

Before Wellington City Council

Under the Resource Management Act 1991

In the matter of Plan Change 81 : Rezoning 320 The Terrace and de-listing the Gordon Wilson Flats

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE BY LINDA TYLER

1. INTRODUCTION

My full name is Linda Rose Tyler and I am a university academic and recognised art and architecture historian.

I am Associate Professor in the National Institute of Arts and Creative Industries. I was appointed inaugural Director of the Centre for Art Studies at National Institute of Arts and Creative Industries of the University of Auckland in February 2006. In this role, I administer the Art Collection, manage programmes and exhibitions at the Gus Fisher Gallery, and also digital and on-site exhibitions under the auspices of the Window project. I have a BA and MA with first class honours in architectural history from the University of Canterbury. My MA thesis at the University of Canterbury in Art History in 1986 was about the New Zealand architecture and planning of émigré architect Ernst Plischke (1903-1992) who was in the Housing department under Gordon Wilson.

I have read the evidence of Mr Adam Wild of Archifact Ltd (University of Victoria's Heritage consultant) and Viv Rickard (Wellington City Council's Heritage Officer)

I have read and agree to comply with the Environment Court's Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court Consolidated Practice Note 2014. The evidence is within my scope of expertise except where I state otherwise. I have prepared this statement to meet my obligations under section 7 of the Practice Note and have considered and referred to all material facts that I am aware of that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed here.

Introduction

The Gordon Wilson Flats are vitally important in NZ's architectural, social and political history. They were designed by and named after the most prominent, powerful and influential architects in New Zealand from the 1930s and through the 1950s – Government Architect Gordon Wilson.

This housing block is one of the few built examples of modernist high rise social housing in New Zealand and is linked directly to the housing crisis of the interwar period and the policies of social reform of the first Labour Government of Michael Joseph Savage.

My evidence is set out below relates to the assessment criteria from Section 66 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, which lists criteria used in qualifying the inclusion of place on the New Zealand Heritage List administered by Heritage New Zealand

Aesthetic Significance

Considering the formal qualities of the fabric and setting: the form, scale, materials, space etc. Assessment of the space or its parts demonstrating aesthetic significance or contribution to the overall integrity of the design of the place.

The Gordon Wilson Flats represent one of the first of this typology of slab-type apartment blocks in New Zealand with a sister building in Upper Greys Ave, Auckland which has been preserved and given a heritage classification.

Gordon Wilson Flats as a structure shows a very important link with international modernism. This is evident in its strong and direct reference to Le Corbusier's Unite de Habitation in Marseilles. It is a local variant of this particular masterpiece of architectural modernism in its scale and slab like form, its two-storeyed maisonette planning, its common roof terrace and the organic form of its expressed chimney stack.

The maisonette planning (which is unique in high rise apartment design in NZ) with the two storied 2 bedroom units stacked upon each other, allow for a strong east façade articulation broken up by balconies and create a structural grid pattern. Lineal balconies on the west façade echo those of the Dixon Street Flats.

Also unique to this building are the range of colour schemes, most notably the multi coloured finish of the building which resulted in its nickname as "The Dulux Colour Chart Building."

The Gordon Wilson Flats are remarkable as a design because of their scale and the form of the block in relation to its site. It presents a continuum of architectural scale, form, materiality and detail established by structures such as the Dixon St Flats and McLean Flats in Wellington, and the Symonds St Flats and Lower/Upper Greys Avenue Flats in Auckland. The Gordon Wilson Flats can be seen as the apogee of this development over time.

Significant townscape qualities are created by its context within the urban fabric of the city and the Kelburn Hill behind, as well as its link in form and scale to the high rise north/south running slab buildings of Victoria University beyond.

Gordon Wilson Flats is part of a group of internationally significant high rise social housing buildings located in close proximity which are linked stylistically, functionally and aesthetically both to each other but also to the international modern movement of which they are part. In addition, these buildings are also associated with the reforming social and economic reforms of the first Labour Government in 1935 and many of the broader international social, economic and political changes that occurred in the first four decades of the twentieth Century (for example, social housing programmes of Germany's Weimar Republic, Soviet housing programmes following the Russian Revolution and so on.)

