

**Before an Independent Commissioner of Wellington City Council**

**Under the** Resource Management Act 1991

**In the matter** of a resource consent application for the Future Accommodation Strategy to develop the western portion of the site at 1 Molesworth Street, Wellington

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**EVIDENCE OF MITCHELL KNIGHT ON BEHALF OF THE APPLICANT IN SUPPORT OF  
APPLICATION FOR RESOURCE CONSENT**

**PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE – DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**15 May 2023**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** My full name is Mitchell Knight. I am a Deputy Chief Executive at the Parliamentary Service. My remit within the Service is Corporate Services which includes our Buildings Project Management Office.

**1.2** I am authorised by the Applicant, Parliamentary Service, on behalf of His Majesty the King, to give this statement of evidence on its behalf.

## **2. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

**2.1** I have a Bachelor of Commerce and Administration in Accounting and Commercial Law. I am a member of the Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand.

**2.2** I have 23 years' experience in Financial and Corporate Services roles including over 7 years at the Parliamentary Service in the roles of Chief Financial Officer and Deputy Chief Executive.

**2.3** I have been involved in the Future Accommodation Strategy at the Service since the project was reinstated in 2020. I was also involved in the project's predecessor from 2016-2017.

**2.4** I act as the Senior Responsible Officer for the project within the Parliamentary Service and was the co-author of the Detailed Business Case that was accepted and funded by Treasury.

## **3. CODE OF CONDUCT**

**3.1** I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses outlined in the Environment Court's Practice Note (2023) (**Code**) and have complied with it in preparing this evidence. I also agree to follow the Code when presenting evidence to the Independent Hearing Commissioner. I confirm that the issues addressed in this brief of evidence are within my area of expertise,

except where I state that I rely upon the evidence of other expert witnesses. I also confirm that I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from my opinions.

#### **4. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE**

**4.1** My evidence will cover the following matters:

- (a) Provide context for the proposal via giving an overview of the current status of the Parliamentary Precinct and its need for more space.
- (b) The overall objectives of the project and the issues the project will overcome.

#### **5. CONTEXT IN WHICH THIS PROPOSAL IS BEING MADE**

##### **Unique requirements for Parliamentary Precinct**

**5.1** As the Speaker's statement provided with the Application referred to, the Parliamentary Precinct has unique requirements for its buildings. As well as being the heart of our political system – housing the debating Chamber and offices of our Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers – the buildings perform many other roles. They act as a function centre, house art galleries and exhibitions, host select committee hearings open to the public, and are home to many New Zealand tāonga and other historical items. They also welcome tens of thousands of members of the public each year, some visiting, and some engaging with our political system.

##### **Inadequacy (and now unavailability) of rented space**

**5.2** The three Crown owned Parliamentary buildings on the Precinct are Parliament House, the Parliamentary Library, and the Executive Wing (Beehive).

- 5.3** For several decades the New Zealand Parliament has also been a tenant – relying on leased space in Bowen House to cover the short-fall of capacity required for ministers, members and staff. While Bowen House was as convenient location as possible for an off-precinct building, having our parliament as a tenant has caused several issues over the years – including legal proceedings related to the unique use of the building. Having an overseas domiciled landlord also caused issues for our security team who were uncomfortable with the level of control and access held by landlord representatives, given the connection to Parliament.
- 5.4** The lease of Bowen House is now over, and staff and members have had to leave Bowen House for earthquake strengthening and it will later become the new home of the Public Service Commission and other agencies. Members were moved to a reconfigured library space, and staff were moved to leased offices in the TSB building.

#### **Further reductions in available space**

- 5.5** The Precinct has also lost thousands of square metres within its crown owned buildings due to detailed seismic assessments and is now on the brink of a capacity crisis.
- 5.6** In 2022, seismic reports showed a key structure making up part of the Parliamentary Library and basement car park had a NBS rating of 15%. This resulted in 16% of the fit for purpose member accommodation space being lost and forced us to move 20 members from their offices into ex-storage space in the Parliamentary Library attic. This space is still being used (as at May 2023), and it is almost certain members of the 54<sup>th</sup> Parliament post the October 2023 election will also be forced into make-shift offices in this attic.
- 5.7** Additionally, the assessments have resulted in the Executive Wing (Beehive) seismic rating falling to 34% IL4. It is not considered practicable or cost

effective to strengthen this building to 100% IL4, which would have made it a suitably resilient building post a significant seismic event.

