

Technical Advisory Group

**Assessment Report for
FRANK KITTS PARK COMPETITION**

14 November 2007

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Technical Advisory Group Assessment Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment of the five finalist schemes for the Frank Kitts Park Competition is prepared by Wellington City Council's Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The report is intended to inform the Design Jury and the Client, and assist them in making a decision on a winning scheme.

The Assessment Report is complemented several other evaluations, namely the Chinese Garden Committee Report and the Quantity Surveyor Report.

In preparing its assessment, TAG has held discussions with the Wellington Chinese Garden Committee (CGC), CGC representative Oi Choong, WCC Disability Reference Group representatives and Wellington City Council officers. WCC officers provided input on events management, Wellington Conference Centre management, Parks and Gardens, and Council Controlled Organisations.

SCHEMES RECOMMENDED

Two schemes are identified as potential winners. These are not ranked, but are addressed in order of assigned reference numbers:

Scheme 2 The Garden of Beneficence

This scheme is based on a few elegant, bold gestures which provide the park with a simple robust structure. This pared down approach offers an appropriate response to context; a sound framework for varied use and continued adaptation; a deliverable outcome is broadly consistent with limited budget.

Design intensity is concentrated into three compact areas: the built edge of the car park, the Chinese Garden and the children's play area. New buildings occupy the car park structure, activating the upper open space, the lagoon edge and the promenade. Like the Chinese Garden, these buildings create helpful transitions between levels. The Chinese Garden is clearly defined, and is contained within a sequence of discrete spaces which permit the application of traditional Chinese garden design principles. However, the garden is provocatively sited in the Willeston Street view shaft.

Scheme 5 The Gift Line

The concept appears overdesigned and complex. However, when the more superficial elements are stripped away, the underlying three-part spatial structure is simple, clear and offers a sound response to context and brief.

The scheme also possesses inherent flexibility. Consequently, negative aspects of the design can be overcome without the design losing its integrity. For example, the colour red is used extensively, yet this hue is considered inappropriate to the waterfront's natural and constructed contexts. TAG believes that the intense colour may be changed or removed without the scheme being compromised.

Scheme 5 deals particularly well with access to the upper level of the park. Three sides of the car park structure are replaced with steps. These increase visual and physical access, and provide points of outlook toward the harbour and event spaces.

A series of harbour-edge pavilions are well sited for pedestrian traffic. These small structures offer to increase the range of activity along the promenade.

One scheme is recommended as a possible winner. However, it is perceived as a higher risk, because it contains major weaknesses as well as major strengths.

Scheme 4 Cultural Vessel

This is a very contemporary scheme. Its folded ground plane offers the most creative approach to park design. However, while this originality is commendable, the design also has major weaknesses. The Chinese Garden also receives an interesting contemporary treatment. But this part of the proposal remains so undeveloped that it is difficult to judge whether the design can incorporate Chinese garden principles effectively. The southern end of the site also requires further resolution, particularly the edges of the car park structure.

The greatest concentration of landscape elements occurs along the edge of Jervois Quay. This part of the site is dominated by traffic, and remains isolated from major pedestrian flows. It is questionable whether the heavy investment in landscape and pavilions here can overcome the inherent disadvantages of this location. The proposed pavilions may be useful during managed events, but are poorly connected to the main open space.

SCHEMES NOT RECOMMENDED

Two schemes are considered unsuitable for selection. These are not ranked, but are described in order of their assigned reference numbers:

Scheme 1 Body and Soul

This scheme thoroughly re-works the park, and demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of existing site issues and the broader urban context. However, the design adopts a conservative approach, and produces some of the least innovative outcomes. It is essentially a re-interpretation of the existing park and while it significantly improves some attributes e.g. connection to the water and access to the upper level, it fails to introduce fundamentally new kinds of spaces to the waterfront.

The Chinese Garden is located on top of the car park. As a result, design constraints experienced at the garden's previous location (the Transition Building site) are transferred to Frank Kitts Park. In other respects, the Chinese Garden has potential to develop satisfactorily. However, this component of the competition scheme does not yet demonstrate a clear Chinese identity.

