

4 April 2022

Urban Design Assessment Report

for the proposed

MFC Commercial Development

at

110 Jervois Quay, Wellington

SR_510418

Prepared for Wellington City Council

Introduction

The application seeks resource consent for construction of a new commercial building and site development on the site to the east of the Michael Fowler Centre. The site has for some time been used for car parking purposes and more recently has been the location for a temporary building for the New Zealand Ballet. In 2016, the Council staged a competition for redevelopment of the site in which the current applicant was successful. A brief reflecting Council's vision for the site framed that competition. As I understand it, the proposal has continued to be refined and updated, in part in response to feedback provided during a series of meetings with Council officers and advisers prior to lodgement.

The development proposal is described in detail in the application prepared by Urban Perspectives Ltd. and dated 3 March 2022. Other information that I have referred to in preparing this assessment include:

- Architectural Design Statement (ADS) and Plans
- Landscape Design Statement (LDS) and Plans
- Townscape views
- Records of pre application consultation
- Report of the recommendations by the Urban Design Panel convened by Council
- Urban Design Assessment (UDA)
- CPTED Assessment

Site and setting

The site and setting for the project have been described in various documents contributing to the application, including the ADS, LDS and the UDA. The key points noted by these descriptions are as follows.

The site is situated to the east of the Michael Fowler Centre (MFC), constrained to the northeast by Jervois Quay and to the south by Wakefield Street. It is triangular in shape as a consequence of the alignment between these two roads, and largely flat. The effective site boundaries, which influence the footprint of the proposed building, has been described by Council, taking into account surrounding influences such as the alignment of

Pohutukawa trees along Jervis Quay, the outline and servicing needs for the MFC and vision for the public spaces around the site, once the building project is completed.

The temporary building for the New Zealand Ballet, which is located in the centre of the site, is to be dismantled and removed to make way for the project. Similarly, the pedestrian bridge across Wakefield Street, extending from the currently unusable James Smith Car Parking building, will be demolished.

