15 September 2026

Mayor Andrew Little

Te Hoe Matua | City Strategy and Delivery Committee

Matt Prosser, Chief Executive

Wellington City Council

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Dear Mayor, Councillors and Mr Prosser

Future Options for Wellington Museum and the Tangaroa Gallery at Tākina

1. Historic Places Wellington writes regarding the agenda item "Future Options for Wellington Museum and the Tangaroa Gallery at Tākina", which is for discussion at the meeting of Te Hoe Matua | City Strategy and Delivery Committee on 17 September 2026. The Committee is being asked to agree "in-principle" to support the relocation of Wellington Museum from the Bond Store to the Tangaroa Gallery at Tākina.

2. Historic Places Wellington has a long-standing interest in the protection and appropriate use of Wellington's heritage buildings, including the Bond Store on Queens Wharf.

3. We request that the Committee decline to make the recommended "in-principle" decision. The proposed decision is of high significance. It needs to be deferred to allow community engagement to take place. Any decision then needs to be made in a holistic and strategic fashion, together with other linked issues, as part of a Long-Term Plan process.

The Bond Store is a significant asset, and this is a highly significant decision

4. The Bond Store is a Category 1 Historic Place on the New Zealand Heritage List and a scheduled heritage building in the Wellington City 2024 District Plan. It is the second oldest building on the waterfront.

5. Importantly, the Bond Store is identified as a strategic asset in Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, alongside "the buildings and collections of the Wellington Museum".

6. Under that Policy, a decision is likely to be highly significant where two or more of the following criteria are engaged: importance to Wellington City; community interest; inconsistency with existing policy and strategy; and impact on Council's capacity and capability.

7. In our view, the proposed relocation of the Museum engages at least two of the criteria.

   (a) Importance: the Bond Store carries substantial cultural and heritage value to Wellington City. Removing its long-standing occupant creates real uncertainty about the building's future use, and about the ongoing viability of housing a treasured collection within it. There are significant costs and uncertainties for the Council in losing a long-term occupant of its strategic asset. Relocating the Museum to Tākina also involves potential opportunity costs in how the Tangaroa Gallery may be used.

   (b) Community interest: There is likely to be high levels of community interest in the decision, including from heritage stakeholders, museum visitors, and general members of the community. The Wellington waterfront is a focal point of our city for the public. The high level of public interest has not yet been visible to the Council because of the approach taken to date.

8. We do not see any assessment of significance recorded in the agenda papers for this item. Council officers instead have simply made a bald assertion that the decision is of low significance.

9. Before the Committee proceeds to a decision, even an in-principle one, we ask that Council formally assess the significance of this decision against its own Policy criteria. The decision is likely to be highly significant, but at the very least it must be of medium significance. Either way, a much greater level of engagement is required before any decision, even an in-principle decision, is committed to.

The proposed relocation must be in the Long-Term Plan

10. Section 97 of the Local Government Act 2002 provides that certain decisions may only be made if they are explicitly provided for in the local authority's long-term plan, following the special consultative procedure. Those decisions include a decision "to transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the local authority."

11. The Bond Store is a strategic asset under Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, as is the waterfront land held by Wellington Waterfront Ltd on which it stands. Council's current control of the building is exercised indirectly, through Experience Wellington's leasehold occupation and the associated rental grant arrangement. If the Museum relocates and that lease is terminated, effective control of the building will pass to Council.

12. This is a transfer of control of a strategic asset to the local authority within the meaning of section 97. The concept of a council "transferring control" extends to any situation where a local authority intends to transfer substantial and effective control over a strategic asset, even where it retains ownership.[1] That is the position here: Experience

[1] *Wānaka Stakeholders Group Inc v Queenstown Lakes District Council* [2021] NZHC 852 at [183]

Wellington currently occupies and manages the building on Council's behalf, and ending that arrangement means that full control reverts to Council.

13. This means that a decision to end Experience Wellington's occupation of the Bond Store, and thereby return control of that strategic asset to Council, cannot lawfully be made outside the Long-Term Plan process. It does not matter whether the decision is described as an "in-principle" decision. Section 97 applies regardless of the label. The future of the Bond Store, and the future location of the Museum, must be considered together through the Long-Term Plan.

14. There are sound reasons why a decision to permanently relocate the Museum should be in the Long-Term Plan. Without Experience Wellington as a tenant for the building, the Council is effectively saddling itself with full control and liability for a significant asset. If that is the Council's decision, then there needs to be strategic planning around the use and occupation of the building over the medium to long term.