Scheme 3 Unnamed (Feng Shui Scheme)

The application of Feng Shui principles across all of the park is commendable. This philosophy engages the wider urban context, and produces an original response. However, although the three main elements of the composition are linked conceptually, they generate a large area of residual space without clear purpose or character. The design also retains a 2-dimensional "graphic" quality, and there are concerns that the plan will not translate convincingly into 3-dimensional experience. Projections into the harbour do not appear to take account of the exposed nature of the site. This reclamation also presents technical and financial challenges.

A summary assessment of each scheme and detailed points relating to assessment criteria are included in the following report.

FRANK KITTS PARK COMPETITION

Technical Advisory Group Design Assessment

14 November 2007

Scheme 1 Body and Soul

1.1 Summary

This scheme essentially re-works and updates the park's existing layout. This could be seen either as a weakness or a strength. While it fails to deliver conspicuously new kinds of public space, it makes economical use of the project's modest budget. However, one consequence of this strategy is that the scheme is conservative, and the physical design does not live up to expectations raised by poetic metaphors in the design report. The conventional character of the design is at odds with aspirations for creative, innovative design which will attract national and international attention.

On a functional level, the scheme achieves some important objectives. Opportunities to interact with the water edge are increased. In addition, access to the upper level of the park is significantly improved, and a well considered strategy for the park interface with the Events Centre/Hunter St entry is proposed.

1.2 Creativity & Imagination

Negative features

- The conventional character of the design fails to deliver conspicuously new kinds of public space.
- The scheme does not meet the aspirations for innovative contemporary design that are being realised elsewhere on the waterfront.
- The architecture of the built forms is unresolved. The teahouse is a self-referencing form awkwardly sited on a corner of the existing car park structure. In this form and location, the teahouse does little to support events. The design of shade and platform structures appears arbitrary.

1.3 Virtuosity of Chinese Garden Design

1.3.1 *Positive features*

- The Chinese Garden readily accommodates a traditional format. This approach may encourage a perception of the place as "just" a Chinese garden. However, it also assists recognition of the garden as a discrete identifiable element of the larger park.
- As a strong destination, and as a more secluded component within the larger public park, the Chinese Garden provides a good functional fit with the raised area of the site.
- The plan offers good potential to develop a Chinese Garden offering a range of spaces, a linking path and the potential for narrative.

1.3.2 *Negative features*

- This scheme places the Chinese Garden over the existing car park. The underlying structure places formidable constraints on the location, species and growth of trees. It also has the potential to affect water elements and, importantly, increase the costs of construction. Such a strategy risks replacing one technically difficult site (the Transition Building adjacent to Te Papa) with another.

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- The success of the Chinese Garden depends on detailed design. Although the proposed plan has good potential for developing a Chinese Garden, it is not immediately recognisable. Any character suggested indicates a conservative interpretation of the Chinese Garden genre compared to the more dynamic approach of other schemes.

1.4 Responsiveness to Context

Positive features

- Scheme 1 demonstrates a very comprehensive understanding of physical context and functional issues.
- The design positively addresses the northern edge of site. In particular, the scheme provides a clearer interface with the vehicle access zone at the south end of the Events Centre. The design also suggests a novel solution to the “pinch point” for foot access around corner of Shed 6. Together, these moves delineate a potential footprint for additional building at this end of the Events Centre.
- Scheme 1 greatly improves access between the lagoon and the upper level of the site (the proposed Chinese Garden) which is the main southern access point to the Park.
- Scheme 1 allows greater interaction with the harbour but does not sacrifice the visual simplicity of the existing edge.

Negative features

- The park requires an additional pathway along a “desire line” between the Williston Street intersection and the base of Queens Wharf. While this route is missing on the plan, it is possible to insert a path without compromising the design.
- Amongst a variety of edge conditions on the waterfront, Frank Kitts Park offers the unique opportunity of a green edge. While Scheme 1 retains this “green” character and improves outlook, the plan fails to exploit potential for a fundamental reconsideration of the landscape.
- Improved access to upper level may reduce existing facilities for boat storage. Some of the retail spaces inserted into the edge of the car park may also be lost.

1.5 Feasibility

Positive features

- Existing elements such as coping materials are recycled and reused.

