

TAG

Design Assessment of Proposal for North Kumutoto

2 September 2013

INTRODUCTION

This review of buildings for Sites 9 and 10 and related open space including Site 8, focuses on the proposal's relationship to Waterfront Framework and North Kumutoto Design Brief expectations. Assessment includes reference to the 'key project objectives' which are part of the Information Memorandum for the project, the Wellington Waterfront Framework and the North Kumutoto Design Brief.

TAG was involved in refining the Information Memorandum, and undertaking formal design review of five project proposals for North Kumutoto. Subsequently, TAG met with the two shortlisted developer/designer teams to clarify feedback on the proposals. Subsequently the preferred proposal has been confirmed, and is the subject of this design review.

Summary assessment

This proposal presents an effective combination of high-quality context-specific building and open space designs. These treat Sites 8, 9 and 10 as parts of a single integrated precinct. In particular, the proposal provides a strong direction for the treatment of open space on Site 8.

The proposal introduces activities which will contribute to the vitality of a part of the waterfront which is currently treated as a thoroughfare rather than a destination. Activities include a mix of commercial/retail and public-good uses. The day-time population of the proposed office building and higher visitor numbers will also support a range of informal retail activities in the plaza and associated public spaces.

The proposal gives a shape and an identity to Whitmore Plaza, the principal public space in the northern arm of the waterfront development. By bringing two "landmark" structures to the edges of this space, the proposal frames an important visual and functional connection between City and Waterfront. In the reverse direction, this threshold provides a more imposing connection between the waterfront and the evolving Parliament Precinct.

The proposal improves the experience of large numbers of commuters who cross the Whitmore Plaza/Kumutoto area on foot. For this user group, the combination of buildings and open spaces: increase the legibility of routes; introduce sheltered edges; and increase visual interest.

The design also builds on two key circulation routes: the Waterfront Promenade and Kumutoto Lane. These are merged and continued to northwards towards Shed 21 and the Harbour Quays development. In this way, the proposal helps to indicate a public space structure for the CentrePort land and ensures a positive interface between City and Port initiatives here.

Comprehensive assessment

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The proposal takes a precinct-wide approach, addressing Sites 8, 9 and 10. Key design issues are addressed for all three building locations as well as intervening open spaces.
2. The basic architectural concepts are sound and, subject to further design development, the proposal promise to produce a very successful outcome for buildings and open spaces in this part of the waterfront.

PROPOSED ACTIVITY

3. The proposal aims to establish a highly relevant combination of activities.
 - a. The portico gesture at the south end of Site 10 frames a public or semi-public space in a conspicuous location. This sets expectations for public use for internal as well as external areas. Here, the proposal features a

generously-scaled multi-level “gallery” space which is animated by a dramatic cantilevered stairway. The “gallery” area is strongly supported as an indication of the type of activity that would need to occupy this area.

- b. The ‘Innovation Cluster’ at the north end of Site 10 is a positive concept with a major public-good component. It would need to be carefully managed to ensure it continues to fulfil its stated purpose and to ensure it contributes to edge activity. Internal spaces would need to be flexible. However, the cellular subdivision pattern, transparent frontages and multiple entrances all provide assurances that this area will not simply revert to a single generic office tenancy.
 - c. A Shipwreck Heritage Institute for Site 9 appropriate public-good activity which would be of national significance. Its relationship with the Wellington Museum of City and Sea should be clarified to ensure that the Institute functions as a complementary attraction. The proposed facility could also be a strategic asset which adds to the existing network of museums in Wellington City. Business viability would need to be tested.
4. This proposal resolves the problem of retail viability by limiting the extent of retail space and by including other relevant waterfront activities. The Innovation Cluster at the north end of Site 10 is an example of this strategy. The Cluster occupies a location which is currently unattractive for retail uses yet it presents an active edge to public space. The Cluster’s cellular spatial structure also allows units to be converted to shops if demand for retail space increases in the future.

OPEN SPACE

5. Open spaces have been resolved convincingly. The buildings support adjacent open spaces and vice versa.
- a. Extension of Kumutoto Lane through Whitmore Plaza and past the old EFT building resolves competition between vehicles and pedestrians and appears to be consistent with the geometry of the wider Kumutoto/Whitmore Plaza precinct.
 - b. The diagonal path through Site 10 connects directly with the old Eastbourne Ferry wharf. This passageway makes an important visual connection to a heritage building. It also creates a continuous sheltered pathway running along and through the site.
 - c. Relationship to open space at Site 8 is strong and compelling. The indicated landscape treatment includes declamation and a hard-edged “dockside” condition. The indicative landscape also has a positive relationship with the proposed Shipwreck Heritage Institute on Site 9. This ensures that the two sites are experienced as an integrated entity.
6. Currently there is a risk that Site 8 becomes a residual open space within the larger precinct. By establishing a quay-side character and introducing a partial declamation, the proposal shows how this relatively small pocket of space can become a convincing addition to the larger Kumutoto Plaza area.

