

Pre-hearing meeting on District Plan Change 75 – Centres Heritage Areas

19 October 2010

(Undertaken in accordance with Clause 8AA, First Schedule, RMA)

Participants Submitter 11 – Steven Kerr, Environmental Compliance and Planning Manager, Chorus (Telecom New Zealand Limited)
Alesha Wallace – Resource Management Consultant, Incite
Sacha Walters – Heritage Adviser Planning, New Zealand Historic Places Trust
Alison Dangerfield, Heritage Architect, New Zealand Historic Places Trust
Sarah Edwards – Senior Policy Advisor, Policy and Planning, Wellington City Council
Vivien Rickard – Principal Heritage Advisor, Urban Design and Heritage, Wellington City Council
Michael Kelly – Heritage Consultant on behalf of Wellington City Council
Russell Murray – Conservation Architect on behalf of Wellington City Council

AGENDA

- Background
 - Intent of the proposed plan change
 - Designation
 - Perceived heritage values of 32-34 Waitoa Road
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SUMMARY

The purpose of this meeting was to allow Council officers, the Council's heritage consultants, New Zealand Historic Places Trust and the submitter to discuss issues relating to proposed District Plan Change 75. The pre-hearing meeting format was used because it is less formal than the hearing process and allows for open discussion of issues. Following the meeting clause 8AA of the Resource Management Act (RMA) requires that the Council prepare a report that identifies those matters that are agreed between the local authority and submitters, and those that are not.

BACKGROUND

Along with five other areas in Wellington city, Plan Change 75 proposes the establishment of a heritage area for a collection of commercial buildings located around the Waitoa and Hataitai Roads and Moxham Avenue intersection in Hataitai. Telecom (Submitter 11) seeks the exclusion of their telephone exchange building at 32-34 Waitoa Road from the area.

The proposed Hataitai Shopping Centre Heritage Area includes the full lot boundaries for 32-34 Waitoa Road. The building, which was constructed in 1950-51, is located on the corner of Waitoa and Hataitai Roads. The single-storey part of the building fronting Waitoa Road originally housed the post office but nowadays is used for commercial purposes. The rear part of the building is two-storey and contains the telephone exchange and telecommunications operations. Externally, the building contains a number of mounting poles and antenna.

The site is designated in the District Plan as T3: Telephone exchange.

The meeting was requested by the submitter who wanted to understand Council's position on the proposed Hataitai Shopping Centre Heritage Area and better understand why Council consider that their building should be included in the proposed area.

INTENT OF THE PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE

Sarah Edwards explained that the suburban centre heritage project was initiated in November 2007 when Council commissioned a study of Wellington's town, district and neighbourhood Centres. The study identified potential heritage areas and included thorough reports on each area. The reports described the history and collective values of the buildings, as well as an architectural description and brief history of each building in the area. The draft proposed areas were released for public feedback as part of the draft Suburban Centre Review in November 2008. Between November 2009 and April 2010 Council officers undertook more targeted consultation with the building owners who raised initial opposition to the proposed areas.

Steven Kerr explained that Telecom was not aware of the draft proposals (and thus unable to respond) due to the notification being lost within the organisation.

Sarah Edwards explained that the purpose of the Plan Change 75 heritage areas was to protect the uniformity of the buildings and the collective nature of their setting. There was a presumption that the main building fronting the street provided that greatest contribution, but that the full site boundaries were (generally) included to ensure that any new development is sympathetic to the buildings fronting the street.

She explained that the groups of buildings nominated for potential heritage areas in the city are of high heritage significance and some are potentially at risk of being lost. The proposed heritage areas are important for the contribution that they make to Wellington's history and the stories they tell about how and where the city developed over time. They represent a legacy of the suburban expansion of the city and are considered by Council to be a significant asset to the city and future generations

It was generally agreed at the meeting that the intent of Plan Change 75 was an efficient and effective means of protecting important aspects of the city's heritage. With particular reference to Hataitai and 32-34 Waitoa Road, the submitter did not agree that their building was of sufficient significance to warrant inclusion in the proposed heritage area.

Agreed position:

It was generally agreed that the intention behind the plan change was understood and acknowledged.

