

BEFORE THE INDEPENDENT HEARINGS PANEL

IN THE MATTER OF: An application for land use consent,
pursuant to section 9(3) RMA for
Partial Demolition and Additions and
Alterations to All Saints Church

AND

IN THE MATTER OF: A hearing by Palmerston North City
Council

SECTION 42A REPORT OF MORTEN GJERDE – URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

Dated 4 December 2020

Executive Summary

1. The All Saints Church is a valued part of the Palmerston North central city. The building makes positive contributions to the townscape and to the more immediate streetscape around Church Street/The Square.
2. The applicant proposes changes to enhance the seismic stability of the existing church building. The seismic upgrade interventions would be largely contained within the fabric of the existing building and where the interventions would be visible, they have been sensitively designed to be compatible. Other changes are also proposed to address deficiencies in weathertightness and accessibility.
3. A building addition to the west of the existing church and wrapping around onto the north (street) elevation, is proposed to help the church better meet its aims and aspirations, all of which have been articulated in the application.
4. The addition would affect perceptions of the site and building at several levels. At the townscape level, the silhouette is most important and, except for the area over which the addition would be built in the lower west areas of the form, the outcomes would be largely unchanged. Overall, the changes would result in a minor adverse effect on the contribution of the building to townscape.
5. At streetscape level, the changes to the building would be significant. Some of the changes would be positive, including opening the façade of the existing building by removing the Baptistry and inserting glazed doors. The transparency of the new addition would help animate the adjoining street space and convey positive messages about the vitality of the building and activities that take place there. As a new intervention, the addition, and the project more generally, would help convey a sense that this part of the Square and of Church Street are vital.
6. However, the form of the addition would significantly affect people's perceptions of the All Saints Church brick building. The proposed addition would be located in front of the church on two sides, extending from the

west side elevation around the corner to also sit in front of the street façade. The addition therefore assumes primacy on the site, when viewed from the street. The addition would also diminish our ability to perceive the existing building as a complete, three dimensional form.

7. The form of the addition contrasts strongly with the form and design attributes of the host building (the All Saints Church). While such contrast is acknowledged to be a valid way to approach the design of an addition to a visually coherent and complete host building, in this case the addition would lead to an incoherent composition.
8. The application also seeks to establish parts on the public footpath including the curving façade of the addition and several freestanding abstract trees. While some aspects of this part of the proposed development would lead to positive outcomes, such as those that provide shade and shelter amenity and that would lead to people lingering before and after scheduled church activities, overall the effect would be negative. This is because:
 - a. Encroachment of the building onto the public footpath would be perceived poorly, and
 - b. The location of the proposed addition and the proposed abstract trees would create pinch points that would interrupt pedestrian use of the footpath, particularly at times before and following a scheduled church activity.
9. In my opinion, the overall effect of the proposed addition would be negative.

Introduction

1. My full name is Morten Tor Gjerde. I am a New Zealand Registered Architect and qualified urban designer. I am also an Associate Professor in the School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington.

Qualifications and experience

2. I hold the academic qualifications of Associate of Arts from Palomar College (California), Bachelor of Architecture with Honours from California Polytechnic University at San Luis Obispo, Certificate in Urban Planning from the University of Oslo, Master of Research in Urban Design from Oxford Brookes University and PhD in Architecture from Victoria University of Wellington.
3. I am registered as an architect in New Zealand (NZRAB no 2594) and in California, USA (CAB no 14911). I also hold registration with the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) in the USA. I am a member of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and in 2003 was elected to Fellow status by my peers in the Institute.
4. I have considerable experience of reviewing and providing expert opinions on the urban design outcomes of new development proposals. This experience has been gained by reviewing applications for resource consent against the relevant design guides, policies and objectives of district plans. Coupled with my training and experience as an architect, I often provide assistance to applicants to help them improve the design outcomes of their proposals.
5. I have prepared this evidence on behalf of the Palmerston North City Council to assess the urban design effects of a resource consent application to strengthen and extend the All Saints Anglican Church, 338 Church Street, Palmerston North.

