

November 30, 2007

Frank Kitts Park Redevelopment

Recommendation and Report by the Jury

to

Wellington Waterfront Limited

Recommendation

The jury is delighted to announce that it unanimously recommends Team 2 as the winner of the design competition for the redevelopment of Frank Kitts Park including the Chinese Garden. The jury is confident that their competition design, when developed in detail in consultation with client and stakeholders, will positively transform the existing space, fulfilling the potential of its spectacular site and adding significantly to its valued place in the hearts and minds of Wellingtonians.

The jury commends the winning design to the Board of Wellington Waterfront Limited and applauds their intention to redevelop Frank Kitts Park to increase its usability and connection with its surroundings. It is a unique place in the waterfront precinct, deserving of the best in design thinking, construction and ongoing care.

In its deliberations the jury considered the idea of change at some length and affirms the view that if the site is to change, such change should occur only if that change adds significantly to its value. The jury considers the competition process to have been entirely suitable for a site of such public interest and that it has produced a design worthy of realization in the near future – as a positive change of real value.

The following report expands upon this summary recommendation.

APPENDIX A

Background

The jury has made its decision based on consideration of the following:

- the designs produced by the five teams selected from the eleven originally expressing interest in the process and their accompanying reports;
- their detailed review of these designs relative to the existing site, the waterfront precinct overall and the surrounding city;
- the design brief (which referred in detail to the Wellington Waterfront Framework) and assessment criteria;
- The Wellington Waterfront Framework 2001;
- the City to Waterfront – Public Spaces and Public Life Study 2004;
- the Assessment Report for the Frank Kitts Park Competition by the Technical Advisory Group, Wellington Waterfront (November 2007) ;
- the comments made by members of the community (128) subsequent to public exhibition of the five designs;
- the Report from the Wellington Chinese Garden Committee on the five designs (November 2007).

The jury thanks the interested parties for their comments and recommendations which have been of value in informing its deliberations.

The Winning Design

The jury was impressed by the clear structure of this design, which makes it at once and integral whole, simple to understand spatially, robust in terms of further refinement and interesting to experience. While apparently simple, its skillful organization of form and space works -- resolving interface issues, successfully organizing usable spaces and integrating the site with its surroundings. It also creates more exciting and useable spaces throughout.

Positive features include the following:

- Activity concentrated to the south of the park and associated with existing buildings;
- The levels of the main lawn reduced to open up the Willeston Street vista and to provide a clear relationship between the lawn, promenade and water;
- A buffer between the main lawn and Jervois Quay;
- A main lawn inviting to general use and suitable for events;
- Clear north-south pedestrian links;

APPENDIX A

- An activated upper level area linked to its context (stairs, pavilions, teahouse, ramp);
- A Chinese Garden (Garden of Beneficence) located to activate the Willeston Street axis and provide a destination at the waterfront;
- A Chinese Garden sited and designed to integrate and improve the link between the lawn and level above the underground car park;
- A compelling, comprehensible and contemporary Chinese Garden embedded in its park setting;
- A playground retained in its popular northern location with the lighthouse slide used as a component feature visible from Jervois Quay, framing the view from Hunter Street;
- A view south east view to the water from Jervois Quay and Hunter Street;
- Important sculptures and memorials located to take best advantage of the new site organisation.

The jury is of the view that the design's strong and simple structure can maintain its integrity during subsequent design development phases. Its integral structure and the confined nature of the site require development as a whole.

Having considered this preliminary design, the site and comments of the various stakeholders, the jury makes the following comments and proposes that refinements be considered as the design proceeds. The design development of the Chinese Garden will, especially in its functional and interpretive aspects, be subject to on going discussions with the Wellington Chinese Garden Committee:

1. Promenade and harbour's edge

Reinforce the green edge experience during design development, incorporating further opportunities for informal seating to the main lawn through use of perimeter steps, seats etc while maintaining a broad sweep of lawn. Provide vegetative shelter (trees and other plantings) in key locations to take advantage of outlook and views.

APPENDIX A

2. Willeston Street axis and Chinese Garden

The design activates the Willeston Street axis by locating the Chinese Garden (Garden of Beneficence) within its view shed. This produces a combination of results including opening up some views (removing structures, landform and trees), reducing others (adding structures and vegetation) and over all, resulting in no net reduction in the view. The jury considers these moves positive, noting that in addition, the main lawn will open up views to the north east along the axis, views that will be available from the length and southern footpaths of Willeston Street, and the redevelopment site on the Victoria Street car park opposite. Once such views are created, they should be maintained during subsequent development and will affect how the lower levels of that site are designed.

