

10 November 2006
To: Rebecca Scannell
Wellington City Council

Re: 50 Customhouse Quay Notified Resource Consent (SRN: 148140)

Dear Rebecca

The Architectural Centre withdrew its objection to the initial proposal for 50 Customhouse Quay (Appendix C C-52) presented as part of the Resource Consent application (SRN: 148140). Our objection to the initial scheme was on the grounds that it was "unimaginatively designed. The design is hesitant, bland and watered-down. The stepping back appears to be about hiding the addition rather than being proud of Wellington's current production of architectural heritage."

After discussion with the NZHPT and ourselves, a revised scheme (Appendix C C-55) was produced by Warren and Mahoney which successfully asserted a new architectural heritage and made sophisticated connections to the existing J.T.Mair Government Life Building through actively engaging with the existing building's proportional schema, and giving this a contemporary interpretation. This scheme managed the difficult terrain of negotiating existing heritage fabric and contributing a high quality architecture to our city. We commended Warren and Mahoney for this proposal, and hence we withdrew our initial objection.

It is with some disappointment that a much watered down scheme (Sketch, Elevation, Section and Part-Plan as shown on Appendix C C-57) has been presented as an additional revised scheme for the site. This scheme is capped by the "tower lighthouse" which appears embarrassingly twee. In addition, the strength of the addition has been broken by the reimposition of the unfortunate stepping of the initial scheme. It must be acknowledged though, that despite these, this is an improvement on the very initial proposal, and that the building's context in the city, and the angle of the street-level view, will help to mitigate these issues. We do however consider that this third scheme still falls into the trap of making naive and simplistic connections to the existing building and as a result produces a compromised architecture.

We must acknowledge though that improvements from the initial bland and unimaginative scheme have been made. While we do not support the new proposal, because it is not, in our opinion, the best architectural outcome for the site, we are pleased that the first scheme (Appendix C C-52) will not be built, and withdraw our opposition to that scheme as it is not proceeding. We do however strongly encourage any further development of the design which asserts the architectural merit present in the second proposal, and we discourage any further "design-by-committee".

We must however reiterate our initial concerns regarding council policy:
"It is time that architects are allowed to truly design additions to heritage buildings, rather than present hesitant schemes which appear to be the work of an obedient and unimaginative draftsman. The Heritage Provisions astutely note that additions of significance and/or by a significant architect should be considered as important as any original heritage fabric. Why is it then that there appears to be no active encouragement by the council to encourage today's additions to heritage buildings to be significant, and to add to the vibrancy of the city and our new architectural heritage? We must stop the current trend of apologetic hiding and hesitancy when adding to heritage buildings. These buildings do not deserve the mediocre architectural additions they are currently getting for their future."

Yours sincerely

Christine McCarthy
President
The Architectural Centre



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