Negative features

- Because it is based on a series of low-intervention design moves, the scheme may fail to attract a sufficient number of new activities to the public space.
- Overall the plan has sufficient flexibility to allow minor design issues to be resolved at a later stage of development. However, some of the scheme’s flaws are broader site-wide issues (e.g. lack of innovation) and these will be more difficult to remedy later.
- Although new structures at the waters edge increase possibilities for interaction, any modification of this interface needs to consider tidal movements and, in the longer term, potential changes in sea level.

1.6 Functionality

Positive features

- The central open space allows for staged events of different sizes. The area’s triangular shape maximises connection with the water and minimises exposure to passing vehicle traffic on Jervois Quay.

Negative features

- The tripartite structure visible in plan is more likely to read as two spaces divided by an axis from Willeston Street. This is not currently a key movement corridor but may be in the future, being the shortest connection between the harbour and Lambton Quay.

Scheme 2 Garden of Beneficence

2.1 Summary

A handful of bold gestures provide the park with a simple robust structure. The elegant simplicity of the design concept is carried through into uncomplicated spaces, buildings and details. As a result, the proposed landscape is consistent with the understated character of other waterfront public spaces.

Detail is concentrated into just three compact areas: the built edge of the car park, the Chinese Garden and the wetland edge of Jervois Quay. These areas contrast with two expanses of grass which account for the bulk of the park. This is a good strategy for dealing with a limited project budget. It also allows a great variety of activities and experiences that belie the simplicity of the plan. The concentration of trees and wetland planting along the Jervois Quay edge provides an effective transition between the vehicle traffic and the park. This edge frames rather than blocks the motorists' view.

Compared with other submissions, Scheme 2 locates new buildings in places where they can make the most contribution to park and promenade activity. Buildings are concentrated along the southern and eastern edge of the car park, where they are able to negotiate the change in level and attract activity to the upper open space. By replacing what are largely blank walls, these buildings also help activate the edge of the lagoon and promenade. However, although new internal and external links are provided, access to the raised lawn is less generous than in other submissions, notably Scheme 1 and Scheme 5.

The Chinese Garden is treated as a walled garden containing a sequence of more or less discrete spaces. It's relatively enclosed character suggests that the garden is likely to become a conscious destination rather than a casual pathway. This attribute has both positive and negative aspects. One negative consequence is that the garden's cellular structure raises safety and security issues. These may mean that parts would need to be closed at certain times.

The Chinese Garden is provocatively sited in the Willeston Street view shaft. While critical views of St Gerard's Monastery and Mount Victoria are retained, walls and pavilions combine with the sloping ground plane to prevent the water being reintroduced to this viewshaft.

2.2 Creativity & Imagination

Positive features

- The design is based on a simple elegant concept. A few bold moves provide a very explicit structure for the whole park.
- The design concentrates detail in three compact areas, and contrasts these with large expanses of grass elsewhere in the plan. As a result, the design produces both variety and simplicity.
- As a walled enclosure, the Chinese Garden reverses expectations about "solid" and "void" in relation to the Willeston Street view shaft.
- Architectural elements are more resolved than in other competition entries. Indicative building designs – such as the dramatic cantilevered canopy of the tea house – promise to add significantly to the character and amenity of the park.

Negative features

- "Hunter Street Plaza" appears unresolved characterless and lacks a clear purpose. Visually this zone appears contiguous with the service area immediately to the north. As a result, the two areas merge and the extent of vehicle domination could appear to increase.

2.3 Virtuosity of Chinese Garden Design

Positive features

- An enclosed cellular structure allows for a relatively traditional approach to garden design including themed spaces and a sense of journey or narrative.
- The defined zone for the Chinese garden enables development of a series of spaces with recognisable, distinct characters. These could include either traditional or contemporary expressions of Chinese garden principles.
- The Chinese Garden can be experienced from the upper or lower levels as the slope ascends from Jervois Quay towards a high-point nearest the water.
- The tea house engages the promenade as well as the Chinese garden. This structure is well sited to take advantage of views and host events. It also offers a valuable transition between the two main levels of the park.

Negative features

- The sequence of spaces draws people through the Chinese Garden. However, the garden's relatively enclosed structure creates a definite boundary between this area and the rest of the park. This means that spontaneous visits to the garden are less likely to occur. In this respect, the proposal differs from other schemes which disperse the elements of the Chinese Garden or blur the distinctions between this space and the rest of the park.
- Enclosed spaces raise safety and security issues, and may require the garden to be closed after hours. However, the cellular layout means that it would be relatively easy to secure all or part of the garden.
- The zone allocated to the Chinese Garden is tightly defined with limited application of the "borrowed landscape" traditional in Chinese garden design. The form and location of the garden is dictated partly by a deliberate intention to "invert" the viewshaft concept. Nevertheless, this idea is strong enough to permit adjustment of the garden's footprint and edges. Such modification may permit a more permeable edge and a more intricate relationship with the rest of the park.

