

Proposed District Plan Change 81 Submission form

Absolutely Positively
Wellington City Council

Rezoning 320 The Terrace and De-listing the Gordon Wilson Flats

Form 5, Clause 6 of First Schedule, Resource Management Act 1991

Submissions can be

Emailed to: district.plan@wcc.govt.nz

Posted to: District Plan Team
Wellington City Council
PO Box 2199
Wellington 6011

Delivered to: Ground Floor Reception
Civic Square/101 Wakefield Street
Wellington

We need your submission by Friday 25 September 2015 at 5pm

Your name and contact details

Full names:

Dr Ben Schrader, historian
Michael Kelly, heritage consultant
Chris Cochran, conservation architect

Full address

c/- Dr Ben Schrader, 41 Northland Road, Northland, Wellington 6012

Address for service of person making submission

As above

Phone 475-4284

Fax

Email lisben@xtra.co.nz

Trade competition and adverse effects (*select appropriate*)

We could not gain an advantage in trade competition through this submission.

We are not directly affected by an effect of the subject matter of the submission that:

(a) adversely effects the environment, and

(b) does not relate to the trade competition or the effects of trade competitions.

Delete entire paragraph if you could not gain an advantage in trade competition through this submission.

**The specific provisions of proposed District Plan Change 81
that our submission relates are as follows** *(Please continue on separate sheet(s) if necessary.)*

1 Remove Gordon Wilson Flats at 320 The Terrace from the Heritage List.

1.1 Remove 'Gordon Wilson Flats' from the Heritage List in Chapter 21 and also remove heritage notation '299' from District Plan Map 16.

2 Change the zoning of 320 The Terrace to Institutional Precinct.

2.1 Change the zoning of 320 The Terrace from 'Inner Residential' to 'Institutional Precinct' with corresponding change to District Plan Maps 12 and 16.

Our submission is that

(You should include whether you support or oppose the specific provisions or wish to have them amended. You should also state the reasons for your views. Please continue on separate sheet(s) if necessary.)

Plan change items 1 & 2 (as cited above) should not proceed in any form.

The Gordon Wilson Flats is listed on the district plan (and should remain on it) for very sound reasons. The building is of very great historic and architectural significance and its protection and conservation should be strongly supported by the WCC. The importance of the building is outlined in an attachment to this submission.

The use of a plan change to demolish a listed heritage building is completely inappropriate. Demolition of a listed heritage item is a discretionary unrestricted activity and should be assessed through the normal resource consent process. The merits of the proposal can be decided via such an application.

It is critical that a precedent is not set in this fashion, namely that an institution other than the WCC successfully pursues a private plan change of this nature. The WCC should determine what is listed on the DP via its usual public processes and manage plan changes when appropriate, as it has always done.

The Gordon Wilson Flats does not need to be demolished and the zoning does not need to be changed. The building can be repaired and restored and used as student accommodation. Victoria University ought to be setting a better example in its use and care of heritage buildings, even ones that it takes over or inherits.

We seek the following decision from the Council *(Please give precise detail.)*

That proposed plan change 81 is rejected.

Please indicate by ticking the relevant box whether you wish to be heard in support of your submission

- We wish to speak at the hearing in support of our submission.
 I do not wish to speak at the hearing in support of my submission.

Joint submissions

- If others make a similar submission, please tick this box if you will consider presenting a joint case with them at the hearing.

If you have used extra sheets for this submission, please attach them to this form and indicate this below

- Yes, we have attached extra sheets. No, we have not attached extra sheets.

Signature of submitter *(or person authorised to sign on behalf of submitter)*:



Date 25/09/2015

Personal information is used for the administration of the submission process and will be made public. All information collected will be held by Wellington City Council, with submitters having the right to access and correct personal information.

The Heritage Significance of the Gordon Wilson Flats

The building was designed in the head office of the Ministry of Works, and construction supervised by the Wellington District Office. The plans were at least in part the work of Ernst Plischke, the Austrian-born émigré who worked for the Ministry of Works under chief architect Gordon Wilson. Plischke was, together with Wilson and a handful of others, one of the most important Modernist architects in New Zealand history. A design by Plischke, dated to 1942, shows a building that in idiom and scale was very like the one eventually designed. It confirms how the design ideas he was promoting had already been absorbed by the Government's own architects.

The original plans, signed by Gordon Wilson, were not completed until August 1954, and the building itself was not finished until 1959, but the flats still broke new ground. They were uncompromisingly Modernist in style and closely followed the kind of apartment construction then becoming common in Western European countries. The structure introduced maissonette-style flats to New Zealand, a type that Le Corbusier's famous *Habité d'Habitation* in Marseilles (1947-55) pioneered. This building and the related Upper Grey Street Flats are the only examples of maissonette social housing flats in New Zealand. Although the building was one of the biggest in the city, its impact on the environment was cleverly reduced by its construction against - and beneath - Kelburn hill.

In 1961, in a review of the building, the *Journal of the NZIA* noted that the system of piling was not known to have been used before in New Zealand. It involved 'placing reinforcement and dry concrete aggregate' in a pre-bored cavity, and then 'grouting with a fluid mixture of cement and sand.' The system proved to be not only economic, but also 'ensured a better key with the sloping rock beds'.¹ The building's technological value is also enhanced by the fact that it also included equipment to measure seismic movements, not a common practice at the time.

The extent of the government's commitment to mass social housing was fully evident in this building. It concluded that the answer to housing state tenants in low-cost accommodation in inner-city areas was large apartment buildings. These included the Dixon Street Flats (opened 1944) and Symonds Street and Greys Avenue Flats in Auckland (both opened 1947). The buildings were intended to provide accommodation for pensioners, single people, childless couples and others who wanted to live close to city workplaces and amenities. The Gordon Wilson Flats was a further huge statement of intent. The accommodation provided was generous. The complex comprises 75 maissonette style apartments, most with two double bedrooms, and 12 bedsitting-room flats.

The high-rise slab block of flats is a significant townscape feature and dominates the southern end of The Terrace. It also maintains high authenticity in its design, materials and setting.

Together with the adjacent McLean State Flats, and the nearby Dixon Street Flats, the building is part of an important collection of buildings of a similar design and purpose located in the same part of central Wellington. More widely, Wellington is the home of some of the most important buildings in the history of the provision of mass social housing in New Zealand, including the Centennial Flats on Adelaide Road (1940). There is no comparable collection of state-built flats like it in the country.

Gordon Wilson Flats was the last large multi-storey state housing complex built in Wellington. It foreshadowed the embrace of city-based social housing provision in the 1960s by the Wellington City Council, which went on to build many more large apartment buildings. (The recent excellent renovation of Newtown Park Flats surely shows the redevelopment potential of this structure.)

The building has historic significance for its association with one of New Zealand's most celebrated Modernist architects, Gordon Wilson, who died while it was being constructed. The building was fittingly named after him. The connection with the Ministry of Works, the government's builders for over 110 years, is also historically significant.

¹ '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, Serial No 222, p.5