

Attachment E
Heritage Review

APPLICATION FOR DISTRICT PLAN CHANGE - 320 The Terrace, Wellington, Gordon Wilson Flats: Applicant – Victoria University of Wellington

SR - 333169

HERITAGE APPRAISAL – Wellington City Council

1 Introduction

In July 2015 Wellington City Council received an application for a plan change to the operative Wellington City District Plan from Victoria University of Wellington. The application requests that the building known as the Gordon Wilson Flats (GWF) be removed from the District Plan Schedule of Heritage Buildings. Further changes to the District Plan are also requested, not addressed in this report.

2 Wellington City District Plan Heritage Objectives and Policies

The operative District Plan was adopted in July 2000. Included in the Plan is an extensive Schedule of heritage buildings which has been further expanded through plan changes.

Since July 2000 the protection of heritage has received greater national recognition. Under the 2003 amendment to the Resource Management Act 1991 historic heritage is recognised as a matter of national importance. In particular, Section 6(f) of The Act provides for the protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use and development. Subsequent to this change to the RMA the District Plan Heritage Rules were updated by way of Plan Change 43, which became operative in July 2012.

The Introduction to Chapter 20 – Heritage, of the District Plan includes the following statement:

20.1.1 Built Heritage - Listing Buildings, Objects, Areas and Archaeological Sites and Their Settings:

'The evidence of Wellington's heritage is seen in buildings, structures, objects, archaeological sites and areas. At the same time protecting the city's built heritage is not about locking it up. The continued use of a heritage building is essential to its survival but it should not be at the loss of its historic and architectural integrity. The challenge is to protect the most valued heritage places in an evolving environment while meeting the needs of a rapidly changing community.'

Objective 20.2.1.2 seeks:

'To discourage demolition, partial demolition and relocation of listed buildings and objects while:

- acknowledging that the demolition or relocation of some parts of buildings and objects may be appropriate to provide for modifications that will result in no more than an insignificant loss of heritage values; and*
- giving consideration to total demolition or relocation only where the Council is convinced that there is no reasonable alternative to total demolition or relocation.'*

Taking account of the intention of this objective is key to discussion of the current request for a district plan change to remove the Gordon Wilson Flats building from the Heritage Schedule.

3 Heritage Buildings Schedule

The GWF building is included in the Wellington City Council Heritage Inventory - 1995 which provided limited research about Wellington buildings, most but not all of which are scheduled in the district plan. This

research was used to develop an updated Schedule of Heritage Buildings for the District Plan which became operative in 2000. The Heritage Inventory assessment of the GWF is attached as Appendix 1.

Recently, all buildings on the Heritage Schedule have been researched, assessed and evaluated to a consistent standard in an internal Council project carried out during 2012-2015. The research report for the GWF is attached as Appendix 2.

As a result of this recent comprehensive research project the Council has reliable, up to date research on which to base consideration of the heritage significance and value of a specific item. This research is the basis for providing a response to the current district plan change application.

4 Other Heritage Considerations

The GWF building is not listed by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZ) on the Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero. In a response to a request for comment on the proposal, HNZ states that: "Heritage New Zealand raises no matters concerning the potential disposal or demolition of the Gordon Wilson Flats".

All land within the boundaries of Wellington City is covered by the archaeological provisions of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. This city site is registered on the NZ Archaeological Association Site Register as Site number **NZAA R27/270**. Any earth works on the site will need to be subject to an application for archaeological consent.

5 Heritage Assessments

5.1 Applicant's Heritage Assessment:

As a component of the application, a heritage assessment is provided, prepared by Archifact Limited. It provides an analysis of design, engineering and structural issues and an analysis of a range of heritage issues including evaluation of heritage values and significance. It includes an assessment of the impact of demolition of the building on the heritage landscape of Wellington and the wider New Zealand heritage buildings assemblage. Archifact's report gives a comparative analysis of characteristics of the GWF with other similar multi storey social housing projects of the same era in New Zealand.

Section 9 of the Archifact report provides a detailed assessment of the building's heritage values against the assessment criteria included in Section 66 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. These are similar to the criteria used by Wellington City Council to assess the heritage values of places on the Heritage buildings Schedule.

The Archifact Ltd assessment provides the following evaluations:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| • Aesthetic significance | Moderate |
| • Archaeological significance | Not assessed |
| • Architectural significance | Moderate |
| • Functional significance | No significance |
| • Historic significance | Considerable |
| • Scientific significance | Minor |
| • Social significance | Considerable |
| • Technological significance | Minor |
| • Townscape significance | Moderate |

No criterion was assessed as having 'Exceptional' heritage significance. Overall Archifact assessment is that the building has '**Moderate**' heritage significance.

