

21 June 2010

sent : kilbirnie@wcc.govt.nz

attn: Paul Kos, Principal Advisor, Urban Strategy and Centres

Re: Kilbirnie Town Centre Draft Revitalisation Plan

This submission is from the Wellington 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. Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the planning of Kilbirnie Town Centre.

Broadly we support the draft plan, but we also have the following comments to contribute.

Densification

We supported the council's ambition to encourage the densification of Kilbirnie. This is important for sustainable development and to attract greater numbers of Wellingtonians living along the transport spine from Johnsonville to the airport.

Transport

We encourage the council to ensure that its planning allows for the possibility of light rail in the future. Light rail needs to be available as a plausible option and the ability to debate this option in the future is dependent on roading decisions made today. In the shorter term we support the council's moves to encourage cycle and pedestrian transport by reducing the incentives for car traffic (e.g. large supermarket carparks). We applaud the introduction of new pedestrian cross-town routes linking Pak'n'Save through to Bay Road, and ask that these be carefully designed in a manner which is sensitive to the existing urban fabric they will penetrate.

Kilbirnie is currently well serviced by public transport because the bus barns are there. If these barns are to be developed into mixed use residential, where do the buses end up? and how will Kilbirnie's current level of public transport servicing be maintained? This is a pertinent issue as a proportion of those buses may be diverted to service the new recreational centre on Cobham Drive.

The 2D spaghetti junction outside Pak'n'Save is one point in particular, which we consider needs some smart thinking. Currently it is confusing for cars - but possibly safer for cyclists than many parts of the city. There are currently a number of roads and short slip lanes that cross each other and create traffic chaos. We believe that a reduction in the number of roads in this area, and the possible conversion of some of the roads to pedestrian/cyclist only routes, may be an answer to the current traffic muddle.

We suggest that Council invest in some significant traffic replanning in this area, particularly to the block containing KFC and the Mobil gas station. We note that there could be gains in the form of open space that could be used as either additional park area, or building sites for community facilities to offset the cost. In addition, the proposed formalisation of the cycle lane/residual road south of the bus barns needs to be redesigned as a safe cycle path with integrated access from existing roads to facilitate its use.

We also suggest that the speed limit around Kilbirnie be reduced to 40km/hr like Newtown and Tinakori Rd. This 40km/hr zone could be made to include the area between Childers Tce to Mahora St.



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Heritage

An area in which we think the draft plan is deficient is in its consideration of heritage. Kilbirnie is an important suburb in Wellington and New Zealand's past being proximate to the site of the 1939-1940 New Zealand Centennial Exhibition. Kilbirnie also has a number of buildings which have heritage value: for example buildings on the corner of Evans Bay and Bay Roads (facing the Mobil, now NZ Quilter), the building on the corner of Rongotai and Bay Roads (currently a dairy and Flight Centre), and the bus depot barns being prime of these. In addition several buildings from the 1980s are good representative examples of the era. Such structures should be recognised as important to provide continuity of built fabric and local identity, as well as supporting Kilbirnie's heritage as a mixed use community.

We consider that as part of this study a heritage audit and evaluation be conduct to identity heritage and non-heritage buildings which will play an important part in the future shaping of Kilbirnie's built environment.

Mixed Use

We are pleased the council has recognised the mixed-use character of Kilbirnie but are disappointed that this is not reflected in the imagery informing the draft plan. Kilbirnie is also an area of diverse ethnicity and race. Kilbirnie is also host to the Wellington Islamic Centre, the Wellington Indian Association, as well as a number of churches (e.g. St Giles Presbyterian, Kilbirnie Crescent). It is important that these diverse ethnic and religious cultures are celebrated in terms of both the imagery and the actual re-planning of Kilbirnie.

Rather than reflecting this the council continues to promote a generic white middle-class imagery (pp. 12-14) (which will be irrelevant to many people in the area) in its proposal. Rather diversity needs to be represented. You need to employ an artist who can comprehend a greater diversity of: use, people (in terms of age, ethnicity, socio-economic groups), architectural form, and building age. Your current artist clearly has too many Photoshop files of white people (ready to uncritically paste into any council proposal), and a limited notion of architecture (include some of the existing Kilbirnie buildings please!).

This is not a trifling issue, but suggests the council plans to displace the Muslim, Indian, Polynesian, and the working class population from Kilbirnie, to transplant a C21st Thorndon (or even Ponsonby) in its place.

Kilbirnie seaside suburb

It strikes the Architectural Centre as fascinating, given the proximity of Kilbirnie to Evans Bay, that the potential of the link from Evans Bay to the town-centre has not been explored. Developing this link by providing safe ways to cross Cobham Drive, seem to us to be an important opportunity for Kilbirnie. We acknowledge that the Study Area stops just short of the Evans Bay foreshore, but surely establishing sight-lines and promoting pedestrian and cycle connections to adjacent areas of significance, such as the shoreline walkway is an important part of the strategy for the area.

We also believe that the boundaries of the study area have to go further, to examine the recent intensification of retail and light industrial uses in Tacy and Kemp Streets, and the effect that the Rongotai retail barns are having on the area. The undoubted increase in effects of traffic, people, and interest in Kilbirnie from the Indoor Sports Centre need to also be factored into this redesign. The building edge along Cobham Drive, for example, needs to be an active one to facilitate connections to the harbour: to deny this north facing, seaward edge of Kilbirnie any connection with the harbour is perverse.

However, the fact that the recent Tacy Street retail park development has been a failure in terms of both retail success, urban design appearance, and the lack of integration into the existing Kilbirnie retail/commercial structure must be of concern to the council. It certainly is to the Architectural Centre and the people of Wellington.

The study area also precludes discussion of connections between Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay and the "big box" retail centre there. The link to Lyall Bay in particular could be made more explicit. Kilbirnie has the opportunity to be developed as a non-car zone, to mark it as a distinct community shopping experience. Taking cars out of Bay Road might be a way of doing this.

Kilbirnie, as a seaside suburb, is also a high wind zone. Raising the height of the buildings and creating long axes of streets will amplify this wind. We suggest incorporating a staggered height and frontage-line, in combination with planting and wind-break/screening elements, to the plan for Bay Road may help to mitigate these prevailing wind patterns.

Conclusion

Thank you again for this opportunity for being involving in this consultation process. Kilbirnie is currently a rich area of our city because of its diversity in people and built form. We encourage a strengthening of its unique qualities, and its better integration into the public transport infrastructure of the wider city, but we this should not be at the cost of gentrification.

Yours faithfully

Guy Marriage
President
The Architectural Centre