

# **2-12 AITKEN STREET PROPOSED CENTRAL AREA BUILDING**

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## **APPLICATION FOR RESOURCE CONSENT URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT**

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**Prepared for PSPIB/CPPIB Waiheke Inc**

**September 2019**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The proposal involves the construction of a new multi-storey Central Area building and associated public plaza at 2-12 Aitken Street to replace the demolished former 'Defence House' building. The development site is situated within the 'low city' of the Wellington Central Area.

This report forms part of the AEE accompanying the Resource Consent Application and assesses the urban design outcomes of the proposal against the relevant District Plan provisions.

The assessment is based on site visits and a review of the architectural and landscape plans and associated Architectural Design Statement and acknowledges the urban design issues discussed at the pre-application meeting(s).

# 2 THE PROPOSAL

The proposal replaces the demolished former Defence House with a new high-quality building occupying the southern half of the site. The remaining - northern half of the site - will be developed as a publicly accessible open spaces in the form of a landscaped plaza. The new building is 9 stories (ground + 8 office floors) and a single level basement accessed by a new vehicle ramp off Guthrie Lane.

The ground level accommodates two entrances off Aitken Street (a main and a secondary office entrance) linked to a lobby and some meeting rooms, as well as an entrance from the north, accessed from the new landscaped plaza. These are supplemented by additional entrances off Mulgrave Street providing direct access to the proposed retail and cafe spaces at the eastern end of the ground level. The north/western part of the ground level accommodates the plant and circulation core.

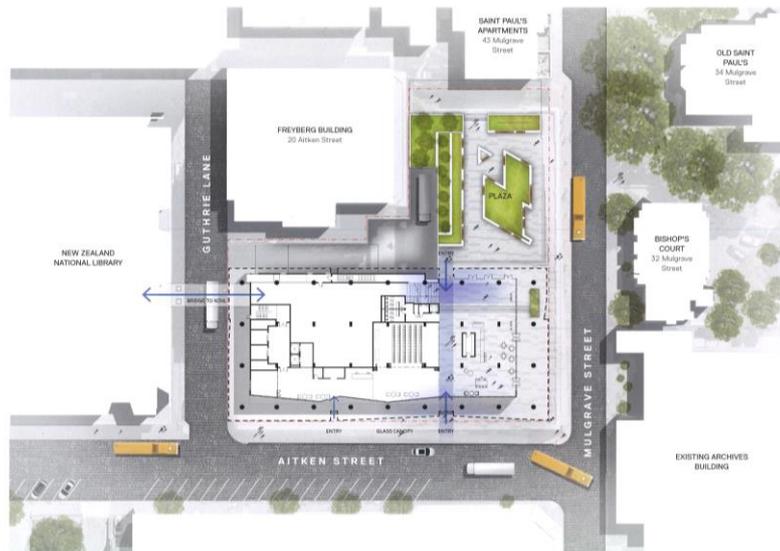
The basement carparking and service area are accessed via Guthrie Lane. The basement level also accommodates user amenities and functional/storage areas.

The building has been designed to the specific requirements of the future tenant - Archives NZ with first 5 levels above ground developed as storage spaces and the 3 top levels as supporting workspace areas.

A detailed description of the proposal and its design elements is integrated into the Design Guide assessment (Section 4 of this report). A complete outline of all the development components is included in the Architectural Design Statement.

## 8.0 PUBLIC REALM

SITE PLAN  
1:500



1100 - AITKEN STREET  
RESOURCE CONSENT / REV 4.7 AUGUST 2019

TEAM  
HEARD AND MARONEY, NEV. AURECON, DPFL, RLB, SIDA, STANTEC

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### 3 THE SITE AND ITS CONTEXT

**The site** - the development site is situated at the northern end of the Wellington Central Business District (CBD) in close proximity to the Railway Station, the Parliament Buildings, the Court of Appeal and High Court buildings and key government head offices. The wider area around the site accommodates three secondary schools and departments of Victoria University of Wellington, as well as ecclesiastical buildings.

The development site occupies the south/east end of the large block bounded by Molesworth, Aitken, Mulgrave and Pipitea Streets. It has an L-shape and a corner location with two main street frontages facing Aitken and Mulgrave Streets respectively.

Previously the site was occupied by a 7-storey office building accommodating the Ministry of Defence. Known as Defence House it was arranged in an L-shaped configuration and built to the street boundaries of the site. The building suffered significant damage during the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake and was demolished in 2017-2018 creating a vacant site for new development.

**Context** - the site sits within the 'low city' part of the Central Area. The wider townscape setting is highly diverse comprised of a range of government/institutional type buildings of variable age, form, scale and architectural character mixed with educational facilities, residential apartments and some ecclesiastical buildings. Amongst those there are a number of heritage buildings of both domestic and civic scale.