5.2 Wellington City Research Report Heritage Assessment

The Heritage Value Assessment undertaken as a part of the research report completed in 2012 had evaluation conclusions comparable with the Archifact Ltd analysis. The following matrix shows the heritage values assessment:

Cultural heritage values:

(NA = Not Applicable)

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

The Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high-density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

The monolithic high-rise block of flats is a significant visual element in the cityscape and has townscape value for that reason.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

The Gordon Wilson Flats have a relationship to the neighbouring McLean State Flats, and the nearby Dixon Street Flats, forming a collection of buildings of similar design and purpose in the same part of central Wellington.

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation? NA*

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The flats are associated with the social policy of the government of the day and were an endeavour to solve a chronic housing shortage. They were the last of the high-rise tower-block social housing developments designed by the Ministry of Works & Development (although there were several later high-rise social housing developments constructed by the Wellington City Council). The flats are also associated with economic recovery in the 1950s which led to a boom in the building industry.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Central City NZAA R27/270

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past? NA*

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

The building has technological value for the inclusion of equipment to measure earthquake movements, a practice that was not widely used in New Zealand at the time. The building also has technological value for being one of, if not the first, building in New Zealand to use the particular system of piling employed.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem? NA*

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it? NA*

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity? NA

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

This building fulfils an ongoing function as social housing, although this is in temporary respite while the earthquake prone status of the building is resolved.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection? NA*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding? NA*

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high-density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The building has had relatively few intrusive modern alterations or additions and retains much of its original built fabric.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

The building is of local significance as an example of Modernist high-density social housing. It is of some significance nationally as the last high-rise tower block designed as social housing by the Ministry of Works.

The heritage criteria assessments undertaken as:

- (i) a component of the district plan change application (Archifact Ltd), and
- (ii) the heritage criteria undertaken as a part of the internal Wellington City Council research report on the building

both reach similar conclusions. The building has some heritage characteristics which are of moderate value on a scale of Exceptional Significance to No Significance.

6 Adaptation and Future Uses

A key factor in assessing “historic heritage values” is that assessment is dependent on the features intrinsic to the particular heritage item, its immediate surroundings and townscape issues or its place in the local, regional or national “collection” of heritage items. However, there are a wide range of both intrinsic and extrinsic considerations that impact on the overall values of a heritage item which must be evaluated in order to arrive at a comprehensive assessment of the whole worth of a building, which must be structurally sound and have a viable economic use to survive.

Changes in approaches to city resilience after a disaster, triggered by seismic activity in New Zealand, including earthquakes in Canterbury and sizeable shakes in Wellington, are influencing decision-making processes with respect to all building and including heritage buildings. In order to defend the retention of a heritage building, or its demolition, an analysis of a range of both intrinsic heritage values and extrinsic non-heritage values is necessary to arrive at an objective argument for retention, upgrading or removal of a building.

Considerations of external issues, which affect heritage management and conservation, are generally not the objective of a discrete heritage assessment. It is necessary to have a range of expert analyses from different disciplines, to be able to consider all options for a building’s future. Accommodating all these analyses, alongside the heritage assessments is important in order to have an understanding of all possible options for the future of the building.

The assessment and options reports provided by the applicant cover a wide range of areas of expertise, including Seismic Assessment, Building Condition and Options Assessment, Building Services Condition Assessment, Architectural Review, Urban Design Review and Adaptation Reporting. These consider the current condition of the building, options for future uses and budgetary implications of a range of possible adaptations for future use. The solutions considered to structural questions in general appear to require that both the exterior and interiors of the building will be significantly modified in order to achieve the required level of New Building Standard (NBS). These modifications would significantly affect the aesthetic and architectural heritage values of the building. Apart from the social and cultural values which are attributed to the building, whether the building would retain sufficient of the identified architectural features of heritage importance, is open to question until any final possible concepts for changes to the building are considered.

Assessing the future of a heritage building and taking into account all issues, including both heritage values and possible future uses does to some extent depend on the level of heritage status of the building or place in question. Heritage New Zealand has a two tier list with a third “Historic Landmarks” list currently being developed. The WCC District Plan Heritage Schedule does not rank items – all buildings/items have the same status and are managed using the same rules. The District

Plan does not differentiate between those buildings which are highly valued either locally, regionally, nationally or internationally and those which are of lesser significance. The level of significance of an item can only be deduced through considering the research report provided. Without a formal system of ranking heritage buildings in relation to the entire collection of scheduled buildings or of a group of buildings within the schedule (such as multi-storey apartments) is problematic. All scheduled items have the same value. This makes prioritisation and where to direct resources for the most effective heritage protection, a challenging matter.

The applicant has concluded that having prepared a wide range of detailed reports by recognised professionals in the field and examining a range of options, the economic and future use values are not sufficient to enable the building to be successfully adapted for a viable, sustainable future use.