Expert Witnesses – Code of Conduct

6. I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014 and that I agree to comply with it. I confirm that I have considered all the material facts that I am aware of that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express, and that except where

I state I am relying on information provided by another party, the content of this evidence is within my area of expertise.

Background

7. The changes can be organised under three headings; modifications to enhance the ability of the church to withstand earthquakes, modifications that will enhance weathertightness and compliance with other parts of the New Zealand Building Code (NZBC) and modifications that will help the church better meet their needs and aspirations. I am aware that there is overlap between many of these changes when they are organised in this fashion.
8. All Saints Church will be seismically upgraded and repaired so that the main hall can be used again for worship. The earthquake strengthening work will largely be contained within the envelope of the existing church building. Bracing will be added to the roof while the unreinforced brick masonry walls will be cored top to bottom at regular intervals to enable unbonded reinforcing to extend their full height. This process will require new reinforced concrete beams to be formed along the top edges of all these walls. I understand that some decorative details will be removed in the process.
9. The changes to enhance weathertightness and NZBC compliance include reroofing the church, creation of a new alternative accessible entrance to the 'South Aisle' (west) elevation to improve circulation and fire safety improvements.
10. Another area of proposed work is primarily aimed at helping the Church meet their seven stated goals. The changes and additions grouped under this heading include creation of a new lobby and reception addition; removal of the existing Baptistry wall in order to create a new accessible entrance into the main church space; creation of a new access to the 'West' (north) Porch entrance; development of a new linking covered walkway along the 'South Aisle' (west) edge of the church; and introduction of new landscaping.
11. The measures taken to achieve these goals are largely manifested in a single storey, glazed area to the north and west of the existing building. The addition adopts an organic, curvilinear design approach that includes 'tree-like' timber

columns, curving outline shape and shallow curving (in section) roof form. The form of the proposed addition is illustrated in Appendix C to the application.

12. In addition to the new attached building form, several small freestanding structures are planned within the site and on the adjacent street to provide areas for informal conversation and visual interest. These and other proposed streetscape interventions are illustrated in Appendix D to the application for resource consent.
13. Parts of the new building addition extend over the street boundary and would be located on the public street. Similarly, the proposed freestanding 'trees' would be located on Church Street.

Scope of evidence

14. My assessment considers the the potential urban design effects of the proposed changes. This includes the effects on townscape – views of the building and its setting taken from moderate distances such as The Square (Te Marae o Hine) – and streetscape – where the effects are evaluated from the more immediate vantage point of Church Street.

Reports and material considered

15. As part of preparing this statement of evidence, I have read the following reports and documents:
 - a. Applicant's Assessment of Environmental Effects
 - b. Appendix C: Plans of structural and architectural work proposed
 - c. Appendix D: Plans of streetscape work proposed
 - d. Appendix F: District Plan relevant rules assessment
 - e. Appendix G: Heritage impact assessment
 - f. Appendix H: Record of consultation by applicant
 - g. Appendix I: Assessment of relevant objectives and policies of the District Plan

16. I have also read

- a. The submissions numbered 1 to 101;
- b. Applicant's Response of further information 15 Jan 2020;
- c. Applicant's Response of further information 17 April 2020.

Site visit

17. I have visited the site on two occasions to become familiar with the setting and the existing All Saints Church building. I visited the site most recently on 1 November 2020.

18. The church building is not currently used by the parish, although I understand that the offices and facilities to the rear of the church building are occupied and used regularly. They were not open during my visit and observations of the site were limited to what I could see from the paved areas around the building, including the Church Street footpath.

19. During my visits, I have observed several characteristics of the site and surrounding area that are relevant to how I have considered the effects of the proposed changes.

20. The church building is easily perceived as a three-dimensional form. The laneway to the east and open garden area to the west create space around the building that enable it to be read in this way. This differs from some other buildings in Church Street and The Square more widely, where the effect of a close relationship between adjoining building and a verandah over the footpath means that perceptions of these buildings is largely as two dimensional facades.

21. There is a low level of engagement between the building and public space. This is in part created by the tall fence between the grassed area and the footpath but in even greater part due to the lack of transparency at the street level of the building façades.

