

**PROPOSED NEW ASHBURTON MUSEUM  
AND ART GALLERY**

**Landscape and Visual Effects and Urban  
Design Assessment**



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## **Landscape and Visual Effects and Urban Design Assessment**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Opus International Consultants Ltd (Opus) has been engaged by Ashburton District Council, to prepare a land use consent application under the Ashburton District Plan (“District Plan”) for a proposed new Ashburton Museum and Art Gallery (“the proposal”).

Ashburton is located approximately 100km south of Christchurch along State Highway One (SH1) and the site is located centrally within Ashburton.

Landscape and visual effects and urban design have been identified as among the key actual and potential environmental effects of the proposal. On this basis Opus has undertaken a landscape and visual effects and urban design assessment of the proposal to accompany and support the land use consent application. The scope of work undertaken in this assessment may be summarised as follows:

- An investigation of the proposed site and surrounds was undertaken by Opus Landscape Architects Joanna Soanes and Sharyn Ogg on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2008. The investigation included a walk around the proposed site and the immediate block; the site visit also extended out from the proposed site by car around the Ashburton CBD and the wider township.
- During the site investigation, views towards the site were noted from a number of public viewpoints.
- A Landscape Design plan has been prepared by Natural Habitats (Auckland) (Fig 1).
- A meeting was held with the Museum and Art Gallery Project Architect, Brett Taylor of CDA Architecture Ltd, and Landscape Architect Debbie Tikao from Natural Habitats.
- Preparation of a landscape and visual effects and urban design assessment and photographic viewpoints. (Figures 2 & 3).
- Review of relevant statutory documents and non-statutory documents, including consideration of the Ashburton District Development Plan (ADDP) (BML, 2005) and the Ashburton Town Centre Urban Design Study (the Urban Design Study) (BML, 2008). This latter document is currently under public consultation.
- A draft urban design context plan has been prepared to show how the site links with other civic spaces - namely, the town centre; the Domain to the east and the Cenotaph Reserve, Courthouse, Council offices and Public Library to the west; and the adjoining residential area to the north and the rest of the town centre to the south. (Figure 4).
- Consideration to issues raised by New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) in particular concerns regarding pedestrian connectivity between the CBD and the site.
- Amendments to the Landscape Design Plan to incorporate changes to the proposed landscaping requested by adjoining residential neighbours.

## 2 BACKGROUND STUDIES

This assessment has considered the following documents as a 'reference point'.

### 2.1 Resource Management Act 1991

The assessment focuses on effects on the understanding of landscape values and landscape character; Section 7(c) and (f) are considered within this report.

### 2.2 Ashburton District Plan

Refer to the land use consent application.

### 2.3 Non Statutory Planning Material

#### 2.3.1 New Zealand Urban Design Protocol

Ashburton District Council is not a signatory to the NZ Urban Design Protocol, but the protocol is an important reference for urban design assessments.

#### 2.3.2 Ashburton District Development Plan

The "Ashburton District Development Plan – Planning for the future of our District to 2021" ("ADDP") was prepared for the Council by Boffa Miskell Ltd and was adopted by the Council on 30 June 2005.

#### 2.3.3 Ashburton Town Centre Urban Design Study and Plan

A draft study of urban design matters relating to the Ashburton town centre was completed in 2008 on behalf of the Council by Boffa Miskell Ltd ("the urban design study").

This study is currently open to public consultation and has not been formally adopted by the Ashburton District Council. The purpose of the study is as follows:

*"The concept plan sets a broad framework for improvement, building on the good foundations of the town centre. This framework will take effect over many years and will have the flexibility to accommodate a range of new initiatives (only some of which are known today).*

*The concept plan aims to coordinate many of the individual actions and changes that can take place within the town centre, to create a strong focus for the social, civic, business, entertainment and living activities of the District and create a safer and more pleasant place for the future."*

The study identifies a number of potential land use changes in the form of precincts, including the creation of new Civic and Cultural Precincts. The Museum and Art Gallery is located within the proposed Civic Precinct.

