established building types;
- d) Traditional expertise in design and construction which is transmitted informally;
- e) An effective response to functional, social and environmental constraints;
- f) The effective application of traditional construction systems and crafts.

ICOMOS also states that Governments and responsible authorities must recognise the right of all communities to maintain their living traditions, to protect these through all available legislative, administrative and financial means and to hand them down to future generations.

Heritage does not have to be **physical**, or even extant. Our vernacular is the **manifestation** of our living traditions on this whenua, in our built environment and our landscapes.

I one day wish to see a **reclaimed** vernacular composed of our European and Polynesian history. When I am an **old man**, I hope I can walk down the Golden Mile and see **skyscrapers** with waharoa and tukutuku patterns adorning the sides, and a **Parliament** building with Doric columns overlooking māra on the lawn.

Ken Elwood, Chief Adviser, Engineering, MBIE and EQC

How many architects are there in the room? (about 15) I wish I was an architect and I always wanted to be an architect but I couldn't draw so I became an engineer. It's a privilege to be talking to the heritage festival. Existing heritage buildings are the type of engineering and architecture that I really love and have a passion for. I was doing to talk about three things, but speakers have already talked about one of those, so I now have only two.

The first is seismic hazard. Some of you may have heard about the very good work of GNS which last year released the new seismic hazard model. This looked at the sources of earthquakes around NZ, their likelihood and the likely shaking. It confirmed we live on the shaky islands. It confirmed that we are probably a little more shaky than we thought before. Here in Wellington the shaking is probably 1.5 to 2 times more likely than we thought previously. In this context of heritage and existing buildings in NZ we need to take seismic activity, shaking into consideration when thinking about the preservation of heritage. It is the reality of where we live.

The next topic is my favourite three letter word, NBS, new building standard. This is the rating that is given to buildings to assess how risky they are to damage and loss of life. Despite the fact we know our seismic hazard is higher than we thought the way in which we assess the NBS is still perfectly adequate. We can continue to assess these ratings according to our current standards, that we use to design buildings and have done for the last ten years. The reason why we keep that rating the same is that we want consistency. That rating number is very useful as long as we have a consistent framework to rate these buildings. That's important because we don't want moving goal posts. People know over time what the meaning of this percent NBS is. We can compare buildings with these different percentages. Continuing to use the same building standards, the same loading standards as we do is very important.

The third topic was sustainability but that was very eloquently spoken on previously. I fully agree with my colleagues that the greenest building is the building already standing. The work of heritage and to preserve existing buildings is really the work for more sustainability.

Questions and discussion

Q: I returned from an inspiring visit to Budapest where there is the Hapsburg Palace on top of the hill. Inside that palace is a modern art gallery. What premium do you put on the external façade as opposed to the interior.

Ken Elwood: Personally, I would put emphasis on both.

Jamie Jacobs: What are the most significant parts? On Lambton Quay and Cuba Street, often the façade is the primary heritage. With the interior we can be more permissive. Also there is the question of whether the building has been changed previously. You have very valuable

interiors e.g. Old St Pauls, Parliament. Most heritage professionals are malleable with these questions.

Q: Interested in embodied carbon in buildings which already exist. How do we take this into account and factor it into heritage values.

Jamie Jacobs: How we go about processes and legislation and deal with processes for demolition, demolition by neglect .

Grace Ridley-Smith: – Place economics in the US took a triple bottom line to which quantified economic, environment and social values. It is possible to quantify the value of materials used, carbon used for lorries. We can do this. I am interested in that cost being incorporated. What about the price of carbon which comes from demolition.

Ken Elwood: There are methods to calculate and buildings doing that today. We are looking at encouraging this. You will see this as more common. It would be beneficial for this to be reflected in savings.

Grace Ridley-Smith

It takes between 10 and 80 years to offset the negative climate change effects of new building, even when the replacement is energy efficient. Still the building there is the most green one. It doesn't only apply to heritage, but to all buildings.

Q: Nick Bevan, chair Futuna Trust.

Those who have bought an EV with government subsidy; the mechanic down the road is losing work. Can the heritage value be measured and receive government support and the heritage sector would be employing more people than subsidising EVs.

Grace – this is the role central and local governments can play to make certain behaviours more attractive. To provide such discounts. Movement in the UK call retrofit which was started by the Architecture Journal which was about taking a retrofit approach, eg through lowering the VAT on repurposed building. Government can assist through rates rebates.

