Built Heritage Challenges: Neglect, Earthquakes and Urban Development.
A presentation to Wellington City U3A by Felicity Wong, Chairperson of Historic Places Wellington (HPW), 31 August 2021

(This was a talk accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. This document includes the PowerPoint slides with notes for context, but not the complete talk).

Some abbreviations: DSP: Wellington City Council’s (WCC) Draft Spatial Plan
NPS – Government’s National Policy Statement on Urban Development

Slide 1: topic

Built heritage challenges: Neglect, Earthquakes & Urban Development

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Slide 2

Historic Places Wellington is separate from Heritage New Zealand

Our principal aims are to:

- promote the identification, protection and conservation of historic places in the Wellington region, for the benefit of communities and the general public; and
- inform, advise and educate the public on the significance of historic heritage
HPW is an independent advocacy group of volunteers. We formed in 2012 from the Wellington Branch Committee of Historic Places Trust. We are separate from Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga. We make submissions on laws and plans. We have member events. And a new Home Restorers Group.
This presentation focuses mainly on public buildings or funded by public; built heritage woven into lives & deaths of Wellingtonians.

Slide 3:

**Two main sources of heritage protection in NZ**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listing by Heritage New Zealand</th>
<th>Included in local councils’ District Plan heritage schedules</th>
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<td>Gives recognition, but no legal protection</td>
<td>Gives limited protection – typically a building owner needs a resource consent to demolish the building; and constraints on alterations.</td>
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<td>(They participate in litigation and have possibility of using a Heritage Order; have input to council processes.)</td>
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Heritage Protection – two sources. Wellington City Council is reviewing its District Plan currently.
- Several examples illustrate different listing mechanisms

Slide 4:

TRUBY KING HOSPITAL (1927) – part of a historic precinct – now one part demolished
TRUBY KING Hospital: 1923 Truby King purchased 10 acres Mt Melrose.
- Architect William Gray Young designed Truby King’s bungalow & baby formula factory
- 1927 modern Karitane hospital by public donation
- Truby King’s was the first NZ State funeral
- House then gifted to Plunket
- 1970s both the Karitane Products factory & the hospital were closed and sold
- Council purchased house, gardens & mausoleum
- 2006 HNZPT listed all buildings as a precinct
- Half precinct (house, garden & mausoleum) historic reserve under WCC, factory turned into apartments. The hospital (not separately listed by WCC) was demolished last year.
- It is a big heritage challenge when there is a collection of buildings (e.g. Karori teachers college site or Otaki Health Camp).

Slide 5

- NEGLECT: two examples
  - Nott House (c. 1860) Ivy Bank farm - see in Glenside from train
  - Early country section 100 acres of farm on Old Porirua Rd/Middleton Rd
  - Land above taken for Manawatu railway / later motorway
  - 1930s land below taken for Tawa Deviation main trunk thru Glenside – house marooned
  - Max Dorsett WWII veteran, in 1956 got only 1 year prison after shooting dead his wife’s partner when wife leaving (judge: “quite understandable”)
  - Died 2011 – house sold.

- “Demolition by Neglect” – can be positive and negative
  - Positive: neglect can mean building saved until there’s funding
  - E.g. Cuba St lack of funding in 60s on meant buildings were not demolished.

- Negative: House at 128 Abel Smith St. 1898 Edwardian free style
- Private maternity hospital “Waimarie” until 1950. Lebanese Society purchased it
- WCC listed
- Historian Gabor Toth: “Wellington summarised within four walls”. Anarchists & activists inhabited it.
- It burnt down
- Others fall down or become “earthquake prone”/ unsafe and unsanitary

**Slide 6:**

- Edwardian Terraced houses on Basin Reserve, like Sydney style / unique in Wellington?
- At one time were offices of Martin Hill heritage architect & Judy Siers' publishing (Chair Onslow Historical Society)
- Long neglected
- Owned by supermarket / later sold to Chinese Embassy
- HPW asked WCC to list these in the heritage schedule (they had earlier been proposed).
  - WCC said wait until District Plan is reviewed.
- HPW met Embassy & offered to remove
- Urgently demolished
- Example of what happens if not listed