The proposal lacks joined-up thinking

15. The officers' report itself identifies two connected problems: the long-term future of the Museum and the Bond Store (Problem 1), and the long-term future of the Tangaroa Gallery at Tākina (Problem 2).[2] The report goes further and describes relocation to Tākina as attractive because it offers "an integrated solution" to both the Museum and Tangaroa Gallery challenges "through a single investment pathway rather than requiring separate solutions for each."[3]

16. Having identified the future of the Museum and the future of the Bond Store as interconnected parts of a single strategic problem, the report then asks Council to make an in-principle decision on one half of that problem (the Museum's relocation) while explicitly deferring the other half (the future of the Bond Store) to a separate and later decision-making pathway in early 2027.[4]

17. This is not a strategic or holistic approach. Approving the Museum's departure from the Bond Store, without any corresponding decision for the building it will leave behind, risks Council locking in one part of an integrated problem while leaving the other part to be resolved later, on a much narrower set of options and with the momentum of an already-announced relocation behind it. As the Bond Store's future is genuinely linked to the Museum's future, good decision-making practice requires the Council to consider both issues together. At the very least, the Council should ensure that realistic options for the Bond Store's future are on the table before any in-principle relocation decision is made.

18. The officers' intended decoupling of the two decisions creates a significant legal risk to the Council. Section 82 of the Local Government Act requires that, where the Council seeks or receives the views of the community, it does so with an "open mind". The Council must not approach a decision-making and engagement process having already effectively made its decision. If Council agrees "in-principle" now to relocate the Museum, it will have committed to vacating the Bond Store before there is any analysis or understanding of options for that building's future. By the time the Bond

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[2] Agenda for ordinary meeting of Te Hoe Matua City Strategy and Delivery Committee, 17 September 2026, item 2.2 "Future Options for Wellington Museum and the Tangaroa Gallery at Tākina" at paragraphs 15–16.
[3] Paragraph 87.
[4] Paragraphs 40–42.

Store's future, and the associated Long-Term Plan funding decisions, come back to Council for final sign-off, Experience Wellington's fundraising and development programme will be well advanced, the Museum collections may have been decanted and relocated, and Council's practical ability to approach those later decisions with a genuinely open mind will have been substantially narrowed. Excluding the Bond Store from this decision, and from the Long-Term Plan process required by section 97, will therefore mean that the Council is at significant risk of predetermining future decisions.

Decision cannot be made until community views and preferences are known

19. The officers' report states that, because this is "an in-principle decision only", "it is not necessary to carry out engagement or consultation prior to making this in-principle decision", and that the obligation to obtain and consider the views of affected or interested people will instead apply to "later decisions".[5]

20. This approach is legally flawed. Section 76 of the Local Government Act requires the Council to make "every decision" in accordance with sections 77, 78, 80, 81 and 82, as applicable. There is no exception in the Act for "in-principle" decisions. If the Committee makes a decision on 17 September 2026 to support relocation in-principle, that is a decision that must be made in a manner that gives consideration to the views and preferences of persons likely to be affected by, or to have an interest in, the matter, as required by section 78.

21. As things currently stand, the Council has effectively no information about the views and preferences of persons likely to be affected by or interested in the matter. As the paper states, the topic has been discussed informally with Councillors and the proposal has been socialised with WellingtonNZ and Te Papa.[6] No broader stakeholder engagement has been attempted.

22. Treating community views as something to be gathered only after Council has already signalled its support for relocation inverts the correct sequence. Section 78 requires the Council to turn its mind to the views and preferences of affected and interested people in relation to the decision it is about to make. An in-principle decision of this kind, particularly one that Experience Wellington itself says will be used to give fundraising and delivery confidence, is capable of carrying real practical weight, and the community's ability to influence Council's thinking is likely to be greatest before, rather than after, that signal is given.

23. The Committee simply cannot form a judgement about community views on the information that has been presented to it. The Local Government Act's decision-making requirements are therefore not able to be complied with.

What we ask

24. Historic Places Wellington asks that Te Hoe Matua | City Strategy and Delivery Committee:

    (a) formally assess the significance of this decision against Council's Significance and Engagement Policy before proceeding further;

[5] Paragraph 94.
[6] Paragraph 39.

(b) recognise that decisions about the future of the Bond Store fall within section 97 of the Local Government Act 2002, and defer any decisions about the Bond Store and the future location of the Museum to be considered in the legally correct way through the Long-Term Plan process;

(c) defer the recommended in-principle decision to support relocation of the Museum, pending appropriate community and stakeholder engagement; and

(d) consider the future of the Bond Store alongside, rather than separately from, the future of the Museum.

25. We recognise that Council faces real and difficult trade-offs in relation to strategic assets, cultural facilities, and overall affordability. Historic Places Wellington does not take the view that the Bond Store must remain the Museum's home at any cost. Our concern is with the process. A decision of this significance, involving an important heritage and strategic asset, should not be pre-determined "in-principle" ahead of engagement with the community and interested parties, and should not be taken piecemeal, separately from the connected question of the Bond Store's future.

26. We welcome the opportunity to meet with officers or elected members at any time to discuss these matters further, and to contribute constructively to any engagement process Council undertakes.

27. Thank you for your consideration of this topic, which is important to Wellington's culture, identity and community.

Yours faithfully

Felicity Wong

Chair
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