

BEFORE THE PALMERSTON NORTH CITY COUNCIL

IN THE MATTER OF the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER OF an application by the Anglican Diocese of Wellington for the refurbishment, strengthening and extension to the heritage listed building known as All Saints Church, 338 Church Street, Palmerston North

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF MATT SOONG

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Introduction

- [1] My full name is Matthew Soong.
- [2] I was born in Palmerston North where I attended Riverdale Primary School and Awatapu College. I was married at All Saints Church in 1996 and our three children were all baptised there in 2012. I lived in London from 2001 to 2010 and returned with one and a half children and the same wife. My personal interests are culture, including the psychology that drives it. Architecture, art, music, food, theology and the intersection of all these things. As a developer and considering my personal interests above, I am a champion of authentic beauty within the city. There is an unspoken lift to one's spirit when surround by true art. This must bubble up from the individual/the grassroots and seems to be not as 'pure' if driven top down. The regeneration and 'hipness' of a city happens naturally and authentically when the zeitgeist is right enough for the artist to create it and the city to accept it.

What are my skills?

- [3] I grew up in the construction business. My family has operated a successful building company in Palmerston North for the past 40 years. In my years, I was involved in all aspects of the family business. Between 2001 and 2010 I was involved with project/contract managing \$1 million to \$15 million carpentry projects in London. I have performed at every level, from working in the field, to managing all of the business' contracts and functions. It may be worth noting that Stott Carpentry, the company I worked for had number of projects that involved the refurbishment and enhancement of heritage buildings, including The Tower of London and Buckingham Palace, although I personally was not managing these particular projects but other sites at this time.

My experience and past project selection (with Lakemba Properties NZ and Stott Carpentry UK):

- Kingston St, Palmerston North
- Worcester St, Palmerston North
- Lakemba Mews, Palmerston North
- Lakemba Park, Subdivision Royal Oak, Palmerston North
- Athletes Village East, London (Responsible for the successful tender submission)
- Greenwich Millennium Village, London (Project Manager)
- Grosvenor Waterside Chelsea, London (Project Manager)
- St George Wharf Vauxhall, London (On Site Foreman)
- Battersea Reach Wandsworth, London (Project Manager)
- Westminster College, London Re-development (Project Manager)
- Wembley Central, London (Responsible for the successful tender submission)
- Lakemba Park Subdivision Liberty Grove, Palmerston North (Project Manager)
- ISO14001 Environmental Accreditation (Project Leader). Many of the projects worked on from 2001 were brown land to residential development.

How did my work on the project develop?

- [4] As I was on the vestry, I knew there was a feeling of doom and gloom regarding the 3% IPE rating. I was asked a number of times if I'd like to be involved with solution investigations but declined as I knew that this would be very time consuming.

- [5] Some time later on the 9th of September 2012, the morning of my children's baptism, I kept thinking about the Church building and that it would be a terrible thing to lose such a special place. You have to understand that during that time, Crossroads Church were building/completing their purpose build auditorium, the costing of which the vestry has acquired along with a quote for total demolition. This was a real option. In fact, I recall one phone call with Alison Dangerfield where she said 'people don't know how close this building has come to being demolished'. Being very involved with the functioning of the Church at that stage, I understood the desire and the necessity for All Saints to be a community bastion.
- [6] I knew the methods the Church attempted to engage, via Alpha dinners etc, but also understood the potential of engagement when I attended some of the pop concerts and the jazz services that brought the community into see this building. The limitation is the entrance and the lack of 'openess' of the front. Logistically it was not ideal but more than this, "what if the community could see a welcoming entrance rather than solid brick". The baptistry has three amazing arches that lead to the area that stored children's toys and where my children would play during the combined part of the Sunday services. This area is like a hidden diamond. Imagine opening this up to the City. Imagine having a building that was open and welcoming to any and every one, that actually belonged to and could engage with the community. That was the key!
- [7] The obvious course of direction would have been to have the design driven by the structural engineer. But I believe this to be backward. I wanted to start from the way a building makes you feel. I knew it had to be radical for Palmerston North to be a marker for the city. I knew that if it was not run of the mill it would cause controversy. But the new is hard to accept and what is fringe, often becomes loved and iconic. Think Dylan goes electric, the Beatles, Beethoven, etc... it's this kind of thing that pushes a city into life and vibrancy.
- [8] The 2015 concept was this, it was polarising, but was needed. That design ended up being toned down to the current option by losing the 'drive under

portio'. That was hard to lose that but in order to marry two different styles into a complementing unity, compromises must be made.

