

## Heritage Assessment of the Waitakere Central Civic Centre

### Brief

Barnes & Associates Ltd has been contracted to provide a heritage assessment of the Waitakere Central Civic Centre, Henderson, to evaluate its potential for statutory protection by inclusion as a scheduled item in the Waitakere City District Plan.



### Acknowledgement

The top five images on this page were provided by the Waitakere City Council.

## The Waitakere Central Civic Centre

The Waitakere Central Civic Centre is closely associated with the Waitakere City Council, which was formed in 1989 by amalgamation of a number of smaller Councils as a result of local body reforms.

Early in its life the Council adopted the Eco-City aspiration, not only as a brand but also an ethos which would pervade the Council's decision-making.

The Council saw the manner in which it developed its own buildings as critical to achieving its vision. For this reason it commissioned a design for its new civic centre that would allow the Council to 'lead by example'. It selected a site in Henderson that allowed the integration of its civic centre with a transport hub, and provide a connection with the town centre. The design was undertaken according to the principles of environmentally sustainable design.<sup>1</sup>

The Waitakere Central Civic Centre was completed in 2006 to a design by Architectus in association with Athfield Architects. The design excellence was recognised in 2008 with an NZIA Resene NZ Award in the 'Community and Cultural' category.<sup>2</sup>

### Assessment Against Plan Criteria

***1. historic - the item is associated with a past event, notable people or activity, a social period, a particular technological milestone, scientific history or principles, or scientific data about fabric (such as the composition of mortar);***

The Waitakere Central Civic Centre is closely associated with the Waitakere City Council, which was formed in 1989 by amalgamation of a number of smaller Councils as a result of local body reforms.

Shortly the Council functions will be transferred to a new larger entity, after a similar merger. It is considered that after the formation of the new Auckland Council, the building will continue to be associated with the former Waitakere City Council and its vision.

***2. architectural - the item is a good example of a particular architectural style, construction technology or the work of a notable architect;***

The Waitakere Central Civic Centre was completed in 2006 to a design by Architectus in association with Athfield Architects. The design excellence was recognised in 2008 with an NZIA Resene NZ Award, in the 'Community and Cultural' category.

Both these architectural practices have attracted a number of awards for their work. The principals of these practices include leading members of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. In 2004 Ian Athfield received the New Zealand Institute of Architects Gold Medal, the supreme award in architecture.

Architecture New Zealand, the journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, described the building in its May/June 2008 issue:

*'The project's careful integration of administrative and civic wings with a busy public transport interchange makes for a humming building which actively brings the council together with its local community. A strong pedestrian link to Henderson town centre and sympathetic response to the existing urban fabric has brought life to what was previously industrial land and signals a new beginning for what used to be the rough side of the tracks. The rigorously planned building displays a somewhat robust exterior, while within, the soft curves and warmth of the council chamber create a delightful heart to the otherwise staunch building. The success of this project has raised the bar for future rejuvenation of the Henderson central area.'*<sup>3</sup>

As discussed above the design is energy efficient and uses sustainable materials. The cladding in some parts of the building is brick, a material with an abiding association with Auckland's west. As an exemplar for sustainable design, the building has also been planned to maximise the use of natural light while avoiding over-heating, exploit transport linkages and provide cycle storage space, have efficient air conditioning and water use, and minimise food waste. Even a green roof has been included.<sup>4</sup>

The building has a carved *pou* at the foot of the entrance stairs, and carved panels on a column extending through both seating levels of the Council Chamber. On the wall at the front of the Council Chamber is an art work which represents *Matariki* (the Pleiades), significant to Maori. The integration of these artworks has allowed a Maori dimension to be incorporated in the public parts of the building.

***3. landmark - the item is a physical landmark within the City which is valued by the community;***

The Waitakere Civic Centre is a landmark in the Henderson Central area, and a marker for the adjacent redeveloped railway station.

***4. the item has significance to the community - consideration given to value placed on an object by the local community, irrespective of other values;***

As discussed above, the Council Chamber is a beautifully crafted space, with a close association with local democracy and government in Auckland's west.

The building as a whole has a strong association with Waitakere City's Eco-City concept, and was designed to demonstrate leadership in environmentally building design.

Additionally the incorporation of Maori elements in the design has emphasised the relationship of the building, and the Council, with Maori.

The works of other West Auckland artists such as John Edgar are also significant.

***5. visual - the item is important visually and contributes to the amenity, the form, scale, fabric and setting of the place or an area;***

The building is generally consistent in scale with some of the larger developments in Henderson.

The form of the civic wing is designed to reflect the nature of the Council Chamber, and is accordingly different to the commercial development in the area.

**6. patterns of settlement - the item is an important representative example of the surrounding settlement pattern (such as an example of a bungalow within an area where housing built in the 1930s dominates), or is a relatively rare example in an area which is dominated by another form of settlement.**

The building sits on a re-developed industrial site, and is not considered to reflect any particular pattern of settlement.

**7. Sense of Place - contributes to the identity of the local area or city e.g. orchards, special buildings, community halls etc.**

The building contributes to the sense of place of the area not only because of its civic functions and the history of Auckland's west, but also because of its association with the Eco-City concept.

The historical associations are well represented by the Civic Commission 2006 art work by Allie Eagle, designed for the lobby to the Council Chamber. Doors in the back of the Council Chamber open to extend the space, at which time this art work forms a backdrop.

The relationship with Maori is embodied in the building, as discussed above.

## **Conclusion**

It is concluded that the Waitakere Central Civic Centre is a significant building that warrants statutory protection. This protection should cover the interior of the Council Chamber, its public lobby, and the external artworks associated with the building (by West Auckland artist John Edgar), as well as the recently developed Japanese garden reflecting the partnership with sister city Kakogawa, Japan.

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Waitakere Central Civic Centre is scheduled in Category II. The listing should include the interior of the Council Chamber, its public lobby, and the external artworks associated with the building, as well as the Japanese garden.

Barnes & Associates Ltd



Tony Barnes

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<sup>1</sup> *Trends Commercial Design Vol. 22. No. 9 pp 170-179*

<sup>2</sup> *Architecture New Zealand No. 3 2008 May/June p81*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Sustainable Design: Waitakere City Council's Civic Centre (Council leaflet)*