**5.8** The Parliamentary Precinct has also lost the use of the Executive Wing annex (the Press Gallery) in the last ten years – forcing the press to move to the ground floor of Parliament House, which displaced bespoke member office space. This is not ideal, as member space should ideally be part of the select committee space, and a public access space that the public can use to engage with the democratic process.

**5.9** Losing the use of the Executive Wing Annex, and car parking building to seismic issues has left New Zealand’s parliament in the rather ridiculous position of not being able to properly house its members. The recent changes in party structure (a normal part of a Westminster style democracy) have left us scrambling to find space to provide members and their staff with office space.

**5.10** I cannot therefore emphasise strongly enough the need for these two proposed buildings.

## **6. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

**6.1** The proposal seeks to add crown-owned capacity to the Precinct in the form of a new members building (MUS, which will be 100% IL4) located on the Western Side of Parliament House, as well as a secure deliveries building (BAL, which will be 100% IL3) on the precinct’s Ballantrae Place frontage.

**6.2** Another important aspect of the proposal is to transform this part of the Precinct from a surface car park into an attractive pedestrian and landscaped plaza (LAN). This transformation eliminates a significant hazard in the shared vehicle pedestrian space it is today, and the traffic hazard from the uncontrolled Museum Street entry /exit onto Bowen Street. This egress point is uncontrolled into the centre of the Bowen Street / The

Terrace intersection. This is discussed in more detail in the evidence of Andrew Carnell.

- 6.3** Other project outcomes are to achieve a level of security that is commensurate with the growing risk environment, to add a visible representation of our bi-cultural nation, to reduce long term opex costs by running efficient and environmentally friending buildings, and to provide parties with fit-for-purpose office space immediately after an election or other change in party configuration.
- 6.4** The idea to create a fully crown owned, fit-for-purpose set of Parliamentary buildings within the boundaries of the crown land is not new thinking. The need has been recognised since the 1990s. A full accommodation review was conducted in 2015, which included consultation with all political parties on the Precinct and a wide section of the agency and staff. This consultation resulted into a detailed set of objectives, of which most were directly inserted into the 2020 version of the project and noted below.
- 6.5** It was unanimously agreed that the objectives were best met by a Museum Street member building replacing leased accommodation. The project was paused in 2017 due to political interference.
- 6.6** The project was restarted in 2020, and the objectives were reviewed and refreshed. Changes to the business case considered regulatory updates since 2015, a security review, climate change mandates, further consultation with mana whenua, and the initial findings of the seismic reviews.
- 6.7** The 2020 Detailed Business Case was written by the Parliamentary Service, and consultation with members occurred through the Parliamentary Service Commission Buildings Subcommittee and the full Parliamentary Service Commission (an advisory committee to the Speaker created under the Parliamentary Service Act 2000, with designated members across all parties). The final business case put to Treasury and the Executive for

funding had full cross-party and Iwi support, as set out in the evidence of Dave Wills and Michael Davis.

### **Best Economic Value**

**6.8** Even before the significant non-financial benefits were considered, a new building that utilises Crown land and avoids perpetual lease and landlord-managed operational costs was clearly the best economic value for New Zealand. Providing fit-for-purpose accommodation for Parliament's members and staff for the next 50 years at the best possible price has always been a key objective of this project.

### **Fit for purpose**

**6.9** The proposal will provide the increased capacity needed to accommodate more MPs; for example, in proportion to New Zealand's population increase, or if the number of parties increase.

**6.10** Several reports (including the last two Appropriations Review Committee reports) have stated that New Zealand is falling behind similar parliamentary systems across our peer group in number of constituents vs elected representatives. It is likely that in the next decade a referendum will be held on this very matter. Currently the Precinct's three buildings cannot hold all its current members and staff, even with remediation of its current seismic issues.

**6.11** The House of Representatives and Government need to be provided with resilient fit-for-purpose accommodation to meet their roles with minimal disruption at elections, during incidents and natural events, and through changes of executive.

**6.12** Accommodating members and Ministers is not like accommodating normal office staff as the three-year election cycle changes the composition and number of political parties elected, with each requiring associated staffing,

space separation, and security. Currently, it takes around three months and considerable cost to reconfigure spaces after each election, during which time members must work in impracticable office conditions.