- [9] I approached a couple of illustrators to help me with my lack of drawing skills. That was a dead end. Eventually I called a guy call Jono Smith, whose name was given to me by Blacksheep Design. Jono and I got started and Jono's ideas took it to another level. We had photovoltaic ivy, that would transfer light from outside to inside, like a stainless window, we had flying steel buttresses and reinforced polymer trees. After a few months I presented the initial design to Brent Costley and Peter White and then the Vestry. There was a really feeling of potential. The doom and gloom I mentioned above had been replaced. We had a vision for the building that could match the community direction of the Church. Rather than demolish, a hybrid was on the cards. We could save 98% of the building whilst making it functional.

How did the basic outline of the concept develop?

- [10] Everyone feels something when they walk into a building. You can't articulate it, its ambience, its acoustic, its temperature and light, it's the feeling under your feet, it's the movement of air, it's so much more. When you walk into a place you want to feel, and for lack of a better word, good. Few are aware of the structural engineering of the foundations, wall and roof structure. To the lay person, these tend to take a backseat.
- [11] Unfortunately, most strengthening projects are driven by the necessity of function, because this is the whole reason for the project. Function should operate as a support for the form and the form operate as physical and metaphysical support for people. It always comes back to serving the person and facilitate the releasing of potential of those who encounter and dwell within its space.
- [12] If the end game is the bettering of people and community, you need to work backward from this, ending up at 250mm steel PFC beam.
- [13] There must be a marriage between the Form and the Function. The functional and the passion need to co-exist in order to produce a harmonic

environment. Each visual element must demonstrate both purpose and beauty fused. This can be seen in the symbolic trees that support the canopy. On a macro level, it can be seen in the organic nature of the proposed frontage against the ridged brick of the existing building.

New Frontage and its interactions

- [14] As humans, we are all about meaningful relationship and gathering spaces for these relationships. (Grattan Institute Social Cities 3). The importance of mission and drawing people into the building is paramount for the future sustainability of the Church. In fact, mission and people are the purpose for the existence of the building.
- [15] There are a number of subsequent factors for the main egress to be front and centre of the All Saints building, but the main overarching purpose is that people and community are at the forethought of this project. It's all about connecting with people.
- [16] The current closed design of the Church creates a sanctuary apart from the busy city outside. This has been noted by Ian Bowman in the draft conservation plan. However, the culture of community has vastly changed over the past 100 years and connection in and with the surrounding community operates differently. All Saints' passion is to realise the potential of each individual within the community requires a building that facilitates this. Connection to the space is first necessary, and then the way the people can operate within that space. You can't have both sanctuary and community engagement simultaneously.
- [17] For the outsider being able to see into the heart of the Church and having a visual path back to the outside can put any novel passer-by at ease. This is due to our ancient brain seeking safety in novel situations. The level entry and being able to see within the building also creates ease of entry. People often unconsciously are hindered from investigating a space due to the unknown, we want this building to have 'a path of least resistance. This is the opposite approach to encountering the brick walls of the baptistry.

- [18] Part of the vision for the building is that it is not just a place to be used on Sundays but a full time place for the community, buzzing with life. In the past, musicians such as Dave Dobbyn, Bic Runga, Holly Smith etc have performed here. From jazz festivals to classical symphonies, all this is part of ‘normalising’ and ‘demystifying’ the building for the unchurched. They may say “Yes, I’ve been there before, maybe I’ll go for an Easter service”. When these kinds of gatherings can be seen front centre of the building, socialising in a social space, others are also drawn. More than this, people will take note of the building. People draw people, but people need to be seen. William H. Whyte in reference to urban spaces notes that ‘what attracts people most, it would appear, is other people’. He also mentions that in various studies, contrary to common sense expectations, that people were found to select their sites for social interaction right on or very close to the traffic lines. I personally believe this is a way of feeling safe and included.
- [19] The design has been pulled back to three main elements. Trees, Canopy and Glass. The organic essence is in total contrast to the ridged straight form original brickwork. It is this contrast that makes the frontage complementary in a masculine (being the brick) and the feminine (being the organic) symbology. Having said that, the organic frontage has taking its cues from the original building. This can be seen in the Jarrah timber that is used as the support columns and trusses in the original building and also in the support columns (trees). The curves have taken their ratios from the original plans by Clere (the 1914 architect). The copper facia and soffit is the repurposed 1950’s roof cladding. The canopy sits ‘off’ from the original brick walls to allow light to flow down over the original brick work. The three arches of the baptistry are now exposed for all to see and walk through and a viewing skylight will allow a new view of the tower and front window. The original and the new are distinctly different, in some sense opposite whilst finding its complimentary union.
- [20] There were a number of suggestions from CBAB over time the proposal was being developed i.e. the need for a wind lobby as the ‘drive through’ portio which offered a weather shelter had been removed; the curved glass

changed to segmented due to budget restraints; to rethink the wheelchair location as not to alienate those less able.

