



16 March 2012

Wanganui District Council
P O Box 637
Wanganui

Attention: Bruce Falk

**Support for Funding of Cultural Heritage
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui**

I write on behalf of New Zealand Historic Places Trust to support the strengthening and development proposals for the Sarjeant Gallery and the application for funding.

The Sarjeant Gallery is a category I registered historic place and is listed on the Wanganui District Plan. It is a culturally important historic building which holds the esteem of an engaged community and deserves support in order to address conservation required for its future well-being. The proposals involve two significant sections of work.

Base Isolation Seismic Strengthening

The gallery is proposed for a base isolation strengthening scheme to resist seismic events, designed by Holmes Consulting Group. Base isolating the gallery is to involve a substantial new sub-floor structure and a new concrete floor. The gallery walls are to be partially retained and partially reconstructed with reinforced concrete. At roof level, further new structural elements will support the perimeter wall, the dome and the gallery roof.

Best practice principles for heritage¹ state that design should:

- *Retain surviving internal and external heritage fabric as far as possible and disturb, distort or obscure it as little as possible.*
- *Respect the design, form, scale, materials, workmanship, patina of age, colours, contents, location, curtilage and setting, including alterations that have heritage value.*
- *Avoid work that will compromise or obscure fabric of heritage value.*

It is clear that the proposals are challenged by these principles. There is considerable demolition and removal of building fabric which does affect the integrity of the material. However, it appears that the seismic capability of the gallery is at such a level that change of some magnitude will be unavoidable.

¹ NZHPT, *Sustainable Management of Historic Heritage, Information Sheet 12*, 2007, Wellington

The current base isolation proposal is preferred to the earlier design in that it avoids the wide extent of drastic change. While a considerable amount of original fabric will need extensive rebuilding, the base isolation alternative is less invasive. It is possible that, in the design detailing, the effects on the heritage fabric can be minimised further.

The proposals indicate that the surfaces and elements affected by the works will be returned to their former appearance however it is not evident from the proposals how extensive the making good or repair will be or how it will be done. NZHPT recommends that a conservation architect be engaged to advise the project team – and specifically the engineering team – as the detail design of the work is undertaken. The engineering design can then be informed by heritage values of the building.

Extensions to the Sarjeant Gallery

On an entirely different path, the Sarjeant Gallery is to be extended with the construction of a new building to its north east. The extension has been planned and thought about for a number of years. The proposal is for a new rectangular shaped gallery, constructed on three levels, and connected by a glazing-enclosed bridge. The gallery increases exhibition space but also includes storage, an auditorium, education spaces, convenient parking and a café – the functions which are seen to increase useability and appreciation of galleries.

A relevant best practice principle is that additions should

- *Ensure any new work is of a scale and location that it does not dominate the heritage place and respects its setting.²*

NZHPT is pleased to see that the design of the extension does not dominate the heritage building. The proportions of the extension respect the heritage building in that it is no wider, higher or longer than the Sarjeant Gallery. The dome remains the apex and the extension continues the very strong axis from Watt Street through to Bell Street. It is the opinion of the NZHPT that, in general, the extension has a scale and location that does not dominate.

A further principle to consider is that

- *Historic patterns of access and movement are retained.³*

A new entrance to the gallery is made through the glazed bridge area which will change the circulation into and out of the building. There are obvious advantages to the new entrance: accessibility and security can be foremost in the design; the proximity to the car parks makes for an easy entry.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

However it is most crucial that the current entrance is maintained as a point of entry. The significance of the main façade of the building, the important view up many steps from Victoria Avenue and the sense of arrival which is achieved, would result in a sense of disappointment should the doors be solidly closed. The sense of the heritage façade would be ambiguous and ultimately lost.

In Summary

The NZHPT supports the proposals for both strengthening and extensions in principle, and commends Wanganui District Council for taking an active approach to matters of safety for people and collections.

The NZHPT supports base isolation in particular as the damage to heritage fabric above floor level is reduced. As the project proceeds through its design phases, attention to minimising the damage to heritage, even further, is recommended, especially for highly visible surfaces and spaces.

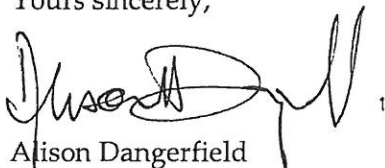
Where walls and other elements are damaged or removed, reinstatement should be planned to a level that can allow equal appreciation once the strengthening is in place. Detailed specifications for reinstatement can be based on careful documentation of the original fabric.

The NZHPT has worked with Council representatives and consultants for these projects and acknowledges their work to date. Strengthening works are, in principle, necessary for the long term integrity of the building and with it comes loss of some heritage material. NZHPT recommends that a heritage architect be part of the project team so that, during the detail design and construction phases, adverse effects can be understood and minimised.

The NZHPT is pleased to commend the design of the extensions overall but recommends that the main façade of the Sarjeant Gallery be retained as a point of entry to that the sense of the building is maintained. The potential for archaeology in the area of development should be considered.

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust endorses the direction of work to the Sarjeant Gallery and commends the Wanganui District Council in working hard to care for the building.

Yours sincerely,



Alison Dangerfield
Heritage Advisor Architecture

