

MEMO To: Andrew Croskery (WAREHAM CAMERON+ CO)
From: Deyana Popova, Urban Perspectives Ltd
Subject: 314 The Terrace, Gordon Wilson Flats
Date: 29 MAY 2015

INTRODUCTION

Purpose - I have been asked to provide an overview/high level assessment of the potential of the existing Gordon Wilson Flats to be used for either social housing or private residential accommodation.

Assessment reference points - if the building is to be used for social housing, it should measure up well against the specific design requirements (design guides) of the two largest social housing providers in Wellington - Housing NZ and WCC City Housing.

The potential of the building to be used for private residential living has to be tested against the provisions of the Wellington District Plan Residential Design Guide.

With this in mind I have assessed the existing building against the following documents:

- Housing New Zealand Design Guide (Architecture)
- Wellington City Council City Housing Design Guide (Minimum Housing Standard)
- Wellington District Plan Residential Design Guide

The existing building, which has been vacant since 2012 due to safety concerns, is a listed heritage building in the Wellington District Plan (Heritage list: Buildings, Chapter 21, Appendix/page 23). The listing aims to protect the integrity of the building exterior (all building elevations)¹. This is an important consideration that needs to be integrated into the assessment. The heritage significance of the various building elements and the building as a whole is assessed in the Heritage Assessment prepared by Archifact Ltd (March 2015).

The findings of the 'Building Condition Assessment/Services and Structure' prepared by BECA, dated 24 April 2015 and 8 May 2015) indicate the work that would be involved as part of a possible upgrade and as such have informed my interpretation of some of the above guidelines.

In preparing this assessment I have undertaken a site and building inspection and have studied the original plans of the building.

Existing Building - the existing building is an eleven storey residential block. It was built in 1957 as part of the government social housing programme. The building has a large horizontal bulk with an externally expressed superstructure of wall and floor slabs creating cellular units.

The main access to the building is via a lobby at the northern end of the east elevation connecting to a two-lift tower. Extensively glazed stairwells - located at the north-west and south-west corners of the building respectively - provide links to the semi-open access corridors to the maisonette flats. Both stairwells and the lifts connect to the top level/roof area which accommodates common laundry facilities along the length of the western side of the roof and an open air drying area on the eastern side.

¹ Any modifications to the exterior of the existing building are deemed a discretionary activity and would require resource consent (District Plan Rule 21A.2.1).

The ground level accommodates 12 bed-sitting room flats, the main entrance and lift lobby, the caretaker's office, waste disposal and storage areas.

The upper levels accommodate 75 maisonette style flats. The majority (70 of those) have floor area of 64sqm with two double bedrooms. The remaining 5 flats have one double and one single bedroom.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

This is a high level assessment outlining the degree to which the existing building can potentially satisfy the specific requirements of each design guide.

The assessment is carried out in a table/checklist format highlighting the 'problem' requirements which would be difficult to meet and/or might impact adversely on the heritage facades (tables/checklists attached in Appendices 1-3). The 'problem' requirements are summarised and discussed in light of some generic principles for good high-density development and with the heritage status of the building in mind. My overall conclusions have been drawn on that basis.

A three point-scale has been applied to 'rate' how feasible it is to meet the requirements of the various guides. The following rating key is used:

- The requirements can potentially be met (regardless of cost)
- ◐ The requirements can partly be met
- The requirements cannot be met or would be difficult to meet (e.g. unfeasible/impracticable due to either technical reasons and/or because of heritage considerations). Where meeting the requirement is technically possible but will result in alterations to the heritage exterior a 'red dot' rating has been used.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Housing New Zealand Design Guides

Housing NZ's requirements are outlined in four separate design guides:

- 1) 'Site' Design Guide;
- 2) 'Medium and High Densities' Design Guide;
- 3) 'Urban' Design Guide; and
- 4) 'Architecture' Design Guide.

These guides relate to new development and target primarily medium density housing schemes with little reference to apartment buildings and/or requirements for refurbishing existing buildings.

Gordon Willson Flats is an existing multi-story heritage building. For that reason the appropriateness of its location/siting, overall bulk and form and associated design treatment is taken as a given. Therefore the design matters contained in the first three guides are not relevant to the assessment. To this end my assessment is focused solely on the requirements of the 'Architecture' Design Guide, which covers building design/internal amenity matters.

