

**BEFORE THE INDEPENDENT HEARINGS PANEL AT WELLINGTON CITY I MUA NGĀ  
KAIKŌMIHANA WHAKAWĀ MOTUHAKE NGĀMOTU**

**UNDER THE Resource Management Act 1991  
IN THE MATTER OF the hearing of submissions on the Proposed Wellington City Plan  
(Hearing Stream 2)**

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF MICHAEL KELLY ON BEHALF OF CLAIRE NOLAN  
AND OTHERS GROUP 275**

**Qualifications and experience**

1. My name is Michael Kelly. I am a historian and heritage consultant and I have been working in historic heritage for the majority of the past 40 years. I have been an independent consultant since 1997. Prior to that I worked for Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) and the Department of Conservation. Over my career I have undertaken a wide range of heritage-related work for many different organisations.
2. Of particular relevance to these hearings is my work in heritage significance assessment, particularly in Wellington. I have written significance assessments for Wellington buildings, objects and areas from the outset of my career. This work includes listing proposals for HNZPT and inventory entries for the Wellington City Council (WCC) for district plans and plan changes. The WCC work has comprised individual and heritage area listings, and reports on suburban centres (including Newtown), prepared mostly in collaboration with other heritage practitioners. I have also written or co-written heritage assessments of the inner-city suburbs of Thorndon and Mt Victoria.
3. Beyond my heritage work, I taught heritage conservation at Victoria University as part of the Museum and Heritage Studies Masters programme from 2007 to 2019. I am currently president of the Professional Historians' Association of New Zealand/Aotearoa (PHANZA).
4. Disclosures: I am contracted to the WCC to provide historic heritage advice on resource consents on an as-needed basis. Allied to this, I have been contracted to provide advice on a range of other matters in recent years, including the preparation of conservation plans, one-off listings and heritage assessments. I am also part of the Wellington Heritage Professionals, which is presenting a series of submissions on heritage-related aspects during the PDP hearings.

**Evidence**

5. My evidence is in general support of the submission of 'Claire Nolan and others group 275' (the 'Newtown Group').

## A brief history of Newtown

6. Newtown is generally regarded as one of Wellington's inner-city suburbs. The area was laid out by William Mein Smith in 1840 in his plan for the New Zealand Company and his street arrangement can still mostly be seen on the ground to this day. Newtown's point of difference is that, although it was part of the original settlement plan, it was sufficiently removed from the city that it arguably constituted Wellington's first proper suburb, as opposed to the likes of Thorndon or Mt Cook, which sat on the cusp of the city in what was then regarded as a reasonable walkable distance. Newtown grew because trams made the suburb accessible.
7. Although it was settled sporadically from early on in the city's history, Newtown really hit its stride from 1879 when it was linked via an extension to the city's first passenger transport system – the steam-driven (soon to be horse-driven) tramway – which opened the previous year. The suburb's growth was boosted by the opening of Wellington Hospital in Newtown in 1881, which was first planned in 1875.
8. There were, broadly speaking, two phases in Newtown's development. That initial development, tied to the tram and hospital, saw a selection of town acres opened up for subdivision and then occupied, particularly around the Riddiford Street / Constable Street intersection. This is reflected in the 1891 Ward Map, which shows relatively intensive settlement in some areas, particularly south of Constable Street, along with rows of vacant town acres.
9. The second phase was fed by a move away from the intensely settled city centre in the early 1900s, hastened by the launch of the electrified tramway in 1904. By this time, Te Aro had become densely settled and something of a slum. The tram facilitated a move to the suburbs and took the pressure off the city. Some of this shift began in anticipation of the arrival of the tram. Newtown, still far from full, also benefited from this move. It gradually filled over the following two decades and by the late 1920s was very closely settled.<sup>1</sup>
10. Newtown's suburban character is dominated by the late Victorian, Edwardian and pre-World War II housing built by owners and developers over a 50-year period. There are one-off designs, workers' cottages, pattern-book villas and even some bungalows. There are large or grand houses, but they are mostly confined to the south end of the suburb. Commercial expansion has nibbled away at the edges of residential areas and infill and multi-unit developments have also changed parts of the suburb. Many houses have been modified, but, with the exception of houses stripped of their characteristics, this should not necessarily be seen as disqualifying, as adaptation of dwellings is highly characteristic of life in Wellington's inner-city suburbs.

