

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

Wellington's history is an essential part of the texture of our cityscape and heritage; it's also my family history. My maternal ancestors lie in Bolton Street cemetery, my paternal ancestors in Mount Street cemetery, St Mary of the Angels has been my family's parish church since it was opened in 1922, and I've attended many events at the Old Town Hall, right back to my primary school days. I have a particular interest in Wellington's churches – many of which are significant heritage buildings.

Many heritage buildings have already been lost (Wellington Public Hospital is one example) so it's important to focus on protecting as many as feasible. At the same time, most of our heritage buildings need expensive seismic strengthening (a huge fiscal burden on owners) and some buildings will need to find a new purpose, to justify the strengthening costs. We cannot afford to save everything, so we need to think carefully about buildings with relatively low heritage value and high earthquake risk.

There are some fantastic 're-purposing' precedents both in Wellington (Circa Theatre, the Odlins Building, the Taj Mahal lavatories and Clyde Quay apartments) and abroad. In Britain charming old buildings have been converted into hotels (the Hotel du Vin chain has a number); and in Singapore: Fullerton Hotel (a former Post Office), National Gallery (the old Supreme Court) and Chijmes foodie quarter (a former Catholic convent).

I've done this myself, having bought and re-purposed St Anne's Anglican Church in Northland Road, turning it into a family home and giving new life to a charming arts and crafts building.

Wellington City Council's list of heritage buildings doesn't always tally with the Government's list – the Gordon Wilson flats are a recent example – and this inconsistency is confusing.

Cuba Street has been described as one of the world's finest examples of Imperial architecture; certainly it's potentially one of Wellington's most charming areas – we need to explore options of some type of loan structure to help the owners strengthen their buildings.

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?

It's impossible to have a hard and fast rule, so decisions have to be taken on a case-by-case rule.

Sometimes we will have to amputate to save; for example, Erskine College (my old school) is in danger of being 'saved to death'. Since my election to Council three years ago, I have worked closely with the local residents, alumnae and the owners (The Wellington Company) to find a solution before the buildings collapse in a big earthquake – they have already been severely vandalised. Both the chapel and the convent (school) building are red-stickered heritage buildings, and have been empty for years. No one can find an economic future for the convent building, and the school's alumnae are desperate for the glorious chapel to be saved. We must find a compromise; that's a better result than a pile of rubble and lots of heart Kauri for recycling.

Futuna Chapel was eventually saved, although has been compromised by the surrounding housing development which – in my uninformed opinion – is unsympathetic to John Scott's architecture.

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?

Absolutely! It's disgraceful that work hasn't started, especially when contrasted with St Mary of the Angels which closed after the 2013 earthquakes and will be re-opened at Easter next year.

Some argue the 1904 Town Hall should be demolished, and replaced with a new fit-for-purpose town hall but – putting to one side the heritage aspects – the old Town Hall has sublime acoustics, and that can't be guaranteed with a new building. The history of concert hall construction is littered with examples of acoustic failings and construction issues, which have been extraordinarily expensive to remedy: Sydney's Opera House (\$NZ1.18billion), Adelaide's Festival Centre (\$NZ96million) and London's Royal Festival Hall (\$NZ167million).

The Town Hall costs continue to balloon: initially \$NZ43million, then \$NZ60million; Council has now approved spending \$73million on upgrading the whole precinct but there is no sign of activity...

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

\$3million over three years is not enough, although we must accept that financial support will always be limited. At present it is spread too thinly. We should increase the fund, and then give larger amounts to fewer buildings and give priority to buildings that are open to the public, or highly visible/significant in our streetscape.

We should investigate some type of loan mechanism, with funds to be repaid if the building is sold.

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

It's important to have watchdogs, but equally important they have a grip on the realities of safety, cost and feasibility.

We should have a consistent heritage plaque system, akin to the English Heritage one; to mark significant sites (when the original building has gone), significant buildings and significant residents.

Suggestions: house where Bernard Freyberg grew up (43 Hawker Street), Wellington's first synagogue: (220 The Terrace), Terrace Gaol where Peter Fraser was imprisoned for sedition in 1916 (360 The Terrace), Michael Savage (father of the welfare state, who boarded in Sydney Street), the Te Aro baths, Luke's Lane (where the Luke Foundry built Cape Palliser & Castlepoint lighthouses), Sexton Cottage (Bolton Street cemetery), Crofton (William Fox's house, Kenya Street, Ngaio). This scheme could be a joint venture between Historic Places Wellington and Wellington City Council.

6. We welcome any other comments you may wish to make on this subject

How accurate are seismic ratings of buildings? Three engineers will give three different opinions. Are we being overly cautious? Some of our best seismic engineers suggest there may be better ways of assessing seismic risk in buildings.

We need to review our list of heritage buildings – too few? Too many? We need to be realistic, but also

Heritage Wellington – Responses from Nicola Young.

remember these buildings cannot be replaced. I am concerned about St Gerard's church & monastery, as it doesn't have the backing of an active parish and will be far costlier and more complex to strengthen than St Mary of the Angels. At what stage, if any, should Council step in?

Owners of heritage-listed buildings in Britain can get the Value Added Tax (= GST) waived if the building works are approved by the heritage authorities, and carried out by approved tradesmen. Such a scheme should be investigated here, to encourage the restoration of heritage, and high calibre work.

Façade-ism could have its uses too. It worked well for the former Kirkcaldie & Stains building (now David Jones) and has worked well abroad – one, rather different example, being the Norman Foster reconstruction of Berlin's Reichstag.