In summary, the key findings of my assessment against the 'Architecture' Design Guide are:

- Some of the requirements could potentially be met either in full or at least partially. It is noted however, that due to the age of the existing building and its poor state of repair, meeting some of those requirements would involve substantial up-grade work.
- Design requirements which would be difficult to address relate to:

Amenity

- kitchen areas and bathroom areas are relatively small and might not be suitable for large people
- limited potential for providing adequate storage areas
- limited opportunity to meet cultural needs (e.g. outdoor cooking areas)
- private open space per individual unit limited to a very small balcony (approximately 2.0sqm)

Health and Safety

- meeting fire protection requirements - meeting the relevant requirements in full appears to be technically possible (Building Services Assessment Report, prepared by Beca, 8 May 2015, page 16). However, it is noted that this might require some alterations to the stairwell facades and therefore could potentially adversely affect their heritage value;
- upgrading ventilation of kitchens and bathrooms will be required, including new dedicated bathroom extract system and a new separate kitchen extract systems (Building Services Assessment Report, prepared by Beca, 8 May 2015, page 6). Re kitchen extract systems, the report notes that to successfully remove smells, the resulting size of a common extract system will most likely not fit within the existing services riser. It further notes that the existing risers are constructed in concrete and are likely to form an essential part of the building structure so cannot be easily changed. The report recommends that each flat is provided with an extractor hood discharging outside, noting that (a) the existing kitchen windows will need to be remodelled; and (b) that smells discharging directly into the common open accessway could be an issue.

Construction

- given the current state of the building and the amount of expected work for its up-grade, the cost would be substantial.
- the repair of the building facades would be (a) technically challenging; (b) involve alterations to the heritage facades; and (c) require on-going maintenance (Steve Kemp/BECA, File note 4 May 2015).

Wellington City Council City Housing Design Guide

Given the high level of the assessment, it has been carried out in relation to the Minimum Housing Standard requirements (Appendix 1 of the Wellington City Council City Housing Design Guide), rather than against all the requirements of that guide.

The minimum housing requirements deal with matters under the following headings - Secure; Healthy; Essential Amenity, Improved Access, Landscaping; Community Renewal and Servicing. These matters largely overlap with the matters under the Housing New Zealand Design Guide 'Architecture'. For that reason the findings of the assessments against the two guides are similar.

In summary the key findings of my assessment against the Minimum Housing Standard requirements are:

- the assessment indicates that most of the requirements could potentially be met, however, given the age of the existing building and its poor state of repair, this would involve a substantial amount of up-grade work. Repairs to the existing facades would involve changes to the building exterior; and

- my assessment comments re 'health and safety' requirements as per the Housing New Zealand Design Guide 'Architecture' (above) are also relevant here.

Wellington District Plan Residential Design Guide

The Residential Design Guide (Wellington District Plan) targets primarily new town-house development and covers four design matters - character, site planning, building design and open space design. From those, only the last two are considered directly relevant to the assessment of the subject heritage building.

While many of the applicable objectives/guidelines can potentially be satisfied, there are three fundamental issues which would prevent the successful functioning of the building as a good quality private residential accommodation. These relate to:

- Private open space - in relation to multi-storey apartment buildings the Design Guide requires that each apartment is provided with a balcony of approximately 10sqm (minimum width of 2m). The flats in the existing building incorporate a small balcony (approximately 2.0sqm). In order to meet the Design Guide requirements the size of the existing balconies will need to be enlarged. Enlargement of the balconies, while technically possible, would not be an easy task and will require modifications to the heritage facades and/or reduction in internal floor area depending on how the enlargement of the balconies is approached.

I note that the existing ground level open space around the building is not large enough to accommodate a sufficiently large open space area for shared use (as a way to compensate for the small balconies), while also addressing on-site carparking requirements;

- Carparking provisions - the District Plan requires one carpark per residential unit. The existing building accommodates 75 maisonette style flats and 12 bed-sitting room flats. If the existing maisonette style flats are refurbished and the 12 bed-sitting room flats are converted into single bedroom units, for example, then approximately 80 carparking spaces would be required. The site currently provides approximately 25 spaces (taken from the aerial photograph).

