Hi David - I am delighted to answer the very good questions you have asked.

Obviously this is about trying to see the differences between candidates so I will try to do that. I am chair of Transport and Urban Development which includes responsibility for heritage, and over the years have a track record of protecting heritage. I would also like to pay tribute to Cr Iona Pannett who has been a tireless advocate for heritage and with whom it has been an absolute pleasure to work.

1. Matters concerning heritage buildings is a heated topic in Wellington's media. What is your position on heritage buildings in Wellington?

Heritage is a critical part of Wellington’s character. That includes heritage listed buildings, it includes the special character of many of our suburban areas and places like our cemeteries and monuments. Over the years I have been responsible for listing a significant number of buildings, for rule preventing as of right demolition of pre 1930s buildings in all the inner suburbs, and often work closely with the owners of heritage buildings to help them with strengthening and restoration. That often involves also working regularly with Heritage New Zealand. Iona and I have been part of a working group with HNZ and the Property Council working on issues such as insurance, lobbying Government over tax treatment of strengthening work, bringing Donovan Rypkema to Wellington (etc)

I've also been at the helm of many of the rule changes to address loopholes that once allowed significant modifications without requirement for consent. I have ensured purchase of heritage sites (like Fort Buckley which took a decade), protection of the setting and interior of Futuna Chapel and ongoing support for Futuna Trust. Then obviously there is supporting work done to strengthen Council’s own heritage buildings. I will stop reminiscing.

Looking ahead we currently have 135 Heritage listed EQP buildings - of those by my calculation 58 are in some stage of strengthening work - anything from initial investigation to work being complete and simply awaiting certificate of compliance.

I think we will be able to work with owners of most of the remaining buildings and get them across the line and the buildings strengthened, and I will continue to work actively with owners and HNZ to ensure this happens. We will provide funding and advisory support. I think there will be some challenging buildings and some challenging owners. We are likely to have to prioritise, we are likely to have some fights (see my answer to question 2). The ideal would be to retain all heritage, the likely situation is that we may lose a few buildings - what is really important is that we protect and maintain the most important buildings and groups of buildings - and I think we can do that. I would like to think that by 2022 (two elections time) that every one of those 135 has action underway in one way or another, and that we get the whole stock strengthened with losses in single figures.

A key issue is working with the body corporate owners of some apartment blocks to help them get solutions together.

Iona and I together successfully proposed increasing Council’s heritage budget from $400,000 a year to $1 million a year last year. We have also provided for extensive rates relief of up to 10 years where a Category 1 building is strengthened.
2. With the high demand for housing and development in Wellington, what is your position on those developments which risk the demolition of heritage buildings?

We absolutely have high demand for housing. I think that can be compatible with heritage retention. Past decisions which I have been part of have assisted heritage retention in this light, particularly the flexible mixed use allowed in the Central City and not requiring any carparking provision. This made possible large scale residential development in the Central City, and allowed owners to convert old office buildings into residential, where that would otherwise have been uneconomic.

I am working very closely with Iona and HNZ on one particular proposed development which is of grave concern, and has potential for serious adverse impact on an important heritage building. I hope we will resolve this and save the building. Rest assured that if we have to fight for it - we will.

3. Do you support strengthening of the Town Hall to a satisfactory level of earthquake prevention and working towards an urgent opening of this important amenity?

Town Hall - absolutely. It is frustrating that negotiations with VUW and NZSO are taking as long as they are. The Town Hall will be strengthened and reopened. The current timetable is for that to happen by early 2020. That's what we must work to. Once negotiations are concluded then that is the time for detailed design and actual physical work to be completed. If anyone suggests that from here it will be done any quicker I would suggest that they are either ill informed or trying to misinform.

4. Do you support maintaining or increasing the Wellington City Council Built Heritage Fund

As noted above Iona and I significantly increased the heritage budget, and also made greater rates relief available. The $1 million was for 3 years. I would expect that we will need to continue at that level for a few more years to come - we originally proposed 10 years. That will come up as part of the next Long Term Plan.

5. What is your vision for historic places' role in Wellington's future?

I'm not sure - especially because it is not capitalised - whether this question is about Historic Places Wellington (or Heritage NZ) - or about Historic Places as a group of spaces? If it is the former - then absolutely - I work regularly with HNZ (indeed talking again today), and would welcome working more with you also.

If it is about historic places (as opposed to historic buildings) then these area also very important. We are going to review our Maori precinct rules working with Iwi and other Councils (as a pan Council approach).
We will continue protection and where needed maintenance of historic monuments.
A major opportunity for the city is the Miramar peninsula - Defence land - becoming a heritage precinct. I have long wanted to put together a coherent approach to protecting and interpreting the range of military defence fortifications around the city and Matiu Somes (Lower Hutt City jurisdiction)
Another important opportunity is to make more of our historic cemeteries. In addition to Bolton Street, Mount Street, various church cemeteries, Karori Cemetery is a huge opportunity representing as it does something like 140 years of Wellingtonians being buried there.
There are also a number of built heritage areas which we have protected.
Finally while I think of it - Interpretation of heritage is another important opportunity, refreshing 'heritage trails' in C21st way, but also I have got into the current year's budget $20,000 per annum for heritage plaques on buildings and to commemorate events. I would welcome talking with you about starting that programme.

I have also been rolling out the World War One street signage and got an initiative in on street signage generally - all of which tells about the heritage of the names of our streets.

Very happy always to discuss further.

Warmest regards

Andy Foster  
Chair - Transport and Urban Development  
Wellington City  
Mayoral Candidate