The proposed town concept plan identifies key projects and the following projects are directly relevant to this assessment:

1. *Strengthening the existing “Green Corridor” along East Street as a pleasant promenade for walking and cycling directly through blocks to improve north/south pedestrian access and diversify the urban experiences, beyond the street grid.*
2. *Improve east and west connections at the northern end of town centre, between the Cultural Precinct and recreation areas of the Domain and Schools beyond.*
3. *Join Baring Square East and West together to create a strong visual link across the highway/railway and bring the existing Civic buildings back into the town centre.*

### **3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONTEXT**

#### **3.1 Landscape Context**

Ashburton is located approximately 1 hour south of Christchurch along State Highway 1 (SH1). The town developed on the flat Canterbury Plains during early European settlement as an agricultural service town. The town now supports a population of around 14,600 people.

The town was laid out in the traditional grid layout with the Ashburton River, separating the southern part of the town from the settlement of Tinwald.

Ashburton is the major town of the District. SH1 runs through the centre of the town. West Street (SH1) directs traffic parallel to the main retail street of Ashburton (East Street). The South Island Main Trunk Railway Line dissects East Street and West Street (SH1).

Ashburton is known for its many established trees and these are evident throughout the town and the Ashburton Domain.

#### **3.2 Site Context & Description**

The site is centrally located in Ashburton, located on the northern side of West Street (SH1) between Cameron Street and Wills Street. The site is approximately 100m long and 40m wide and encompasses the entire block frontage of West Street between Cameron Street and Wills Street. The site is currently zoned Residential in the District Plan and is comprised of four residential lots. The site is owned by the District Council.

The site includes the street margin and road reserve. Two one storey bungalow houses are currently located on the centre of the site along with several large trees. Both houses are currently vacant and are likely to be relocated prior to the proposal proceeding. The two vacant sections either side are maintained in mown grass.

There are a number of established street trees on site. These include; five semi-mature plane trees on the Cameron Street frontage, eight elm trees on West Street frontage and a mature cabbage tree located near the corner of Wills and West Street. Other trees also

located on the site include a large horsechestnut tree, three small liquidambers and three mature maple trees.

The railway corridor runs parallel along West Street (SH1). A pedestrian over-bridge crosses over the railway from the town's core retail area on East Street to West Street. Opposite the site on the east side of West Street is an area of open space – the “Green Corridor” – which is comprised of mown grass planted with three rows of plane trees. This open space is part of the railway land over which the District Council has a licence to occupy, and the Council currently maintains this area as open space.

On the northern side of Wills Street, east of the site, is the Ashburton Domain. The Ashburton Domain is a 37.54 hectare park which comprises a large open space area within easy walking distance of the town centre. The Cenotaph Reserve in Baring Square West is located to the south-west of the site. The land to the north-west of the site is zoned Residential. Two residential properties neighbour the northern boundary of the proposed site.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the existing views from the corner of West Street and Wills Street and from the corner of West Street and Cameron Street respectively.

### **3.3 Urban Design Context**

The site is located within the “Civic Precinct” proposed by the urban design study and which includes the Cenotaph Reserve at Baring Square West, the Court House, the Council offices and the Public Library.

The site has three active edges: SH1, Wills Street that faces the Domain entrance and Cameron Street that faces Baring Square West. The main retail core is located on the eastern side of town, as is the “Cultural Precinct” proposed by the urban design study. SH1 and the railway separate the site from these retail and cultural activities. However significant other retail activity is also located on West Street in either direction from the site. SH1 and the railway therefore bisect the retail areas of the town.

The town has developed as a rural service centre and this is evident in the town character today, with established tree planting and many rural industries. The scale, form, and style of the buildings within the proposed Civic Precinct are of a range of styles but in similar box form and scale. The Ashburton Courthouse is of Art Deco style, the Ashburton District Council is three storey 1970s with stone texture cladding and the more recent Ashburton Library is two storeys with brick cladding.

