

Mike Chilton – Submission Statement to the Hearing

1. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to my submission.
2. My name is Mike Chilton. I have been a member of All Saints Church parish now for 16 years after moving to Palmerston North from Sydney with my wife Susannah.
3. I am self-employed as a consultant quarry engineer. In 2007-08 I was contracted part time to All Saints as the building development consultant.
4. I support Wellington Diocesan Board of Trustees' application to earthquake strengthen, weatherproof, improve ingress and egress to the church and provide of a new entrance, foyer and shelter canopy in the design proposed.
5. My August (2020) submission detailed the magnificent interior features of the church, how the real community value of a church is inside it (in its people and worship space) instead of its frontage, how the nature of church meetings have changed over the last 100 years, that people are less familiar with church, the demolition and use of the baptistry, the careful design of the proposed additions, the mitigations to preserve heritage fabric proposed by the Diocese and a pragmatic look at demolishing the old church building and rebuilding a cheaper, auditorium style church.
6. You don't need to be a heritage expert to appreciate the appealing visual features on the inside of the church. The kauri carvings and pews, the Oamaru stone altar, the giant jarrah pillars and framing, the stained-glass windows and the organ. These features are inspiring and should be preserved and shared as much as possible. Although the frontage is dissimilar to all others in Palmerston North, and is therefore memorable, it is tired and imposing, and a reminder of those that didn't want to be outdone by a pub across the street.
7. A church building should always be a place of welcome and gathering, reflecting God's intention for His people – the Church. A place of communion with one another and of worship to God. In movies like Home Alone or Sister Act, it is a place where people who might feel lost or fearful can go to feel safe, valued and welcome. It is important that All Saints becomes as accessible as it once was to people coming in off the street into a quiet, contemplative space where a sense of peace and calm is felt.
8. Church practices and meetings have become a lot less familiar to people than they were when the church was built. 42% of New Zealand reported their religion as Anglican in the 1916 census, versus 6.7% in the 2018 census when over 48% of New Zealand reported they had no religion at all. This is why making the frontage more inviting and welcoming using glass is desirable. The element of transparency is important in welcoming people to church. I think the way that the church can still be seen "in the round" through the new frontage is testament to sympathetic design.
9. I thought it was interesting that Heritage New Zealand supported the proposed frontage and were against the partial demolition but Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua, in their submission, were against the design and function of the proposed frontage but didn't oppose the demolition aspect.

10. I understand the disagreement over the proposed frontage and I think it demonstrates how there is some subjectiveness involved. Dispassionately one could look at the proposal as “is the church building worth keeping?” The economic answer is a clear no. If then, the desire is to keep the church, for other intangible reasons, then it must come with some reasonable concessions to make the building fit for purpose, such as providing a flexible gathering space and conveniences like an accessible toilet, much like All Saints had power added to it after it was built.
11. I don't believe the Diocese are heritage vandals by any means. The seismic strengthening, using tactically placed and patterned concrete and Macalloy post tensioning bars (or as we mining engineers call them; rock bolts), has been designed for minimal heritage impact.
12. Furthermore, the Diocese has consented to this hearing and the resource consent process after over a decade of collaboration with experts on engineering, heritage and architecture. It would have been cheaper, faster and easier to pay the maximum \$40,000 fine imposed by the Historic Places Act for damage or modification to an historic place. Even if the church is totally demolished without consent it is only a \$100,000 fine. Less than 1.5% of the expected project cost. Bargain.
13. I understand the baptistry has architectural gravitas, but I know for the church building to work for the people meeting in it, it needs to have function as well as form. It is no longer acceptable for people to walk 100m outside to go to the toilet for example, or for wheelchair users to be excluded from church gatherings because of stairs. For goodness sake, we even let left handers in now!
14. The baptistry was hardly ever used for baptisms, maybe 1-2 per year, generally by families who didn't regularly attend church. The baptistry was used as the only place one could take young children during the service, kind of a crying room without soundproofing. If you weren't enjoying the sermon, you had to say so very quietly.
15. Baptism is a core part of our faith, a symbol of entering and belonging to the church and of parents' and godparents' promises to nurture the child with a Christian upbringing and the parish's promise in response to help them. Neither of our children were baptised using the original font in the church as it is too impractical (visually), and the water gets too cold for the child.
16. The proposed new location for the font will be much more symbolic and make it easier for the congregation to participate in baptisms. I was also very pleased to see the stained-glass windows from here would be repurposed elsewhere to mitigate the loss of heritage value, I agree with Ms Dangerfield on this point.
17. Finally I'd like to address demolishing and rebuilding a cheaper, auditorium style church, like St Albans, Central Baptist or Crossroads. This makes economic sense and would provide a flexible space for more than just church gatherings. This is the easier option, but not the one the parish has chosen.
18. The hall we currently meet in has been useful but is not a good long-term solution for church meetings as it is not designed for that purpose. The helpful thing about the hall is

easy access to children's church, toilets and the baby change room, and a space is available to gather before and after the service.

19. Unfortunately our family members have had to meet at St Oswalds instead of All Saints now as there is not enough capacity in the hall for two services. The changeover time was too brief. For example, I play regularly on the music team at church. The hall is hard to set up and pack down given the very limited space and multiple users of the facility. We usually have to practice on Saturday afternoons so we can leave the sound gear out for Sunday morning but it was still in the way for the 8am congregation. A dedicated worship space doesn't have these problems.
20. I am missing the dedicated worship space and the connection to the thousands (maybe tens of thousands) of Christians who have gone before us in the church. Although, I was given a pertinent reminder that church is about where the Church meet, not the building, by our youngest when he was about 4. When we were driving into the carpark one Sunday morning, he asked "what's that old building in front of the church?" Bless him.
21. In conclusion, heritage is not just about the building, as Ms Stevens explains in her s42A report, "The emotional, historic, cultural and continuation values of the building are intangible – meaning that they are not physically observable, although they are inherently connected with the existence of the building in physical form." To preserve the tangible and intangible heritage values, the inadequacies of the building in its current form need to be addressed by adding the proposed frontage and access (ingress/egress).
22. If the Diocese is not granted consent to change the frontage and add the facilities and links to the rear of the property then it is not worth strengthening the church in the first place. It could be likened to rebuilding the motor of a classic car but failing to address issues with the steering. It would be a shame but more economical for the building to be condemned, demolished and a cheaper, auditorium-style church built as its replacement. I am not aware of a single submission that states this total loss of heritage is an acceptable outcome, therefore I support the Diocese's application in full, as a means of retaining heritage as well as usefulness of All Saints church.