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Tēnā koe Mitch,



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### Parliamentary Precinct - presentation by Studio Pacific Architects

Thank you for recognising our organisation's historical and current concern for Wellington's architecture. The Centre, incorporated in 1946, is a volunteer organisation of professional and non-professional members promoting good design of the built environment. Current committee members include Dr. Duncan Joiner and Dr. Peter Parkes, both of whom worked on development of the Parliamentary Precinct in the past. They bring substantial awareness and understanding of the complicated design problem which the precinct entails.

On the evening of July 27 representatives of the Centre attended Studio Pacific offices to discuss Resource Consent documents circulated prior, and the ongoing evolution of the project. We understand that the Museum Street Building (MUS) and Ballantrae Place Building (BAL) are progressing through developed design, but that the Ministerial Building (MIN) is not so well resolved, and indeed raises several problems at a fundamental level.

### Site Planning

We see benefits in the proposed site planning from a public domain perspective. The massing of the project as discrete elements and functions replaces existing, inconsistent 'lean-to' and 'plug-on' provision. Benefits include:

- It allows each generation of building in the Precinct to be read and appreciated as a standalone structure.
- It exposes the internal spaces to natural light.
- It creates pocket parks and courtyard spaces with seating.
- It allows the former street grid (Museum and Sydney Streets) to be re-instated as public laneways and the original path of the Wai-piro stream to be referenced.
- This cross site access better reflects our democratic ideals of accessibility and transparency.

Based on discussion of the functions of the MUS and the MIN there is concern that the design risks becoming quickly out of date from lack of capacity. The only direction for further building appears to be the Upper Carpark, which we understand forms the "green moat" around Parliament. Further building in this area may ruin this concept.

Mana whenua site concept, Te Tai Whakarunga (translated as 'the upward tide' in consent documents) is not currently expressed in the site design. On the one hand, there is potential conflict where expression of the ancient pathway of Tupua- horo-rangi may be at odds with the reassertion of the old street grid and preserving the 'green moat.' On the other, Tupua- horo-rangi may provide other ways of conceiving movement across the site that present new opportunities. There is not currently, for example, a protected north facing outdoor seating area. It is acknowledged that the site funnels the prevailing winds. A cross site structure may help disrupt this flow. The 1986 new Parliamentary Service Building scheme, undertaken by MWD, successfully dealt with these issues.

Centre members have had some experience with moving established Oak trees. This is an endeavour which should only be attempted if death of the tree is considered an acceptable outcome. We strongly urge that appropriate expertise is engaged here such as Japanese arborists who have a long tradition with moving Oak trees. The 1986 scheme also called for the oak tree to be relocated and engaged such specialists. Mitigation should include planting of a number of cuttings from the tree on site, perhaps along Museum Street.

#### Ballantrae Place Building (BAL)

This building appears to be conceived well. The clarity and efficiencies gained by incorporating plant and basement vehicular accesses into the single building seems sound. There is little sense of this building having expressive values, as a 'backyard' type structure. However, what material and detail design we could see, was satisfying.

#### Museum Street Building (MUS)

This part of the project appears to be approaching design completion. There are conceptual and programmatic efficiencies within the adaptable design that we understood to be sound solutions to the brief.

The laneways created by this building result in an impressive vertical vista from the Terrace-Bowen Street-Hill Street and beyond to the Town Belt. However, the link bridge to Parliament House poses a visual barrier. An underground link may not be possible, so a less obtrusive design such as a suspended glass tube with a graduated frit pattern to conceal structure, should be considered. Seismic separation of the structure could be expressed positively in the design by use of a different 'design language'. Bridges are powerful metaphors so this is also an ideal opportunity to integrate a sculptural narrative into the project.

The co-design relationship with Kaiwhakarite, Kura Moeahu, and other Mana Whenua representatives, was discussed as evolving in a positive way, to everyone's satisfaction. However Māori culture does appear to be reduced to formalistic appliqué. Not going beyond, in other words, many existing other public buildings. Is this an example of European dominance still at work? And what about other cultures? Surely the aesthetic ought to encompass multiculturalism. A challenging task, but good, socially relevant architecture is hard and a struggle!

Along with the debating chamber, the ground floor of the MUS building will be the most publicly visible display of the inner working of the government. This may conflict with privacy requirements for some functions, therefore programming needs to be handled appropriately, with very careful and minimal use of screening and walls. A glass wall revealing a solid screen is more overtly concealing than a solid wall with well placed windows.

There is a contradiction between the 'appearance of glassiness' and the recognition of the poor performance of glass in sustainable building guides. This building will be a 'trend setter' for local design. It will be published in magazines and be rated by local and potentially international design awards. If for this reason alone, the government's promotion of a sustainable future must be 'shown' by this building.

#### Ministerial Building (MIN).

For many reasons, not least of all heritage, we recognise the deeply complicated problems of building. The currently proposed MIN detracts from the rest of the Beehive; the massing obliterates the Beehive visually from the south west, and its architecture is poorly resolved. We do not believe this is something that can be resolved simply by further design development, along the approach taken by Studio Pacific architects.

The proposed aesthetic is based on a formalistic mimicry of the Beehive drum squeezed into a rectangular mass. This doesn't work. The sketch designer, Basil Spence, described the form of the Beehive as "the hub - a universal joint - of New Zealand" suggesting dynamism in the round form, cantilevered floor plate and vertical detailing.<sup>1</sup>

The existing office accommodation block at the west end of the Beehive plinth (former Law Drafting Office) is conceived in contrast to this. It is a simple modest, respectful appendage to the plinth (like the stopping block on school wood working saw bench!). We believe, as the client, Parliamentary Service need to push harder on the architects to substantially rethink their proposal. Greater sensitivity is needed in the reworking of this accommodation to allow for its seismic strength up grade and addition ministerial office accommodation. We suggest that the existing structure is simply rebuilt using the same overall aesthetic, similar scale, same materials, and details and features as the existing building. The test would be that it appears as there is no real visual change to it, and that it is hard to tell

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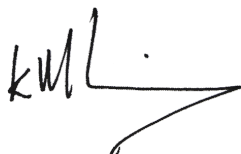
<sup>1</sup> Cited in Robin Skinner 'Hanky-panky at parliament' *Architecture New Zealand*, May/June 2005, 86-88.

apart from the existing. The additional office accommodation space could be created on the ground floor (inside the 'plinth') and extend into the internal carpark area behind it. A small interior courtyard could be created in the existing carpark for daylight and private outdoor amenity. If required the building foot print could extend towards Museum Street, emulating the alignment with Parliament House of the proposed design.

The Centre acknowledges the anxiety about public backlash over 'glamour' building at parliament. This criticism is likely to come no matter what is built. However with the current design brief a reverse criticism is as easily applied: the new builds are not quite big enough to be enduringly serviceable and the spirit with which they have been contracted lacks an aspirational, future looking vision for our democracy. The building forms are little more than well decorated but conventional office buildings. Studio Pacific are fully qualified to produce 'visionary' architecture. It sounds like the co-design partnership is even more qualified to do this. But a lack of optimism is being expressed through the commission.

Ideally the Architectural Centre would see the project opened to a design competition for the better engagement with the community.

Nāku iti noa nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'kml' followed by a stylized flourish that extends to the right and then curves back down.

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