An urban design context plan has been prepared. The plan illustrates the site within the urban context and pedestrian linkages within Ashburton. (Refer Figure 4)

## **4 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL**

The proposal is for a new Museum and Art Gallery. The building has been designed by CDA Architects based in Auckland. The design is a two storey structure with modern style and form. The building exterior is in precast concrete and finishes include textured paint, rendered plaster and natural precast concrete. The majority of the building is solid with windows concentrated around the public entrance of the building and café. The building provides an overview onto West Street.

The entrance to the proposed building is located on the West Street side of the building, although public vehicle access is off Cameron Street. The main public pedestrian access is also off Cameron Street with pedestrian access also from West Street. There will be a café and education/conference facility located on the ground floor as well as the museum exhibition and storage and work spaces. The art gallery exhibition, storage and work spaces are to be located on the first floor.

There are two proposed on-site car parks; a visitor car park located off Cameron Street (21 car parks) and staff car parking accessed from Wills Street (8 car parks). Cycle racks will be provided near the front entrance to the building.

At this stage of the assessment a shading analysis has not been undertaken, as the building height is largely compliant other than the parapet on the leading elevation.

Most of the existing vegetation on site will be removed and replaced with the landscaping shown in the attached Landscape Design Plan, except for five existing Golden Elm trees on the West Street (SH1) frontage of the site which are proposed to be either retained in or relocated from their existing locations. However, investigation into the potential for transplanting the Golden Elms by a qualified Arborist, cost of relocation, and paving levels will need to be undertaken before the retention/relocation of the Golden Elms is confirmed.

The landscape design has been prepared by Natural Habitats based in Auckland (Refer Figure1). The design intention has been to allow the building to have visual dominance. The landscape design includes a mix of exotic specimen trees and native under planting. Five plane trees are proposed along the West Street road frontage. Along Wills Street and Cameron Street a single row of magnolia trees are proposed. Against the building on West Street is proposed conifer planting. Screening along the north-east boundary is proposed to be native hedge planting. Shrub and ground cover planting is a mixture of indigenous species planting in swaths.

Paving along West Street, around the building entrance and on the pathway from the visitor car park is to be of high quality and incorporate the use of local stone. The remaining hard surface within the site is proposed to be asphalt; the majority is in car parking. There is also potential for future art work to be located at the building entrance.

## **5 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECT**

The landscape and visual effect of the proposal will result from the change of land use and development of the site from private residential to a public museum and art gallery. The potential changes to the landscape include the removal of the existing residential houses and established trees and mown grass which will be replaced by a modern architecturally designed building and increased traffic and pedestrian movement to and from the site.

Further visual changes will be the removal of all existing trees on the site.

The proposed street tree planting is in keeping with the surrounding urban landscape. The trees will help strengthen the connection and amenity within the proposed Civic Precinct, the Domain and the continued theme of tree planting already established along the east side of West Street.

The tall sculptural form of the cypress is part of the architectural vision, and supports the building as it has a modernist flavour, with strong geometric lines. The under planting is all indigenous and will provide the local flora component.

During the developed design stage street trees will require adequate growing conditions and supportive maintenance regime to ensure the long term success of the street tree planting. In the future the trees will provide shade.

A positive indoor/outdoor flow to and from the building has been created with the design of a large paved area at the entrance to the building. This space also allows for potential display of integrated art work and museum elements adjacent to the public building entrance, as shown on the landscape design plan. (Refer Figure 1)

Pedestrian safety from the building entrance and large paved area at the entrance may need to be addressed as this entrance space directly flows out to SH1 where there is a large volume of traffic movement. This could be achieved with the use of integrated art work or a low wall with seating and planting.

Pedestrian movement from car parks and bus drop off which is located at the north-west end of the site by the security gates is complicated by the need to incorporate visitor car parking on site. The visual sight line and pathway from the Cenotaph Reserve has been reinforced by the creation of a path through the site and pedestrian crossing over Cameron Street that aligns directly from the site to the existing pathway through the Cenotaph Reserve.