The wider townscape setting around the development site is punctuated by the landmark buildings within the Parliament Grounds and St Paul's Cathedral.

Most buildings are stand-alone structures built to or generally close to/ the street edge.



**Immediate neighbours** - the site's immediate neighbours include the Freyberg Building (a 15-storey free-standing office tower) to the north/west, the National Library (5-level building with a large horizontal bulk) immediately to the west and 5-storey St Paul's Apartments to the north.

Directly opposite the site, on the southern side of Aitken Street is the Ministry of Justice (including 15-storey former Vogel tower and adjacent lower buildings) and an 8-storey serviced apartments block at the corner with Mulgrave Street, known as 'Aitken on Mulgrave Suites'). The lower horizontal volume of the Court of Appeal is further to the south/west.

To the east, directly opposite the development site are the horizontal volume of the National Archives NZ and the heritage listed 2-storey Anglican House (Bishop's Court) and the Old St Paul's Cathedral, with the vacant site of the former Rivera House further to the north-east.

Further to the north/east is a cluster of older low-scale buildings in the vicinity of the Mulgrave/Pipitea Street corner used for commercial uses. The north/west corner of the block accommodates Rugby House and DIA tower set up around the St Paul Square.

**Connections** - the site connects to Molesworth Street and the Parliament Grounds via Aitken Street. Mulgrave Street links the site to the Railway Station and the bus interchange to the south and to Pipitea Street to the north. Mulgrave Street is a pedestrian route connecting the various office buildings and nearby educational facilities to the Railway Station/bus interchange.

**Visibility** - the site is visible from along Mulgrave and Aitken Streets and is experienced by both pedestrians and motorists. Oblique views to the site from the west can be obtained from within the vicinity of the Aitken Street/Molesworth Street intersection. The site provides an opportunity for new development that enhances its corner location and restores the street edge definition of the urban block it sits on.

## 4 ASSESSMENT OF DESIGN OUTCOMES

The relevant District Plan provisions for the urban design assessment of the proposal include:

- (a) the Central Area Urban Design Guide (Section 4.1 of this report provides an assessment against the Design Guide provisions); and
- (b) the 'design excellence considerations' - these have been imposed by the District Plan which requires over-height buildings in the Central Area to be assessed in terms of design excellence (the proposed new building exceeds the permitted height limit by extending it to the discretionary height threshold). Assessment against the 'design excellence considerations' is provided Section 4.2 of this report.

### 4.1 CENTRAL AREA URBAN DESIGN GUIDE ASSESSMENT

The intent of the Central Area Urban Design Guide (Design Guide) is "to achieve high quality buildings, places and spaces in the Central Area of the City" by ensuring buildings, places and spaces:

- *are coherently designed;*
- *make a considered response to context;*
- *address heritage values;*
- *establish positive visual effects;*
- *provide good quality living and working environments;*
- *integrate environmental sustainability principles; and*
- *provide conditions of safety and accessibility.*

The Design Guide is built upon six urban design matters with specific objectives and associated guidelines for each matter, including: design coherence; relationship to context; siting, height, bulk and form; edge treatment; façade and building tops; materials and detail.

**4.1.2 DESIGN COHERENCE: “A new building or public space should have its own inherent design integrity and coherence”.**

**Objective 01.1** aims: “to ensure each design solution is coherently designed, demonstrates design integrity, and integrates all relevant design criteria in the best possible way”.

The relevant **guideline** (G01.1 ‘Internal consistency and integration’) encourages designers to: “demonstrate in the design and composition of any building an overall coherence that integrates the various design guide requirements”.

**Assessment:**

- The design of the proposed building is based on a clear architectural concept which takes into account the site’s context and conditions, acknowledges the relevant District Plan provisions and addresses the client’s requirements for efficient archival repository areas and A-Grade office/work space within an environmentally sustainable building that is seismically resilient.
- The key issues have been considered at the outset of the project as discussed in the Architectural Design Report, pages 4-7). The building has been conceived as an integrated whole where uses, structure, external appearance and public open space have been developed together, while taking into account the relevant design guide requirements.
- The proposal will contribute to the activity of this part of the city by repairing the street edges of the site, enhancing its corner location and providing good quality archival repository space and associated office/work space, as well as publicly accessible ground-level activities and a new publicly accessible open space.

**4.1.2 RELATIONSHIP TO CONTEXT: “Relating to context means understanding and responding in a considered way to conditions beyond the site”.**

**Objective 0.2.1** aims: “to recognise the unique qualities and sense of place of every urban setting and respond to and enhance these with new development”.

**Objective 0.2.2** aims: “to maintain or enhance the quality of the settings of individual heritage buildings, including those in heritage areas”.