7 Discussion

Recent (2012) research completed on the building by Council researchers, confirmed that the building has sufficient standing to warrant it remaining in the District Plan Heritage Schedule. According to the Council's heritage research and evaluation of the building, in comparison to other similar buildings in Wellington the assessment places the building as having "moderate" heritage value. It comes within the range of buildings that qualify for inclusion in the Heritage Schedule. This evaluation does not take into account economic, structural or other extrinsic factors which may come to bear either at the time of assessment or in the future.

In the case of the Gordon Wilson Flats, the heritage value of the building lies not only with the aesthetic interest as a representation of an architectural typology but also in its representation of a contemporary, modernist style of social housing, that was relatively unusual in New Zealand. The majority of social housing had been stand alone or semi-detached houses on a plot of land in suburban situations, rather than flats located in the central city and focussed on housing for single occupants or couples, rather than the traditional family group. These factors have been taken into account in the Council's assessment for inclusion in the District Plan Heritage Schedule.

The other two examples of similar social housing styles in Wellington are the Dixon Street Flats in the central city and Centennial Flats in Berhampore. Both are considered to be exceptional examples of the multi storey housing genre and have been assessed by the Council as having high heritage significance. These two are listed in the District Plan Heritage Schedule. They are also included as Category 1 Historic Places in the Heritage New Zealand List. The Gordon Wilson Flats building is not included in the Heritage New Zealand List.

In a brief review of three recent publications focusing on state-provided housing in New Zealand (see bibliography) the Gordon Wilson Flats are not included as examples of the multi storey social housing buildings of the mid-twentieth century. However Gordon Wilson as the chief architect of the Ministry of Works at the time the flats were built is recognised as having an important influence on the design of social housing in the mid twentieth century and this building was named in his memory as he died at the time the building was being constructed.

The application provides a Heritage Assessment prepared by Archifact Ltd. The Archifact report states the following:

*“This report is an objective and independent assessment of heritage values of the Gordon Wilson Flats development and has proved to be a finely balanced exercise in determining the level of significance for the place. The Gordon Wilson Flats are considered overall to be of **moderate** significance.”*

The reports from the Council and Archifact Ltd closely align in their assessment of the heritage significance of the building.

8 Summary

The application by Victoria University of Wellington for a District Plan Change to de-schedule the Gordon Wilson Flats would result in the loss of building included in the District Plan Heritage Schedule. The Wellington City District Plan (Section 20.2.1.2) allows for the consideration of demolition but only where all reasonable options for retention or adaptation have been given full consideration.

The heritage research report completed by Wellington City Council in 2012 and the heritage report provided by the applicant have been examined. Although the Council report does not assign a rank or estimate of the level of significance, the assessment against criteria is similar to that presented by Archifact Ltd. As discussed above in this report, without a broad ranking system of assessing heritage significance such as is used by Heritage New Zealand it is problematic to evaluate where this building is positioned in relation to other buildings and items in the collection of heritage places scheduled in Wellington. When compared with other similar scheduled buildings it is apparent that it is not the most significant multi-storey public housing building in the city.

There is no question that the building has been researched and has appropriately been included in the WCC Heritage Schedule. It is the legislative role of the Council to ensure that a wide, representative collection of heritage buildings are identified which as a whole tell the story of the development of the city. The collection enables well-informed decisions to be made in the future about where resources are best utilized.

The assessment and evaluation processes which led to scheduling rested entirely on the heritage attributes of the building and its place in the heritage landscape of the city. When assessing a building for heritage scheduling it is not appropriate to take into account the broad range of extrinsic factors which will come to bear on the future of the building. When the future of the building is being contemplated, for whatever reason, it is then appropriate to take into consideration all the range of other factors which will impact on the future use, safety and economic viability of the building. Also to be taken into account will be the status of the building in either the local, regional or national heritage collection.

The analysis of heritage significance provided by the applicant and the evaluation undertaken as a component of the research and assessment of the building by the Council research team, come to similar conclusions – that the building has a **moderate** level of heritage significance. Also, the building is not the most important example of its genre in either Wellington or elsewhere in New Zealand.

Reports on the building provided by the applicant have been commissioned from experts in a wide range of building issues. Options for future uses of the building have also been considered and assessed. The reports provided by the applicant come to the conclusion that it will be difficult to adapt the building for a new use within reasonable economic limits. For a building to survive into the

future it must be able to be reused and adapted to new uses and also stand comparison to the cost of a new purpose built structure. From the information and professional reports provided by the applicant, it appears that these objectives will be difficult to meet.

I consider the respective assessments to be sufficient and agree with their conclusions, as outlined above. I agree that the building has a moderate level of heritage significance and is not the most important example of its genre.

The question now is whether the heritage values of the building and the non-heritage considerations have been sufficiently well researched in order for a defensible outcome to be reached.

Vivien Rickard - Principal Heritage Advisor, District Plan
18 September 2015

8 Bibliography

Books:

Gatley, J, 2008. *Long Live the Modern, New Zealand's Architecture 1904-1984*. Published by Auckland University Press.