**Slide 7:**

**EWART NURSES HOME**
- 3rd slide of a building with connections to women’s health
- Neglect & “earthquake prone” often go together
- 1910 Ewart Nurses home (former) listed by both HNZPT and WCC
- Next to Wellington’s first fever hospital
- Minister at the time: ‘Wellington needed fever hospital because isolation at home not possible - density of city & overcrowded homes’.
- Design for staff to disinfect before entering their 17 bed home
1980 – 2009 it was Parkview abortion clinic
Intact, owned & neglected by DHB but needs a modern re-use
Strengthening deadline expires 2022

Neglect and Earthquake Prone

Ewart Hospital Nurses Home (1910, Newtown)
and Defence General HQ Building (1911, Taranaki St)

GHQ Taranaki St / Pukeahu War Memorial Park
- Photo: military historian Peter Cooke at protest (with Cnr Pannett) to save building in 2015
- Expert on Mt Cook history: Māori use /early colonial military site/ old prison/ goal brick works / Dominion museum site & education
- Oldest remnant of Mt Cook’s military history & HQ for WWI &1913 waterfront strike
- Complements 1894 brick police station at other end of (former) Buckle St
- Defence undecided on its reuse.

Slide 8:
GORDON Wilson Flats (1959)
- Listed by WCC (although they wanted to remove it from the list) & last year as Cat I by HNZ
- Built by Housing Corp as social housing
- Tenants evicted a decade ago & building sold to Victoria University who want to demolish
- Thought by many to be “ugly”. We sponsored a public talk in 2020 called: ‘Is Wellington Modernism too Ugly to Love?’
- However the flats have important social history: Quality housing for low income people – views /sun /blocks no one/ comfortable family maisonettes & studios for working women.
- Well liked by their tenants
- WCC recently passed a resolution to support doing them up for student accommodation.
ADELAIDE (TRAMWAY) Hotel:
- Listed by WCC: neglected & earthquake prone
- History as last pub before ‘dry’ Newtown & near the former tram depot
- 2013 bought cheaply because needed strengthening
- What is often called “Demolition by neglect” where an owner wants the land not the building
- In court to decide whether the council can take it over to do the work
- We objected to demolition - but we are a community group with limited funds
- Resource consent process gives time for solution
- Lately new plans were notified (see photo)
- Accept there are different view about its bulk & style and “facadism”, but welcome no demolition.

Slide 10:
ST GERARD’s Monastery
- Spectacular Wellington landmark
- Redemptorist Fathers church built 1908 by public donation
- John Swan architect - beautiful stained glass windows
- 1932 monastery: architect Frederick de Jersey Clere (both well known architects)
- Now owned by an Evangelical Catholic mission
- Earthquake-prone and hope Wellington can support strengthening fundraising

St Gerard’s Monastery (1932) and Church (1908), Hawker St, Mt Victoria

Slide 11:

Need strengthening: Freyberg Pool (1963) & Railway Station (1937)

Freyberg Pool & Railway Station
- Freyberg Pool: architect Jason Smith 1963. Owned by WCC
- Asymmetrical butterfly roof & curtain glass walls
- Railway Station: Architect William Gray Young (same as Truby King house) 1937
- Expensive at time (£340k) and considered ‘finest public building in NZ’
- Maori motifs along platform walls, soaring public lobby (Cathedral like)
- Recent controversy over proposed disability access ramp with HNZ wrongly criticised for noting more of a roller coaster or luge.