The public car park located adjacent to the Cameron Street frontage and staff car park located within the Wills Street frontage are both screened by a single row of magnolia trees. The trees will grow to be approximately five metres in height, they will not dominate the building, but along with the under planting, will offer effective screening of the car parks.

There will be the creation of a strong pedestrian linkage between the Cenotaph Reserve to the west and the Domain to the east across the SH1 frontage of the site due to the wide footpath and street tree planting.

The viewing audience will predominantly be motorists travelling north or south along SH1 and general pedestrian movement. The two residential properties directly adjacent to the site to the northwest will notice change due to the increase in building height on the site from one storey to two storey, the increase in building coverage and increased traffic movement from cars and pedestrians. However, as shown in the plans attached to the land use consent application, the part of the building closest to the two residential properties directly adjacent to the north-western boundary of the site is single storey; the two storey section of the building is to be set back from this residential boundary to mitigate any effects of building height on these adjacent residential properties. The proposed native hedge planting between the site and the adjacent houses will provide some screening over time.

The landscape and visual effects will be well integrated with the surrounding sites. The local built environment has a high potential to absorb change, therefore the proposed building can be integrated into the existing environment relatively easily.

## **5.1 Analysis of Visibility**

The viewpoints have been chosen to describe representative viewing along West Street (SH1). The two viewpoints have been taken from public places adjacent to the site. The graphic illustration shows potential views to the proposed building and actual views to the site (corresponding photographs). The combination of two images for each viewpoint allows for a comparative visibility analysis.

Viewpoint 1 – From the corner of West Street and Wills Street looking north-west towards the proposed Museum and Art Gallery. The viewpoint illustrates the visitor experience travelling along West Street (SH 1) from the north. The street tree planting provides context to the surrounding landscape. The building is of similar scale to the surrounding established buildings and sites within the scale of established tree planting adjacent to the site.

Viewpoint 2 – From the corner of West Street and Cameron Street looking north-east towards the proposed Museum and Art Gallery. The viewpoint illustrates the proposed building, visitor car park and the pedestrian connection from the Cenotaph Reserve. The proposed tree planting provides context to the surrounding landscape and helps screen the car park.

The viewpoints both illustrate important elements of the design, viewpoint 1 illustrates the building as a gateway to the town centre when coming from the north along SH1 and viewpoint 2 shows the linkage between the Cenotaph Reserve and the building.

## **6 URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT**

The following urban design assessment focuses on connectivity, scale and how the building design fits within the urban context of Ashburton.

The Urban Design Study indicates the preferred town centre extension to include the proposed Museum and Art Gallery site, but this extension is expected to happen gradually and to consolidate the town centre before extending out to the fringes towards the site (Refer Figure 4). In this context the proposed Museum and Art Gallery will eventually form part of the town centre.

The connection from the main town centre (East Street) to the site is currently relatively disjointed due to the railway and SH1 that runs adjacent to the proposed site and bisects the town centre. NZTA has also expressed concern with pedestrian and cycling connectivity between the town centre and the site. However, the ADDP and Urban Design Study have identified improving walking and cycling connections between east and west sides of the town centre, linking schools, residential properties and the proposed Civic Precinct with the town centre. These improved walking and cycling connections will enhance connectivity between the proposed Museum and Art Gallery and the eastern side of the town centre.

The existing pedestrian over-bridge provides access over the railway tracks but no direct crossing point to the site. Controlled pedestrian crossing points are located to south on the intersection of West Street and Havelock Street. To the north the intersection of West Street and Walnut Avenue there is currently a roundabout, but it is likely this is going to be replaced by traffic signals in the future. However this crossing point of the highway and the railway is 615m from the site and is likely to provide limited connectivity between the retail area and the site.

The Urban Design Study provides options for upgrading pedestrian links across the “Green Corridor” and the proposed Civic Precinct. Options include refurbishment or replacement of the existing railway over-bridge, but due to cost it is unlikely this will go ahead, and providing an improved signal approach to the town centre by establishing a ‘green gateway’ along the highway at either end of the town centre including Walnut Avenue and at the Domain. These improvements would enhance connectivity with the proposed Museum and Art Gallery.