2.4 Responsiveness to Context

Positive features

- The elegant simplicity of the plan and the texture of individual landscape components fit very well into the wider context of waterfront public space.
- The wetland edge to Jervois Quay provides an effective interface with the arterial traffic. Intensive planting and ecological processes represent an appropriate use for the "back" of the site, and for an area that is relatively isolated from major pedestrian routes.
- The scheme proposes new activated edges to the eastern and southern edges of the car park. These are achieved by extending the existing car park structure. The new buildings bring people and events and to the edges of the lagoon and the promenade. To a large extent, these structures replace blank walls with a more intensively inhabited frontage.

Negative features

- The design takes a provocative stance towards the Willeston Street view shaft. Willeston Street offers a particularly valuable visual link between the harbour, the waterfront and the city's original shoreline. Willeston Street also represents the closest point between the Waterfront and the Golden Mile. The walled spaces of the Chinese garden would edit a small but conspicuous area of water from this view, in much the same way as the existing car park structure.
- There is a "desire line" for pedestrian movement between the Willeston Street intersection and the base of Queens Wharf. There also exists a need for wheelchair access to events spaces within the plan. It is possible to meet these needs by adding a diagonal path across the main area of lawn. However, this element could disrupt the simple geometry of the design.

2.5 Feasibility

Positive features

- The design concentrates landscape features into three intense areas and requires less change in other areas. This is an appropriate strategy for dealing with budget limitations.
- The design includes several new buildings with the potential to generate income.
- The new buildings are associated with existing structures, i.e. they occupy the edges of the car park structure. As a result, the benefits of additional accommodation are maximised while the loss of green open space is minimised.
- The distinct spatial and formal identity of the Chinese Garden helps this part of the park to be funded and implemented as a discrete project.
- One of the more intense areas of landscape is the play area. This has a novel “crustacean” theme, but retains a well-established user group in a popular location next to the promenade. As a result, the play area continues to benefit from good visibility and accessibility.
- The scheme keeps the most useful and healthy planting along Jervis Quay and selectively removes the remainder of the plant stock which is of variable quality.

Negative features

- Questions must be asked about the technical processes associated with treatment of contaminated storm water. Water treatment should not be just a “symbolic” gesture. It should contribute significantly to environmental objectives. In this regard, the design should represent an advance on a similar “demonstration” scheme operating at Waitangi Park.

2.6 Functionality

Positive features

- Simple grassed open spaces are a sound response to budget and brief. They allow flexibility, accommodating planned events of different scales, as well as unstructured activities.
- Because detail and activity are concentrated in some of the more accessible spaces, other more isolated areas of the park (particularly the top of the car park) can remain calmer and relatively uneventful.
- The wetland zone and canopy of trees concentrate planting along the street edge. This creates an effective transition between the main open space and passing traffic. It concentrates vegetation and ecological processes in an area that is unlikely to attract intensive activity.
- The activity generated by new buildings around the promenade and the upper lawn complements and extends the treatment of public open space elsewhere on the waterfront.
- By increasing opportunities for built structures, the design achieves a “critical mass” of building and activity around the difficult space above the car park.

Negative features

- Access to the upper level is less generous and less obvious than in several other schemes.
- Several ramps serve the upper area, but other routes fail to extend access to a wide range of users. As already noted, new paths across the “Harbour Lawn” could detract from the geometrical simplicity of the design.
- The design asserts that the “City Lawn” is oriented to the city and that this relationship complements the harbour orientation of the larger open space. While geometry and outlook confirm this claim, the backdrop of CBD buildings offers a poor substitute for harbour views and there is little evidence that the city view will – on its own account – attract people to the raised level.