**Slide 12:**

- “EARTHQUAKE Prone”: a major issue for Wellington apartments
- Listed heritage buildings need a sensible policy
- Watkins (Cuba St) building: 1904 printing factory, now apartments
- Edmund ANSCOMBE Flats, Oriental Bay 1937
- C.550 Wellington buildings earthquake prone. C.150 heritage listed
- Is this “Demolition by Regulation?”
- Changing standards of Building Code - huge heritage risk
- 2004 Building Act amended to deal with leaky buildings resulted in earthquake standards being extended to residential buildings without any policy analysis of its impact on residential owners
- 2016: 34% NBS became National standard & risk of standard creep by regulation
- “engineering opinions" differ & strengthening costly
- problems with body corporates and trying to get agreement
- There’s a Unit Titles Bill: Group Inner City Wellington proposed more flexibility for owners including only 50% insurance
- In 2019 budget a loan scheme admin by Kainga Ora; interest rate too high; amount $250k too low; no loans taken up / under review
- A very big issue for Wellington’s heritage & politicians need to resolve it
- But government removed EQUIP fund & there’s only small WCC strengthening fund
Slide 13:
- OLD ST PAULS: GOOD news: one of first heritage buildings saved in the 1960s, Prof Beaglehole and others campaigned to save it
- HNZ recently strengthened it and did other upgrades for $3m - good outcome
- Town Hall & St James also underway (costly) and Basin Reserve museum stand completed
- Council needs to do the Bond Store (Wellington Museum), Shed 5, and Freyberg; Library.

Slide 14:

Chevening, Kelburn: 1929 apartment, with previous owner Susan Price. Strengthened & gifted to Heritage NZ

CHEVENING: MORE GOOD news
- 1929 largely intact apartment block
- Owner Susan Price bought it; strengthened to 100% and gifted to Heritage NZ
- Her family also saved Randell Cottage, Thorndon; their ancestor’s house, now a writers residence
Perhaps the biggest issue of all is URBAN DEVELOPMENT / Draft Spatial Plan controversy

**Slide 15:**
- Plimmer House, Boulcott St. A 19th century remnant now lost context
- Happened in 1970s: why HPW working hard to retain character areas in Wellington’s old heritage suburbs - little old houses risk being overshadowed by tall buildings.

![Urban Planning: Plimmer House in Boulcott St](image)

- Government policy is now requiring the Council to allow this in all parts of our inner city suburbs which are within the town belt or on planned rapid transit routes & train lines.

**Slide 16:**

![Thorndon Heritage Project](image)

**Inner city suburbs pre-1930 demolition rule**
- Currently District Plan Rule: pre 1930 buildings need Resource Consent to demolish
- Applies in: Thorndon, Mt Victoria, Mt Cook, part of The Terrace, Aro Valley, Newtown & Berhampore
- It was introduced over 20 years ago. Mayor Foster introduced & supported those protections
- Numerous heritage reports support this approach
- Map of Mt Victoria & Mt Cook showing areas currently covered by this rule (shaded)
- National Policy Statement (Government instruction to Councils) includes an exemption for heritage / character
- 2019 Boffa Miskell did a study of inner suburbs: said 80% should stay protected & remove character protection from 20%

WCC's Planning for Growth (Draft Spatial Plan or DSP):
- Council grappling with the government’s NPS instruction to “intensify” and provide more housing & development opportunities
- Disputes about population projections but housing shortage & extreme house prices means increased supply needed

Slide 17:

Planning for Growth

Our city is growing. The District Plan will soon be up for review. The decisions we make now, will shape the way we live, for decades.

Timeline:
- August 2020: WCC Draft Spatial Plan released (71% inner suburbs pre-1930 ‘character’ protection taken away)
- June 2021: Revamped Spatial Plan (50% protection removed) – council voted back to the 71% removal

- Intensification in ‘old Thorndon’ & ‘new’ Erskine College development (demolition of a Category 1 historic building to enable this development!)
- DSP proposed removing demolition rule from more than 70% of current areas (protecting not 80% as Boffa Miskell said, but less than 30%).
- More than 2800 submissions were made & 350 people gave oral presentations to Councillors. Hugely controversial.
- Council staff responded & recommended to Councillors that protection be removed from “only” 50% (still only half of what’s currently protected & well short of 80% recommended by Boffa Miskell)
However in highly political vote, a majority of Councillors voted to reject officers’ recommendation & ignore citizens’ submissions