SITE 10 BUILDING DESIGN

7. The concept behind Site 10 is strong and consists of two main architectural components:

- a. A large scale portico at the south end gives a strong relationship to the open space at Whitmore Plaza.
- b. Two horizontal layers (each two floors high) which either slide over one another or “grip” each other.

With further resolution, articulation of the building’s facades needs to reinforce these basic elements and clarify their relationship.

8. The south end of the Site 10 building combines with the Whitmore St gateway to create a progression of open space experiences with a varying degree of shelter. This progression begins with the fully external space on the Quay side of the building and proceeds to the interior of the portico. Within the portico, there remain strong visual connections to the plaza, the promenade and the water.
9. The Site 10 portico works as a grand gesture at an important gateway to the waterfront.
 - a. This setback allows the larger building to defer respectfully to the old Eastbourne Ferry terminal building.
 - b. The scale of the portico and the indicative timber soffit provide a dramatic signature feather which is emblematic of public access. This welcoming feature will be read clearly from distant viewpoints along the promenade and across the inner harbour.
 - c. The “gallery” space on the ground floor and mezzanine floors would contribute multiple levels of activity to this important space.
 - d. The setback and articulation of the ends of levels 1 and 2 enable the old Eastbourne Ferry Terminal building to act as a third edge to the open space.
10. A positive relationship to the Ferry Terminal Building is achieved by setting back the southern end of the Site 10 building to allow increase the visibility of the heritage structure from the city. Further voids are introduced within the footprint of the Site 10 building. These contribute to a generous open space around the Ferry Terminal. The diagonal path through the Site 10 building directs views and movement towards the heritage structure and its wharf. In all these ways, the Ferry Terminal Building is celebrated and given emphasis despite its diminutive size.
11. A colonnade provides a sheltered pedestrian thoroughfare along the full length of the Customhouse Quay side of the building. On the seaward side of the building, the portico and the harbourside extension provide a similar function.
12. Functional robustness and flexibility are important attributes of the proposal:
 - a. The multiple cores and entrances to Site 10 allow for various sizes and types of offices.
 - b. The ‘Innovation Cluster’ introduces multiple small workplaces which might in the future become retail if that demand emerges here. The smaller scale of these spaces brings greater variety and introduces a human scale which would not be achieved with a single ground-floor tenant. This is a strong attribute of this proposal, and it is essential that this is retained during design development.

Relation to reading as more than one building

13. The Environment Court decision [112] suggested that “the footprint in terms of continuous building volume for a permissible building [on Site 10] should be adjusted so that the form reads as more than one building.” This principle is identified as an issue in the North Kumutoto Design Brief (the Design Brief, on page 9). The principle of breaking down the mass is achieved by three means:
 - a. Expression of levels three and four as a formally and architecturally as a distinct upper horizontal layer. Likewise, expression of levels one and two as a distinct lower horizontal layer.
 - b. Harbourside extension helps the lower horizontal layer to read as a three-dimensional volume.
 - c. Inclusion of three distinct façade treatments on the Quay side of the building.

14. The expression of components within this two-part or three-part successfully breaks down the visual bulk of the Site 10 building. Questions remain about how the facade is developed around the northern end of the building and also at the junction of the harbourside projection and the portico. We suggest that the harbourside extension might be three storeys rather than two storeys high. As a three-story element, the harbourside extension clarifies architectural relationships at the northern end of the building. A three-storey extension also strengthens the visual relationship between the Site 10 building and Shed 21. Additional floor area within the extension would voids and other architectural features to be introduced elsewhere on the building. These features could be used to improve the articulation of the architecture, e.g. at the portico and the diagonal through-site link.

Height

15. The Environment Court decision recommends that a building on Site 10 should be not more than 22m AMSL, and the Council’s Design Brief (adopted 22 November 2012) proposes that the maximum height be 22 m above ground. The Operative District Plan has a zero height limit on the site. Irrespective of these various interpretations, our assessment on height is based on relationship to the height of Shed 21, and to buildings across Customhouse Quay.
 - a. The proposed building relates successfully to Shed 21, being more or less the same height as the older structure. The proposed building is separated from Shed 21 and its two northernmost structural bays are approximately 1 m lower than the parapet of Shed 21. Further south, the roof of the proposed building rises to approximately 3m above the level of the Shed 21 parapet.
 - b. At the southern end of the proposed building, a large void space opens up beneath the cantilevered layer of levels three and four. This void has the effect of reducing the visual bulk at the building.
 - c. The proposed building is significantly lower than the podium of the NZ Post building. This relationship is consistent with a deliberate stepping down in scale a step down in height between the taller CBD office blocks and lower structures along the waterfront.

The Environment Court decision referred to a “sense of relativity” in relation to height [107]. We consider that a sense of relativity has been successfully achieved.