DESIGNATION

Sarah Edwards discussed the designation that applied on site. Under the current designation provisions in the District Plan there is no requirement for Telecom to consider the heritage values that may apply to the site and the wider area. Should the proposed Hataitai Shopping Centre Heritage Area proceed, there would be an expectation that future developments on site would be sensitive to the heritage values of the area, but ultimately Telecom is able to lodge an outline plan of works at their discretion.

Alesha Wallace explained that the current designation process under the Resource Management Act could change. In addition, if Telecom sought to have the designation rolled over, Council would have the ability to then attach conditions to the site that could focus on heritage matters. This uncertainty was an area of concern for Telecom.

Agreed position:

It was agreed that the designation in its current form provides flexibility for changes. If the site is zoned as part of a heritage area, it could result in conditions being placed on the designation that requires an extra layer of consent process for the development of the site.

PERCEIVED HERITAGE VALUES OF 32-34 WAITOA ROAD

Steven Kerr explained that Telecom struggled to see special heritage value in the building. He explained that there were 870 exchanges around New Zealand, some of which had heritage value. In this particular case however, he felt that the building was a simple utilitarian box-like building in which it was difficult to see significant heritage merit against other buildings of its era. He considered that the heritage area requirements could potentially have an impact on the ongoing or future function of the building as a telecommunications hub. In addition, incremental changes that may be made from time to time to the

building and equipment could become a much bigger consenting issue in the future. He pointed out that the site was designated for a purpose which could be jeopardised by heritage considerations.

Vivien Rickard acknowledged that there are many different examples of telephone exchange buildings around the country, but this building was considered to be important in its context – situated in a suburb that has characteristic eras of development closely linked to technology and periods of rapid growth. 32-34 Waitoa Road adds to that interesting and valued historical context. She acknowledged that Council understand that buildings that are currently utilitarian in nature may need to be adapted for future use.

Sacha Walters considered that the building is a good example of post war modern architecture which was being carried out by the Ministry of Works at the time. Although there is no national audit of such examples, in the experience of NZHPT, nationally this style of 1950's building is becoming rarer. Ms Walters was of the view that the building strongly defines the corner which also adds to the heritage value of the proposed collection of heritage buildings. In this respect the building is important for its contribution to the group of heritage buildings in Hataitai.

Whilst acknowledging that the collection of buildings in the area are of different styles and eras, Alison Dangerfield felt that Hataitai shopping centre was becoming more attractive and interesting for people to be in and visit. She used Jackson Street in Petone as a heritage area example where the buildings range from the 1880's through to present day and that people value that area for its history and character.

Ms Dangerfield explained that New Zealand Historic Places Trust currently have 5 telephone exchange buildings registered in the central region (the central region covers the area from Nelson, Blenheim, Tasman to Wairoa, Ruapehu and New Plymouth) 32-34 Waitoa Road is vulnerable in that it is from an era which is easily forgettable, however, as time goes on, its value does become more significant. The 32-34 Waitoa building is a fine example of its type which is not represented on the NZHPT register in the central region.

Ms Dangerfield also explained the NZHPT process for assessment of registered buildings. Mr Kerr considered that it can be a somewhat subjective process. Ms Dangerfield considered that the process was quite transparent and based on recognised heritage and conservation principles such as the ICOMOS charter.

The Council's heritage consultants were asked to comment on the values they attributed to the building in their heritage report. Michael Kelly explained the decision making process in deciding whether a building should be included in an area or not. Specifically concerning 32-34 Waitoa Road, he explained the importance of the building's location on the intersection, and that its exclusion from the proposed area would compromise a key townscape and heritage value (in that only 3 sides of a key intersection would be recognised). He explained that the inclusion of a modern building recognises different eras in the development of the shopping centre. The building had a 60 year history of community use and association with Hataitai and that adds to the contiguity of the proposed heritage area.

Russell Murray mused that the building was not the best example of its type in New Zealand, but in its context, was of interest. He considered that the building was of a good scale and had a strong streetscape presence, especially in its relationship with the intersection. Whilst not necessarily worthy of listing on its own merits, Mr Murray considered it reasonable for it to be included as part of the proposed area.

Steven Kerr reconfirmed that Telecom struggled to accept that the building was of such merit that it warranted inclusion in the proposed heritage area. Whilst, Telecom is supportive of heritage protection, he stressed that the key, for Telecom's national portfolio, is about finding the right balance and recognising buildings of significant value. From Telecom's perspective, 32-34 Waitoa Road did not possess high enough values.

Agreed position:

None