During design development care will be required to ensure that the sequence of walls and rooms that structure the Chinese Garden (Garden of Beneficence) balance the progressive opening and closing of vistas to those moving along the Willeston Street view-shed and the garden itself. Not only should views to the water and the surrounding landscape be revealed to achieve the most positive overall dramatic effect, the visual connection between key components of the broader harbour landscape (skyline) and Willeston Street should be maintained. The height, mass, material, colour and siting of walls and roofs to the tea-house and the Garden will all need very careful articulation when composing these views and decisions on their final configuration would be best informed by the use of 3D scale models and views (digital or made).

3. Water and drainage

While it is accepted that run-off needs to be contained and treated on-site, the jury is of the view that, given the confined size and location of this site, its emblematic expression as the filter-field, or role as a filter-field for adjacent areas may not be appropriate here. Other ways of buffering and framing the park promenade and lawn should be considered.

APPENDIX A

4. Sculptures and memorials

While the jury applauds the concept for its creative approach to site many of the existing sculptures and memorials to best effect with the proposed layout, it notes that their final siting will need to be informed by consultation with stakeholders, including sculptors and user groups, since some have particular and important ceremonies and activities associated with them that must be catered for. Others have associations with particular sites and settings.

5. The upper lawn

The jury recognizes that improved connectivity is critical to the success of the upper lawn and supports the use of stairs and ramps to achieve that, encouraging even more generous use of these as the design progresses.

It also recognizes that the proposed two level café, tea-house, screens and canopies will also activate this area and connect it to the Chinese Garden, promenade and main lawn, also providing elevated prospects of the broader landscape and shelter during inclement weather. As with the Willeston Street vista, the design of these to achieve the appropriate balance between lightness, bulk and robustness will require careful development during further design, also taking into account the impact of shade on the lagoon walkway south. The pool associated with the tea-house is a requirement of the brief and its reflective qualities complement the more active views to the harbour.

6. Extended steps to the lagoon ('the ghat')

The jury supports expansion of the steps connecting the southern terrace to the lagoon but notes that achievement of a full-width flight is reliant on relocation of the Albatross sculpture (see comments above). While the proposed relocation of the sculpture has the potential to improve its visibility because of elevation and location at a focal point, should the current site be maintained, this is not seen as fatal to the success of the concept over all.

APPENDIX A

General Observations and Recommendations

Following its deliberations the jury offers the following comments of a more general nature relating to the proposed redevelopment of Frank Kitts Park.

The first relates to re-use of the existing trees. The *Meterosiderus excelsa* are mature and many have become established in contained conditions. They provide shelter and framing throughout the park and are species which are transplantable. Given the challenge of establishing new trees on these waterfront sites the jury strongly recommends that these be assessed for their capacity to be dug, balled, stored and cared for on-site before being re-planted to provide an immediate frame and shelter to the new use areas.

The second relates to the potential for increased connectivity with the park context. A number of the proposals explored how this could be achieved (additional walkways and boardwalks, waterfront pavilions and shelters, pontoon). The jury was impressed by the potential that these offer and suggests that they be considered in future works in the precinct at large. Further, in terms of the precinct, it also notes that the relationship between the park and the rear of the Arena building is one that requires some care in terms of day-to-day management and future development, since it operates as the service and back-of-house access. The proliferation of vehicles associated with these functions is somewhat at odds with the park function of relaxation and pedestrian focus. While the winning scheme proposes how that relationship can be improved, it is recommended that further improvements are made through time as the building itself develops.

Thirdly, the jury notes that while this design has managed to integrate the car park structure and use it to some benefit, providing an elevated prospect, the significant constraints the car park provides to the development of useful open space are demonstrated by these designs which have been prepared by experienced professionals.

APPENDIX A

The car park roof has not been designed to support anything beyond paving and grassing and cannot therefore, support major new garden developments, which must be confined to its perimeter. The experience should act as a caution to any future considerations of locating covered parking areas in the waterfront precinct, or expectations that they offer unlimited opportunities for landscape development.

Jury Convenor

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Elisabeth Murdoch Professor of Landscape Architecture

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Jury Members

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