The supporting **guidelines** cover the following matters: *Consistency or contrast (G2.1); Positive precedents (G.2.2); Achieving consistency (G2.3); and Developing an authentic sense of place (G2.4).*

**Assessment**

As already discussed, the character of the site’s context is diverse and accommodates a mix of tenancy typologies. While including some residential apartments, the context is comprised primarily of government and parliamentary buildings in a range of building forms with varied scale, bulk and design appearance/façade composition. The site has a corner location and two primary street frontages with each frontage characterised by different contextual conditions. The proximity of the site to listed heritage buildings adds another layer of contextual complexity.

In the context of its diverse townscape setting and the lack of pronounced building patterns, the proposed design has appropriately focused on creating a building that expresses its use, enhances its corner location, establishes a positive scale and spatial relationship to its immediate neighbours and makes a positive contribution to the character and activity of the local streetscape. This has been achieved through the massing of the building volume and its design treatment as discussed below:

- the massing of the proposed building responds well to the corner location of the site and the varying character along its two street frontages. The location of the building mass at the southern end of the site creates a building footprint comparable in size to other buildings in the vicinity while allowing for the development of a new landscaped open space at the northern part of the site which acknowledges the proximity of the development to the heritage-listed Anglican House and Old Saint Paul's Cathedral;
- generally aligned with the street edge of the National Library's 'podium', the proposed building reinstates the street edge definition along Aitken Street and around the Aitken/Mulgrave Street corner. The proposed publicly accessible ground level provides a continuous active edge along the two street frontages of the buildings and along the edge of the plaza;
- the proposed 'sculpted' façade treatment of the building enhances the corner location of the site in views from along both Aitken and Mulgrave Streets. The scale of the vertical façade modules responds to the scale of existing heritage buildings on the opposite side of Mulgrave Street;
- the treatment of the northern façade (which faces the new plaza) defines and activates the plaza's edge via the proposed ground level uses and northern entrances to the building. The combined treatment of the ground and first floor levels along the northern façade and the north/eastern building corner creates the impression of a double-height ground level that opens up the northern facade in views from the plaza and improves the visual proportions of 'building base';
- Lowering the height at the north-east corner reduces its bulk in views from the north along Mulgrave Street and from within the new landscaped plaza; and
- the proposal incorporates a continuous pedestrian shelter in the form of a colonnade along the street frontages of the new building to support the pedestrian movement along Aitken and Mulgrave Streets.

Overall, the proposal responds appropriately to the givens of the site and the specific characteristics of the local context. It fits in well into the wider city setting and recognises its proximity to important heritage buildings. The distinctive building image of the proposal will make a positive contribution to the character of the surrounding area and enhance its sense of place.

**4.1.3 SITING, HEIGHT, BULK AND FORM:** *"The siting of buildings should allow for intended activities while also acknowledging neighbouring buildings, reinforcing valued patterns of public space, and creating positive open spaces".*

**Objective 03.1:** *To complement existing patterns of alignment and achieve a positive scale relationship with adjoining buildings and public spaces.*

**Objective 03.2:** *To respect the setting of heritage items and identified heritage areas.*

**Objective 03.3:** *To create coherent patterns of buildings that contribute to the amenity of neighbouring public spaces.*

**Objective 03.4:** *To ensure that reasonable levels of ventilation, daylight and outlook are maintained in a building's habitable spaces should development on adjacent sites be built to the maximum standard.*

**Objective 03.5:** *To enhance the informal pedestrian network within the Central Area, by encouraging the retention and enhancement of existing pedestrian thoroughfares and promoting the creation of new thoroughfares where they would enhance walkability and permeability for pedestrians.*

The supporting **guidelines** relate to following matters: Street edge definition and building alignment (G3.1 - G3.4); Height and scale relationship (G3.5 - G3.7); Building bulk (G3.8); Natural light, outlook and ventilation (G3.9); Positive open space (G3.10); Wind effects on public space (G3.11); and Pedestrian block permeability (G3.12).

**Assessment:**

**Street edge definition and building alignment** - as discussed, the proposal is taller than the previous building (Defence House) on the site, but has a smaller rectangular footprint located at the southern end of the site. This allows for the creation of a landscaped plaza on the northern side of the new building. This is an appropriate response to the site's context given the proximity of the two heritage buildings to the east on the opposite side of Mulgrave Street.

The ground floor of the new building is setback from Aiten Street and Mulgrave Street to address the proposed treatment for seismic movement and provide a widened footpath along the street edges. The exposed ground level columns create a generous colonnade space providing pedestrian shelter along the street frontages of the new development. Although the building's ground level is setback from the site's street edges, the proposal as a whole reflects the general pattern of street edge definition and building alignment along Aitken Street and Mulgrave Street, as its upper levels project out from the ground level to generally align with the site's boundaries.