Setback from the North-east site/harbour edge boundary

16. The Environment Court called for a setback greater than 9m [114] between the seaward boundary of the site and the eastern edge of the building. This setback is intended to provide for pedestrian and vehicle movement, and this imperative is reinforced by the Design Brief (page 9). A further consideration here is that the Site 10 building should relate favourably to the much smaller Ferry Terminal Building.
 - a. The ground-level setback from the line of the water edge is around 14m at the southern end of the proposed building. This provides generosity at the pinch-point opposite the Whitmore Street gates. Some 30m north of the water edge, the line of the building columns then steps out to be setback approximately 9.2 m, and the building envelope itself is set back in excess of 10.5m.
 - b. The harbour edge extension projects into the 9m zone at first-floor level, leaving a clear 6m high space beneath. This presents no loss of amenity to promenade users. Indeed, the approximately 2.5 m projection provides a degree of shelter to pedestrians along this edge.

SITE 9 BUILDING DESIGN

17. The Site 9 building maintains all relevant connections, and provides publicly relevant activity that will help to activate this part of the waterfront. The building is inherently of a scale that relates to Sheds 11 and 13.
 - a. It also offers potential to explore innovative timber framing and modularity. To be in keeping with the central city location, this needs to be resolved in an architectural language which is sophisticated rather than rustic. The composition and materials should not be too overtly similar to Shed 1 or Shed 6.
 - b. This building and associated activity would work very successfully with the open space on Site 8 where a dockside character as proposed.
 - c. The relationship of Site 9 to Site 8 also respects the existing treatment of Kumutoto Plaza, complementing it both spatially and in terms of activities.
 - d. The lifting gantry indicated is not visually necessary and has not been justified from a functional perspective. However it does help to establish a visual and perhaps metaphorical connection with site 8. This connection might also be explored in different ways.
18. The Site 9 building could accommodate a range of activities including the Shipwreck Heritage Institute. The simple form and layout of the proposed building mean that the Institute can co-exist with a range of other activities. Equally it would be possible to substitute another primary use if required.

Appendix

This is a summary assessment against the 'key project objectives' in the WWL Information Memorandum for the project, the Wellington Waterfront Framework vision and objectives and the North Kumutoto Design Brief.

CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT
<p>Key project objective 1:</p> <p>High quality developments of character and identity that display design excellence and benefit and enhance the strategic location of each site.</p>	<p>Yes, subject to minor design development.</p>
<p>Key project objective 2:</p> <p>Provision of a use(s) that complement or preferably add a new use(s) to the existing range of uses of buildings on the waterfront.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Key project objective 3:</p> <p>Compliance with the vision and objectives of the 'Wellington Waterfront Framework'(2001) and the principles and parameters of the 'North Kumutoto Design Brief" (2012)</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Wellington Waterfront Framework Vision</p> <p>"Wellington's waterfront is a special place that welcomes all people to live, work and play in the beautiful and inspiring spaces and architecture that connect our city to the sea and protect our heritage for future generations."</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Wellington Waterfront Framework Objectives (refer page 21)</p> <p>Locally and internationally recognised designreadily accessible to all safe at all times..... attractive place that draws Wellingtonians and visitors.....caters for a wide range of events and activities..... heritage buildings protected ... activities integrated with the harbour</p>	<p>Yes, substantially meets and has potential to fully realise these objectives.</p>
<p>North Kumutoto Design Brief</p> <p>New building principles:</p>	
<p>1. Sympathetic to and relate to scale and size of heritage buildings. Site 10 building relates to the former Ferry Terminal Building.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>2. Provides primary facades to major public open spaces, and appropriately places servicing. Has active edges at ground and visual connections above.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>3. Designed in a coherent fashion, relating to context and complementing neighbours.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>4. Potentially responsive to change of use over time</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>5. Provides character and complexity appropriate to location, considering also roof design and potential green roofs.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>6. Provides visual interest with recognition of different viewing distances and duration.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>7. Displays exceptional architectural design including innovation, creativity and imagination, responsiveness to context, ESD and expression of contemporary culture.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>8. Universal design to ensure accessibility for all</p>	<p>Yes</p>

North Kumutoto Design Brief	
Building relationship to open space:	
1. Contributes positively to the open spaces of the waterfront	Yes
2. Size and shape relates to spaces around, neighbouring buildings and the water edge.	Yes
3. Provides a protected accessible sheltered route along the Quays, and contributes to shelter along the promenade.	Yes
4. Buildings may become landmarks and add character to public spaces.	Yes, potential to achieve this.
5. Defines public spaces, provides natural surveillance and activity that engages with people using space.	Yes
6. Ground floor is predominantly and clearly publicly accessible, adds to overall waterfront activity and vitality.	Yes
7. Has active edges by providing frequent entries, and ground level openings that allow visual links and interaction with activities within.	Yes
8. Servicing is integrated into the building and/or located along secondary frontages.	Yes
9. Upper floors relate to surrounding open spaces, potentially integrating balconies and/or roof decks to establish sense of connection and add to vitality and safety.	Potential to achieve this.
Key project objective 4: Provision of some civic amenity/public good	Yes
Key project objective 5: An acceptable commercial outcome for both developer(s) and WWL.	Outside TAG's scope of assessment.