22. The characteristics described in paragraphs 20 and 21 are not unusual or unexpected, given the building typology and the fact the church building is currently closed, in part, for use.

Assessment

Preface

23. The key matters for consideration in this assessment of urban design effect are taken from the District Plan. In particular, City View Objective 10 anticipates that “the visual appeal of the City is enhanced” and Objective 11 is that “the principles of good urban design are given effect to for all new subdivisions, urban intensification and major building developments, particularly those located within the City Centre”.

24. The Inner Business Zone objectives and policies that are relevant to this assessment are as follows:

Policy 2.3 To require as a key aspect of maintaining the continued vitality and economic viability of the Inner Business Zone well designed public spaces and buildings which are: fit for purpose, comfortable, safe, attractive, accessible, durable.

Policy 4.2 To ensure that a core pedestrian area is provided in the Inner Business Zone that is compact, conveniently interconnected, pleasant, safe and has a high level of landscape design.

Policy 4.4 To promote building frontages that include publicly relevant activity and strong visual connections with the street.

Policy 5.1 To promote a sense of place in parts of the Inner Business Zone that have a recognisable identity.

Policy 5.4 To promote building development in the Inner Business Zone which respects the historic character of surrounding buildings or heritage areas.

OBJECTIVE 6 All buildings in the Inner Business Zone contribute to a high quality public environment, particularly those buildings fronting the Square.

Policy 6.1 To enhance the public environment of the Inner Business Zone by guiding the design of new building development, and enhancing the accessibility and usability of buildings, and their relationship with public space and publicly used private space.

Policy 6.2 To require high quality building design within the Inner Business Zone that acknowledges, and responds to, the context of the site and surrounding environment.

Policy 6.3 To enhance the visual quality and design of ground floor level developments fronting streets, public space and pedestrian thoroughfares, in particular to require all buildings to be built to the street edge, and characterised by active street edge treatments, particularly those sites fronting The Square.

Policy 6.5 To ensure that in providing pedestrian shelter any adverse effects on the architectural integrity of a building to which the shelter is being affixed, and any effects on public amenity, public safety and the informal surveillance of public spaces are managed.

25. The key urban design matters that precipitate from this list of objectives and policies is as follows.

26. The effects of the proposed additions and alterations on

- a. the functional and visual relationship between the building and adjoining public street
- b. aesthetic perceptions of the site from distance (townscape effects)
- c. aesthetic perceptions of the site from close by (streetscape effects)
- d. perceived sense of place

27. In considering these effects, the spatial and visual relationships formed between the proposed changes and the existing site and setting are important to consider.

Relationships between the building and adjoining public spaces

28. As noted above, the existing building fosters a low level of visual connection between the building interior spaces and the adjoining footpath. This is in the nature of the building typology and the age of All Saints Church.
29. The proposed changes will enable improved visual connectivity between these spaces, largely because the Baptistry would be removed and replaced with transparent openings. More importantly, the proposed foyer space and wind lobby are largely transparent, which would foster positive visual connections.
30. The extension of the new foyer building, and the associated wind lobby would diminish the quality of the adjoining footpath space. This is in part because the footpath would be narrower than could be expected but would also result from the appropriation of the public footpath by the church with the proposed abstract tree structures.
31. The extension by the building into public space, in conjunction with the freestanding structures, would create a bottleneck of 2.500m width along this footpath. Refer to p23, Appendix D. The appropriation of public space by a private organisation can also lead to negative associational meanings, which could further diminish the way people perceive this part of the proposed development.

Townscape analysis

32. Despite its peripheral location relative to The Square, the church building makes a valued contribution to townscape. From areas around the Butterfly Pond in the southwestern corner of the site, the distinctive profile of the building is clearly visible and its form makes it easily recognisable. This view is illustrated in Appendix 1.
33. The silhouette and brick cladding are the two key features that inform generally positive perceptions of the building at a wider scale of townscape. These two aspects of the building are unique in the setting, which only adds to the attraction.