- The raised lawn is likely to remain a little-used passive space. However, as a purely visual amenity it will be enjoyed by the occupants of surrounding pavilions. Also, it has the potential to offer a quite refuge.
- There are potential structural and technical issues associated with placing a large flat expanse of grass over the car park structure. These would need to be addressed as a more detailed stage of development.
- The relocated playground lacks the kind of sheltering pavilion proposed in Scheme 1. However, there is potential to introduce such an element if required.

Scheme 3 Unnamed (Feng Shui Scheme)

3.1 Summary

Scheme 3 raises major questions about economic and technical viability. In particular, the costs of reconfiguring the existing car park and carrying out new reclamation are likely to exceed the modest project budget. Additionally, the proposal for a slender promontory fails to take into account the severity of marine conditions in this part of the harbour.

Its application of Feng Shui principles is comprehensive in scope and innovative in execution. However, the design approach is too singular for a public park which must be interpreted and experienced by many different people on many different levels.

On a purely visual level, while the three main landscape components all possess a strong “figure”, a large proportion of the plan remains “residual”. There is also a concern that many elements of the design have an unduly “graphic” character, i.e. they produce a strong two-dimensional composition in the drawings, but do not result in equally convincing three-dimensional experiences.

3.2 Creativity & Imagination

Positive features

- The design is based on metaphysical concepts. Its application of Feng Shui principles produces an explicit, yet very different reading of Wellington.

Negative features

- The scheme is composed of three main conceptual and figural elements. These are strongly integrated on a metaphysical level, but visual and formal integration remains weak. Spaces between the three elements are residual, and lack clear purpose or character.
- Landscape elements and themes are spread relatively evenly across the park. As a result, the design achieves less variation in spatial experience than other submissions.
- The three main elements of composition appear “graphic”, i.e. they read more strongly as patterns on a plan than they do as three-dimensional constructions. A formal language of sinuous curves is readily identifiable in landform, buildings and vegetation. However, these elements appear secondary to other geometries present in the scheme and, as a result, the whole composition remains unclear and undeveloped.
- The architecture of built structures is diagrammatic or unsophisticated. This lack of resolution is concerning, and detracts from the landscape elements of the design.
- Some of the smaller elements lack an appropriate cultural or physical context. The authentic Wahine mast is sited incongruously on a green mound, and an enlarged replica of Uenoku is inexplicably placed out in the harbour.

3.3 Virtuosity of Chinese Garden Design

Positive elements

- The design is commendable for applying Feng Shui principles to the whole site and indeed to the wider city.

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- Feng shui principles appear to have been applied in a rigorous manner.

Negative elements

- The application of Chinese garden principles across the whole park could have a 'diluting' effect on this component of the project. In contrast, several other schemes concentrate the Chinese garden in one location thereby producing a more recognisable entity.
- Basic design weaknesses such as "pattern making" and the presence of residual space produce uncertainty about other aspects of the design. In particular, some doubt arises over whether the Chinese components of the park would be realised as a sufficiently functional high-quality cultural landscape.

3.4 Responsiveness to Context

Positive features

- The design produces a stronger engagement with the harbour, and offers more ways to interact with the water.
- The water element is proposed as an intrusion of seawater into the landmass.
- The design concept engages Mateu-Somes Island and the Wellington hills. These references to the wider landscape setting foster stewardship of the city's natural environment and refer to culturally significant places.

Negative features

- This scheme invokes Feng Shui principles to use Frank Kitts Park as a "remedy" for the whole city. While this approach is admirable in its scope and innovative in its approach, it begs the question whether this particular site should be privileged (or burdened) in such a manner.
- Some references to Wellington's natural landscape are misguided, e.g. the use of patterns in sand as a metaphor for coastal conditions. In reality, Wellington's coastline, is comprised of rocky headlands and stony beaches. This is certainly true of the inner harbour.

3.5 Feasibility

Negative features

- Certain elements of the design are likely to be very expensive. Reclamation and reconstruction of the water edge would be very costly. Reshaping the car park is also likely to draw heavily on the limited project budget. Screen structures and building forms are complex and potentially expensive to build.
- Changes to the water edge do not seem to take account of tides, winds and rough water. For example, the Tea House will be very exposed and potentially unusable in high winds.
- Because some of the scheme's flaws are present at conceptual and structural levels, these issues would be difficult to remedy without compromising the design's integrity.