What are the core outcomes/elements?

[21] During the design process, we pushed the possibilities wide. Eventually, we ended up with three simple and symbolic elements, The Trees, The Canopy and the Glass.

[22] The following key operational aspects are listed as bullet points:

- Direct level entry from the footpath
- Wind lobby for weather protection due to the removal of the portico
- Direct forward entrance in the main building via the existing baptistry arches
- The ability to enter the gathering space/reception directly without egress through the main building
- Internal accessibility ramp from the main entrance to the gathering space
- Reception situated to allow point of contact
- Kitchenette to service social gathering
- Side entrance via modified window (the window without stain glass) to allow an alternative route that avoids walking in full view to the front of the Church to access toilets, baby change areas
- Side entrance allows connection from the main building to the gathering space without walking back out the main entrance arches
- An accessible alfresco gathering area connected to the internal gathering area
- A 'healing' garden to the left of the link with a dedicated area for the baptistry windows on the right

- The link connects the gathering space to the office area. Currently there is no personal interface in the front area of the Church. Office, reception is situated at the rear of the Church and is disconnected from the main Church. This has the disadvantages of lack security if the main Church is open, and lack of personal interaction. To only move the reception to the front of the Church does not facilitate the day to day operations of interaction with the rest of the office staff. To move the critical parts of the office to the new office allows connection to the reception area at the front of the Church
- The new office area can be lock during public concerts or public use if required. Whist still allowing access to the main toilet areas in the community centre at the rear of the building
- An accessibility toilet and baby change area is to the left at the top of the link

How was the design settled with the community?

[23] The parish were presented with three options, a radical (for Palmerston North) organic design, a design that would sit well with current Palmerston North architecture, and a design that kept the neo gothic brick spirit of the building. I was obviously championing the organic option. I spoke at a number of services and explained my rational behind the designs. The parish held an SGM on the xxxx and overwhelmingly voted on the organic design. After this design the Manawatu Standard ran a front page image and article. The wider public response was varied and quite polarised. I believe this is because the public has not been on the same journey that the parish had, this was their first introduction of an image with no backstory. Partly due to this and partly due to heritage advice, we removed the large flying drive under portico as a compromise. The parish were invited to suggest changes to the design, most of these were incorporated.

How did you fare with Heritage New Zealand (“HNZ”)?

[24] I met with Alison early on in 2013 [check date] at Cafe Royal to get her feedback on two designs Jono and I had been working on both All Saints and the Hoffman Kiln. Alison seemed to be supportive of the direction. She mentioned that the fusion of old and new was an acceptable option and it was a direction that New Zealand should follow in its heritage approach. This was the same approach we had used for the Hoffman Kiln. To be renewed and functional, being proud of the contemporary without the dishonesty of faux materials to match and past. Over the years, the feeling of support has somewhat shifted.

Describe your collaboration with BSM

[25] In my naivety, I wanted to do the bare minimum required to obtain resource consent. As I didn't want to waste resources at All Saints' end if it was to be vetoed. It soon became evident that a certain amount of detail was required. After Alison pointed me in the direction of BSM due to their work on Wanganui collegiate. I approached Gerald Cogan who understood what we were trying to achieve, practically, community wise and culturally. The collaboration was positive. The collaboration process involved, Jono Smith (independent), Gerald Cogan (BSM), James Cross (BSM), Garry Newton (Structural Concepts), John Brown (Plan Heritage), and Myself.

Why is removal of the baptistry essential to archived the desired outcome/objectives?

[26] HNZ asked why it was essential to demolish the baptistry wall to achieve the Congregation's objectives.

[27] At HNZ's request we developed workings using the West Porch as a main entrance to show that it would not be a viable option. A document was produced to investigate this option. In summary, even if this was practically possible (which it is not) it doesn't meet the needs of the Church's community focused direction. Practically, the West Porch in itself is a wind lobby, to enter the West Porch via another wind lobby makes no sense considering the boundary restraints and the footpath to required west porch floor level makes even less sense.



Matt Soong