The street edge of the proposed public plaza along Mulgrave Street is delineated by steps/level changes and 'activated' by the proposed raised garden beds and associated seating along and close to the eastern edge of the plaza.

**Height and scale relationship & building bulk** - these guidelines are aimed at avoiding abrupt height differences between adjacent buildings, while ensuring the height/bulk of new development relates well to and does not dominate adjacent public spaces and/or neighbouring buildings. The ultimate aim is establishing a positive height and scale relationship between old and new.

The proposal is based on a concept where the overall building form and bulk and the treatment along each side of the building respond to the specific conditions of the adjacent street context. Sitting at the southern end of the site, the primary bulk of the proposal is based on a rectangular footprint that occupies approximately two-thirds of the site. It is understood that, as part of background studies several bulk/massing options were explored including a new building across the full 'L-shaped' site (similar to the demolished Defence House) as well building forms based on different height regimes. A rectangular building footprint at the southern end of the site was considered superior to the other options in terms of structural robustness (e.g. superior base isolated building solutions being made possible via an orthogonal floor plate and foundation structure). The proposed building height, in tandem with a rectangular floor plate of restricted depth, can achieve a well functioning building supporting A-grade spaces, while exploring passive design principles. As already discussed, the size, configuration and location of the chosen building footprint also allows to create a new publicly accessible open space on the northern side of the building.

The permitted building height for the site is 27m above ground. The proposal, at its highest point (top of the plant/service room) is 36.45m, which is within the District Plan discretionary height limit envisaged for the site. The height of the primary/'usable' building bulk is slightly lower. The highest parts of the building associated with plant room and lift/riser are setback from the street edges and located in the centre of the building footprint (see modelled 3D views on pages 14-15 of the Architectural Design Statement).





As already discussed, the height of adjacent and nearby buildings varies, but the general pattern is of taller buildings to the north, north/west and south/west (up to 15 storeys), and lower buildings to the east on the opposite side of Mulgrave Street with the National Library, located immediately to the west, also being of a lower/horizontal scale. The proposed height and massing of the proposal are considered appropriate for the following reasons:

- in its variable height context, the proposed 9-storey building will not appear out of scale/character as it will be seen as mediating between the heights of the nearby vertically proportioned towers (Freyberg and Vogel, refer to street height elevations page 17, Architectural Design Report).
- the width of the proposed Mulgrave Street facade is generally comparable to St Paul's Apartments with the spatial gap created by the plaza assisting further separating the height differences between the two buildings. Similarly, the spatial corridor of Aitken Street provides a good separation relative to the apartments at the Aitken/Mulgrave Street corner to the south;
- the proposed landscaped plaza is located almost directly opposite Bishop's Court and responds to the spatial setting of Old St Pauls;
- in terms of the immediate street context, the height/scale relationship of the proposed building will be moderated by the proposed articulation of the building form and its façade treatment. For example, the relationship to the lower building height of the adjacent National Library is recognised through change in materiality and facade treatment, while the proposed colonnade extends the public space along the edges of the building, thus aiding its integration to the spatial context of the proposed plaza;
- the proposed facade composition, proportions and detailed design treatment aid the height and scale relationship of the new building to its context. The east and west elevations have been articulated in a manner that enhances their 3D quality, while recognising the smaller scale set by the nearby historic/heritage buildings. The top floor has been modelled to achieve a sense of articulation and a step-down effect at the north/east corner of the building that is prominent in views from the north/east and from the adjacent new plaza; and
- the corner location of the site supports the proposed height. Height/scale relationships with surrounding buildings are illustrated on 3D views from the architectural model (views 2 and 4, Architectural Design Statement, pages 14-15). The images show that overall the height/scale relationship of the proposal, and the modulation of its overall form, have been appropriately addressed and assist the integration of the new building to its street context (see also comments under 'Facade Modelling and Building Tops').

**Natural light, outlook and ventilation** - the Design Guide encourages new buildings to achieve acceptable levels of natural light, outlook and ventilation for residential and other habitable spaces by providing on-site setbacks from side and/or rear boundaries (or atria and light wells) and without needing to rely on the openness of adjacent sites. These issues have been to the forefront of the design from the outset of the project and have been appropriately addressed. This conclusion is based on the following main reasons:

- the 'free-standing' nature of the proposed building allows for extensive glazing along the entire building perimeter ensuring good levels of natural lighting and opening views to adjacent streets and open spaces thus enhancing the internal amenity. While access to natural light is not relevant to the archive storage floors, the size and configuration of the building footprint does maximise the amenity of the upper levels office/work space in terms of natural light and outlook for the east and north facing spaces; and

- the proposal incorporates an appropriate ventilation system.

**Positive open space** - the Design Guide encourages that any publicly accessible on-site open space is located in a way that complements and/or positively defines it. Any space for recreational activity should be sunny and sheltered and support occupation.