McKay, B and Stevens A., 2014. *Beyond the State: New Zealand State Houses From Modest to Modern*. Published by Penguin Books Ltd.

Schrader, B, 2005. *We Call it Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*. Published by Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd.

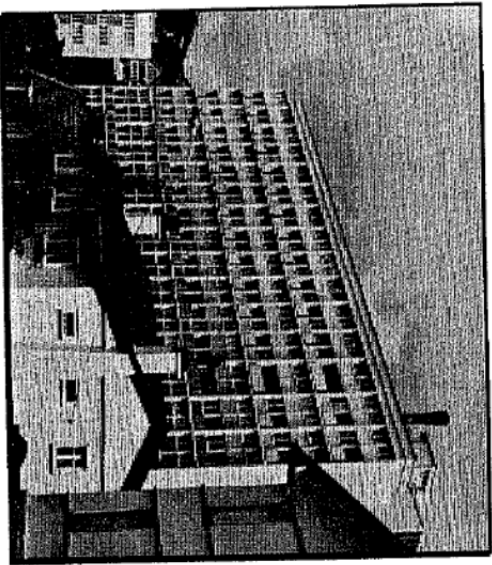
Reports:

Application for District Plan Change – 320 The Terrace. Victoria University of Wellington. July 2015

Research Report. Gordon Wilson Flats. Wellington City Council. 2012.

APPENDIX 1 - Heritage Inventory – 1995. Gordon Wilson Flats.

GORDON WILSON FLATS 320 The Terrace



Architect: Gordon Wilson.
Architectural Style: Modernist.
Compilation Date: January 1994.
Condition:
Visible Material: Reinforced concrete, rendered cement.

Date of Construction: 1950's.
Building Type/Use: Residential Housing Block.
Photo Negative: 7.12.11994.
District Plan: Map 16, reference 299.

□ HISTORY

Built on an historic site of the first residence of Mr George Hunter, the first Mayor of Wellington. The block provides 116 units (mostly single bedroom), and its height varies from seven to ten storeys with a maximum height of 100 ft, which was higher than other buildings of the time. Unlike Berhampore Flats also designed by Gordon Wilson, the Gordon Wilson Flats are a monolithic unit with a group of lifts at the centre. Ernst Pilschke's contribution to the design is an unanswered question. His arrival in New Zealand shortly before this block was built, and the fact that he was working in the housing division put him in a position to be influential. (1)

□ HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Gordon Wilson Flats are an important high density housing development, and one of a type of construction rare in New Zealand. They are still one of the largest public housing projects undertaken in the country, and exist as a memento to the social housing policies of the post-war Governments.

□ ARCHITECT

To his predecessor's sound organisation, Gordon Wilson brought his brilliant design skill to the position of Government architect. He had already made his mark in private practice with many major projects to his credit. He had also had, a highly successful record of achievement as Chief Architect for the Housing Construction Department. He had designed the Dixon Street Flats (1947, in association with Ernst Pilschke) that had gained for him a Gold Medal Award. He was tireless in design, leaving nothing unstudied, and he had the capacity to enthuse all his staff with the same degree of intense involvement. Architectural design was his whole life, and to many young architects he was the arbiter of "contemporary design". During his short term as leader of the Architectural Division - from 1952-1959 - he was responsible for the Bledisloe Building, Auckland; the Bowen State Building,

Wellington: State Flats, Grey's Avenue, Auckland; the Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington; the Dental School, Dunedin; the Milford Hotel; the Engineering School, Canterbury University; and many more.⁽²⁾

*Level of Authenticity: Maintains a high level of authenticity of design, materiality, function, workmanship and setting.
Statement of Significance:*

SOURCES:

- (1) Wellington's New Buildings, David Kernohan.
- (2) Booklet prepared by Architectural Division of the Ministry of Works.
- (3) VUW School of Architecture, Research Report, Stuart Gardyne.

ARCHITECTURE

An architectural landmark in many ways. It was a very big building by Wellington standards, and went some way in creating a new urban scale. Previously only smaller luxury apartments had been built. The building signalled a rising 'social concern' of the Government and architects. New institutional clients, had given the modern movement a start. Flat roofs, no cornices, sheer walls. No window architrave or raised lintels, no capitals or pediments and originally no colour.

The individual unit's appear as boxes placed into the structural grid of the building block. The layout of each unit is planned on two levels, the upper level accommodates the two bedrooms and bathroom while the bottom level provides kitchen and living room, and a small recessed balcony that faces the harbour.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

Cultural:

Emotional:

Historical: The building is a response to the social policy of the Government of the day, an endeavour to solve the chronic housing shortages. Later responses moved away high-density developments like this one to medium and low density solutions.

Design: The design is a significant example of the social agenda of the period and an exploration of modern principals of architecture. The apartment block is a significant element in the cityscape.