---

<sup>1</sup> A longer but concise history of Newtown can be found here:  
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/nwo3hsypxv46usq/History%20of%20Newtown%20-%20Kelly.pdf?dl=0>

## **Newtown Group's submission**

11. As outlined in their submission, the Newtown Group has sought changes to the Proposed District Plan.
12. Firstly, they would like an expansion of the present character precincts beyond that provided for in the PDP to that outlined in the Officers' Recommended Plan, which draws in part on the Boffa Miskell report. This would represent an increase in the area covered by the Character Area from approximately 25% to 50%.
13. The streets containing houses they would like included within the boundaries of this character area are Balmoral Terrace, Blucher Avenue and Coromandel, Daniell, Harper, Lawrence, Owen and Stoke Streets.
14. They would also like to see Green, Emmett and the eastern half of Normanby and Donald McLean Streets also included (either as Character Area or Heritage Area) to acknowledge their age and integrity. These streets incorporated areas that were relatively densely settled by the early 1890s.
15. From my understanding of the group's position, it recognises the need for a certain level of intensification of the suburb. I support the group's submissions, for the main part, for the following reasons:
  - 15.1 The character areas approved for the PDP are not obviously based on data or assessment. In other words, the listing is an arbitrary conclusion, not evidence-based.
  - 15.2 The Newtown Group's approach would retain a broader and therefore more coherent portion of the suburb's oldest houses. This approach would be preferable to the inclusion of a patchwork of areas, which would inevitably lead to a fragmentation of the suburb's predominant character. As an observation, the quality of the streetscapes they propose to retain do vary somewhat, but the consistency of scale, form and materials is evident.
  - 15.3 In a similar vein, it would reduce the likelihood of tall apartments randomly popping up in predominantly low-scale streets. So, by retaining taller new builds to specified zones, it would help retain the integrity of designated character areas.
  - 15.4 It would retain the north-eastern portion of what has been described as the 'rug of Newtown', which refers to the roughly rectangular portion of Newtown between Riddiford / Mansfield Streets (east), the Town Belt (west), Mein Street (north) and Roy Street (south). Protection of a broader part of this area would be an even better outcome.
  - 15.5 It would help retain the general scale of a series of dead-end streets that abut the town belt and are one of the most interesting features of Newtown. As in

other parts of inner Wellington, the juxtaposition of older houses and the open space and vegetation of the Town Belt is a quintessential Wellington experience.

16. In addition to the group's request for the Officers' Recommended Plan, their application for the inclusion of four streets that join Riddiford Street (Green, Emmett, Normanby and Donald McLean) is also entirely reasonable. In particular, the exclusion of Green Street from both the Boffa Miskell report and the PDP is, to my mind, inexplicable. The houses in that street and the others named are likely to be among the oldest in Newtown. To these I would add Minerva Street, slightly later in age, which is a short, no-exit street overlooking Newtown School and still in substantially original condition.
17. I would note that, although my evidence is in support of the Newtown Group, some of the more general points I have made would apply equally to other inner-city suburbs with heritage character.
18. I would also observe that at least some of what are deemed character areas in Newtown might well qualify as heritage areas. This could be revealed by a more detailed study, similar to those undertaken at Mt Victoria and Thorndon, that might identify, for example, clusters of Newtown's oldest houses or patterns of local history e.g. how certain social or ethnic groups lived in the same area, links to Newtown's commercial development or the hospital precinct, the influence of various immigrant groups during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the role of gentrification. This kind of information can only be found by doing more intensive work.
19. The proposal by the Newtown Group is a bid to get a better balance between intensification and character protection. Protection of more of the suburb's heritage streets and their contents would help maintain the traditional scale and grain of the suburb. In the end, heritage is local and Newtown's location, topography and development have delivered a history uniquely its own, which should be reflected in the district plan.