

Birkenhead Residents Association Inc

Submission on Plan Change 38 – 23 August 2012

Methodology and criteria used in this plan change

The criteria used for inclusion and deletion of listed items are difficult to understand – for example Stafford Villa 2 Awanui Street and 12 Bridgeview Road have been deleted despite having a significant historical background.

The methodology for releasing the plan change has not adequately involved property owners or community groups or even local boards in commenting on additions and deletions. This applies both to homes being removed from the list and to buildings being added to the list.

There is widespread concern that decisions about heritage are made by individual Council contractors or officers without community engagement or peer review. The methodology used in this plan change does not provide reassurance that the Council is taking community views seriously.

Council strategy for heritage preservation

Council tells us that huge population growth is going to occur in Auckland and development pressure will intensify enormously according to frequent messages from the Mayor. Leading overseas cities such as Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane have created strong protection for their inner city and inner suburban heritage that is wonderfully successful compared with Auckland's dismal record.

If Auckland is to achieve its ambition to be the "world's most liveable city" and to also to provide a tapestry of historical and social interest for domestic and overseas tourists, Council needs to work with speed and determination to save from demolition what's left of one of the world's finest and largest collection of Victorian and Edwardian wooden houses.

Heritage tourism has the potential for strong financial gains for both communities and Council. Anything over say 60 years old or of significant architectural or cultural merit should by default be considered worthy of protection in order to create those points of difference which will attract visitors to the North Shore's heritage zones and help to build up local businesses.

The Birkenhead Town Centre Association is putting considerable effort into promoting Birkenhead as a visitor destination and is encouraging historical walks as part of this work. The wide variety of historical wooden houses below Highbury should be preserved for the sake of the community's cultural heritage, in the interests of attracting visitors to Birkenhead and to preserve features of architectural interest.

Plan Change 38 proposes dropping historical homes on the grounds that they are not easily visible from the road and on the grounds that the Birkenhead Residential 3C Zone gives all houses in the zone some degree of protection.

If Council and the Local Board wish to significantly preserve the heritage of old buildings in and around the Birkenhead town centre, they should not dilute the strength of listed historical places. The listing of historic places provides focal points to encourage public interest, understanding and community pride in the distinctive character of the area. It announces to the community and to visitors that the city and the local community believe that these are items worth of protection and interest. If Council is concerned about the costs of management

of listed buildings, the approach should be to research ways to reduce these cost overheads, not to remove significant buildings from the list.

It is important that heritage protection is not diluted in the drive to increase intensity of residential development. The size of heritage areas is comparatively small in the total picture of residential housing space, which makes it even more important to protect what we have. Heritage protection will also help to enhance community continuity and diversity to preserve what little is still left following the destruction that has taken place over the past 5 decades.

Why must we do more to prevent the loss of our heritage

Heritage is such a fragile resource that if we don't make an opportunity to get things right much of our heritage – both streetscapes and individual features – will be lost to the pages of photograph albums. Heritage decisions are not like road construction or rubbish disposal strategies. If Council doesn't get these right first time round, there is always the chance to do better next time. However with heritage, once it is destroyed, there is no going back. It is lost to future generations. With heritage, decisions are enduring, as they can create situations here societal assets are lost forever. No generation should be so arrogant as to constrain future generations with the prejudices of current fashions and developers' enthusiasms.

Decisions need to be made in a very considered way. Every generation has a duty of stewardship. We need to move from individual officer assessments as to what is meritorious towards criteria based assessments involving a range of factual input and judgements – with both peer review and public input on all cases.

Resources for heritage preservation

A major issue is that Councils (both the old NSCC and the new Auckland Council) have continually failed to put sufficient resources and money into heritage issues – including research, consultation and preservation.

This has left a huge gap in the background research needed to efficiently support details of scheduled houses. There is just not enough good reliable research on built heritage items, and this has been a long-term inherent problem. Council needs to ensure that the homework is done to justify the recommendations they are trying to establish. Council has declared its commitment to community engagement. A Council-Community partnership – possibly in association with schools of architecture - could build up a wealth of information about preservation criteria and built heritage. This resource could provide valuable resources for public education and for visitor information.