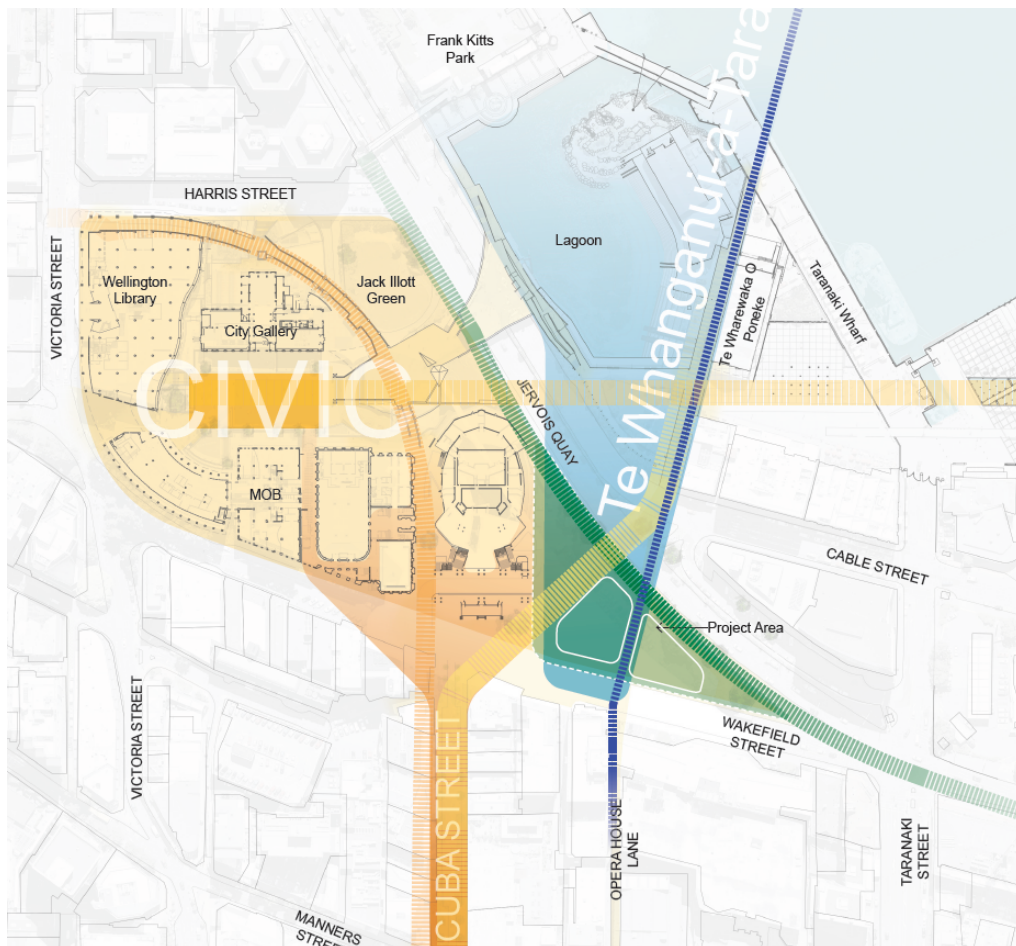


Figure 1: Site area shown in its setting with the key movement corridors around and through the site highlighted. Image from the Architectural Design Statement.

Figure 1 shows the site in its setting, which includes the lower portion of Cuba Street, the Civic Centre Heritage Area, the Michael Fowler Centre, which is also in the heritage area and the buildings along Wakefield Street. To the north, the site is adjacent to the busy Jervis Quay traffic corridor and across this opens up to the Whairepo Lagoon and Wellington Harbour beyond. This location presents the project and its designers with opportunities to strengthen connections between the city and waterfront across an existing but underdeveloped crossing point.

Development Proposal

The proposal has also been described in various documents contributing to the application, with those referred to in making this assessment including the ADS, LDS, AEE and UDA. The key points noted by these descriptions are as follows.

The proposal is to clear the site and construct a new eight storey building, rising to 38.2m above ground level. The building is strongly shaped in response to the triangular shape of the site and in response to the surrounding context. See figure 2 below. In particular, the building form is modelled as three architecturally distinct parts within the overall form composition. The Lantern is the tallest part of the composition, and is expressed as a sweeping wedge extending toward the north. The applicant describes this convex shape of the western façade as a response to the curving shape of the MFC building, a factor that contributes significantly to the visual interest of the proposed development.

