Mt Victoria Historical Society

Mt Victoria Historical Society is an incorporated society with the aims of researching and sharing the history of the suburb of Mt Victoria and promoting interest in, and preservation of, its unique heritage. On one long side, its boundary is the Mt Victoria section of the Town Belt; on the other it is Kent Terrace and the Basin Reserve.

The Society was established in 1996 and currently has 69 members, many of which are family members representing two or more individuals. It is a very active society, which has conducted major research and outreach projects including an oral history and photographic documentary resulting in a public exhibition, development and installation of a large heritage panel on the side of the Embassy Theatre, publications and many guided walks. We have made submissions protesting about the impact on heritage of the Ngauranga to Airport transport proposals to both NZTA and Greater Wellington Regional Council since 2008, and to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage in 2012 about plans to move the Crèche under the National War Memorial Park (Pukeahu) Empowering Act.

Mt Victoria Historical Society opposes, in full, construction of a flyover at the Basin Reserve.

Introduction

The Basin Reserve precinct is not simply a piece of open country to draw a line across and construct a highway through. As Ms McCredie said in her cross-examination on Day 46– it is trying to “retrofit a flyover structure in what is a very tight contained street pattern”. ¹ This is an historic landscape, with many heritage sites, in the heart of the capital city, with historic reserves and residential areas. In short, a unique and irreplaceable city heart.

¹ Day 46, pg 5411
The Basin Reserve recreation ground

The Basin Reserve is acknowledged as being special, under the Historic Places Act. It was registered by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust as an Historic Area (Register No. 7441) in 1998. The whole area, however, is more than the sum of its parts – it is registered as an historic area because it “possesses aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological, or traditional significance or value”\(^2\) – in this case it meets at six of those 10 criteria.

All the buildings and structures within the Historic Area are interrelated. Removal and relocation of the C.S Dempster Gate and construction of a long, three-storey structure in its place would affect the relationships between the elements of the Historic Area. The historic significance in the opposing historic entry gates on the north and south sides of the Basin Reserve, allowing entry from both sides through gates named after renowned cricketers, would be destroyed.

The Basin Reserve has been used as a public park since 1857. It was formally granted to the citizens of Wellington by the Crown in 1861, and covered by The Town Belt and Basin Reserve Deed in 1873. This historically places it in the context of the founding vision for Wellington, one of urban development balanced by open spaces.

The 1873 Deed stated that the land was “to be for ever hereafter used and appropriated as a public Recreation ground for the inhabitants of the City of Wellington” and that the trustees who held it on behalf of the citizens of Wellington had no power to “alienate or dispose of the same”.

The 1884 Basin Reserve Trust Deed, which forms part of the current Trust Deed, also states that the Basin Reserve is “to be for ever used for the purposes of a Cricket and Recreation Ground”.

There’s been a lot of focus on the fact that it is important as a cricket ground – it is only very recently that it has become almost exclusively used for cricket, in terms of organised sport or recreation. Throughout its history, it has also been a focal point for civic and community events and activities.

The national significance of the Basin Reserve is acknowledged by all parties.

Construction of the flyover will have a severe and irreversible effect on the nature of this open recreation space. It will impact on the way thousands of people experience it, including sports and events participants and spectators, those who cycle or walk through the Basin Reserve, those who take their lunch to the Basin Reserve on a sunny day, those who move round it and those who live nearby.

\(^2\) Historic Places Act 1993
Designation of Basin Reserve land

We oppose designation of a significant area of land within the Basin Reserve Historic Area perimeter fence for the purposes of the Basin Bridge Project.

The land is being taken in order to construct a building to try and mitigate the effect of the flyover. The proposed structure is not part of the flyover or RONS, therefore NZTA should not be permitted to take land within the registered Basin Reserve Historic Area, for the purposes of constructing a building to provide sports facilities.

There is a history of such designations never being handed back. There is therefore no guarantee that this is the last assault on the Basin Reserve.

And this is part of the land which is “to be for ever used for the purposes of a Cricket and Recreation Ground”.

It should be protected in perpetuity. Like Patricia Grace’s land on the Kapiti Coast, this is “a place of cultural and historic significance” and a place of “special significance”, though in this case to all Wellington citizens.

Historic landscape

The impact of the flyover construction is not just on the registered historic area of the Basin Reserve. An Historic Places Act registration has to have legal boundaries, but the Basin Reserve’s connection to the Canal Reserve and Mount Victoria Town Belt are intrinsic to its value. This is part of a wider heritage landscape. The construction of the flyover would further erode the historic connection between the Basin Reserve, Canal Reserve and the Town Belt of Mount Victoria. The Basin Reserve was originally connected to the Town Belt through the Wellington College land.