This makes the Gordon Wilson Flats and the associated buildings unique and significant nationally and internationally

I believe this building has **considerable aesthetic significance**

Archaeological Significance

The degree to which the space can be said to have an archaeological potential.

This was not assessed

Architectural Significance

Addressing the design and architectural aspects of the place. Assessment of the space demonstrating those particular characteristics of a school of design.

The Gordon Wilson Flats have exceptional architectural significance. Not only are they associated with F. Gordon Wilson, one of the most prominent, powerful and influential architects in New Zealand from the 1930s through to the 1950s but they are the last of a line of highly important high rise social housing projects built by the state. They were initiated by the first Labour Government of 1935 and they reflect and have a direct connection with international modernism.

Gordon Wilson was one of the most acclaimed, significant and influential New Zealand architects of his time. After an education at Wellington's Technical College, he was articled in 1916 to William Page Architect in Wellington, then the firm of Hoggard Prouse and Gummer in 1920. Wilson moved to Auckland in 1922 and joined the office of Gummer and Ford. In 1928 he completed his NZIA Professional Examinations and travelled to the United States. On his return, he became an Associate of Gummer and Ford and worked on a range of significant award winning projects. These included the National War Memorial Carillion (1929), Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery (1929-1936) in Wellington, Wellington Public Library (1935), the Auckland Railway Station (1931) and the Dingwall Building in Auckland's Queen St (1936).

In 1936 he was appointed as the Principal Architect of the newly formed Department of Housing Construction by the first Labour Government, where he directed the design of all the new state housing throughout New Zealand, including the innovative multi-level apartments such as the Berhampore Flats, Wellington (1938),

Dixon St Flats, McLean Flats, Symond St Flats, Lower and Upper Greys Avenue Flats in Auckland and the Gordon Wilson Flats on The Terrace in Wellington.

During this time he worked with a range of important and talented architects including European émigré architects fleeing Hitler's Europe, including Fred Newman, Fred Farrar, Helmut Einhorn and most notably distinguished Viennese architect Ernst Plischke as well as young New Zealand talent such as Cedric Firth, George Porter, Jock Beere and Ian Reynolds. Plischke in particular offered a significant and direct link back to the epicentre of European modernism having been taught by leading modernist Peter Behrens and recognised as a notable modernist architect in the Vienna in the 1930s and brought this skill, sensibility and experience into Wilson's office, an office attuned and receptive to the modern idiom and the philosophies that inspired it . Plischke had a significant influence in Wilson's office and more widely throughout New Zealand and was closely involved in the design of the Dixon St Flats and early 1942 versions of the McLean Flats , which influenced the subsequent design of the adjacent Gordon Wilson Flats.

Plischke's reputation continued to grow, and following the success of his book *Design and Living* which was published in 1947, he established a private practice with Cedric Firth known as Plischke and Firth in 1948. They designed a range of important mid-century modernist buildings including the seminal Massey House, one of the first glass-curtain-walled office buildings in New Zealand and the Sutch House in Brooklyn. On Plischke's return to Vienna he was appointed Head of his old architecture school, the Akademie der Bilden Kunste and is now celebrated as one of Austria's leading modernist architects. His status in Vienna is so great now that an Ernst Plischke Society has been formed, academic research undertaken about his work and an annual Design Award presented in his honour. I cannot overstate the importance of this international link back to New Zealand and the work of Wilson and his office and thereby to the Gordon Wilson Flats

In 1948 Wilson was appointed Assistant Government Architect and then in 1952 he became Government Architect and led the design of a broad range of government buildings, most significantly Bowen State Building and Broadcasting House, Bledisloe House (Auckland), the Canterbury University School of Engineering, the Otago University Dental School, the Wellington Government Centre, Star Flats, Demonstration Flats, gave advice on New Zealand House in London with Sir Robert Matthew, as well as the Upper Greys Avenue Flats in Auckland and the Gordon Wilson Flats in Wellington.