View towards the proposed plaza

The proposal has successfully addressed this issue by:

- providing sheltered publicly accessible open space (within the site's boundaries) developed in the form of colonnades running along the southern, eastern and part of the western frontages of the building. The colonnade space, enclosed by the proposed highly transparent ground level frontages and supported by the intended ground level activities, will create a positive public space that extends the usable open space of the adjacent footpaths;
- developing a new landscaped plaza on the northern side of the building is designed to connect with the building's ground level and link it through to Aitken Street. The plaza has a good orientation and generous dimensions and will provide usable good quality open space for office workers. Due to its orientation, the sunlight access to the plaza will not be affected by the proposed height of the building. The plaza opens up to Mulgrave Street. On the southern side it is defined and activated by the new building and its ground floor publicly accessible uses, while on the western and northern sides, landscape features and planting will provide an appropriate level of spatial definition;
- the proposed plaza space is highly visible from the adjacent streets and surrounding buildings, including the St Paul's Apartments which have some habitable rooms overlooking the plaza. The plaza design intends to incorporate some lighting as part of its landscape treatment to complement the street lighting and ensure the plaza is sufficiently lit at night. Such arrangements are consistent with CPTED principles and support the functioning of safe publicly accessible spaces; and
- the plaza design incorporates a series of design elements for wind mitigation (refer to Architectural Design Statement for the detailed description of the plaza design and landscape plans). The detailed design of the plaza will be critical for its successful functioning. To ensure that, a condition of consent is recommended re final design detail of the plaza/choice of materials being made subject to Council's approval prior to lodging a building consent, should resource consent to the application be granted.

**Wind effects on public space** - a wind assessment has been prepared as part of the Application. According to its conclusions, specific on-site measures/design elements will be required to mitigate the wind effects arising from the proposal. Proposed mitigation measures are incorporated into the plaza design as discussed and illustrated in the Architectural Design Statement.

**Pedestrian block permeability** - the related guidelines seek to maintain and enhance existing pedestrian thoroughfares or alternatively consider creating new ones as part of the site redevelopment, where a thoroughfare would enhance the walkability and permeability for pedestrians.

The proposal responds to the relevant guidelines by providing interconnected multiple building entrances - these include street entrances off Aitken Street as well entrances off the plaza space (north/east end of the building). These entrances connect via the proposed publicly accessible ground level accommodating the lobby and retail/cafe spaces which are also accessible from Mulgrave Street. This arrangement will act as an internal 'mid-block' through connection between the plaza, Mulgrave and Aitken Streets, thus enhancing the block's permeability.

**4.1.4 EDGE TREATMENT:** *"The buildings that line the edges of streets and other public spaces establish their character and attractiveness".*

**Objective 04.1** aims *"to create building edge conditions that support pedestrian activity and enhance the visual interest, legibility, safety and comfort of streets and other public spaces".*

The supporting **guidelines** cover the following matters: *Building forms/street frontages; Active edges; Servicing and car parking; and Shelter and building entrance enhancement.*

**Assessment:**

**Building fronts & active edges** - the proposal responds positively to the relevant guidelines for the following reasons:

- the development creates continuously glazed 'active ground level building frontages' along the street edges of the building and on the side of the public plaza. The intended ground level activities include cafe space adjacent to the lobby, retail tenancies and multiple building entrances. Ground floor frontages are comprised of full height flush shop-front glazing that assist the visual interaction between inside and outside. The proposed ground level uses, together with the proposed generous colonnade space, allow for outdoor seating thus activating further the Mulgrave Street edge of the building; and
- carparking is accommodated at the basement level. Vehicle access to the basement carpark and servicing area is via the existing Guthrie Lane running along the western/secondary frontage of the building and along its rear/north/west end. The vehicle access and servicing arrangements are appropriately located at the rear of the site (similar to the arrangements of the former Defence House) and without affecting the main/visible building frontages or compromising the quality of the proposed publicly accessible landscaped plaza.

**Shelter and building entrance enhancement** - both the Design Guide and the District Plan require new buildings in the Central Area to provide pedestrian shelter/verandahs along their street frontages of buildings on the development site (see images below and detailed images pages 19-29 Architectural Design Statement).



As already discussed, the proposal provides a generous colonnade spaces along the street frontages of the building (approximately 5m wide along Aitken Street frontage and approximately 7m along Mulgrave Street frontage). The colonnade space, which provides the required shelter along the main street frontages, is an integral element of the overall building structure and in terms of spatial dimensions and ground level facade treatment, which fits in well with and enhances the two street facades.