3.6 Functionality

Negative features

- No part of the site remains as an unstructured open space. Consequently, it is unclear where a large or even medium-sized events could take place.
- The park's main entrance is located on Jervois Quay opposite Willeston Street. This street could become a more important visual and physical link between city and harbour than is currently the case. However, the location of the proposed entrance does not correspond to existing pedestrian flows. Foot traffic is presently concentrated along the promenade and the route from the City-to-Sea Bridge. Because it is isolated from both these routes, the proposed entrance would at best be a symbolic gateway visible to passing motorists.

- Accessibility appears to be peripheral to the design rather than integrated to the concept.

Scheme 4 Cultural Vessel

4.1 Summary

Scheme 4 is comparable to Scheme 2 in its conceptual elegance and compositional simplicity. However, its folded ground plane introduces a strong contemporary character, and offers a completely new kind of landscape on Wellington's waterfront. It has the potential to deliver a park with a distinctive visual character capable of attracting national and international attention.

Like Scheme 2, this design concentrates landscape elements in a relatively small area of the park. However, in this case, the privileged zone is the Jervois Quay edge. This strategy is risky. It will certainly announce the park in a dramatic manner to passing motorists. It may also succeed in converting the "back" of the site into a positive "front" for users of the park itself. However, there is also a strong possibility that much of the project budget – and many of the park's landscape experiences – will be invested in the least favoured part of the site.

The proposed pavilions illustrate this dilemma. Their scale and rhythm present well to motorists passing at speed. The pavilions accompany pedestrian movement along a secondary walking route which connects with "Whitmore Lane". The pavilions could also support special events, such as markets, along this inland axis, although the structures are not well connected to the main open space. However, these elements are unlikely to attract high level of everyday activity, and may be difficult to tenant, simply because they are isolated from major pedestrian flows.

The Chinese Garden is the less developed than in other schemes. While the design potentially offers the most contemporary interpretation of the Chinese Garden genre, it is difficult to understand exactly how this vision will be realised.

The Chinese Garden is the main occupant of the intensely designed zone along the quay. In this location, the garden is very conspicuous to passing traffic, and provides a transition zone between the street and the park's main open space. While this arrangement is not conducive to a peaceful garden setting, it does ensure that the better portion of the site remains free for unstructured public use.

The plan splits cleanly into major and minor parts along the diagonal line of Willeston Street. While this fracture leaves the view shaft unobstructed, it also produces a sense of disengagement between the northern and southern ends of the park. The disjunction is partially off set by the consistent application of a "folded" terrain. But separation is confirmed again by the markedly less developed proposals for landscape on and around the car park.

Access and sight lines to the upper level are greatly improved by the addition of a generous ramp. This faces the lagoon bridge, and offers a strong invitation for pedestrians approaching from the south. But the other edges of the car park are handled much less skilfully, and present poor interfaces with the lagoon and the rest of the park.

4.2 Creativity & Imagination

Positive features

- The design takes an innovative and creative approach to an urban park. It achieves this by manipulating landform, and using the theme of folded terrain to unify the whole space. The result is distinctive and contemporary and maintains a high degree of visual and spatial coherence.
- The "Vessel" metaphor produces a successful conceptual response to the requirements of the brief.

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- Scheme 4 provides a range of experiences and environmental conditions and, like Scheme 2, proposes a balance between simplicity and intensity.

Negative features

- The continued application of the folded terrain creates spatial issues at the southern end of the site. This area remains unresolved.
- The greatest concentration of design intensity is in the most problematic environment i.e. beside Jervois Quay. This strategy contains risks, notably the extent to which the road edge can become an attractive, intensively used area of the park.

4.3 Virtuosity of Chinese Garden Design

Positive features

- Of the schemes which have a recognisable, discrete Chinese garden, this design is the most unconventional and therefore, potentially, the most contemporary.
- While the Chinese garden is a recognisable area, it is also accessible and fully integrated with the larger structure of the park. As a result, the garden is identifiable without having hard and fast boundaries.
- In this scheme, the rising topography presents the Chinese garden to passing motorists. In this way, the garden can be experienced at several speeds and scales from the “itinerant” to the intimate.