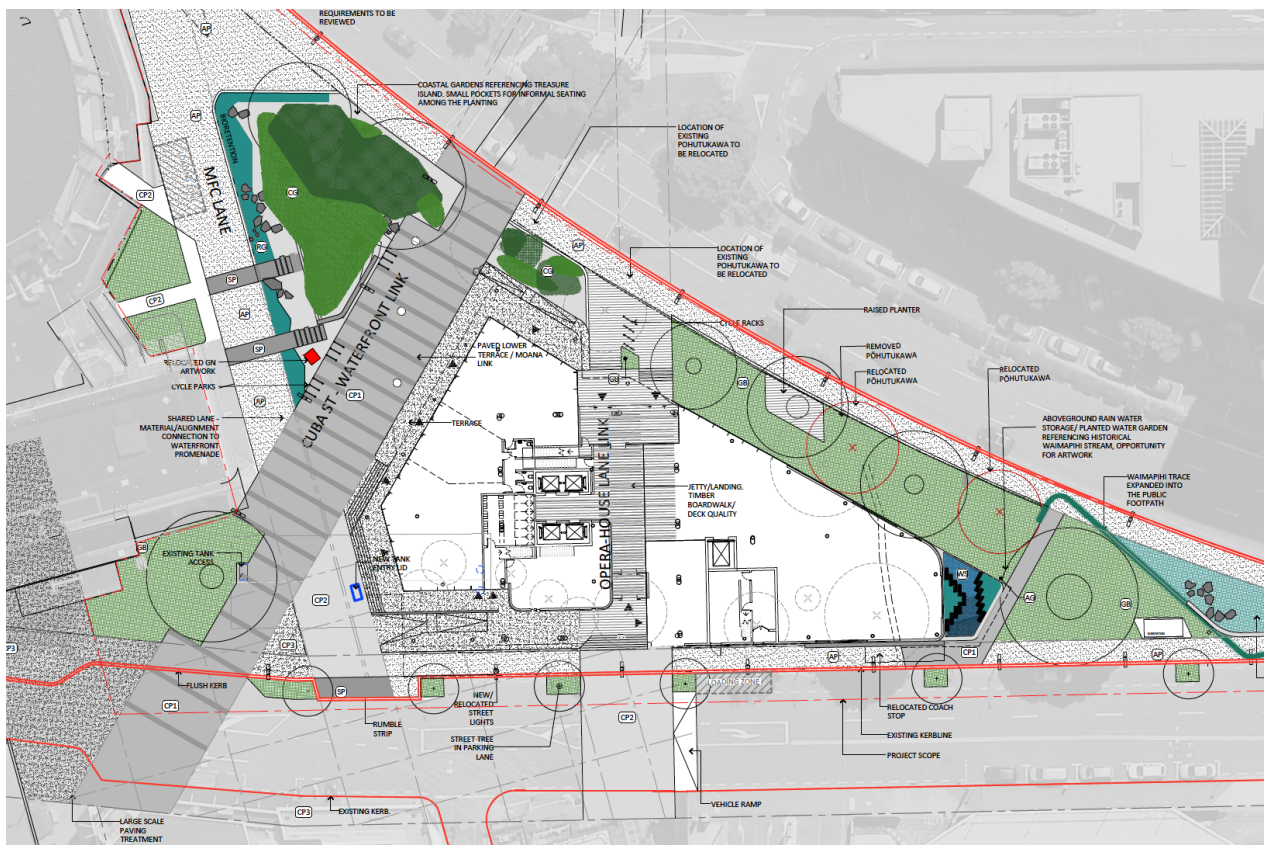


Figure 2: Ground level layout of the proposed development. Image sourced from the Landscape design proposal.

The Lantern is expressed along the southern side of the building through its curtainwall clad façade situated between the West and East Wedges. See figure xx below. The West Wedge is expressed as hovering above an open space oriented toward the Cuba Wakefield Street intersection and the Cuba Heritage Area beyond. The height of this apt of the composition is set to relate to the Renouf Foyer and the walkway apron extending around the perimeter of the MFC building. The East Wedge creates a bullnose end as the building extends toward the Wakefield/Jerojis Quay intersection. The triangular shape of the East

Wedge and bullnose profile link it to the John Chambers Building on the opposite side of Jervois Quay.

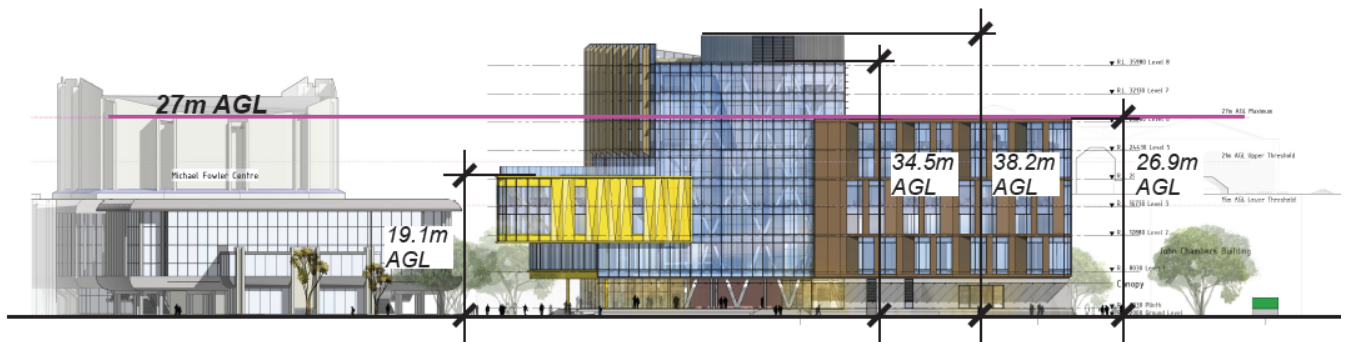


Figure 3: Elevation of the southern facade, extending along the Wakefield Street frontage. note the expression of the three compositional elements; the Lantern, West Wedge and East Wedge.

While the Lantern façade cladding is largely a patterned curtainwall, the two wedge forms develop façade patterns using solid and transparent elements that recall the pattern set up by the curtainwall as well as fenestration seen on buildings in the surrounding area.

The site is to be comprehensively landscaped, including moving of several of the large Pohutukawa trees along the Jervois Quay frontage. The landscaping proposal is based around three distinct areas; the Waimapihi Landscape between the MFC and proposed building, adjacent to the walkway linking the waterfront to Lower Cuba Street, the eastern Water Garden, which acknowledges the Waimapihi Stream and its historic course to the waterfront, and the Green Gateway Corridor, that incorporates the existing Pohutukawa trees along Jervois Quay. Together, the three components of the landscaping plan would provide places for people, shelter from winds and traffic, passive treatment of stormwater runoff, collection of water for irrigation and opportunities for biodiversity in the transitional zone between city and sea. The landscaping proposal extends across the notional site boundaries and would require coordinated implementation by the applicant and Council to help ensure that the overall proposal can be implemented.

