Oral submission to WCC on proposed long-term plan, May 2018

Resilience and Environment: Built Heritage Incentive Fund

We do not support the proposal to reduce the Built Heritage Incentive Fund. We fear any reduction will pose a risk to those heritage buildings where owners are struggling to finance their strengthening and/or refurbishment. These grants not only provide practical help to preserve built heritage but send a signal to all Wellingtonians that the Council values it. A reduction in the Fund sends the opposite message.

Housing: Special Housing Areas

We support SHAs but do not think they should be proclaimed over areas where in which there are heritage-listed properties. This happened in the Erskine College case and has led to the imminent demolition of a Category 1 listed building: the Main teaching block. We don’t want to see other heritage buildings put at risk through the SHA mechanism.

Arts and Culture: Strengthening cultural facilities

We strongly support the strengthening of the Town Hall and other cultural amenities in Wellington, but we feel the Town Hall has been closed too long, leaving the impression that Council has a weak commitment to this and other important heritage buildings.

We would like to see the Council lift its commitment to the city’s built heritage by strengthening its heritage unit, which we believe is severely understaffed and lacks influence within the Council. Further resourcing will enable it to better identify new places of heritage significance and provide district plan protection for it. This would avoid situation like the present Karori campus debacle. Its high heritage value has been known to the Council since 2007, but it has never been placed on the district plan. We are now faced with the prospect of losing the most important collection of Modernist campus buildings in NZ.

Finally, we would like to see the Council better acknowledge that built heritage both frames and expresses Wellington’s cultural life. More needs to be done to promote the city’s heritage fabric to residents and visitors alike. This could begin updating its heritage trails and signage, which are in poor condition and do not reflect the social and cultural diversity of the city’s past, especially in regard to mana whenua. They’re well overdue for a complete makeover.