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Cobblestone Park

This is a submission from the Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design, and in the promotion of good design in Wellington.

The Architectural Centre opposes the proposal to redesign Cobblestone Park.

(1) we do not believe this is the best use of council money in its aim to provide quality public spaces throughout the city.

(2) we believe that any lack of use of the current park is due to the park's location on SH1 and the associated noise issues, rather than the design of the current park.

(3) the redesign will destroy a park of heritage significance and reduce the variety of landscape designs in inner city Wellington.

The key issue for us is "Why change the park?" Our discussion below explains why we believe that this question has not been sufficiently answered to validate the redesign of the park.

Money and Public Spaces

We understand that the redesign of Cobblestone Park is part of the "Three Parks in Three Years" Council Initiative which has to date produced the unfortunate and unproductive redesign of Glover Park, and the more productive new park on Courtenay Place. The redesign of Cobblestone Park is the final phase of this. While we appreciate the council's attempt to improve inner city public spaces, we believe that the desire to "make-over" existing parks is naive. A more intelligent and strategic approach is needed. As we have previously noted, Glover Park, for instance, is in a poor position and will consequently never be a successful park for the middle-class citizenry WCC design seems to be aimed at.

Instead, the Architectural Centre believes that council efforts should be put into (1) maintaining existing parks and (2) purchasing new land for inner city urban parks, as part of a strategy which identifies key location relevant to thoroughfare and street useage, and environmental considerations, such as sunlight, wind, traffic noise and pollution.

Swan Lane car park for instance would provide an excellent site for an urban city park. The money allocated for the redesign of Cobblestone Park (over \$1 million) should be redirected to a fund to be built up to acquire such land for more inner city parks.

Reduce, reuse, recycle. Wellington has adopted a carbon neutral policy, which would be more in fitting with refurbishment of the park rather than redesign. Improving drainage and keeping to an appropriate maintenance plan would consume less resources (and money). It can be argued that the main outlay necessary is a new bung for the pond, which has been un-maintained and hence empty of water for over 3 years.

Aim of the Redesign

It would be easy to conclude that the redesign is primarily due to the elegance of political sloganeering "Three Parks in Three Years." We believe more substantial reasons are

needed in this era of sustainable development, where political whim is in sufficient for wasteful and ill-conceived redesigns. The Council webpage claims the current park does not "meet the needs of the growing residential population." We believe that any lack of use of the park is not so much due to its design, but rather due to more complex issues, prime of which are its proximity to the noisy and smelly SH1, and the lack of mutual engagement of the School of Architecture building and the park.

The park will always be supported by users of the Schools of Architecture and Design though, and the greater issue is the negative impacts of SH1. The proposed design does not address this. We do not want the same unfortunate situation as has happened with Glover Park, where lack of use by Wellington's middle-class citizenry is a product of the park's location, not design. Cobblestone Park could be an equally expensive error.

Café, Exhibition Space, or Ball Park

While we welcome the initiatives to look at these other recreation uses in the city, we seriously question all those uses proposed so far. The part of the School of Architecture and Design closest to the eastern end of the Park is a Library, and peaceful enjoyment of the Library would appear not to have been considered. A built exhibition space goes against the principles of flexible, usable open space, and there are other more suitable spaces for rent nearby, with higher pedestrian counts. That said, the eastern end of the park is not well utilised, and while it would be rather nice to have more children / youth-friendly activity spaces around the city, having a playground outside the library is rather problematic, especially given the proximity of SH1.

Variety and Heritage in City Park Design

We do not want city parks to be minor iterations of Waitangi Park. Waitangi Park is an excellent design and we (as in the past) strongly support it. We do not however consider it appropriate that other city parks (in this instance Cobblestone Park) be Waitangi Park "mini-me"s. The scheme as proposed makes no reference to the history/culture of its Cuba Street location.

The current design from 1974 is significant. It is one of the few examples of 1970s park design left in Wellington's inner-city. It was designed by a significant woman landscape designer, Mary Buckland. Her work has been documented and researched by Paula Wilkinson. New Zealand's landscape profession is comparatively young. This park is an example of city park design in the profession's formative years. This fact should be celebrated, as should diversity in inner city park design.

Conclusion

We encourage the WCC to keep, and adequately maintain, the existing Cobblestone Park.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Cobblestone Park proposal. If you have any questions about any of the points raised please contact me.

Yours sincerely

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President
The Architectural Centre

Sources

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