

OPT Redevelopment Design Review

13 April 2006 *Draft*

1.0 Summary Comments

This proposal is highly resolved architecturally. It is a well-considered response to the *Design Brief* which results in a lively yet coherent collection of forms. The central portion of the three-part composition is strongly reminiscent of the existing building. The redevelopment also occupies the same footprint and structural grid as the original. As a result, the landmark remains recognisable and there is potential to retain parts of the existing fabric.

- 1.1 While continuity with the past is maintained, extensions to the building signal new uses and help to articulate the lengthy and somewhat repetitive structure of the existing OPT. The redevelopment also provides a convincing treatment of public space. Activities (including servicing) appear viable, and promise to enhance the adjacent promenade.
- 1.2 The increase in bulk is modest. Additional volume is concentrated at either end of the wharf with only a single additional residential floor between. This configuration limits the impact on city-harbour views, and also produces a positive scale-relationship between the base of the OPT, Chaffers Dock and the John Wardle design for Sites 1-3.

2.0 Design quality and visual interest

The first Framework objective is: "The waterfront is locally and internationally recognised for its design."

- 2.1 The design is coherently resolved at all levels. Additions are treated in a contemporary manner, however they have a clear visual relationship to the composition and structure of the existing OPT.
- 2.2 Cantilevered planes at the north end of the building have a suitably strong sculptural quality, and refer to the roof forms on the existing OPT. Because these elements are large in scale, they can readily be identified in long-range views across the harbour.
- 2.3 The building is broken down into three main forms, and is further modulated with cantilevered and recessed volumes which create a stronger, more variable rhythm along the east and west elevations.
- 2.4 These alterations introduce greater visual interest, and they supply motifs which are easily recognised in long, intermediate and short-range views. The new work invokes nautical imagery, continuing a theme which is inherent within the original OPT design. However, references to hulls, ribs and modern marine industrial processes are suggestive rather than explicit. The subtlety of this treatment allows the building's character to be updated without devaluing traces of the original design. As a consequence the two styles of architecture sit very comfortably together.
- 2.5 In these ways, the redevelopment enhances the positive contribution already made by the OPT to waterfront and harbour views.

- 2.6 The ensemble of forms at the southern end of the OPT relate well to the Wardle design on Sites 1-3. Taller volumes establish a counter point to the long horizontal forms of the Wardle buildings and the linear emphasis of the existing OPT. The additional height also provides a transition to the more massive Chaffers Dock, and helps to establish a presence in the Kent and Cambridge Terraces view shaft. At the same time, strong three-dimensional modeling and the use of intermediate-scaled elements create visual interest in short-range views. The asymmetrical massing of the building's southern end leaves the western side of the OPT relatively unencumbered. As a consequence, when people approach the wharf from Waitangi Park, they gain a clear impression of the OPT's original character and they receive a strong invitation to walk out onto the wharf.
- 2.7 Double height ground-floor spaces increase visual interest, and encourage greater variety of activity along the side of the wharf.

3.0 Relationship of building to open spaces

The Waterfront Framework states that buildings and their activities should be focused outwards to address their surroundings and generally contribute to life on the waterfront.

- 3.1 This design maintains the full width of the existing promenade on both sides of the wharf.
- 3.2 A through-block passageway offers pedestrians a short cut around the wharf. This east-west link is likely to bring more foot traffic to the less popular eastern side of the wharf.
- 3.3 Cantilevered forms provide covered areas along the promenade, particularly at either end of the wharf.
- 3.4 The design establishes a primary ground-level frontage along the west side of the wharf and a secondary frontage along the east side. This treatment is a realistic response to the hierarchy of use on the site. Moreover, there is capacity to increase retail space along the eastern frontage if there is a demand.
- 3.5 Additions to the southern end of the OPT will reduce views of Mt Victoria and the Clyde Quay boat harbour from some vantage points along the waterfront promenade. Likewise, the additional bulk affects sightlines to the central city from Oriental Parade. From some vantage points, existing broad vistas will be transformed into a sequence of framed and varied views. These will be available to people traveling along the water edge or approaching from Waitangi Park. For people traveling (in either direction) between Taranaki Wharf and Oriental Bay, signature views of Mt Victoria and the CBD will be introduced, removed and finally re-introduced in a more dramatic form. The cluster of buildings at the base of the OPT wharf will provide a key threshold in this sequence.
- 3.6 Because the visual impacts of new buildings will be assessed cumulatively, redevelopment of the OPT may constrain opportunities for new structures on Sites 1-3.
- 3.7 The OPT's southern extension establishes a closer connection with the waterfront promenade and the park. Here, the form and internal accommodation help to create a pair of nodal open spaces which will be shared by new buildings on Sites 1-3. These spaces have different orientations and views. One faces the Clyde Quay Boat Harbour and Mt Victoria, while the other looks towards the Inner Harbour and the central city. The two aspects help to ensure that attractive public spaces are available at different times of the day and under different weather conditions.
- 3.8 Residential accommodation begins at first floor level, directly above the promenade. In this location, apartments provide a greater sense of inhabitation and more effective informal surveillance.
- 3.9 The proposal includes a low-level extension to the northern end of the wharf. This element allows closer contact with the water. However, it should be noted that the wharf

extension is vulnerable to rough seas and also risks 'domesticating' a section of wharf which should be associated with open water and larger ocean-going ships.

