

Statement from the Chief Executive
12 July 2019

Update on the Central Library

Given the high public interest in the Central Library building, as well as the broader Civic Precinct, what follows is an update on where we are at with this work and an indication of the process from here.

The future of the Central Library building is a high priority for the Wellington City Council, but there are no quick nor easy fixes. It's early days and no decisions can or have been made about the future of the building.

The immediate focus has been on re-establishing library services in the CBD. We are making good progress on this, and our focus now is to determine what the engineering implications and challenges are, and possible solutions for the Central Library building. These challenges are complex and need to be fully understood before any decisions can be made.

This update sets out how we plan to move forward and gives a high level outline of next steps.

Despite speculation, the Council is not in discussions with any third party around partnerships or deals relating to the future of the building. It's much too soon to be having those conversations.

As the building owner we are focused on our responsibility to get the technical engineering and industry advice we need to inform our decisions about the future of this prominent central city building.

The closure

The Central Library closed on 19 March 2019 to protect the safety of customers and staff. This decision was made based on engineering advice following the release of new Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) guidelines relating to hollowcore concrete floors.

This advice revealed the Central Library building has significant structural vulnerabilities that mean it may not perform well in the event of a significant earthquake. This is not a theoretical risk; the adjacent Civic Administration Building was seriously damaged by the Kaikoura earthquake, as was Statistics House. Each of these buildings also have hollowcore flooring.

Over 3,000 Wellingtonians visited the Central Library every day and, as one of Wellington City's busiest buildings, the risk to public safety meant closure was the only responsible option.

Up-to-date information about the reasons for closing the building is on the [Wellington City Council website](#). This includes a copy of Aurecon's [engineering report](#), commissioned by the Council in response to the MBIE guidelines.

In May 2019, we commissioned WSP OPUS to peer review these findings. This too confirmed the findings from Aurecon, that the flooring system presents a critical structural weakness for the building. The [WSP OPUS peer review](#) is available on our website.

Replacing lost services

Over the past three months, we've begun to establish a network of pop-up library services in the central city. We have also seen a boost in usage of our branch network, helped by [extended branch hours](#) – a move we were able to make within a month of the building closure.

[Arapaki Manners Library and Service Centre](#) opened in May and provides access to over 15,000 items, with 7,500 items on the shelves at any time. Library users can browse and borrow items, read papers and magazines, and even pay their rates or register their dog all in one place.

Library staff are available to answer questions, process library payments, register new customers, and provide support and advice on the wide range of online content available through the eLibrary. Free Wi-Fi, self-service computers and a Council payments desk are also available.

The new facility has proven very popular. Open 70 hours per week, Arapaki Manners Library and Service Centre has had more than 33,000 visitors since 28 May, with 92 percent satisfied with their experience. Over 4,000 individual customers have used Arapaki Manners Library to borrow, return or renew 48,000 items.

A second pop-up library location was [announced](#) for the National Library and will be opening in September. The collection will have an Aotearoa New Zealand focus to complement the National Library's existing collection. Planning and preparations are well underway.

A third larger central location and warehouse is being planned for the Central Library collections. Announcements will be made on these locations once negotiations are completed.

Building solutions

The next step is to engage an independent specialist to facilitate a process, working with engineering and industry experts, which will identify potential engineering solutions for the Central Library building. This will begin in August.

Once we have that information we will commission detailed engineering assessments on the possible solutions (including indicative costs) and a peer review of this advice. At the same time, work will be done to develop the future service model for the library and that will involve community engagement.

All of this work will ultimately inform a report back to the Council on the options and a recommended way forward. It will be a rigorous process and will take well over a year to complete.

Central Library is part of the wider Civic Precinct

As we're working through and discussing the future of the Central Library, we're mindful that decisions about this building – which sits in the heart of the city – cannot be made in isolation. As decisions are made we need to consider what these mean for the rest of Te Ngākau/Civic Precinct.

This work is a priority. We will be providing an update on the broader Te Ngākau/Civic Precinct programme of work soon.

Kevin Lavery
Chief Executive
Wellington City Council