While colonnades are not a typical feature for the Central Area, or in the vicinity of the development site, their use in the particular context of the proposal is considered appropriate for four main reasons:

- (a) the colonnade response to providing pedestrian shelter has been largely determined by the base isolated structure of the building which will create a seismically sound building;
- (b) the colonnades provide a stronger and more distinctive base to the building and enhance the quality of its ground level;
- (c) the colonnades will provide a sheltered pedestrian path adjacent to the public footpath and in this sense they will extend/widen the usable public space along the Aitken/Mulgrave Street frontages of the building; and
- (d) the lower level building form at the north/east corner and along the edge of plaza is expressed via a double-height space to aid engagement with the landscape of the plaza and enhance the pedestrian experience.

**Servicing and carparking** - carparking is provided within the basement level. Servicing is at the rear of the building and together with the basement carpark will be accessed via a single vehicle entrance from Guthrie Lane. This arrangement is an appropriate response to the Design Guide objectives, as it minimises the visually exposed area for vehicle movement.

**4.1.5 FAÇADE COMPOSITION AND BUILDING TOPS:** *"The composition of buildings determines their relation to context, their design coherence, and their suitability for a range of uses".*

**Objective 05.1:** *To ensure the façade and building top design is coherently resolved.*

**Objective 05.2:** *To ensure that additions and alterations to heritage buildings maintain the heritage values of those buildings, their setting and any associated heritage area.*

**Objective 05.3:** *To facilitate multiple and changing building uses, except where such change adversely affects the heritage values of heritage buildings or areas.*

The supporting **guidelines** refer to issues such as: *Relationship to neighbouring buildings; Shopfronts, Building tops and roofscapes; and Human scale.*

**Assessment:**

**Relationship to neighbouring buildings, building form and facade composition** - this issue has been largely covered under 'Relationship to Context'.

Further to this, the following additional comments are made with regard to building form/facade composition:

- the composition and the detailed treatment of the building facades have been approached as part of the overall design concept which, while expressing the specific building function also references the storey of 'kete o to wananga' (the three baskets of knowledge) from Maori mythology;
- the building function is expressed through the horizontal subdivision of the building volume into three horizontal layers differentiated through their height and external design treatment including - a 'public function' layer within the ground level, a 4-storey 'collection storage' layer and a 3-storey 'collection support and workplace' layer at the top of the building. The three-layer approach to the façade

composition creates a longitudinal form with an external treatment aimed at creating a 'lighter weight' top, an enhanced base and a 'weighted' layered middle;

- the horizontal layering is complemented and counterbalanced by a vertical façade articulation based on the 'kete o to wananga' concept. The 'kete o to wananga' concept is expressed through the articulation of the building's long facades (northern and southern) into three vertical modules. Described by the Architect as container-like forms or baskets, these are differentiated three-dimensionally through recesses and negative detail and some variation in façade modulation. The vertical modules are sculpted around the ground plane and along the building corners. This enhances the building corners and emphasises the building base and, in turn, provides visual interest and widens the spatial setting around the building corners, thus contributing positively to the pedestrian experience at ground level while signalling the entry points;
- the southern/Aitken Street facade represents the primary 'public face' of the building and its treatment appears more formal and restrained. In comparison, the eastern/Mulgrave Street façade and the northern façade, which faces the new plaza, have a slightly different expression of their base and top. The base along those sides of the building appears taller as it 'combines' the ground + first floor level.
- combining the ground and first floor levels creates the impression of an enhanced double-height base - this is a positive response to the sloping street topography and the raised level of the plaza which reduces the perceived height of the ground level in view from the north and north/east. The building top along the north/eastern corner is articulated by a setback of the top level from the north/east corner of the building, which steps down the building height towards the plaza. The proposed varied and stronger articulation along the east/ Mulgrave Street façade and around the north/east building corner adjacent to the new public plaza acknowledges the higher visibility of this part of the building in both close up as well mid-distance views. It also aids the integration to the building to the adjacent plaza by enhancing its 3D quality and creating the notion of a double height ground level;
- the expression of the large scale vertical and horizontal façade articulation is understood from afar, while in close up views it is further enhanced by the proposed materiality and design detail; and
- the proposal conveys a sense of visual interest achieved through the proposed facade composition based on interplay of smaller and larger elements and vertical horizontal articulation lines.



Aitken Street/Mulgrave Street facades



Northern façade (reduced bulk at the top north/east corner)

**Building tops and roofscapes** - the design of the building top is based on a concept aiming to:

- lighten up the top of the building and differentiating its treatment from the levels below;
- reduce the perceived building height in views from the north and north/east; and
- create an integrated building top, while downplaying the visual impact of the utilitarian roof top plant areas.

The above approach to the building top design is expressed through:

- modelling the building top and modifying its bulk around its most prominent north/east corner to reduce its visual impact in views from the north; and
- setting back the plant/service areas from the building edges and locating them towards the western end of the building footprint to reduce their visibility.

