

29 November 2006

**Re: Newlands Shopping Centre**

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.

**1) Support for the proposal**

The Architectural Centre supports the draft principles for the future development of Newlands Shopping Centre as there is a huge need for some intervention at Newlands Shopping Centre to improve the environment and to increase its relevance for the Newlands community. The draft principles are a first step but more detail is needed. Equally the inclusion of a plan of the area is helpful but this is somewhat misleadingly entitled "Development Plan" as it largely documents the existing situation.

**2) Key Issues**

The Report to the Strategy & Policy Committee "Newlands Local Centre Context Study" (21 Sept 2006) is an accurate and sound analysis of the present situation. The area is dismal and looks both uncertain and unfinished because, so far, the Council has not yet provided strong and definitive urban design leadership.

The Draft Plan does not provide the kind of strong urban design framework needed. One of the aims of *The Northern Growth Strategy* is "providing attractive public open spaces within neighbourhoods" yet this Draft Plan does not yet provide any quality public spaces. A redevelopment of the Newlands Centre is the single best opportunity to provide for that need, but the Draft Plan has so far missed out on achieving that.

**3) Specific suggestions**

Length of visits

Currently, apart from the pub and the Kurunchi Kumaran Hindu Temple, Newlands Shopping Centre has no facilities which encourage people to spend time at the shopping centre. We recommend council encouragement for facilities which will support longer visits to the area. For example the provision of facilities, such as a library, a playground, a kindergarten, cafes or restaurants, and the new Community Centre (to provide spaces for local community groups), would assist in revitalising the shopping centre.

Transport connections

The area is well provided with existing pedestrian access ways and we encourage the retention and improvement of these. We also encourage the development of these as cycle access routes. Such transport access ways also need to connect into the surrounding suburb, and to existing facilities such as Newlands Park and the adjacent school. We also suggest that similar pedestrian and cyclist access ways cut through the large block along Newlands Road which the plan marks as "Redevelopment Opportunities."

Current bus routes circumnavigate the shopping centre. We strongly support the development of the shopping centre as a transport hub. We suggest that the "proposed east-west vehicular/pedestrian link" should be used as a bus route, with at least one major bus shelter area, so that all buses can routinely loop through the Centre and so further encourage people in the neighbourhood to visit.



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It appears that the existing carparks are dedicated to separate groups of people (e.g. users of the pub, users of the Hindu temple, users of the shopping centre). As a result the area appears to be over-catered for by carparks. We recommend a rationalisation of carparking to truly reflect current needs, and the availability of street car parking. Such rationalisation would allow for more space to be dedicated to public recreational spaces, as well as encouraging an intermixing of the different populations which use the centre, and which currently appear segregated.

#### Redevelopment Opportunities

Newlands Shopping Centre is a low rise development and we encourage any future development in the area to remain low rise. While we assume this is also the council's intention we suggest a statement confirming this should be part of the development plan. We consider that the proposed "Newlands Long-Term Development Plan" has been hesitant and conservative in its suggestions for redevelopment, largely marking existing buildings as "Redevelopment Opportunities." We consider that opportunities for redevelopment (especially for new shops and community facilities) also exist along the Bracken Rd edge of the existing shopping centre carpark. If well designed, such development could operate as a filter to draw people into the existing shops rather than a barrier. We also suggest that "Potential Residential Intensification" would be a better development ambition for the large block on Batchelor St currently labelled "Redevelopment Opportunities." We note that the plan does not show where the new Community Centre is to go. This will be one of the major new buildings in this Shopping Centre, and the Council should lead its site selection.

#### Provision of Public Spaces

The Long-Term Development Plan provides for limited public spaces. The plan indicates one "Potential Community Park." This is an existing open space. The existing glass "termination" to the space at the conclusion of the shops needs to be removed to encourage through traffic. We recommend that this area be extended and that connections are made to streets and bus stops. This "Park" space needs to be extended by two north-south extensions: one north to include the tee-shaped cul-de-sac off Stewart Drive, and the other south towards the proposed east-west vehicular/pedestrian link, accommodated within the existing carparking area, but designed such that it does not cut off vehicle access to the shopping area.

These new public spaces need to accommodate areas of both hard surfaces and grassed areas. The opportunity also exists to include more seating and large-scale trees to provide shelter and to assist with the shopping centre's visual identity as a special community place within the otherwise featureless Newlands landscape. These spaces might also include a playground with traditional play equipment, but it could also be more creative with the inclusion of interactive sculpture such as Marte Szirmay's elephant sculpture in Newmarket, Auckland which functions as both play equipment and sculpture.

Lastly, the Draft Plan does not show how all the buildings and open spaces should be linked with sheltered pathways that are user-friendly to parents with pushchairs and young children, and providing "good spots" where school children and young adults would want to gather, but which can also be easily over-seen by the shopkeepers and their customers.

#### Existing Communities

While the Newlands Centre appears to be visually deficient in terms of heritage and specific cultural markers, the shopping centre clearly caters for an Indian community. Other church and community groups are also active in the area. We consider that it is important that these groups are actively consulted and involved in the future development of the area.

### **5) Conclusion**

We support the proposed Newlands Shopping Centre Plan with the additional detail we have suggested. In addition to the points raised above, we also draw your attention to

the importance of employing good urban designers, landscape architects and architects with proven track-records to ensure the success of the project.

Yours sincerely

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The Architectural Centre