Use: Maintains social and functional use values.

Contextual: The building represents an important expression of the modern movement in architecture.

APPENDIX 2

Wellington City Council - Research Report May 2012

Gordon Wilson Flats

320 The Terrace



View of Gordon Wilson Flats from The Terrace (Charles Collins, 2015)

Summary of heritage significance

- The Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.
- The flats are associated with the social policy of the government of the day and were an endeavour to solve a chronic housing shortage. They were the last of the high-rise tower-block social housing developments designed by the Ministry of Works & Development. The flats are also associated with economic recovery in the 1950s which led to a boom in the building industry.
- The flats were designed by Government Architect Gordon Wilson, who died while the flats were nearing completion. It is for this reason they were named in his honour.

District Plan:	Map 16, Symbol 299
Legal Description:	Lot 1, DP 363050

Heritage Area:	None 2012
HPT Listed:	None 2012
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	The Terrace Flats
Key physical dates:	Built: 1957-1959
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Architectural Division of the Ministry of Works, under chief architect Gordon Wilson.
Former uses:	Low cost State Housing rental accommodation
Current uses:	Vacant as at May 2012 (evacuated - safety concerns)
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not EQP (IEP 27/11/2006, SR 210925)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The Department of Housing Construction was set up in 1936 by New Zealand's first Labour government to construct state rental houses.¹ Gordon Wilson was appointed chief architect of the Department in 1938, he became chief architect of the Housing Division of the Ministry of Works from 1943 – 1952, assistant Government Architect from 1948 – 1952 and Government Architect from 1952-59.² The Gordon Wilson Flats (originally known as The Terrace Flats), were renamed to honour Wilson when he died shortly before their completion in 1959.³

The flats were built on the site of the first residence of Mr George Hunter, the first mayor of Wellington.⁴ They were sited next to the existing McLean State Flats (built 1943-44), an earlier social housing scheme of which Gordon Wilson was involved in the design and construction. The original plans are signed by 'Gordon Wilson, Government Architect' and dated August 1954, at a time when Wilson was Government Architect at the head office of the Ministry of Works. The detailed design was completed by the Wellington District Office of the Ministry of Works.⁵

New Zealand's state social housing (multi-unit) designs of the 1930s – 1950s were influenced by the 'International Style' of Modernism promoted by Swiss/French architect Le Corbusier, German architects Mies van de Rohe, Walter Gropius and others. The manifesto of Modernism spread from continental Europe in the 1930s, partly due to the Diaspora that fled from the oppressive regime in Nazi Germany at a time when Modernism was at odds with the prevailing political ideology. Two outstanding examples of New Zealand's state housing designed in the 'International Style' are the Berhampore (Centennial) Flats (1939-40), and the Dixon Street State Flats (1941-44). The Berhampore Flats were the Labour Government's first multi-unit scheme of social housing, and one of the first, largest and most complete schemes of buildings designed in the 'International Style' in New Zealand⁶ and the similarly styled Dixon Street State Flats won the NZIA Gold Medal in 1947.

In New Zealand the best known Modernist architect 'refugee' was Austrian Ernst Plischke who worked for the Department of Housing Construction (c1939-1947)⁷. For some of this time he worked under Gordon Wilson as Chief Architect on designs for multiple-unit housing blocks. However, due to a personality clash, in 1942 Plischke became a community planner under Reg Hammond in the same department.

The level to which Plischke may have been involved in the design of the building when he still worked under Wilson is unknown, but a 1942 drawing by Plischke shows a design for the

¹ See also: Ben Schrader, "Housing and government - State loans and state houses", *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 13-Jul-12, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/housing-and-government/page-2>

² Julia Gatley, "Wilson, Francis Gordon – Biography", from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1 September 2010, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w36/1>

³ "The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works," *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961):1

⁴ Wellington City Council, "Gordon Wilson Flats," *Heritage Inventory - 1995* (Wellington City Council, 1995)

⁵ "The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works," *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961):1

⁶ Julia Gatley, "For Modern Living: Government Blocks of Flats" in *Zeal and Crusade*, (Christchurch: Waihora Press, 1996), 53; also Julia Gatley, *Long Live the Modern: Zealand's New Architecture 1904-1984*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), 34.