Further descriptions of the proposal are incorporated into the design review that follows and in the documents provided by the applicant referred to above.

Review and assessment

The Central Area Urban Design Guide (CAUDG) is the reference for assessing the urban design outcomes of development proposals in the city's Central Area. As the site also lies within the Civic Centre Heritage Area, an additional set of more specific guidelines has been added at Appendix 3. The Heritage Area Design Guidelines primarily address proposals that would directly affect Te Ngākau/Civic Square through co-location and/or the characteristics of individual heritage buildings. The design guide makes specific reference to the MFC carpark site, noting that it has been included "so that future development ...

can be easily managed to protect the heritage values of Civic Square and its buildings and features.”¹

Design Coherence

Design coherence considers the extent to which the form, architectural spaces and fabric of new buildings are coherently designed, demonstrate design integrity and integrate relevant design criteria.

From an overall perspective, the architectural form of the proposal is coherent, a result of careful composition of the three principal sub-volumes. The West and East Wedges build up compositionally to the taller Lantern form when viewed from most surrounding vantage points. These volumes add visual interest and help to moderate perceptions of height and scale. The proposed height of the Lantern is important to the success of the architectural composition, in purely compositional terms. During a meeting prior to lodgement, the applicant presented images with the Lantern height set lower. These images helped convey that a key factor in the success of the current proposal is the relationship of heights between the three constituent parts. The relationships between the different components help to set up a visually pleasing sculptural form.

In terms of the relationships created with existing buildings and spaces elsewhere in the setting, again the formal composition enables it to fit comfortably and positively. As has been discussed in the UDA, the ADS and by the UDP in their report, the different heights relate well to the heights of the adjacent buildings, including the John Chambers Building, the MFC and the former Civic Building on the corner of Wakefield and Cuba Streets. As the various townscape views provided by the applicant also show, the overall proportions of the building and site development fit comfortably into the setting.

The various façade treatments, including colour, help reinforce the three volume composition and enhance visual interest. The proportions set up in the grid of the glazing bars of the curtainwall create a form of backcloth helping to link the three parts of the form to one another. Over this fabric, a pattern of solid/void is set up in the facades of the two wedges to generate a rhythmic overlay on the surfaces and help to distinguish these parts. As noted in the UDP report, the yellow colour proposed for the West Wedge is appropriate in relation to the Cuba Precinct of the city.

The setout of the building at ground level defines the edges of the important pedestrian links around and across the site, particularly the diagonal pathway linking Cuba Street with the waterfront and the Whairepo Lagoon. The landscape design works hand in hand with the architectural setout at this level to create generous, legible pathways. There can be little doubt that the project will enhance legibility of the city to waterfront connection and provide substantial public amenity across the site. I agree with the UDA that the “proposal

¹ Appendix 3, p30

is based on a well-considered and contextually responsive design concept². The overall design of the MFC commercial development is coherent and responsive. In my opinion, it satisfies this part of the design guide to a high standard.

Relationship with context

Relating to context means understanding and responding in a considered way to the conditions beyond the site.

The proposal responds to the opportunities presented by the site location and the factors that influence movement across and around the site. In responding to these opportunities, the proposal should enhance the vital connections between the city and its waterfront. The drawing on page 13 of the ADS provides clear explanations for the ways the design responds to these surrounding influences.

Also at ground level, the landscape design reinforces a sense of place by linking the site to various offsite settings. Planting and water design along the northern edges of the site, between the proposed building and the MFC, help to create strong links with the coastal edge to the north and Whairepo Lagoon. These design elements serve to link the site to its historic condition, when it was part of the natural shoreline around Wellington Harbour. This is a strong conceptual attribute that can enhance sense of place (G2.4).