Negative features

- In its current form, the design invites the question: what makes the Chinese Garden Chinese? While the design creates a very interesting form for the Chinese garden, the scheme does not develop the garden idea sufficiently to convey a sense of its character. Instead, the design statement suggests that the garden will be developed in consultation with the Chinese community in Wellington. Consultation is commendable and necessary as the design develops (as it is for all schemes), but this strategy neglects the requirement for the competition to provide a clear direction for the garden’s design.
- Questions must be raised about the strongly linear structure of the Chinese Garden component. Contrary to Chinese garden design principles, the layout seems to permit an uninterrupted sight line through the garden from its entrance. Also contrary to these principles, the character of the vegetation is austere and the geometry fails to suggest convincing locations for traditional elements such as bridges and winding paths.

4.4 Responsiveness to Context

Positive features

- The design employs a few major structuring gestures and a relatively restrained palette of materials and details. As a result, the scheme matches the broad approach taken to public space development on the waterfront.
- This scheme produces a genuinely contemporary urban park.
- Large expanses of sloping grass present a predominantly green edge to the waterfront promenade. This is significant because Kitts Park is one of the few locations where soft landscape can meet the promenade.

4.5 Feasibility

Negative features

- Some areas of the scheme are already well developed, and these details instil confidence in the designers’ ability to modify and implement ideas. However, several of the plan’s flaws are present at conceptual and structural levels. These would be difficult to amend at a later stage.
- The Scheme requires extensive reshaping of landforms. For the sake of economy, it would be necessary to achieve a balance between cut and fill.

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- The small scale and complexity of the pavilions could make them expensive to construct and potentially difficult to tenant.
- For the scheme to be effective, all six pavilions need to be built. However, the number and probably cost of these elements means that they are vulnerable to cost engineering exercises.

4.6 Functionality

Positive features

- Expanses of grass work well as large and small event space. These simple open areas complement the intensity and relative containment of more linear spaces along the quay.
- Scheme 4 extends a green edge along virtually the full length of the promenade. This is one of the few sections of inner harbour where a soft landscape meets the water, and the design maximises this condition.
- Physical and visual access to the upper open space is improved. A new ramp directly addresses pedestrians approaching from the direction of Taranaki Wharf.

Negative features

- The southern portion of the park appears much less resolved than the northern end. In places, the edges of the car park structure and access to the upper level are poorly developed.
- The new ramp removes an existing active edge from the promenade. While the ramp is conspicuous and convenient for pedestrians approaching from the south, it works less well for foot traffic coming in the opposite direction.
- Existing steps are retained at the south-west corner of the car park. These are under-scaled, have a steep pitch and face Jervois Quay rather than the lagoon edge or the City-to-Sea Bridge. Consequently, there is insufficient invitation to explore the upper level of the park.
- The northern edge of the car park is shown as a vertical wall and a grass slope. Neither element assists access or visual engagement between the northern and southern portions of the park.
- The children's play area is marginalised by being relocated on the raised level. It is largely concealed from the main promenade. The design of this area is indicative and somewhat characterless. The raised location presents a significant barrier to users with wheeled vehicles, including parents with strollers and children with scooters and cycles.

Scheme 5 The Gift Line

5.1 Summary

This complex design is likely to exceed the project budget and produce overwrought spaces which are out of character with Wellington's waterfront. However, when some of the more superficial elements are stripped away, the underlying three-part spatial structure is quite simple and offers a sound response to context and brief.

These issues are encapsulated in the treatment of the harbour edge. As proposed, the rugged simple line of the reclamation would be replaced with a needlessly complex – and expensive – collection of platforms. In this instance, the geometry could readily be simplified, but the series of pavilions might be retained – along with some platforms – as a desirable means of animating and engaging the promenade and the water edge.

The colour red is pervasive in this scheme. In Wellington's harsh sunlight, it would be difficult to maintain such a vivid hue. Additionally, budget constraints raise the troubling possibility that

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much of this colour might be achieved with a surface coating which would be inconsistent with a waterfront-wide commitment to “authentic” materials, e.g. asphalt, timber, metal and stone. However, there is a more compelling argument against such widespread use of red. While Wellington is a polychromatic “painted” city, the natural hues of the harbour are often extremely subtle. Used in such a ubiquitous manner, vivid red would detract from an appreciation of the city’s natural landscape, and would clash with the treatment of public spaces elsewhere on the waterfront. These concerns raise the question: could Scheme 5 be built without such vivid or extensive colouration?

