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**Submission on Golders Cottage and Blockhouse: Assessing the Opportunities.**

Historic Places Wellington (HPW) is an incorporated society which aims to promote the identification and protection of heritage places in the Wellington region and inform the public of their significance. We wish to be heard by the Upper Hutt City Council (UHCC) Committee considering this report.

**This submission supports:**

1. The unique heritage experience provided by this community owned and administered intact collection of historic buildings.
2. UHCC's ongoing interest in and support for Golders Cottage.
3. The timely review of the level of public financial support for the Cottage.
4. The initiation of a priority project to assess the resilience of the three chimney structures, and to strengthen them if necessary.
5. The provision of expert curatorial support to the society so it may refresh (and reduce) the display of objects.
6. The provision of expert communications support to the society for the production of information, interpretation and educational materials.

**This submission draws attention to material inaccuracies in the report:**

1. The inaccuracy about the state of the roof, which does not in fact leak. There are visible historic stains from previous leaks but since then the roof has been fully repaired and replaced.
2. There is an inaccurate assumption the society owns the objects on display whereas they are on long term loan from society (and family) members.
3. The overall misleading sense that the society is either not competent, or has shortcomings in its continued administration of its property. HPW has confidence in the society.

**This submission opposes:**

1. The economic basis on which the suggestion is made to run the cottage as a destination visitor attraction on a cost recovery basis. The estimated visitor numbers and economic assessment is fanciful.
2. The idea that the society be invited to transform itself into a “Friends” type organisation with its property transferring the UHCC or “new trust” no longer controlled by the society.
3. Any renegotiation of the underlying ground lease along regular commercial clauses or with inappropriate health and safety requirements.

## **Discussion**

The strength of the incorporated society which owns the cottage is that its members are closely and actively involved in its maintenance and care. The members have family links to the site and have been long term kaitiaki/guardians of the site. HPW supports their ongoing ownership and opposes any attempt to divest the society of its property. There is no legitimate basis on which to remove the society’s ownership.

The community and family involvement underpins the long-term sustainability of the cottage museum. The buildings are in good condition, and well cared for. The society successfully maintains the buildings using volunteer assistance and donations.

## **Chimney Project**

There is, however, a priority need to assess and potentially strengthen the three chimneys. Ideally, they would be retained, and the society is of the opinion that they were adequately strengthened previously. In any event the investigation and any subsequent work would likely be a major project requiring significant funding.

## **Curatorial / Interpretation Project**

HPW agrees that the appearance of the items on display looks cluttered. The society has accepted gifts of items from families associated with the cottage. It is a small cottage and the display would benefit from a less cluttered appearance.

There is a need for a storage space so that items can be retained (for display circulation), while not actually on display. This problem has hampered efforts to refresh the displays and a solution is needed in coordination with the society and the owners of the items.

HPW understands the practice has been to accept items from 1876 up to 1940, but this has led to space constraints. HPW proposes a reduced time period that covers the Victorian and Edwardian (e.g. 1870 to 1910 period) and items relating to that period be displayed. Other items later than this could be stored for changing displays. Some of the items on display would benefit from better interpretation to explain the link with the Golder family, for example the Chapman-Taylor stool.

HPW supports the idea of focussing on a few important / interesting stories (with changes at times). The Jane Golder / Hannah Barton story mentioned in the report is an appropriate example.

## **Communications Project**

HPW endorses the idea that the site should have information available which links with other heritage sites in Upper Hutt (e.g. Blockhouse; and Barton's Bush at Trentham Memorial Park; local schools and iwi). HPW does not believe any "new trust" with such membership is necessary for the purpose of creating such "links" however.

HPW has compared Golders Cottage to other cottages such as Nairn St Cottage, owned by WCC and run as a visitor destination along the lines suggested in this report. Golders cottage has however retained an authenticity which the professionalism of Nairn St Cottage may have removed. Once museums are run by professional or bureaucratic organisations a sterility can creep in resulting from stripped back, minimalist approaches. Museum studies and display theory is subject to changing fashions. In any given period, the preference may be for authenticity and many objects, while in another period the preference is for minimalism.

The strength and uniqueness of Golders is it has escaped those fads and changing fashions of museum studies in its displays. Although many items were gifted to WCC with the Nairn St Cottage, for example, many have since been removed from display to be stored or divested. The original intact legacy has been broken up in the pursuit of professional display. Some of us feel the "wonder" of that place is no longer there.

HPW is aware of a similar era cottage to Golders in Lincoln. Liffey Cottage, built in 1875, has been restored and furnished as a working family's cottage for the period to 1915 and an inventory of the collection has been done and put on a website with National Library involvement:

<https://www.kotuaia.org.nz/organisation-pages/org-page-3049/>.

A strength of Golder's Cottage is the collection of outbuildings that give a good sense of living in the 19th century. Nairn St Cottage has lost most of its outbuildings. Golders has an exceptional collection of such domestic related historic materials.

## **The Blockhouse**

HPW's main concern is the lack of outside interpretation of the building / reserve/ stockade site.

It is also too restricted in its opening hours (by appointment only or on open days). There is generally poor knowledge about the site and how to visit it.

HPW was pleased to learn that the exhibition on The Blockhouse that was at Whirinaki several years ago has been installed on the ground floor. The interior is very interesting including the collection of flags from the group which used it.

However, there needs to be more signage outside, including with interpretation of local geography and the context in which the Blockhouse was built.

Chairperson  
Felicity Wong