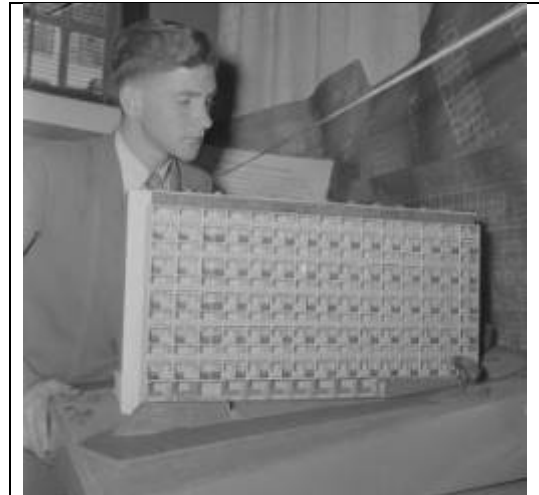
⁷ Linda Tyler, "Plischke, Ernst Anton - Biography", from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 30 October 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5p31/plischke-ernst-anton>

McLean and Terrace Flats.⁸ This drawing is slightly different from the final plans, the most notable differences being the siting of the building; that the staircase is located in the middle of the block, rather than at one end; and the monolithic finish of the building that is closer to the streamlined 'International Style' than the later 1950s Modernism of the Gordon Wilson Flats.

The final design of the Gordon Wilson Flats is somewhat similar to the Grays Avenue Flats in Auckland. The basic plan was designed to maximise views and sunlight on a difficult and steeply sloping site, and to manage costs, structure and amenities.⁹ "After basic research by architects and associated specialist engineers, the solution finally adopted was to provide bed-sitting rooms in the basement and above that to make the remainder of the accommodation in two-bedroom flats on the maisonette principle."¹⁰ The building was the last large, high-rise block of flats designed by the Ministry of Works, before a change in ideology led the provision of social housing solely by low density houses and low rise units.

High-rise, high-density social housing schemes designed on Modernist principles have been identified as problematic in many European countries. In many instances social problems have been exacerbated by housing high-density, at-risk populations in building that were poorly maintained and with insecure communal spaces (particularly staircases & lifts). In New Zealand these problems have been exacerbated by structural problems with the innovative designs of the Modernist era, and in 2011 the nearby McLean State Flats were evacuated when they were deemed to be earthquake prone.¹¹

The Gordon Wilson Flats were evacuated in May 2012 following an engineer's report commissioned by Housing New Zealand that identified the need for urgent remedial work to large concrete panels on the building's exterior facade. The media reported that "they could fall and crush people during an earthquake or strong wind..."¹² and the buildings population of over 130 residents were given seven days to vacate the building. Although some residents spoke to media about their sentimental attachment to the building including one who said that "This is my castle, I love it here,"¹³ others were more equivocal noting problems with other marginalised, often anti-social tenants, and a lack of building maintenance.



An architectural model of Gordon Wilson Flats at a housing exhibition in 1955 (ATL, EP/1955/2193-F)

⁸ August Sarnitz, and Eva B Ottillinger, *Ernst Plischke: Modern Architecture for the New World* (Prestel Publishing, 2004)

⁹ "The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works," *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961):1

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lane Nichols, 'Unsafe flats: Tenants told to leave within week', *Dominion Post*, May 10 2012, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/6897604/Unsafe-flats-Tenants-told-to-leave-within-week>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lane Nichols, 'Unsafe flats: 'This is my castle.' *Dominion Post*, May 11 012 <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/6900410/Unsafe-flats-This-is-my-castle>



Aerial view of the Gordon Wilson Flats under construction c1958-9. The McLean State Flats are to the left (Ref: EP-Industry-Housing-State-02, ATL)

1.2 Timeline of modifications

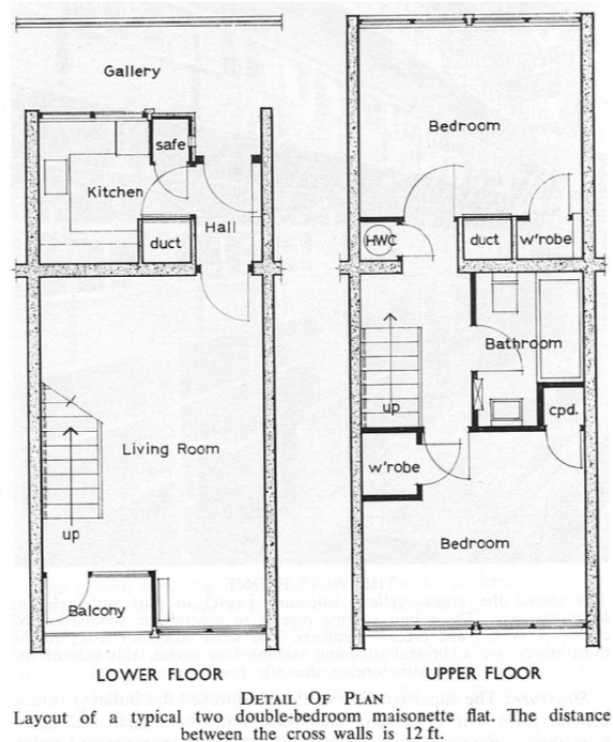


Image reproduced from The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, p3

1957-9 Building constructed

2011 Replacement of stairwell windows, repair and replace membrane roof, replacement of service stair and safety railing, general fire upgrade, install 10 abseil anchor points on the roof, general repair and maintenance work (SR 226613, SR227008).