They adopted a Final Spatial Plan which removed protection from more than 70% of all character suburbs; including from large parts of Mt Victoria & Thorndon, completely from The Terrace, & vast areas of Newtown & Berhampore

Only 88ha of current 307ha protected

Mayor Foster, Councillors Pannett, Young, Woolf, Calvert & Sparrow tried to make bigger exemptions for heritage suburbs (as NPS allows) but a majority of other politicians out-voted them

Draft District Plan will come out in October and the notified Plan in May 2022

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Slide 18:

Under the government’s National Policy Statement councils are required to enable at least six storey buildings within a walkable catchment of existing and planned rapid transit stops and the edge of city centre zones.

The council voted to apply a “15 minute walkable” catchment.

The map shows an area included in an appx 15 minute (c. 1.2 km) walk into the city – i.e. often downhill.

A 15 minute walk out of the city might include a smaller area.

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NPS walkable map (thanks to Richard Murcott for this map)

- HPW’s main concern is with heritage buildings
- Others – residents groups, etc – are concerned about removal of height limits below 6 stories around main transport routes: problem for Newtown, Berhampore & Island Bay (MRT/light rail), & Onslow suburbs with the Johnsonville train route
- NPS: also removes height limits below 6 stories in the “walkable catchment” of central city zone
- Wellington central city zone is area within Molesworth St, Willis St, Waitangi Park (etc)
- NPS - “Enable 6 storey” within a walkable catchment of the edge of that zone
- Same majority of Councillors voted to extend the “walkable catchment” to 15 mins from city central zone (up from 10mins in Draft Spatial Plan).
- As a result, there will be no height limit below 6 stories throughout all the inner suburbs inside the town belt
- Many don’t know this – it was only briefly mentioned in one DomPost article after vote
- ‘As of right’ all properties within a 15 min walk of the central city zone will be “upzoned” to 6 stories
- Allowed to build 6 stories on the town side of Kelburn & Wadestown, up Brooklyn Hill, all Mt Victoria, etc
- Only small “character precincts” (less than 30% of existing character suburbs) will have a lower limit because of the pre-1930 character protection rule
- Thorndon’s fault line will also provide for some lower height limits, but rules still pro-demolition & pro-development

- HPW: the combination of “upzoning” & deregulating demolition (through District Plan) means the native timber houses surrounding our city centre will be allowed to be ‘clear felled’
- Wellington risks losing its identity as a modern, urban city surrounded by wooden houses nestled into the hillsides.

**Slide 19:**

“Brownfields” sites that could be used for development – Adelaide Road:
- Former Tip Top Bread Factory (owned by Ryman’s)
- Former Sheet Metal Works (housing development planned)
- Former Caltex Petrol Station (apartments planned)

**UNDER-USED SITES**

- This slide is for those who ask “where can we build more houses?”
- Under-utilised sites - residents associations have answered
- Mt Victoria Planning Group/ Newtown Community Plan / Thorndon Quay
- Council very divided & majority has voted to ignore the input of such groups.

- These are LARGE ISSUES
- Many causes of unaffordable housing. E.g. population growth & housing preferences; money printing; failure to build state housing; tax incentive for property investment; accommodation supplement
- Reduction in home ownership and 30% owned by those who own 4 or more houses
- Centralisation of planning rules means loss of local discretion
- Challenges of Wellington geography - sun, views, valleys, cold/damp old houses (& some new ones are leaky)
- Inner suburb neglect in parts / some landlords awaiting upzoning & deregulation
- But survey showed 60% renters in Mt Victoria & many appreciated sunny, relatively cheap old character houses
- How to reconcile critical need for more housing with impacts on amenity of existing residential environment?

Next Big challenge:
- District Plan Heritage Schedule will propose 78 new sites or buildings for listing, but we have assumed existing listings will be retained
- Council very divided: How will they vote?

Join our society, visit our website or Facebook, support us by having input to these decisions & visit heritage sites / buildings with us.

Slide 20: www.historicplaceswellington.org

For further information see our website:
www.historicplaceswellington.org

We are also on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/historicplaceswellington