

114 Adelaide Road, Mt Cook

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Comments to: Peter Daly, Senior Planner RC Team
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This application has been lodged to seek approval to remove the building at 114 Adelaide Road – the Tramway Hotel – and in its place leave a vacant site. The application states the intention to later construct another building, but does not state a length of time for which the site would be vacant.

The building has a heritage listing in the District Plan. Adelaide Road in this location is a ‘principal road’ and both street frontages of the site in this location are noted in the District Plan to be ‘primary’ elevations.



The building has been identified as earthquake prone under the Building Act 2004. A legal process is underway in relation to this, but an application to demolish can also be considered in parallel.

Consent is required under rules 7.3.3 and 21A.2.1, which make it a discretionary activity to both demolish a heritage building and create a vacant space in the Centres Area. The site is also in a location where urban design comment in respect of the Centres Design Guide (CDG) is relevant.

The Resource Consents team has asked for an interim Urban Design report to assist the notification decision. The Heritage Team will comment further on the complete loss of the building from a heritage perspective - it is sufficient for the Urban Design assessment to note at the start of this report that complete demolition of heritage buildings is not an outcome anticipated by the District Plan.

Assessment

As well as comment on the CGG, the following two matters related to Rule 7.3.3 require urban design comment:

- Effects on the vitality of the Centre
- Effects on visual quality of the streetscape

Effects on the vitality of the Centre

The application includes the following statement:

“The proposal is to demolish the existing building and to leave the site vacant in the short term. It is anticipated that if and when consent is granted to demolish the building, that would be carried out in a short period of time.”

In the medium term, the applicant will want to make use of the site to provide for an economic return.

The existing situation is one where the existing building is vacant and therefore it provides no contribution to the vitality of the local area in terms of economic return, the generation of foot and vehicular traffic and provision of services.

Without being able to undertake strengthening work, which is uneconomic, there remains no change of the existing building and it's contribution to the vitality of the area.

The contribution made to economic vitality of the centre by the existing building is therefore zero. By being able to demolish the building, it will allow for a new building to be constructed which would then make a positive effect on the vitality of the local centre.

Therefore, the short term effects on vitality of the local centre are neutral."

The building is currently vacant, and no commercial use of the building has occurred for approximately 10 years. Urban Design agrees with the statement the currently, the building provides no contribution to the economic vitality of the area. It delivers no services, offers no useable floor space of any type, and generates no local movement of any type.

Removing the building does not improve on this situation at all. Any contribution made by a different building on this site in the future is totally unknown, therefore no urban design comment can be made on whether it would be an improvement. It is even possible that a replacement building might provide less contribution than this one, which - while still standing – at least offers a suggestion of potential.

There would also be CPTED concerns about creation of a vacant open site in this location, particularly as the application includes no detail about how this would be maintained, managed, or secured in relation to adjacent sites.

An estimate of the potential cost of retaining the building has shown that while it is expensive it does not appear to be impossible. The economics should not be an entirely surprising situation for the owner, particularly since care and upkeep of the building in the past appears to have been largely based on the ill-considered tactic of neglecting it. Urban Design cannot agree that economics should be an over-riding consideration in this case due to the value of the building as both a heritage and townscape item.

The CDG supports multiple and changing uses of buildings in Centres Areas, except where change adversely affects the heritage values of heritage buildings – Objective 5.3. Respect and retention of original heritage fabric is also indicated in the CDG in Objective 6.2. Clearly, the proposal does not meet these Design Guide criteria.

It is the Urban Design view that the effect on the vitality of the local centre by removing the building would be negative as it would create a void with an uncertain future and negative perception within the area. Such uses increase local uncertainty and have a negative effect on the qualities of Centres Areas. Respect and retention of heritage fabric in Centres Areas is also indicated, and this proposal is also contrary to those objectives.

Effects on visual quality of the streetscape.

The application makes the following statement:

The existing heritage building would make a positive contribution to the quality of the local streetscape. Its removal will have an adverse effect on the overall quality of the streetscape, given its relatively prominent location on the corner of Drummond Street and Adelaide Road.

The existing buildings contribution to streetscape is partially diminished by its derelict condition.

The building is on a prominent street connecting the southern suburbs to the CBD.

The short term effects will be more than minor as it will remove a heritage building from the site.

The site will however be grassed so as to minimise the effects of a bare site. Its appearance would be akin to a street corner park.

The applicant will construct a new building on the site in the medium term. That building will be required to meet the standards of the District Plan and Centres Design Guide.

The medium to long term effects of the demolition of the building and creation of vacant space will be less than minor.

Urban Design agrees that the corner is a visually prominent location within the Adelaide Road streetscape. The building, despite its vacant state, makes a positive contribution to the local townscape character due to its age, architectural features and intactness. The building is particularly valuable for its detailing, proportions and placement on the site right at the edge of the footpath, a condition which has been substantially eroded on many other nearby sites. The neglected condition is not considered to substantially detract from this contribution.

The visual effect of removing this building will be substantial. Of particular local value is the way this building defines and strengthens the corner with a side street, a condition that would be lost if the building was removed and no replacement with the same benefit appeared. Demolition of the building would also be contrary to the Centres Design Guide objectives relating to street edge definition and building alignment (G3.1 to 3.4) and edge treatment (particularly G4.4) by altering a positive outcome in relation to this, to a negative one.

The proposed grass finish for the site will not appear “*akin to a street corner park*” as the applicant contends. Even the most modest street corner park might reasonably be expected to have conditions enhanced beyond merely a lawn, as illustrated by this little street corner park in nearby Newtown:



The applicant does not appear to be proposing any improvements to the site beyond grass, and the application does not have any specific statement about maintenance of the site. The grass finish would not be a positive streetscape outcome.

Occasionally, demolition of a structure with townscape value can be considered. Usually, the ‘yardstick’ for this would be a replacement building that delivered equal or better townscape quality outcomes than the building being lost.

No plans for a replacement building are included in the application. Urban Design is therefore unable to comment on this, and unwilling to consider the option that a replacement building might be better than the existing one. It is absolutely impossible to measure the loss of this building against any potential future one without a set of plans for a future building – it can only be measured against the creation of the vacant site the application proposes.

Conclusion

Urban Design considers that the loss of the heritage listed Tramway Hotel and its replacement with a grassed site for an undetermined amount of time is a negative townscape outcome. Interim treatment of

the site with grass as proposed would be an underwhelming and poor quality response that would negatively affect streetscape quality in the area.

The overall effects on the streetscape and local townscape of this proposal would be negative, with no remedy to this offered in the foreseeable future.

The Urban Design team would not support the application to demolish the building at 114 Adelaide Road.