**Human scale** - the design conveys a sense of human scale at the publicly occupied edges of buildings. This is expressed through design elements and architectural detail appearing at the ground levels of the development (e.g. colonnade, entrances, high transparency of ground level frontages, facade sculpted building corners and proposed lighting pattern on the underside of the colonnade space).

**Flexibility and adaptability** - the shape of the building footprint and the proposed internal layout, with a special reference to the configuration/size of the floor plates and associated amount of natural light, provides for flexible adaptation of internal uses and/or change of activity.

**4.1.6 MATERIALS AND DETAIL** *Materials and detail are important in maintaining visual interest and a positive relation to context and heritage value”.*

**Objective 06.1:** *To achieve qualities of visual interest and physical robustness consistent with demands arising from the building’s location in the central city.*

**Objective 06.2:** *To respect and conserve original heritage fabric.*

The supporting **guidelines** cover matters such as: *Compositional coherence; Visual interest; Physical robustness; and Façade transparency.*

**Assessment:**

**Compositional coherence/visual interest /physical robustness/facade transparency** - many of these issues have already been addressed throughout the assessment. Here the following further points are added:

- the architectural concept underpinning the building form and façade articulation is further enhanced by the proposed palette of intended materials, with a special reference to the proposed cladding panels which are embossed and cut out with an evolving patterning to emit light or create shadows;
- the proposal uses unitised glazed curtain walling, articulated metal or composite rainscreen panelling with bronzed finish to provide visual interest and a sense of scale;
- the treatment of the entire building exterior has been approached in an integrated manner. All elevations have been given appropriate treatment in terms of design detail with reference to internal uses/functional requirements, with the change in façade transparency and form expressing the internal activity behind; and
- the relatively limited palette of materials is appropriate for the specific building use in the proposed location within a government workplace area. It allows for a simplified construction methodology while enabling possible deconstruction. The proposed glazing system provides a good level of transparency and promotes visual connections between the building interior and surrounding public space. The use of the proposed high-quality materials and facade systems are intended to minimise energy use.

The intended palette of proposed materials and their application on the building’s facades are illustrated on the elevation drawings and further described in the Architectural Design Statement. It is noted that due to the nature of the design process associated with complex buildings, such as the proposed one, facade materials and detailing are expected to be refined at the next stages of design development should consent to the proposal be granted. As with any project similar to that proposed, there is a challenge in providing certainty on design quality (in terms of materials and detailing) at a resource consent stage, while allowing for flexibility in the next stages of design development. Such a challenge can be addressed via a condition of consent requiring that the final choice of materials and associated detailing to be approved by the Council prior to lodging for building consent. This is an appropriate and well-used mechanism that is relevant to the proposed development.

## **4.2 DESIGN EXCELLENCE**

The District Plan requires design excellence for any building that is higher than the height standard specified for the Central Area (Policy 12.2.5.5). There are no explicit criteria in the District Plan for

assessing design excellence. However, the explanation under Policy 12.2.5.5 states that in processing a consent application for an over-height building, Council will consider: *"both the scale of the proposed height increase and the comparative height of the resulting building in relation to its surroundings"*.

While all new buildings (according to the District Plan) are expected to be of sufficient design quality to make a positive contribution to the public environment, delivering design excellence is considered particularly important to *"proposals that will result in a building that is significantly higher to the surrounding built form"*.

**Assessment overview:** The two likely scenarios re over-height buildings discussed in the explanation include: *"... a building of exceptional height in comparison to every other building in the city (i.e. in excess of 130m in height), and a building that is very tall in relation to the scale of surrounding properties. Both scenarios are likely to result in a building of significant visibility and prominence"*.

The height of the primary bulk of the proposal is 35-36m and sits within a context of buildings of variable height that includes some much taller buildings. Therefore, the proposal does not fall under any of the likely scenarios referred to in the District Plan. Further to this, the proposal's over-height portion (similar to two storeys) will be visible from within a relatively limited area around the development site, but will not be significantly prominent beyond its local area.

The proposed building height is 36.45m (top of the plant room) and is located in close proximity to two towers (15 storeys high). The building has a rectangular footprint with size/shape comparable to other buildings in the vicinity. Its bulk has been modelled to reduce the perception of height in views from the plaza and in views from the north and north/east (from where it will be most prominent/visually exposed). The visual impact of its plant/service areas have been minimised by locating those away from the building edges and towards the western end of the building footprint.

**Design excellence considerations** - as noted, there are no explicit criteria in the District Plan for assessing design excellence. However, to aid the assessment of over-height proposals the Council has provided a non-statutory list of considerations which reinforce the key objectives of the Design Guide. The Council's 'design excellence' considerations, along with assessment comments, are outlined below.

*"Design excellence requires:*

- i. a coherent and concept driven design, relevant to its context. This will include a thorough site analysis identifying matters of importance to the site and how they influence the design.*

The proposal is underpinned by a clear design concept based on an analysis of the site's context, acknowledging the proximity of important heritage buildings and structural and design considerations with a number of alternative bulk and form options being explored (see Architectural Design Statement).