This is the landscape of the original city of Wellington, reflecting the vision of its founding settlers for future citizens. The project would destroy the essential historic fabric of the city and, once done, can never be undone.

This is no parochialism on the part of Mt Victoria Historical Society. All landscape and heritage experts have agreed, in expert conferencing for this Board of Inquiry, on the historic importance and sensitivity of the area.

Its meaning and significance comes from accumulation of civic involvement and experience over 150 years. This meaning is both of National and local importance and value

NZTA Technical Report 12 acknowledges that the flyover “will change the setting for all heritage buildings which lie within the visual catchment”. We strongly oppose destruction of

the interconnection between the historic places in this part of the city, including the former Museum, Buckle Street Police Station, the Catholic precinct including the former St Patrick’s College and Church, the Home of Compassion Crèche, St Joseph’s, Government House and the southern portion of the historic suburb of Mt Victoria. This is a nationally significant heritage-rich area, as well as being essential to Wellington’s identity.

Construction of the proposed flyover also requires the taking of land from the Canal Reserve for roading. The Canal Reserve is covered by the Town Belt Deed and subject to the Reserves Act. We object strongly to the taking of any additional Town Belt land, which is held in trust for the citizens of Wellington for the purposes of recreation.

Bordering the Basin Reserve, and severely impacted by the project, is the Mt Victoria residential suburb. It is a highprofile historic area, defined under the District Plan as a special character area. Settled since 1840, in just this southern corner we have some of the oldest remaining dwellings in Wellington, including Waring Taylor’s house.

If the Basin Reserve precinct had been properly recognised as an historic landscape and built environment of national and local significance, we do not believe the Basin Bridge Project would have got as far as it has. The adverse impact cannot be justified. We also believe that it if is understood as such a unique setting, it cannot be approved.

**Effect of mitigation measures**

The adverse effects of the bridge cannot be fully mitigated, as has been acknowledged by all experts. The proposed mitigation structure of the Northern Gateway building and the green screen compound the effects of the flyover by encroaching on, and further enclosing, the open space with a dominating building and structure.

NZTA Technical Report 12 states many times that the views to and from the Basin Reserve from north and south, and from east and west, are “historically significant”, “important historical amenities” and that these will be destroyed. It would no longer be possible to appreciate the historical setting of the Basin Reserve Historic Area as the legacy of a basin, nestled in a valley between hills, and at the head of a stream that once led to the sea. The adverse effects of the proposal on the cultural landscape will not only be visible from within close proximity, but also from the surrounding hills which are valued dwelling and recreation locations.

Furthermore, the ‘mitigation’ requires removal of historic gates and fence which are integral to the registered Historic Area and surrounds and upsets the historic pattern of buildings being confined to the west side of the Reserve. It therefore represents a severe impact on nationally significant historic heritage.

---

4 Salmond, Jeremy, Basin Bridge Project: Technical Report 12 Assessment of Effects on Built Heritage, pages 9 and 34
Building a structure simply to hide the flyover “from the critical point of view of a cricketer at the central crease”\(^5\) ignores the impact of the flyover and ‘mitigation’ structures on all others who use or experience the Basin Reserve and its surrounds.

The ‘mitigation structure’ is not required for construction of the flyover. Construction of such a building within the Basin Reserve Historic Area should be treated separately, and not simply as mitigation for a roading project. The mitigation structure should be removed from this consenting process.

**Impact on southern Mt Victoria**

Mount Victoria is an historic suburb retaining a large amount of its original housing. The southern edge of Mt Victoria is defined by Paterson Street, Kent Terrace, Ellice Street and Dufferin Street.

NZTA Technical Report TR12 includes among its assessment of adverse effects of the flyover construction, the impact on the setting of the Mount Victoria Residential Character Area\(^6\). The applicant and all its witnesses acknowledge that the northeast quadrant is the most affected and that the impacts cannot be fully mitigated. The northeast quadrant is the southern end of the Mt Victoria heritage area.

The effects on the Mt Victoria historical area have not been adequately taken into consideration.

We are particularly concerned at the impact on lower Ellice Street. The application includes permission to remove 28 Ellice Street and take additional land from St Joseph’s property in order to build the flyover closer to the church and residences on lower Ellice Street. This will have a severe impact on 21-45 Ellice Street and 28, 32, 40 Ellice Street. These buildings, along with 9-13 Dufferin Street, are acknowledged by Technical Report 12 as having heritage significance\(^7\).