1.3 Architect

(Francis) Gordon Wilson – Government Architect (1952 – 1959)

Gordon Wilson's¹⁴ began his public service career as chief architect for the Department of Housing in 1938. He had worked previously as an associate partner at Gummer and Ford and is known to have been involved in the design of the Remuera Public Library, Auckland Railway Station, Wellington Public Library, the National War Memorial and Carillon, and the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum building in Wellington. The design of both the Wellington Public Library (now the City Gallery) and the Dominion Museum building have also been attributed to him. He continued with the Department of Housing until 1943 when he was appointed chief architect of the Housing Division of the Ministry of Works from 1943 – 1952, and progressed to assistant Government Architect from 1948 – 1952. He was Government Architect until his death in 1959.

¹⁴ Julia Gatley, "Wilson, Francis Gordon – Biography", from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1 September 2010, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w36/1>

The various civil service government architectural offices led by Wilson produced many buildings that were at the leading edge of architectural design style throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s. The result was that he was able to attract many gifted young architects to the civil service, particularly the ‘refugee architects who had fled Europe in the 1930s’.¹⁵ Many of his protégées became noted architects in their own right including Ernst Plischke, Fred Newman, Helmut Einhorn, Ian Reynolds and George Porter.

The key buildings during Wilson’s years in the NZ civil service include:

- Bledisloe State Building
- Flats in Grey’s Avenue, Auckland
- Bowen State Building
- Gordon Wilson Flats
- School of Engineering building at the University of Canterbury
- University of Otago Dental School building

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Gordon Wilson Flats are a multi-storey block of social housing that varies in height from 7 – 10 storeys depending on topography. The building was designed with bedsitting rooms on the ground floor level(s) along with a caretaker’s office, and storage for baggage and prams. There were 75 maisonette flats above ground floor and laundry washing and drying facilities on the roof. Each 64m² maisonette consisted of a lounge and kitchen at entry level, with a stair to two bedrooms and a bathroom on the upper level.¹⁶

Exterior of the building is dominated by the expressed structural grid pattern. A primary grid denotes the individual two-storey, two bay maisonette tenancies, and this is further divided by a secondary grid that divides the elevation of the maisonettes at bedroom floor level, and vertically through the bedroom and living room windows. Most of the visible structural elements are concrete, particularly the wall and floor slabs, the precast spandrel panels and window (mullion) posts. The balcony fronts were vitreous enamelled metal and were once decorated in an alternating pattern of red & blue, although this appears to have been over-painted at a later date. The concrete structure was designed as a fair-faced finish, although the internal walls of the apartments were generally papered or painted. The internal floors within the maisonettes were constructed in timber.

The building was partly built into a site that sloped steeply and the hillside was stabilised with a series of crib walls that step back into the hillside and retain up to 20m vertically. The building’s piling system was a new technology for its time and consisted of pre-drilling the holes, filling them with reinforcement and aggregate, and pumping them full of a wet mix of sand and cement.

2.2 Materials

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works,” *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961): 6

Reinforced concrete piles, foundations, walls, floor-slabs, roofs, and stairs

2.3 Setting

The Gordon Wilson Flats are located on a large, prominent, steeply sloping site on the Terrace and are a landmark that is visible from various points around the city, including Mt Victoria and Roseneath. The site includes the much smaller McLean State Flats (1943-44) designed in an earlier 'International Style'.

3.0 Sources

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4.0 Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

The Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high-density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

The monolithic high-rise block of flats is a significant visual element in the cityscape and has townscape value for that reason.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

The Gordon Wilson Flats have a relationship to the neighbouring McLean State Flats, and the nearby Dixon Street Flats, forming a collection of buildings of similar design and purpose in the same part of central Wellington.

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The flats are associated with the social policy of the government of the day and were an endeavour to solve a chronic housing shortage. They were the last of the high-rise tower-block social housing developments designed by the Ministry of Works & Development (although there were several later high-rise social housing developments constructed by the Wellington City Council). The flats are also associated with economic recovery in the 1950s which led to a boom in the building industry.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

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Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

The building has technological value for the inclusion of equipment to measure earthquake movements, a practice that was not widely used in New Zealand at the time. The building also has technological value for being one of, if not the first, building in New Zealand to use the particular system of piling employed.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

This building fulfils an ongoing function as social housing, although this is in temporary respite while the earthquake prone status of the building is resolved.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high-density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The building has had relatively few intrusive modern alterations or additions and retains much of its original built fabric.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