- ii. a design that enhances:*

- *the site*
- *the street (including neighbouring buildings)*
- *the urban block*
- *the wider city*

The proposal will enhance the corner location of the site and provide spatial definition along the street edges and to the new plaza to the north. Carparking and servicing are appropriately located and will not compromise the primary building frontages.

The proposed building and the modelling of its bulk, in combination with the proposed plaza, fit in well with the scale and character of both the neighbouring buildings and the wider townscape setting, while acknowledging the presence of the listed heritage buildings on the opposite side of Mulgrave Street.

The proposal will repair the street frontages of the site and complete the south/east corner of the block. It will provide both activity and street enclosure as well as pedestrian shelter through the proposed generous colonnade space, which will extend/increase the usable public open space along the street edges of the building.

The new plaza will be a positive contribution to the workplace environment with no significant effects on the sunlight access to the plaza caused by the over-height portion of the building. The new plaza will enhance the experience of both workers in the area as well as students in the nearby schools, and visitors to the area.

*iii. a high level of internal and external building functionality and amenity*

The building footprint in combination with the proposed internal layout will provide:

- an adaptable ground level space well connected to adjacent streets/plaza space and adaptable;
- a seismically sound building; and
- high-quality office/work space within an A-grade building.

The proposed building form, its large-scale massing and facade composition, in combination with the proposed palette of high-quality materials, will ensure a high-level of internal and external functionality and amenity that optimise the site-specific conditions of the site and support the building's special use.

*iv. three dimensional articulation of building form and building top to reduce the visual impact of the building, mitigate wind effects, and create a strong architectural identity*

- the composition and the detailed treatment of the building facades have been approached as part of a well-explained design concept aimed at creating a building with a distinctive image that reflects its use. The longitudinal vertical articulation into three container-like modules or baskets and the sculpted treatment around the building corners is balanced with the more restrained and horizontally proportioned facades;
- the approach to the form/treatment of the building top level is appropriately aimed at downplaying the impact of the over-height portions in views from locations where the building will most prominent/visually exposed; and
- wind effects have been mitigated through appropriately placed design elements within the proposed publicly-accessible plaza (refer Architectural Design Statement for design detail).

*v. detailing and materials that add visual interest to the façades*

- materials and detail are appropriately addressed to provide a sense of scale and visual interest along the building facades. This is achieved through the interplay between horizontal and vertical lines/elements, combined with sculpted building corners and a varied massing and façade articulation around the east and north/east parts of the building; and
- proposed palette of intended materials is consistent with and enhances the architectural concept underpinning the form and façade composition. The use of unitised glazed curtain walling, articulated metal or composite rainscreen panelling with bronzed finish will provide visual interest and a sense of scale.
- *a design which goes over and above what would normally be expected to satisfy the Central Area Urban Design Guide provisions.*

While technically the proposal is an over-height building, the assessment of its massing, height and bulk as discussed in the Design Guide assessment (section 4.2 above) established that the proposal in terms of form and massing fits in well with the height/scale of adjacent buildings without compromising the character of nearby heritage buildings (refer for detail in the Heritage Assessment). As experienced on the ground, the proposal will not appear as an out-of-context/scale building, but rather as a well-considered addition to the urban block which repairs and completes spatial patterns of the existing environment. The approach to the generation of the building form and its facade composition creates a building with a visual image and design characteristics that go above what a typical office building could deliver.

Further to this, the proposal will enhance the public environment through the provision of publicly accessible open space - this includes the creation of a landscaped plaza - good quality usable open space - supported by a generous colonnade space which will widen the public footpath along the

street frontages of the building. Providing usable public open spaces is another aspect of the proposal which exceeds what the Design Guide requires.

The overall quality of the proposal, as a whole, as discussed throughout this report, shows that the outcome will exceed the quality of a development that merely satisfies the Design Guide. As already discussed, a condition of consent re making final choice of materials and associated detailing subject to Council's approval prior to lodging a building consent is recommended to provide certainty on the outcome of the detailed design quality, should consent to the proposed building be granted.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The proposal is for a new Central Area building located on the Aitken/Mulgrave Street corner. An assessment against the relevant provisions of the District Plan (including the provisions of the Central Area Urban Design Guide and the 'design excellence' criteria) established that the urban design outcome of the proposal is consistent with the stated intent, principles and objectives of those documents. The result will be a development with a distinctive image that will reinstate the street edge definition and restore street activity, while providing high quality repository/archival space and associated office/work spaces designed to the specific functional requirement of Archives New Zealand, a publicly accessible ground level with active frontages, and a new good-quality publicly-accessible landscaped open space.

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