It is interesting to note that the New Plymouth foreshore overcame similar constraints with the development of a coastal park and walkway. The coast was separated from the town centre by a busy road (SH44) and railway. The implementation of safe crossing points has created a successful urban design outcome.<sup>1</sup>

The Urban Design Study also provides options for the development of Baring Square, including the creation of a linkage to the Domain entrance. The Urban Design Study also emphasises the Ashburton Domain as a key entry point into the town centre when travelling

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<sup>1</sup> Urban Design Protocol, Case Studies, New Plymouth Foreshore, Ministry for the Environment, 2005

from the north along SH1. The proposed Museum and Art Gallery will complement the eastern “gateway” to the town entrance, and will provide a linkage between the Domain to the east, and other parts of the proposed Civic Precinct to the west, namely the Cenotaph Reserve, Courthouse, Council buildings and the Public Library.

The Civic Precinct also has strong connections to the emerging Cultural Precinct around the proposed Performing Arts Centre. However, locating the proposed Museum and Art Gallery within the proposed Civic Precinct will not detach the proposal from the town centre. Although the proposed Museum and Art Gallery would seem to more naturally fit within the Cultural Precinct, which is located on Victoria Street and near the eastern retail core of the town centre, the proposed Museum and Art Gallery will be a “Civic-owned” facility, like other buildings within the proposed Civic Precinct such as the Council buildings and the Public Library, and therefore the proposed Museum and Art Gallery is also consistent with the context of the proposed Civic Precinct.

The setback of the building along the west side of West Street creates a wide footpath and creates a strong linkage between Baring Square West and the Domain. The scale of the proposed building is in keeping with the adjacent Civic buildings such as the Council offices, Public Library and Courthouse. The built character is also reinforced through the use of similar materials and colours. The architecture of the building is of a high standard with quality finishes and will contribute to the amenity of the area.

The surrounding buildings and the proposed Museum and Art Gallery create a strong Civic Precinct and entrance to the town centre and an active edge to the SH1 where many visitors travel along each day. (Refer Figure 4)

The site is located within an established urban context. The building is of high quality and has a scale that relates to the surrounding building context. The connectivity is lost due to the railway and SH1 although safe crossing points are located near the site.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

The proposed Ashburton Museum and Art Gallery is located within the proposed Civic Precinct of Ashburton. The scale and character of the building and landscape design integrates the building into an established urban development.

The State Highway and railway are major barriers to movement from the town centre with pedestrians relying on existing links that are disjointed from the site.

The proposed Museum and Art Gallery would naturally fit within the proposed Cultural Precinct, but it can just as easily be located within the proposed Civic Precinct which is adjacent to the Domain creating a key node on the west side of town for both locals and visitors. With the improvements envisaged by the ADDP and Urban Design Study to key accesses over the railway and SH1 the Civic Precinct would benefit from improved connectivity to the retail core and proposed Cultural Precinct.

The proposed landscape design helps to strengthen the context and character of the site, with the use of potentially large exotic street trees and native under planting. The landscape design will help integrate the new development into the proposed Civic Precinct and activate and generate positive change.

Overall the proposed site location, building and landscape design creates a strong destination that helps connect the site to the proposed Civic Precinct and with the proposed improvements to the SH1 and railway crossings there will be improvements to the connectivity to the town centre. The visual prominence of the site located on SH1 will create a visual entrance of high standard and encourage travellers to stop.

The development site is located in an urban built landscape, surrounded by mature vegetation, which has a high potential to absorb change. The development has good urban design principles and is assessed as having minor effects on landscape visual effects.

## **8 REFERENCES**

Ashburton District Plan, 2001

Resource Management Act, 1991

New Zealand Urban Design Protocol, 2005

*“Ashburton District Development Plan – Planning for the future of our District to 2021”* – Boffa Miskell 2005

Draft Ashburton Town Centre Urban Design Study – Boffa Miskell 2008