5.2 Creativity & Imagination

Positive features

- Underlying the complex visual treatment is a simple three-part spatial structure which is well suited to context, site and function.
- Complexity aside, the scheme’s visual language and contemporary spatial character could offer Wellington a distinctive and memorable park.

Negative features

- In its current form, the park is over-designed and excessively complicated.
- Many elements of the design are superficial and diagrammatic, e.g. the red pathways.
- The colour red could be meaningful for Chinese landscape design, but is something of a cliché and anachronism in recent European urbanism.
- The architecture of built elements is diagrammatic, and must be interpreted as conceptual only. In particular, suggested imagery for the pavilions fails to show how these structures could be inhabited in ways which support adjacent public spaces.

5.3 Virtuosity of Chinese Garden Design

Positive features

- The scheme presents a deconstruction of the traditional elements of a Chinese garden. Conventional elements are present, but are re-organised in an open non-traditional format.
- The theme of a Chinese garden is carried through the park as a whole, rather than being contained within clear boundaries.
- An intense “net” of diagonal pathways produces spatial features which are typical of a traditional Chinese garden but are presented in a fully contemporary manner.
- This invites a critical reading of traditional garden design. It also ensures that the garden is permeable and fully integrated with the wider spatial structure of the park.
- Diagonal red pathways can be criticised as arbitrary, excessively “graphic” and even clichéd in terms of European landscape design. But the same features can be seen as a form of “calligraphy” or “inscription” on the ground plane. These features need to be explained further.
- Timber screens planted with bamboo provide a clear structure to the northern end of the space.

Negative features

- The Chinese Garden is placed at the Northern end of the park in potential conflict with the back-of-house area of the Events Centre.
- The site-wide “net” of Chinese symbolism could develop as a contemporary interpretation of Chinese culture. However, such dispersal could also be seen as a negative, producing a lack of containment and preventing recognition.

5.4 Responsiveness to Context

Positive features

- The design makes a strong engagement with the water edge. It extends access and adds opportunities for interaction with the harbour.

APPENDIX A

- The underlying three-part spatial structure reconciles city and waterfront grids.
- This scheme increases accessibility to the “green edge” of the waterfront. It provides multiple routes and access points, including wheelchair access to the grassed event spaces. Yet all these routes are easily navigable, partly because they are integrated by a strong design language.

Negative features

- Widespread use of vivid red surfaces clashes with the subtle hues of Wellington’s natural landscape and is out of character with the broader design strategy applied to waterfront public spaces.

5.5 Feasibility

Positive features

- The plan exhibits a strong basic structure and possesses an inherent flexibility. The characteristics facilitate further design development, and allows identified design flaws to be addressed without sacrificing conceptual or compositional integrity.

Negative features

- Complex design features are unlikely to be realised within the project budget. In particular, proposals for a reconfigured water edge are likely to be eliminated or significantly modified in order to meet cost constraints. Any modifications to the water edge need to consider tidal movements and potential changes to the sea level.
- The red ground treatment would either be expensive (e.g. tiles) or prone to maintenance and durability problems (e.g. applied coatings).

5.6 Functionality

Positive features

- The central green is a good size for casual and organised events. It is well proportioned and affords ample views to the CBD and the harbour.
- A range of large and small spaces offer opportunities for different sizes of events.
- Universal access principles are stated and integrated into the design approach.
- The north edge of the car park is reconstructed as a monumental flight of steps. As well as improving visual and physical access to the upper level, these face the sun and offer ideal vantage points for watching activity on the green.
- Another generously dimensioned flight of steps occurs at the south-east corner of the car park. This offers a further point of outlook, and greatly improves physical and visual access to the upper level.
- Pavilions or kiosks along the water edge frame views, and support a greater range of activities along the promenade in an area of pedestrian concentration.
- Relocation of the Harris Street bridge directs foot traffic through the centre of the park, and corresponds to a more natural pathway between the CBD and Queens Wharf.

Negative features

- The design makes few provisions for new buildings, other than the pavilions along the water edge. In particular, no attempt has been made to use buildings to support activity on the upper level of the park.
- The children’s play area is relegated to a more isolated part of the site.
- The design fails to deal convincingly with the northern end of the site. Rather than respond to the particular difficulties of this area, the design arbitrarily extends its dominant diagonal geometry towards the Events Centre.