Consistent with moves towards increasing community engagement, Council should develop strategies to benefit from community participation in heritage research. Modern technology would allow Council officers to benefit from the legwork and cameras of volunteers working along Council guidelines and under a suitable MoU. It does not need a consultant to establish basics such as the current status of heritage buildings or protected zones. The public can provide gratis the eyes and ears of council. Modern technology makes it possible for Council to take advantage of these contributions without management overheads – saving time and money for officers.

Council needs to develop a strategy and project plan to preserve our architectural and cultural heritage and to provide the money and other resources for heritage issues. Council is spending millions of dollars on items like paving the street around the central library, one off

events like V8 motor racing, and city planning documents like the recently received Auckland Plan. But the amount spent on built heritage has always been inadequate. The city's unique heritage character is at risk of disappearing bit by bit if resources are not allocated proactively.

Our recommendations

In order to demonstrate Council's commitment to protecting its remaining distinctive heritage, the Residents Association makes the following recommendations:

- Rather than analyse the situation on an individual building approach, the BRA requests that the additions are approved but that, in the light of the pending Unitary Plan and in the absence of adequate research and community feedback, no deletions of listed buildings are made at this stage.
- That procedures are put in place to invest significant resources for the protection of our built heritage (in conjunction with our cultural and natural heritage) and to undertake a more robust study as outlined above with a Council-Community partnership. The community engagement model shows that Council can achieve significant cost savings by getting the community more involved in setting criteria and gathering information.
- There should also be the ability for all changes to heritage properties to be publicly notified to individuals and groups interested in heritage to allow for the possibility for a collaborative community approach to preservation with win-win benefits – rather than communities waking up to find that a particular council officer with a different set of views from the community has permitted the demolition or significant alteration of a neighbour's property.
- It is important that Council ensure our city keeps its stories of the past for both visitors and local communities. Preservation of high quality buildings, streetscapes and zones should be accompanied by easily accessible stories and historical images (in print and available on the web eg using geo-location or QR codes) that helps visitors understand for example how Birkenhead Point's main road (Hinemoa Street or previously Hauraki) used to be the Main North Road in the early stages of Auckland's development.
- It is of great concern to learn that there is no a fund allocated to preserving our heritage – Council should initiate a heritage fund along with strengthening the protection it gives to listed buildings and heritage zones before they are lost forever.

Unitary Plan

A real concern will arise when the Unitary Plan is introduced. It appears that there will be heritage protection zones with consistent provisions across the Auckland Council region. That will mean that the specific protection afforded to Birkenhead via the Residential 3C zone will be changed to something else which *may* result in less protection. At this stage it is not clear how much ability communities will have to give input to the Unitary Plan in the face of the desire from Central Government to get it operational without lengthy delays.

Birkenhead people need reassurance that the Unitary Plan will not reduce the protection that Birkenhead Point, Northcote Point and Devonport heritage zones currently have. We recommend that the proposed deletions under PC38 should be delayed until we see what the Unitary Plan proposes.

Kaipatiki Local Board submission

The BRA endorses the Kaipatiki Local Board submission. In particular we

- support the addition of the new items
- oppose the deletion of any existing items until after more detailed research (as outlined above) is completed and the Unitary Plan is in place.

In item 2 (c) of the KLB submission, it states “The section 32 material makes it very clear that a number of buildings are proposed to be removed because these buildings are within the Residential 3 heritage zone of the North Shore section of the Plan.”

We also endorse the importance of the Residential 3C zoning in preserving our heritage. However we believe that the existence of the zoning should in no circumstances be used as a reason to justify the removal of significant items from specific heritage listing. Listing specific significant items of historical or architectural interest should be complementary to preserving the streetscape of historic areas.

Hearing

The BRA wishes to be heard in support of its submission.

Signed

Gillian Taylor, Chair and Keith Salmon, Secretary

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Note: a copy of the KLB submission can be found at: <https://docs.google.com/open?id=0B9PxGqfAffnrWmNxV1JQYmppQlk>