This adds to the impacts on historic heritage of the Basin Reserve area that have already been incurred by the removal of the historic buildings on Bogart’s Corner by NZTA. These effects are cumulative and adverse on the historic setting of the Basin Reserve.

We oppose removal of the pre-1900 residence at 28 Ellice Street, because this constitutes destruction of the last remaining residence on the south side of lower Ellice Street.

Degradation of the environment through removal of 28 Ellice Street and proximity of the flyover with its associated traffic noise, vibration, dirt and lighting will severely impact historic houses in lower Ellice Street. It is likely to lead to further loss of heritage buildings in this area in future.

We also object to the severe impact on St Joseph’s Church caused by this project. There has been a lot of behind-the-scenes dealing, and discussion, about carparks, but the building itself will be degraded. It is an award-winning, eye-catching example of modern ecclesiastical architecture by

---

\(^5\) Technical Report 12, 2.3 Summary of Effects on Heritage Values (pg 8)
\(^6\) Technical Report 12, pg vii
\(^7\) Technical Report 12, page 13
Studio Pacific Architecture, which is likely to one day be regarded as an important part of the city’s architectural heritage, and includes an important stained glass window by renowned New Zealand artist, Shane Cotton. The brief for the church design in 2001 was “to create a new church and community facility on a prominent site in Wellington” and specified that “the beauty of the building should derive from its material and form rather than from its ornamentation.”

We believe the project will permanently ruin the setting and amenity of the church.

Moving the Home of Compassion Crèche

The applicant set out the results of a “Fatal Flaws Analysis” in the Feasible Options Report 2011 and stated that the requirement to move the Creche was a “fatal flaw” for Option A:

“The heritage building assessment has confirmed that any option that requires the removal or relocation of the Crèche building would be a serious Part II RMA or Historic Places Act flaw. This means Option A (was Option 1A), is therefore potentially seriously flawed.”

The following year, the power to move it was granted under the National War Memorial Park (Pukeahu) Empowering Act 2012, despite the fact that its removal is not required to construct the war memorial park.

Its movement was also contrary to the ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value, 2010.

However, while NZTA has ensured that the Crèche relocation is taken out of its application to construct the Basin Reserve flyover, it does claim “siting the Crèche in close proximity to its present position, thus maintaining historical connections with the locality” and “management of heritage effects on the building in its new location” as part of the project.

Locating the crèche in a war memorial park, removed from the last vestige of its context on the edge of Buckle Street, where the Sisters of Compassion took in and cared for the children of the poor and needy and which stood alongside the soup kitchen from whose window they served the poor, will have a severe impact on the meaning of this historic site. It will be detrimental to future understanding of its importance in the history of Wellington and the Catholic Church.

Mt Victoria Historical Society acknowledges that relocation of the Crèche is not covered by this application. However, it has not moved all the way to its new site yet.

---

9 NZTA, Feasible Options Report, 2011, page 48
10 International Convention on Monuments and Sites
**Resource Management Act requirements**

We believe the applicant has not demonstrated why the irreplaceable historic heritage values and amenity of the wider Basin Reserve area should be so severely compromised to make way for roading. It is our view that the adverse effects outweigh any benefits claimed in the proposal submitted to the EPA.

In our submission we have set out the clauses in Part 2 of the Resource Management Act 1991 that we feel have not been sufficiently taken into account.

**Conclusion**

We appreciate that there will be a lot of pressure to approve this project – NZTA has ensured that plans are well advanced prior to gaining consent, on the assumption that it will be granted.

The modelled, small traffic gains don’t outweigh the adverse effects on heritage or the amenity it contributes to the landscape and the residential area. The Basin Reserve is a park – the open space should be left for future generations. People experience the environment as a whole, including surrounding hills and viewshafts, and the approach down Kent/Cambridge Terraces, the view down Ellice Street and up the rise towards the west. Heritage is not only about buildings, though this project results in loss of built heritage; it is about the experience people have of the environment as a whole. Wellington will lose something precious that will never be able to be recovered.

The experience of the Basin Reserve will become one of a traffic flyover and an enclosed space. The perception will be ‘that’s where the flyover is’. A bit of paving, some sedge and grasses planted in concrete boxes, will not make it more inviting.

The project is out of scale with the built urban environment, and incompatible with the open space, reserve characteristics and with inner city life. It would continue the destruction of this part of the city.

For more than 40 years, plans to create a motorway through the area have led to a blight – from the destruction of the Catholic precinct, including the move of St Patrick’s College and St Joseph’s, to smaller but significant losses. There will be renewal if the land is released from roading designation.