

21 February 2013

Strategy and Policy Committee papers – earthquake resilience [programme – Update and Policy Direction and Councils proposed submission to MBIE on the Building Seismic performance consultative document. – David Watt, NZHPT Central Region Area Coordinator

Mr Chairman, Your Worship and Councillors, thank you for the opportunity to speak briefly to two papers on your agenda today, the Earthquake Resilience Programme – Update and Policy Directions and Council's proposed submission on Building Seismic Performance – the MBIE consultative document. I appreciated hearing the discussion and questions on these papers on Tuesday.

Firstly, I want to say the NZHPT commends the very active and consultative approach Council has taken to all the seismic resilience issues since the Canterbury quakes in 2010 and 2011. A tremendous amount of work has been done by Council. We have kept in touch with Neville Cowan, with the Council's heritage advisory officers and with Iona as Built Environment Portfolio Leader on Council. We have also attended the Inner City Association consultative meetings on earthquake prone buildings and response to policy changes.

We generally support the directions Council is going in with policy update and with its responses to the consultative document to the Ministry. Wellington is a large city and its responses are going to be different in many respects to the challenges faced by many smaller authorities up and down New Zealand. We know that from our own interaction with 30 local and regional authorities for instance, large and small in our Central Region of NZ. We are part of a policy group working with MBIE on the consultative document and with public meetings that are going on around the country for submissions. The feedback in smaller centres is very concerning around the challenges and even getting to the stage you are at with policy. We have initiated our own public meetings with heritage property owners and councils in our region, and elsewhere in NZ, on seismic resilience options with recommended actions in particular using Win Clark, a leading NZ structural engineer from Wellington, and executive officer of the NZ Society for Earthquake Engineering, and on insurance issues with Aon New Zealand.

I want to briefly make a few points on the seismic resilience policy and consultation papers for decisions at Council today. Council has done important work on assessing processes around heritage listings in the District Plan and options it can take. We have received the booklet on the thematic heritage study, and this work will be a key part of future decision making around prioritising listings based on values, using criteria that fairly judge the heritage worth in terms of their rarity, uniqueness, architectural, historical, social and other heritage values that we too use for deciding on places and areas for registration.

We support a deferment on ranking per se at this time while other work is going on, and on future outcomes via Central Government. Work can still go on with prioritising heritage properties in terms of strengthening needs, to establish their importance and apportioning the cost to strengthen. I want to raise one important matter that very much concerns the NZHPT around the MBIE submission process we have been asked to comment on to MBIE. This is an issue that came through from the Royal Commission. – We have a concern about a proposal that the requirement to strengthen or remove a building would take priority over any RMA requirements to protect heritage. If the RMA consent process is removed, the result could be opportunistic and lead to unnecessary demolition. We have seen those kinds of results in Christchurch.

Finally, incentives for the retention of heritage, for places that we consider are important places in our community. Heritage incentives are a powerful complement to heritage regulation and the synergy between them is a valuable heritage tool. There is no one fit for all. We need a range of incentives to assist property owners. We need to be creative in responding to the challenges