As noted above, the formal composition of the proposal responds positively to the buildings around the site, including the Michael Fowler Centre. The West Wedge helps relate the development to the Cuba Street area through its height and façade articulation. As the height of buildings across Wakefield Street sit between the heights of the Lantern and the West Wedge, this part of the composition helps moderate height relationships. Its key attribute is the way in which the height relates to the Renouf Foyer and lower gallery spaces around the perimeter of the MFC. The Lantern height, on the other hand, relates to that of the Auditorium volume of the MFC and to the One Market Lane development across Jervois Quay/Wakefield Street. Building heights have been well considered as a way of relating the development proposal to a varied setting (G2.3).

Similarly, the composition of facades including the proportions of openings and patterns across the facades assist in creating positive relationships with the setting. These findings relate closely to observations made in the UDA and I agree that the proposal has responded to the key contextual conditions and interpreting these through the lens of the relationship to context objectives and guidelines.

Siting, height, bulk and form

This section of the design guide invites consideration of the extent to which the siting of buildings allows for the intended activities while also acknowledging neighbouring buildings, reinforcing valued patterns of public space and create positive open spaces.

² UDA, p5

Street edge definition & Building alignment

The building design adopts three different approaches to alignment with street and public space edges, with each of these being appropriate to the conditions. The outcomes are positive. Along Wakefield Street, the building aligns closely to the street, such that the edge is clearly defined. This continues the clear edge definition to the west and across the street. Along the Jervois Quay frontage, the alignment is set back to allow the landscaping to moderate and filter the interface between the site and this busy street. The existing stand of Pohutukawa trees will be retained, with several trees being moved to work more effectively with project aims and objectives.

The interface between the MFC and the proposed building creates a new public space, not only to enhance movement between the city and the waterfront but also as a space to linger in. This is enabled by the form of the building along this edge, which creates a form of loggia or covered area in which people are invited to sit informally on steps.

In my opinion, the proposal meets the guidelines for street edge definition.

Height and scale relationships; Building bulk

The arrangement of building volumes across the site effectively addresses G3.5 to G3.8 in the design guide. Several observations have been made above about the way in which the architectural form appears to have been modelled in an effort to link the proposal to the heights of other buildings in the near and midrange settings and to create a visually pleasing architectural form when perceived from longer vantagepoints. These points are also relevant under this heading as they can help explain how the composition of volumes in conjunction with treatment of the facades of the two lower elements (West and East Wedges) helps to moderate perceptions of building bulk (G3.8). The overall design outcome is positive under this part of the design guide.

Natural light, outlook and ventilation;

The site has been defined in such a way that it leads naturally to a pavilion building; one that is open around on all sides. This is both a challenge (in creating spaces at ground level for servicing) and a benefit. The design manages these opportunities well to create accommodation that will be light filled with plenty of outlook. In my view, guideline G3.9 is clearly met.

Positive open space and Pedestrian permeability

One of the key attributes of the site, and one that the design responds favourably to, is the opportunity to create publicly accessible spaces. The primary public open space is the one linking the Cuba/Wakefield Street to the waterfront, utilising the existing crossing point with some enhancements. This space is oriented to receive sunlight, set up to enable people to sit and linger in and is highly legible, helping people to move between the city and the waterfront more easily. In my opinion, the design responds effectively to G3.10 and G3.12.

Edge treatment

The buildings that line the edges of streets and other public spaces establish their character, quality and attractiveness. They collectively define the setting for the activities that take place there.

Building fronts, Active edges & Building entrance enhancement

The UDA provides a summary of the attributes of the proposed development against these guidelines. I agree with the observations and note that the edges of the proposed building will help to activate Wakefield Street despite the presence of blank or inactive wall areas. The design has successfully (in urban design terms) avoided an on-site servicing area, which had been planned for this frontage. This has reduced considerably the length of inactive building frontage and enabled tenancies 3 and 4 to provide edge activation. Another attribute of this building frontage is the access that is provided to the secondary through site link, aligning with Opera House Lane. The entry is legible and appears welcoming, not only from across Wakefield Street but also from further west. The pathway leading to it from the Cuba/Wakefield Street corner will be legible.

The building is to have a base isolation foundation system, requiring the ground level to be set up by as much as one metre. This level difference also addresses issues surrounding climate change and sea level rise. This has been turned into an opportunity also for the adjoining public spaces, most particularly along the Cuba to Waterfront walkway. Generous steps provide informal seating with sunny aspect along this walkway, helping to activate the edge and provide public amenity.