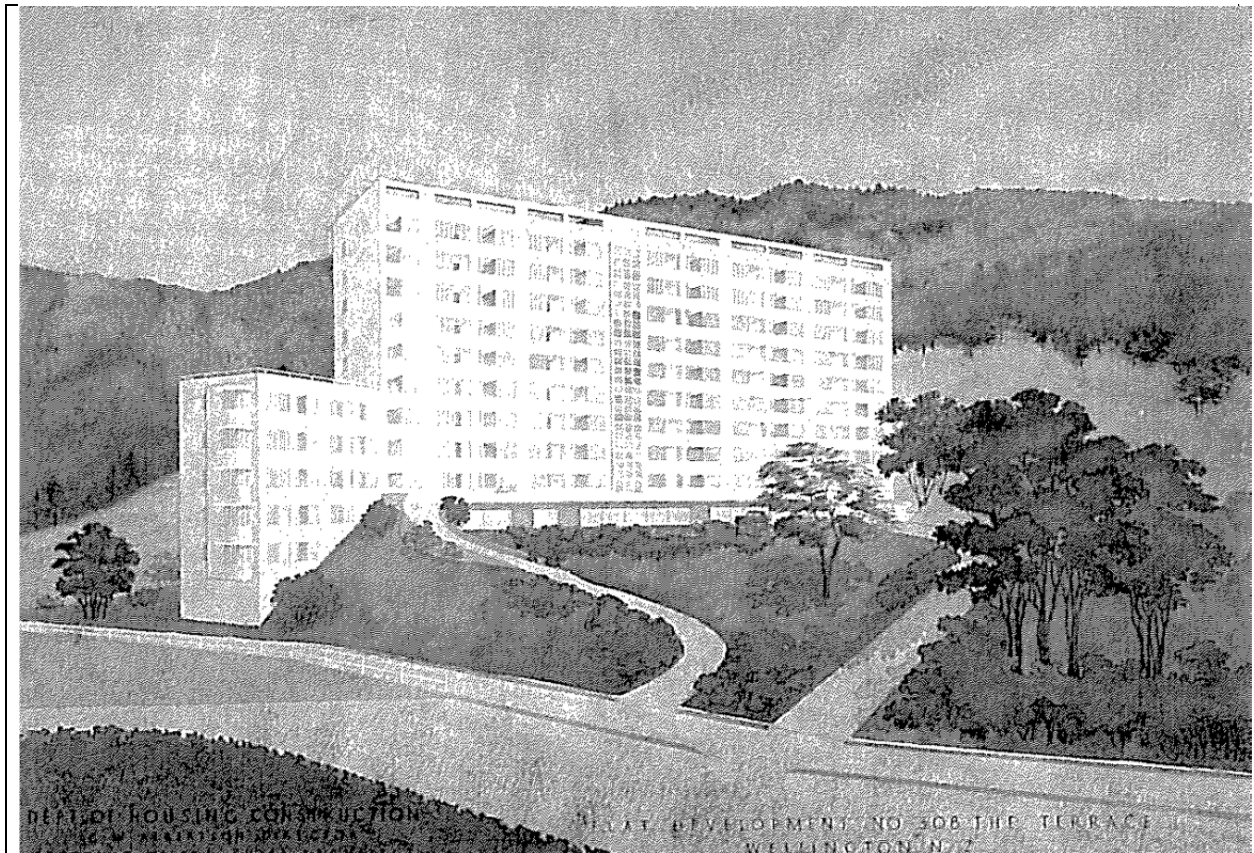
The building is of local significance as an example of Modernist high-density social housing. It is of some significance nationally as the last high-rise tower block designed as social housing by the Ministry of Works.

5.0 Appendix

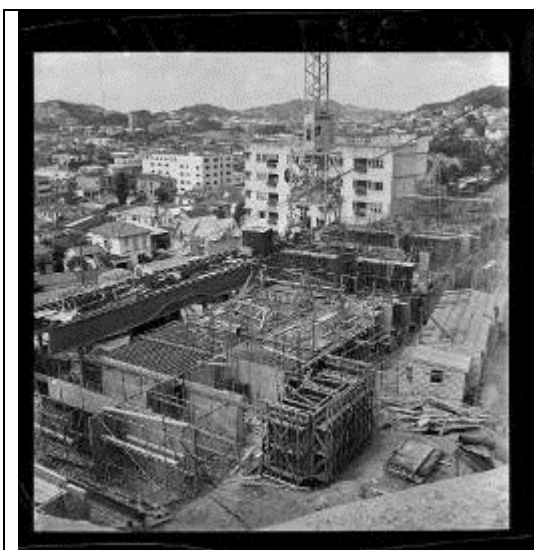
Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	N	Not included
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	N	Not listed
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research



This 1942 perspective sketch shows the proposed McLean State Flats with a larger wing of multi-storey flats behind that later became the Gordon Wilson Flats.¹⁷



¹⁷ Image: *Ernst Plischke: Modern Architecture for the New World*, p 148

Gordon Wilson Flats under construction circa 11 February 1957. The McLean State Flats are behind the Downer crane. *Evening Post*. (Timeframes EP/1957/0397-F)