Jamie – have this with heritage funds and in the US historic preservation allows for tax credits. The huge ground swell of work allowed them to become viable entities which in turn boosted the coffers of local authorities. It is possible; has been thought about , but action would be great to see. Heritage Equip is for private owners to strengthen buildings.

Q Jane O'Loughlin: Live Wellington

Is there possibly a role for council in getting together advice for owners of at risk buildings with expert advice.

Maurice Clark: There have been some incentives by council, but scale and the magnitude of costs for a building like this, \$10-15 million to strengthen then \$5 million to fit out. You have to have a use, and here was an office building for Culture and Heritage. Grants from council are very small. The one that does help is a rates rebate, up to ten years for a heritage building. Toomath building – I was approached by council to help save that building. Council already had the order to get that to 30 percent but council rightly said 'then what'. Most tenants wouldn't go into a 30 percent building. It's a good example of a rock and hard place. I have some sympathy for the owners, but they should sell, get out of it and take their loss.

Grace Ridley-Smith: Toomath building – really frustrating in the public has for years had to put up with the containers, now the demolition. There was a developer who tried to buy the building twice, but the owners wouldn't sell. There were people who could have done the work, but the owners acted as a hand brake.

Q: James Fraser Newtown

Lack of potential heritage protection for trees, open and green spaces, eg Mt Crawford prison garden space and the peninsula as a green space. Eg a kauri tree that prisoners had planted. How do we get greater protection for trees, open and green spaces.

Nikau Wi Neera:

Built and natural environment have to work hand in hand. Feed into a common language across urban landscape. From a policy perspective you have to be careful that one tree might block a development. Tree cover in cities is one of the most effective climate actions. Tree cover in general is one of the firmest predictors of mood increases in central city environments.

Jamie Jacobs: From the late 1990s, people were thinking far more about overall cultural landscapes .. now people are looking more holistically at spaces and layers of meaning. In the next 30 years there will be a lot more space preserved, cultural spaces identified. While we don't specifically look at trees, though district plans do sometimes list notable tree.

Q Janet Holborow, Kapiti District Mayor.

A questions for Nikau Wi Neera. A lot of buildings are European, colonial style. Would like comment about how protecting these buildings might be robbing us of the potential for a more diverse experience culturally?

Nikau Wi Neera

It comes to the old question of whose stories we are telling and why. From a Mataranga Maori perspective we view buildings, spaces and where having their own discrete mana and the practices carried out in them are just as important as the façade outside. When we talk about uses there is a great deal of mana in maintaining a single use all the way through .., but there is also mana in changing the usage of spaces and changing what they represent, what they mean and their function. I used to live in Vienna which has a number of buildings with a sordid history. I've been to the palace in Budapest, which has transformed a space which was used for some odious things in previous times into something rather beautiful. Same thing in Vienna, eg previous prisons turned into social housing. Here we do have a very colonial history but with a future focus we can really bring some mana back to these buildings and evolving them as we grow as a country.

Q: All our questions have been about tangible heritage. The event I'm running is about the communities that make up our beautiful city. The ways we preserve our histories. What are you doing in your work to preserve the histories, heritages, stories?

Jamie: A lot of the work we are doing is with place, landscapes, but the intangible stories and the layering of stories over time. One thing Heritage NZ is doing is looking at this layering, not just one specific point or period. Its finding the intangible meanings of these intangible places, eg we are doing a lot of work for the rainbow list, at the existing listed places, which are generally listed for architecture and street value but now have other values.

Q: Sir Anand Satyanand:

What does the panel think of the idea of including in our heritage of the future losing enigmatic things like a Post Office square with no post office and replacing it with suitable statutory buildings and recollections of people of the past who have had great impact on the Wellington of today? Two examples – the Duke of Wellington and Te Rauparaha

Jamie: It gets to the layering of history. I agree a Post Office square without a post office is a funny thing. It is surrounded by a number of buildings - to add to those stories, I could support.

Grace: you can add layers of history of context and perspectives through good way finding signage, archiving, photography. You can deal with it – it represents something bigger, or something now lost. Having monuments to things which have been lost is important. Lost sights in terms of Maori history – just because it's not there now, doesn't mean it is not important. The question goes to the point of integrity – we can keep imperfect things and tell a story we are a complicated and imperfect people. Things go out of fashion. Now it might be naff, but in 30 years we might revisit. It takes a long time to build up heritage and it's very quick to be gone.

Question (and statement): The Heritage NZ guy has become a real focus (in this session). I'm reminded of my grandmother because she was a repository of wisdom, understood history but had no teeth.

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ii <https://www.calgary.ca/planning/heritage/commercial-areas.html>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juhani_Pallasmaa