Servicing and car parking

There is no car parking provided for on the site and, as noted above, servicing is proposed to be made from kerbside. This helps navigate one of the challenges with a pavilion style building; where to locate the back of the building? In this case, comparatively smaller proportions of the building perimeter are given over to cars and servicing. The urban design outcomes, and conformance with G4.6, are enhanced.

Façade composition and building tops

The façade composition of buildings determines their relation to context, their design coherence, and their suitability for a range of uses. The objectives reiterate expectations around coherence of the design and ensuring that façade design does not limit the building being used for other purposes in the future.

The three components of the building are each expressed individually and in ways that help ensure strong visual interest and appropriate connections are established with surrounding buildings and spaces. The plantroom adopts a contrasting, screen form of wall cladding that creates a distinct cap over part of the Lantern form. In my view this can be an effective design treatment provided the materials and detailing of the plantroom is appropriate. I note here also that the alignment between the two claddings is very close on three highly visible facades. As such, achieving appropriate visual details is critical to the

success of this cladding relationship. The western façade cladding of the Lantern is extended up beyond roof level, in part to help screen mechanical plant that is located between the plantroom and that side of the building.

I agree with the UDA that the silhouette of the proposed development is interesting from a range of different viewing points. The manner in which the plant room is integrated with the facades below is critical to the success of the roof design, however. As noted above, this will need to be carefully considered at following stages of design development, should resource consent be granted. Moreover, when viewed from above, the effect of plant located external to the plantroom is unclear. The drawings provide little understanding of the mechanical plant, noting that figs. 59 and 60 of the ADS present conflicting representations of the size of this plant. Should resource consent be granted, it would be important to allow a condition requiring this aspect of the design to be checked early on, with a view to minimising visibility from surrounding public spaces and from elevated positions.

There is a distinct lack of parapet around the edges of the various roof surfaces, which can lead to unintended visibility of minor roof mounted elements. This should also be carefully considered as the design continues to be developed and certainly should be incorporated into the roof design consent condition referred to above.

At ground level, there is sufficient transparency in the shopfront design to help ensure communication of human scale. Above ground level, the setout of openings across the façade and setout of the curtainwall module will also help convey a sense of human scale. (G5.11).

Materials and detail

Materials and detail are important in maintaining visual interest and a positive relation to context and heritage value.

Each of the volumes is articulated in form and cladding materials. The nominated palettes are outlined, with completed project examples, at section 3.8 of the Architectural Design Statement. The material selections and anticipated detailing characteristics are appropriate and support the design agenda both within the site and in relation to the setting. The materials and suggested detailing seem to be appropriately robust (G6.5) and to foster high levels of visual interest (G6.3 and G6.4).

Conclusion on the CAUDG

The proposal has been reviewed in relation to the design guide objectives and relevant guidelines. This analysis has found that the design is overall coherent and, while the building forms and cladding materials vary, relationships between them are also established such that the whole composition hangs together in a visually interesting and coherent manner. The proposed development has been found to meet expected urban design outcomes, as outlined by the CAUDG.

However, details are also important and while these are anticipated to support the design outcomes, it is important that these also be monitored through conditions of consent, should resource consent be granted. The expectations and cautionary comments are provided in the discussion above.

Design excellence

As parts of the project would extend above the height standard set for the site, it is required to demonstrate design excellence (Policy 12.2.5.5). Both the application AEE and the UDA discuss policy implications of design excellence and the framework by which design excellence is to be considered. Referring to a set of criteria developed during a Council led workshop on Design Excellence, the UDA provides a list of six criteria. The first five of these criteria rehearse, more or less, the content of the Central Area Urban Design Guide and therefore do not provide any substantially different or additional guidance³. I agree. The UDA then notes the most useful reference for discussing Design Excellence in relation to the policy is item *vi*, which refers to a design that *goes over and above what would normally be expected to satisfy the Central Area Urban Design Guide provisions*.⁴ Again, I agree with this approach.

As I have become familiar with the details of the proposal through the lens of the CAUDG, the design attributes that I believe contribute to design excellence have come into focus in three categories. These are discussed below.

Contribution to public spaces

There can be little doubt that the site is in a strategically important position to link lower Cuba Street with the waterfront. The design response to this opportunity is excellent. In particular, the site plan creates a highly legible and accessible diagonal link between the proposed building and the MFC. Legibility is enhanced through the form of the building as developed over the lower levels. In this case, the progressively cantilevered floors above carve out a channel for viewing in both directions. Legibility is also enhanced through the paving and landscape design.