4.0 Heritage Conservation

The Waterfront Framework calls for the building to be "retained" and ... "restored and reused". It notes "The waterfront "is and should remain distinctly 'Wellington'."

- 4.1 The proposal preserves most of the existing wharf structure, including the decking, wharf edges and other features visible to users of the promenade. The development allows continued or expanded use of the both the wharf and the OPT building.
- 4.2 **The precise extent of the wharf structure that will be retained cannot yet be determined with certainty, as significant maintenance and strengthening must be addressed. However the proposed under-wharf parking will replace most of the central portion of the wharf structure at the southern end of the OPT.**
- 4.3 The design maintains recognisable features of the OPT. With the exception of northern and southern extensions, the building envelope closely matches the height, length and width of the existing OPT.
- 4.4 The proposal has the potential to keep parts of the existing OPT including artefacts identified in the conservation report and some structural elements. However, the amount of fabric retained remains uncertain until a more complete survey **can be made**. None of the larger spaces within the existing building will be retained. As a consequence, though some landmark and townscape qualities **will** be retained, much of the OPT's heritage fabric will be lost.
- 4.5 New construction is executed in a contemporary style which nevertheless recalls the scale and composition of the existing building. As a consequence, the design maintains the form and character of the existing building in a recognisable form.

5.0 Activity

Waterfront Framework principle: the waterfront will meet the needs of a range of people.

- 5.1 This design offers a positive treatment of frontages and ground-floor activity. The primary frontage is located along the west side of the wharf where retail uses are already well established. A secondary frontage faces east. Although this elevation contains less retail space, it is activated by a number of apartment entrances.
- 5.2 The development combines residential accommodation with a range of retail and other semi-public uses. The latter occupy critical ground-level locations, and promise to maintain the maritime character of existing commercial activity on the wharf. Because the bulk of car parking is provided below the wharf, floor space immediately above ground can be devoted to more active uses. This makes human inhabitation of the building more evident to users of the promenade. 24-hour occupation of the OPT will contribute to the safety of the promenade and the adjacent park.
- 5.3 Semi-public spaces extend to first-floor accommodation at the north and south ends of the building. These positions are especially favoured in terms of outlook. Furthermore, the southern end of the building is intrinsically connected with the main promenade and with the new public plazas adjacent to Sites 1-3. This first-floor accommodation helps to give the whole OPT redevelopment a greater sense of public ownership. The extremities of the OPT are its most conspicuous features, and the building's southern end marks a gateway to the wharf where strong overtures should be made to passers-by. Therefore, it is appropriate that these parts of the building are not only more strongly architecturally articulated but also exhibit public functions.

6.0 Bulk and Form of Additions

The Waterfront Framework states that the size and shape of buildings should relate to their neighbours and to the spaces around them. Buildings should also be in scale with people.

- 6.1 The somewhat repetitive character of the existing OPT is broken up by a strong three-part composition which incorporates unique landward and seaward features at either end of the wharf. Further visual interest is provided by a series of projecting modules which establish a strong rhythm along the central portion of the proposed building.
- 6.2 Over most of its length, the development is one storey higher than the existing OPT. This increase has only a modest impact on city and harbour views. The tallest volumes are placed at either end of the wharf. This is a good strategy for limiting impacts on east-west city and harbour views. The taller southern volumes also have a positive scale relationship with Chaffers Dock and the Wardle design as well as with more distant open spaces in Waitangi Park. However, this composition means that some of the bulkiest elements of the redevelopment are located adjacent to the waterfront promenade.
- 6.3 The proposal is slightly longer than the original building. However, with the exception of intermittent cantilevered bays, the development matches the existing width of the host structure.

7.0 Servicing and Parking

The Waterfront Frameworks states that pedestrians, cyclists, service and emergency vehicles should generally share the same space although pedestrians should have priority.

- 7.1 The development maintains the present pattern of a shared vehicle and pedestrian zone along both sides of the wharf. This pattern supports a wide variety of activities. Although foot traffic will increase as a result of the development, a shared surface is sustainable because vehicle numbers and speeds are likely to remain low.
- 7.2 Vehicle access is maintained around the perimeter of the building, and a small number of at-grade public car parks is provided along the eastern side of the wharf. This casual parking is likely to increase the viability of ground-level retail spaces. Although these parking spaces produce inactive edges, they occur intermittently and are separated by building entrances and retail frontages. If unsecured, the recessed parking space may be unsafe after dark. However, taking all these factors into consideration, this small amount of at-grade parking is acceptable, particularly as it can readily be converted to an alternative use if demand permits.
- 7.3 Most parking is provided below grade where it has no appreciable impact on wharf-edge public space. The box containing the car parks also adds much needed rigidity to the wharf structure.
- 7.4 The below-grade parking is entered through a cut-out in the wharf. This transforms what is typically a utilitarian element into a memorable feature of the design. The cut-out helps to separate pedestrians from vehicles, and celebrates motorists' arrival at the complex.

8.0 Components, Elements and Materials

The Waterfront Framework states that trees, planting and hard landscape elements, such as paving and street furniture, should reflect the fact that this is an urban waterfront, and an urban rather than natural landscape.

- 8.1 Structural components, openings, balconies and cladding units produce a combination of large, small and intermediate scaled features. Collectively, these elements create a convincing three-part composition in which separate architectural identities are balanced against the evident unity of the whole ensemble.

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