- 6.13** Each political party is entitled to operate with privacy. It is not practical to co-locate two political parties in a tight floor space which requires them to share reception areas, media spaces, kitchens, and meeting rooms. This poses unique space assignment challenges on the Precinct.
- 6.14** The volume of custom fitouts on the precinct and office resizing every three years places greater stress and fatigue on infrastructure and services than in an average office building.
- 6.15** The proposed members building is designed to be quickly and easily configured into a variety of office numbers and different levels of open plan space. This will allow members of Parliament to be allocated working spaces in the space of a weekend after the outcome of an election is known. This compares to the current situation where it can take up to 8% of a Parliamentary cycle to place members in their final office accommodation. The efficiency gain of the proposed new system is achieved by using a bespoke design of demountable highly acoustic partitions that are reusable for every change.
- 6.16** The landscape changes will create a safer and more secure environment for the precinct and the users of the precinct. The western side of the Precinct which was Parliamentary and government buildings until the 1990s is currently used as a carpark. The proposal will look to integrate the MUS and BAL buildings into a plaza style foot-traffic area that is more in keeping with the quality of the front of Parliament. It will also provide enhanced security for any future events (such as the 2022 occupation of parliament grounds). In that case, the open carpark area was deemed by police as a weakness with safe entry and exits by staff and members difficult to manage. The MUS building would also allow a far safer place of work for select committees



and the executive, should any future protest on Parliament lawn create safety risks.

- 6.17** The proposed members building will also enhance the operational efficiency of Parliament. This is currently compromised by having to lease floorspace a long way from the Debating Chamber, and to often split parties across several areas within the Precinct. An essential outcome of the project is more floorspace close to and directly connected to Parliament House, with parties having all their members located together. The proposed members building will achieve this outcome.

#### **Increase Resilience – Incorporate seismic Resilience**

- 6.18** The proposal seeks to mitigate the risk that the Precinct holds, in that all the current buildings on the precinct have safety and security risks, and low resilience to natural disasters and infrastructure failures. A building of 100% NBS at IL4 levels as is proposed is needed to provide a post-event place of work for executive government, key officials, and emergency management staff.
- 6.19** One floor of the proposed members building will be utilised as a National Emergency Management Facility (“NEMF”) and in the case of an emergency will be the National Crisis Management Centre (“NCMC”). The current NCMC is in the basement of the Executive Wing (colloquially referred to as “the bunker”). The Executive Wing currently has secondary elements rated as 34% IL4 or 47% NBS at IL3. The Bunker also sits below the accepted Tsunami levels for Wellington and has recently been subjected to flooding due to aging infrastructure. This facility requires a 100% IL4 structure to ensure it can be occupied immediately following a significant Wellington seismic event.

## **Environmentally Sustainable**

- 6.20** The proposal looks to reduce the Precinct's overall operational costs by efficiently utilising the precinct, and occupying buildings with modern layouts.
- 6.21** It seeks to build two buildings rated at Greenstar 6 – this rating represents 'World Leadership' in environmentally sustainable building practices. This will ensure the precinct is in line with the government's carbon emission reduction targets and sets the example for the rest of the construction industry.

## **Consolidate Parliamentary Footprint**

- 6.22** The proposal will ensure that Parliamentary functions are centralised on the Precinct and within Crown owned buildings, where we can directly manage our security practices without the constraints of being a lessee.

## **Cultural Partnership - A bi-cultural building reflecting a modern New Zealand**

- 6.23** Each of Parliament's buildings; its gothic revival Library, its neoclassical Parliament House and its brutalist Executive Wing, were created using the architectural trends of the day. They represent the trends, fashion and thinking of the day. Unfortunately, none of these buildings show our precinct as the Parliament of a nation based on bi-cultural beginnings.
- 6.24** The proposal gives us a unique chance to use the narrative local iwi have gifted the project to create a piece of New Zealand's Parliament that properly represents mana whenua's role in New Zealand's legislative body. Co-design opportunities are outlined in the evidence of the project architect, Michael Davis.

## **Safety and Security**

**6.25** The Parliamentary Service commissioned an external review of security at Parliament in 2019 and has made significant progress with addressing the recommendations. There are several residual vulnerabilities which require fundamental change to the movement of goods, traffic flows, parking, and access.. The project has been designed to address security and minimise risk while retaining public accessibility. In particular, there is no feasible way to improve the security and flow of goods into the precinct without adding the proposed new secure deliveries building.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

**7.1** Parliament needs more floorspace on the Precinct, and in a building that is seismically resilient and directly connected to Parliament House. The proposed members building (MUS) is therefore essential to Parliament's future.

**7.2** The existing facilities and procedures for screening incoming goods are suboptimal. The proposed secure deliveries building (BAL) is required by Parliament for its safety and security.

**7.3** The rear part of the Precinct is dominated by surface car parking and has low aesthetics. The proposal will convert, integrate, and transform the area so that it positively enhances the role of the Precinct in meeting the needs of Parliament and mitigate significant hazards.

**Mitchell Knight**

15 May 2023