The configuration and topography of the existing site limit the opportunities for providing the required carparking numbers at grade. Alternative options might include a new multi-storey carparking building (built at the back of the site), or using the ground level of the building as a carpark. None of the options are considered practicable or appropriate, as apart from cost, this would involve either substantial earthworks/retaining structure that would compromise the amenity of future apartments, and/or adversely affect the ground level facade.

- Internal amenity - providing self-contained apartments with their own laundry/drying area and sufficiently large storage area would be difficult to achieve due to the size/internal layout of the existing flats.

Regarding the functionality of the building as a private residential complex, the concerns relating to kitchen/bathroom ventilation, fire protection requirements and repairs to/maintenance of the building facade (as per the assessment against the other two guides above) are also relevant here - while they are not referred to in the Design Guide, they nevertheless will need to be addressed at the building consent stage.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a degree of overlap between the issues identified in the assessments against the individual design guides. The assessments show that many of the design requirements could potentially be addressed through substantial amount of work (primarily internal), which although costly, would appear to be technically possible and without any direct effect on the heritage exterior.

Notwithstanding this, there are number of requirements which prove to be either challenging or impractical to satisfy and/or addressing them would require changes to the building facades and therefore adversely affect the heritage value of the building.

With this in mind the specific conclusions are:

- 1) Design Guides requirements that appear challenging to achieve and/or would involve changes to the building facades relate to the following matters:
 - addressing continual corrosion/deterioration of the west and east elevations;
 - extending existing balconies (on east facade) and/or adding new balconies (west facade) to meet private open space requirements, particularly if the building is to be used as private residential accommodation;
 - meeting kitchen and bathroom ventilation requirements; and
 - addressing fire protection standards, which might require changes to the southern and northern facades.

- 2) As a general principle, good quality high-density residential development incorporates a mixture of apartment types. The vast majority of the existing flats are identical and achieving variation would be structurally challenging, thus limiting the ability to alter the existing layout and create the desired mixture of unit types. Providing a mixture of unit types is an important consideration for both social housing complexes as well as private apartment developments.

Further to this, two-bedroom flats, which are the predominant type within the existing building, do not appear to respond to the demand growth which is envisaged to come from single person and couple households². I also note that a two-bedroom flat might not be very suitable for families given the small balcony size; neither would it be consistent with the increasing demand for supported housing for older people.

- 3) The layout and size of bathrooms/kitchens in the maisonettes and the size of the bed-sitting flats prevent the installation of a washing machine/laundry tub within the individual units - this affects the internal amenity of the flats and makes them unsuitable to use for private residential living. If the building is to be used for social housing, this would be less of an issue given the roof top common laundry area, but it will nevertheless remain as a challenge in relation to accessible units and/or family units.

- 4) Meeting the District Plan on-site carparking requirements for private residential apartments would be challenging to achieve. This however would not be so much of an issue if the building is to be used for social housing³.

- 5) There are limited opportunities for providing sufficient wardrobe/storage space within the units - this is a relevant issue for both social housing as well as private residential living. However, relative to the other issues this is not as critical.

- 6) Overall:
 - The existing building is unsuitable for private residential living - this is because:
 - a) it is unfeasible to satisfy some of the fundamental spatial and internal amenity requirements for good quality apartment living as envisaged by the District Plan Residential Design Guide and/or to provide the desired mixture of unit types; and
 - b) any attempt to address those requirements could be structurally challenging and/or would involve changes to the building facades and therefore affect their heritage value.
 - In relative terms, the building, with regards to its spatial layout, appears to have a better potential to be re-used/rehabilitated for social housing. This, however would:
 - a) involve a substantial amount of work/cost to bring the building to current building standards and be able to deliver good quality social housing outcome,

² Wellington City Housing and Residential Growth Study: Final Planning Assessment and Recommendations, September 2014, prepared for WCC by The Property Group

³ Minimum requirement of 1 carpark per 10 units, Wellington City Council City Housing Design Guide

- b) not be able to provide the desired mixture of unit types and/or support the increasing demand for supported housing for older people; and
- c) aspects of the required upgrade work could be challenging to achieve and/or would involve changes to the heritage facades.



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