The Gordon Wilson Flats shows a very important link with international modernism because of its strong and direct reference to Le Corbusier's Unite de Habitation in Marseilles as previously noted. This is very important as it locates this building in a continuum of architectural modernism both nationally but internationally

Gordon Wilson Flats remain as one of only six high rise State Housing projects ever built and the last one completed and therefore represents the final vestiges of the link with the social housing programme of the first Labour Government and its modernist architectural style

Consequently I consider the Gordon Wilson Flats to be of **Considerable/Exceptional** Architectural significance

Functional Significance

The contribution of the function of the place that can be assessed as having cultural heritage significance.

The building's function has not changed since it was completed in 1959 and no significant changes have been made in that time. The functional values were high when the Gordon Wilson Flats were used as inner city social housing. They were occupied until recently, but were vacated due to poor maintenance leading to Health and Safety risks.

The building's functional significance has not diminished because the building has been vacated

Consequently this building is of considerable/exceptional functional significance

Historical Significance

The ability to demonstrate an association with persons, ideas or events. Included in this section are the histories of all the other criteria considered.

This block of flats represents Gordon F. Wilson, the quality of his associate architects in the Department of Housing Construction, (for example, Ernst Plischke) and the organisations he represented, the international modernist references and the linkage to the economic and social policies of the first Labour Government elected in 1935

This building like all the state housing stock helped improve the health and welfare of its inhabitants, both environmentally, socially and psychologically.

The high rise social housing buildings designed by Gordon Wilson and his office subsequently informed a generation of Council-funded and designed inner city social house throughout New Zealand, in both Wellington and Auckland.

The building has exceptional Historical Significance.

Scientific Significance

Concerned with the importance of the place as evidence and with the physical survival of that evidence in the building fabric. Scientific value is the potential to provide information about past human activity. This may encompass technology, archaeology, philosophy, custom, taste and usage as well as technique or material.

The foundation design and construction methodology of this building, particularly the inclusion of seismic measurement into the building makes it unique out of all New Zealand buildings in the period. In terms of its

construction technology, it was innovative by New Zealand standards which contributes to its scientific significance which I consider moderate.

Social Significance

The notion of a spiritual, traditional, political, national, or any other cultural sentiment expressed by a group.

Gordon Wilson Flats have exceptional social significance.

The importance of its association with the reforming first Labour Government which saw Michael Joseph Savage elected as Prime Minister in 1935, means that it is closely tied to that government's social and economic policies which were aimed at eradicating slum housing and improving social and economic equality.

But the building also exhibits a visionary provision of affordable inner city housing for couples, single people, small families and city workers, which is still an important requirement in the western city of today.

Also the State provision of high rise inner city social housing from the 1930s to the end of the 1950s set an example that influenced the development of Council developed high-rise social housing especially in Wellington and Auckland. Much of this housing is still in Council ownership, and it has been successfully maintained or refurbished so it can be still inhabited.

Technological Significance

Assessment of the demonstration of particular characteristics of a building technique or craft.

The construction technology, pile design and application of seismic measuring into the building are important and innovative for the time.

I would consider this to be of moderate significance.

Townscape Significance

An assessment of the 'Townscape Value' or the contribution of the space to its greater context.

The Gordon Wilson Flats have significant townscape qualities in its context with the city and the Kelburn Hill behind as well as its link in form and scale to the high rise north/south running slab buildings of Victoria University beyond.

Gordon Wilson Flats is part of a group of internationally significant high rise social housing buildings located in close proximity which are linked stylistically, functionally and aesthetically to both each other but also with the international modern movement of which they are a highly significant part.

Consequently I believe it has considerable Townscape significance

Conclusion

The Gordon Wilson Flats are a remarkable example of a heroic period of modern architecture in New Zealand, and as such they are both unprecedented and unique in their structure, design, social and architectural significance.

Prepared by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda K. Tyler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L' and 'T'.

Linda Tyler (Associate Professor)
BA MA(Hons)

7 December 2015