

Russell Protection Society Committee and Member Comments on the proposed Museum Design

The Museum building forms one of the first impressions of Russell when entering the township and of all buildings it ought to embody the design guidelines contained in the Russell Handbook, the Russell Planning Study, The Strand Heritage Zone in the Far North District Plan and the Draft Russell Community Plan for Russell (see appended extracts).

This is not the site or place to make an “architectural statement” that hugely stands out from surrounding buildings in the Heritage Precinct.

The scale of the building is strongly questioned.

It is considered “monolithic”, “brutal”, “overbearing” and “out of character” by many people in our community..

Redrawn perspectives and comments that the proposed building is lower than the existing one simply serve to ignore the reality that the proposed design involves two-storey unbroken facades that emphasise the building's considerable bulk.

The building does not relate to other buildings in Russell despite claims that it is a modern iteration of boat sheds from Russell's maritime past.

The building's plywood and concrete exterior adds a further alien element which is not in keeping or character of Russell.

The proposed use of plywood panels is but one example of potential high maintenance risks.

The design does not reflect Maori shapes and forms irrespective that subsequent attention has been given to adding on exterior panels and carvings as a way of compensation.

The building could relate better with the waterfront.

The function of the building is unclear as it looks more like a school or other institutional building.

It is an intimidating structure where one is confronted with a slab two-storey wall along the length of the building that is neither inviting nor welcoming, and does not draw people into it.

The proposed entrance is very exposed to the strong SW winds that frequently blow through this corridor.

The relationship between the Reserve and the proposed building has been marred.

The grass areas to the West have been bisected by angular paths and a wall that serves to alienate usage of this valuable outdoor space by locals and visitors.

There is no provision for any shelter or seating on the North side away from the building.

The maritime displays such as the Endeavour and whale boat lack a cogent link with the waters of Kororareka Bay, while less valuable office space appears located in prime positions.

The entrance and internal flow is compromised by the lack of clear visual links between different display areas.

What we would like to see:

The proposed building broken up in terms of shapes, forms and rooflines to avoid a slab-sided, bulky, monolithic appearance.

The use of more traditional materials and detailing that is consistent with the Russell Handbook.

More open informal approaches from both The Strand and York Street.

Better linkage between the proposed building and the adjoining Reserve with sheltered seating away from the main building as well as alongside it.

The use of covered verandas and overhangs to welcome people and shelter them from inclement weather.

A direct link between the maritime displays and the waterfront by using glass and / or opening-up internal spaces / areas.

Repositioning of the entrance and offices to nearer the York Street end of the building to create a proper welcome space with improved internal flow and clear visual links between different display areas.

Summary

The Russell Protection Society is NOT asking for an ersatz copy of a nineteenth century building, but what we are seeking is the use of familiar design elements that allow the proposed building to blend-in and compliment the Russell landscape and character of the Heritage Precinct.

Russell Protection Society wants to wholeheartedly support a new Museum that is in harmony with the heritage values of Russell in terms of design, colour, scale, detailing, fencing and landscaping. However, we remain vitally concerned.

Extracts from the Russell Handbook

The following important design guidelines contained in the Russell Handbook include:

- There is a relative smallness of scale of buildings and neighbourhood identity areas
- Retain a sympathy for other buildings in the immediate vicinity
- Social, cultural economic and ecological changes influence the development of style
- Overhangs and verandas can be useful
- Simple lean-to roofs make useful additions to main buildings
- Development should not attract undue attention or reduce the significance of a predominant existing character
- Maintain harmony with other buildings
- Before spending time and money on plans ensure that those who are giving design assistance or preparing plans are aware of these (Handbook) objectives and how they relate to the site
- Design should be consistent with the architectural style of historic buildings in the vicinity in terms of primary and secondary form, proportion, use of materials and colour
- Materials are generally wide weatherboard and corrugated iron
- Relationship of wall areas to window and door openings should be considered
- Well pitched roofs are preferred (including hip roofs)
- Use of posted verandas to reduce the scale of facades and the impact of large glazed areas
- Balustrades usually form an integral part of the veranda
- Use verandas as a common element
- Mass, Form, Scale and Proportion are the fundamental elements of suitable design
- Where windows are to be divided, vertical emphasis should be maintained
- Wooden joinery in Heritage areas is preferred
- Large structures can have lean-tos, verandas, screening, pergolas and posts to soften its impact
- Commercial buildings have traditional materials such as wide horizontal weatherboards, timber joinery, corrugated iron roofs and glass in small areas.
- The use of lighter and more traditional colours is listed according to their 2660 and 4800 British Standard ranges

Extracts from the Far North District Plan (The Strand Heritage Precinct)

The following Objectives, Policies and Assessment Criteria contained in the Plan include:

- The maintenance of the special character within the Strand Heritage Precinct is essential to the protection of the heritage values of Russell as a whole.

- While the buildings differ in style, scale, form and proportion, there is considerable use of veranda, roof forms and materials that reflect an earlier architectural style
- To recognise, protect and retain the heritage values of the various heritage precincts derived from the sites, buildings and objects of historical significance and to protect such sites, buildings and objects from inappropriate subdivision, use and development
- To recognise and protect the special character of the various heritage precincts that derives from the built form in combination with the landforms
- That the location, scale and nature of new buildings and structures be controlled so as to not adversely affect the historic character, streetscape or landscape values of the various heritage precincts and of buildings of historic significance within those heritage precincts.
- The Council will consider new buildings as a restricted discretionary activity having regard to the location of buildings and structures in relation to buildings on adjacent sites, particularly so as to maintain a consistent relationship between buildings and the street, the exterior design and appearance of the building, the colour of all exterior surfaces, the materials used, the heritage value of the building and the effect of the activity on the heritage value of the Precinct
- The extent to which any proposed work uses similar materials and is of a similar design to the existing buildings on the site
- The extent to which any demolition or removal of a major building on a site adversely affects the existing streetscape or destroys a building of historical or archaeological significance
- In the case of The Strand Heritage Precinct, the extent to which Heritage colours are used for all external surfaces
- In the case of The Strand Heritage Precinct, the effects of any use or development on pedestrian access to and along The Strand.

Extracts from the Draft Russell Community Plan

The draft Russell Community Plan contains the following Guiding Principles:

- We acknowledge and respect the heritage of Russell and the Bay of Islands
- We value diversity of our communities, our people, their resilience and well being
- We welcome collective participation in developing our plans and aspirations
- We trust and respect our different viewpoints, rationale and consensus decision making

The Policy Statements for the Built Environment include:

- Protect the heritage, cultural and visual values of our environmental landscape of Russell and its surrounding areas.
- We encourage new building development to be in harmony with heritage values of Russell in terms of design, colour, scale, detailing, fencing and landscaping.

