

Lessons Learnt from Princes Wharf

A specific resolution from the November 2008 Transport and Urban Development Committee requested that officers investigate and report back on the lessons learnt from the redevelopment of Princes wharf, giving particular attention to compliance matters and public interest issues such as pedestrian access and the quality of public open spaces.

The technical work listed in the background of this report addresses the adequacy of the Princes Wharf facilities and the lessons that can be applied in any future development, particularly the following reports:

- Understanding Cruise Ship Operations in Auckland (March 2009)
- Options and Analysis (May 2009)

In addition, the following short summary provides a report back on the redevelopment of Princes Wharf in respect of urban design and the planning policy and process undertaken which includes matters of public interest such as pedestrian access, the quality of public open spaces and compliance matters subsequent to redevelopment. This summary was informed by an external review of the Princes Wharf development (authored by Clinton Bird).

Planning and Development

Resource consents for the redevelopment of Princes Wharf were granted in March 1998 by the Auckland Regional Council. The Auckland City Council also granted consents for that part of the redevelopment on land at the wharf entrance.

This had been preceded in 1990 (pre RMA) by a plan change (Scheme Change 4) to the Waitemata Harbour Maritime Planning Scheme. This plan change introduced a specific port zone for Princes Wharf and highly specific provisions for what could be developed on the wharf, including a building envelope, overseas passenger terminal, specified mixed permitted uses, public spaces, design and appearance criteria and a requirement for design and appearance certification by an independent architect.

The developer, Kitchener Group, was granted a development licence by the wharf owner, Ports of Auckland Ltd. The development proposal was designed to comply with the specific Coastal Plan and District Plan provisions and resource consents were processed on a non notified basis in accordance with non notification rules.

A condition of the consent was that the design and appearance, including landscape and public amenity, would be approved by an architect jointly appointed by the ARC and ACC. Associate Professor Clinton Bird of Auckland University was appointed. The developer therefore had an obligation to adhere to urban design scrutiny and meet the requirements of an independent assessor and achieve certification of the design.

The objective of the plan change and the subsequent consent process was to provide for a wide range of activities which would attract people and add to the vibrancy of the downtown harbour edge while providing for continued vessel berthage and a new overseas passenger terminal. The use of a design and appearance certification process enabled detailed design and appearance matters to

be scrutinised by an appropriately qualified person including matters of public interest including pedestrian access and the quality of public open spaces.

Following the development, a number of compliance issues arose concerning access by the public to public viewing decks required to be provided at the seaward end of the development by both the coastal plan and the coastal permit. In response to complaints compliance action was taken by the ARC and the matter was eventually resolved before the Environment Court, with the Court amending the consent enabling gate closure overnight during specified times. This issue may have been avoided by the original consent expressly requiring unrestricted access at all times.

Lessons Learnt from the Princes Wharf development

Princes Wharf was one of the first working wharves in Auckland to become surplus to port requirements. The development created an opportunity to redevelop the wharf and add new functions to a site that had become under-used in some respects and to open the wharf up to the public. There are differences in the public's view of the architectural merits of the development. However, there is a common view that the development has privatized the wharf and has had the effect of excluding public access particularly around the edge and has a poor quality pedestrian environment.

The prescriptive nature of the Regional Plan: Coastal, in respect of Princes Wharf, brought about by a specific plan change for the area, could be argued to have led to an inflexible urban design and building envelope which made it difficult for any developer to deviate from when design issues arose during development. However, the contrary argument to this is that the Plan and the consent conditions provided certainty of outcome. The certainty versus flexibility argument is one that is continuously debated under the RMA.

Aucklanders and visitors to the city value the coastal environment for its scenery and are drawn to the harbour for recreation. However, the CBD waterfront has very few locations where people can connect to the waters edge. Any future development on the waterfront must be able to:

- Provide a high quality public realm that links people, city and sea.
- Provide active spaces and places for people and good connections to local and regional transport.
- Cater for a range of maritime activities that can provide opportunities for economic prosperity.
- Recognise the cultural value of the waterfront and retain heritage quality and views to and from the harbour.
- Showcase best practice in sustainable urban design and minimise impacts on the coastal environment.