34. The building adopts a well-recognised gable form associated with Christian buildings internationally. Visual interest and impact are enhanced though the asymmetrically placed tower.
35. The clarity of the All Saints Church silhouette is made possible by the fact the building stands clear of other buildings. The silhouette is enhanced by the form of the tower, the steeply sloping roof shape and by the elegant finials of the tower.
36. Although the proposed additions would conceal some of the brick cladding at lower levels and interrupt views of the entire existing silhouette (thereby also creating a new and more muddled silhouette), In my opinion the changes would have minor negative effects on the building's contribution to townscape.

Streetscape analysis

37. At the streetscape level, the architectural composition, façade details, materiality and site development of All Saints Church become more relevant to the way it is perceived. The form composition is based on the Gothic Revival and underlying this is the typological gable form. Being able to see the form in the round helps us to understand its three dimensional characteristics.
38. The proposed additions to the building will significantly impact the architectural coherence of its form and this will in turn impact on the surrounding streetscape. The new area of building will interrupt the coherence of the gable structure upon which the design of the church building is based. This effect can be seen on drawing A310 of Appendix C to the application.
39. The additions would visually limit the extent to which the existing building will be seen as a complete and coherent form. This outcome is largely as a consequence of the additional volume extending from alongside the existing building to around in front of it. This would cause views of the street elevation of the existing church building to be blocked and interrupt perceptions of the form as a three dimensional object.

40. The additions adopt a largely horizontal emphasis whereas the church building is largely vertical in compositional emphasis. This contrast in formal emphasis would, in my opinion, diminish the extent to which the vertical compositional characteristic of the host building is perceived and lead to an uneasy compositional relationship.
41. While contrast is a valid approach when designing additions to existing buildings, and an approach I would encourage, the manner in which the proposed addition is composed is so unique and so different to the building that it would be attached to that it creates a visual conflict. This leads to poor visual outcomes when the project is viewed from the nearby locations, outcomes that in my mind would be significantly adverse.

Sense of place analysis

42. Sense of place develops over time through social processes and is largely based on the characteristics of the buildings and spaces, the nature of activities taking place and the meanings people associate with them. Changes such as those proposed in this application can affect sense of place, but it would be difficult at this stage to confidently predict how.
43. I imagine that many people will perceive the proposed many of the changes positively, despite the poor design outcomes I have described above. To see the building and site re-opened and used on a regular basis will certainly be perceived positively. As will the transparent qualities of the addition building. This will enable passers-by to understand more about the activities taking place on site and imagine themselves also participating.
44. If they were to be implemented, the quirky nature of the abstracted trees would create a novelty that would help create positive identity around this part of the city.
45. However, some aspects of the proposed development would attract negative perceptions and likely diminish sense of place. One of these is the proposal to encroach the building into the footpath space. While the street boundary is an imaginary line, people would compare the alignment of the new addition with the frontages of buildings to the east and west. This would give evidence of the

extent to which the addition encroaches. People would also be aware that something is not as it should be at times when the footpath is busy before and after an event taking place on site. The narrow distances between the building addition and the abstracted trees would, as noted above, create bottlenecks and lead to frustration. Also, for those who witness the changes being implemented, they would immediately become aware of the change from what is currently a generous width footpath to one that is constrained and occupied by the expanded church.

46. In my opinion the proposal will result in both positive and negative stimuli to ongoing development of the sense of place around the site of All Saints Church

General comments

47. In principle, it can be difficult to fault a project that seeks to rehabilitate and improve the existing church building that was well regarded at the time it was first opened and remains an important part of Palmerston North's central city and its history.
48. The proposal to strengthen the building is sensitive to its fabric and would lead to little if any visual effects.
49. The addition to the building is motivated to address practical issues such as weathertightness and strategic issues such as enhancing connections with the church community. In some aspects, the approach is well considered.
50. However, the form and location of the proposed addition are poorly considered, at least in the relationships they will have with the host building. The approach leads to an addition that appears wilful and inconsiderate. The proposal would significantly diminish the quality of the streetscape around the site because of this.

51. I believe there would be a number of other design approaches, all of which would contrast with the fundamental design of the host building, that could be more considerate and lead to appropriate visual outcomes.

Morten Gjerde

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Morten Gjerde', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

4 December 2020

ANNEXURE A