The public space is more than a place to pass through; this will surely become a place to visit and linger in, with people attracted to the ground level activities, the generous areas along the frontage in which to sit and the pleasant outlook onto the gardens. The design of this part of the project helps ensure access to sunlight and provides attractive, informative connections with the Waimapihi Stream.

The project also proposes to provide a managed link through the site, in the sense that this link passes through the building. During operating hours, the public will be given access to the path through the building, aligned with Opera House Lane. This provides another choice for those wishing to move between the city and the waterfront and should help

³ UDA, p21

⁴ UDA, p22

activate the building and Wakefield Street frontage as the connection becomes known. In my view, while not fully public, this connection goes well beyond what may be provided as a response to the CAUDG in other circumstances. This design responds to the unique circumstances of the site and surrounding setting.

The design response along Jervois Quay and at the eastern point where Wakefield Street intersects with it is also excellent. This is initiated by decisions to set back from these edges to enable the existing trees to remain and to landscape between the building and street edge. I agree with the architects, who provide a rationale for the decision to bring planting right up to the perimeter of the building along these edges. The outcomes arising from the setback and landscaping treatment are positive.

Overall, the design approach to the project leads to excellent public spaces, certainly beyond that which could be expected through the design guide.

Physical qualities

The physical qualities that go beyond the expectations of the CAUDG are centred around form articulation, materiality and structural design. The site development, which has been discussed above, can also be considered excellent.

The form of the building appears to be the result of careful consideration of the surrounding context, creative form making and clever use of materials. In my view, these attributes take it from a merely compliant design to one that is excellent. This aspect is also noted in the UDA and by the UDP in their discussion of the building massing and overall height. While they do not use the terminology 'design excellent' the UDP has commented that the height of the Lantern is necessary to achieve the successful compositional outcomes. The resultant form of the building is visually interesting, responsive to its setting and effective in framing the public spaces around the site.

The materials proposed for this development are uniformly of a high quality, which should enhance the visual interest one perceives on a day-to-day basis and should continue to look tidy over the life of the building. While it is impossible to make any judgement of the detailing quality based on the information provided, one can set reasonable expectations based on past performance. In this case, the project team has delivered a series of visually complex, exceptionally detailed and robustly constructed projects around the Wellington area. I am familiar with most and have observed that these projects have delivered in each of these three areas. I am also reassured that there will be the opportunity to check that material selections and detailing remain consistent with expectations by way of the consent condition proposed by the UDA. There is no doubt that the specified materials will contribute to an excellent design for the reasons noted and that detailing/construction will simply enhance these expected outcomes.

The building is also to be structurally base-isolated, which is further evidence of the quality that the proposed development strives for. This enhances resilience and certainly is a benefit the tenants would enjoy. There is a public benefit of course, in that there is

less likely to be injury to tenants, their visitors or public around the site in the event of a severe seismic event. I note that parts of the development would be used for tertiary teaching and research. Each and every building like this that is built to such a high structural standard helps advance the technology and serves to normalise the approach. This will have medium and long term benefits to society.

Relationship to setting

In a sense, this aspect of the design has been filtered through into virtually every one of the design evaluation discussions made above; the building and overall development of the site are clearly responsive to the setting which leads to architectural forms, surfaces and site development that can be considered excellent. Here I can note and agree with the second bullet point under the design excellence heading in the UDA; the proposal clearly illustrates that the key characteristics of its contextual setting have been considered and suitably interpreted.

Overall then, like the applicant I consider the proposal to redevelop the site as 'design excellent' for the reasons set out above.

Summary

In summary, the project proposal:

1. Meets the objectives and most of the supporting guidelines, where relevant, of the CAUDG.
2. Achieves a standard of design that can be acknowledged as excellent, in terms of Policy 12.2.5.5.

I have reviewed the proposal in relation to the informally agreed criteria for design excellence, which is required because of the overall height of the proposal. This review has found that the project achieves Design Excellence, with support for this organised under three headings. The proposal goes beyond the CAUDG expectations in the way it responds and contributes to ***public open spaces*** around and across the site; the ***physical qualities*** of the proposed building and in the quality of the ***relationships formed with the setting***.

I would support formation of a consent condition that would require the applicant to submit more detailed plans, when they are available, for confirmation that they comply with the expectations set at the time resource consent was granted⁵.

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⁵ Condition suggested in the UDA.