

## 2. NEW REGENT STREET REVITALISATION PROJECT

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The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of the scope and preliminary cost estimates of a proposed refurbishment project for New Regent Street.

### BACKGROUND

At its 12 February 2004 meeting the Committee asked for the Urban Design and Heritage Team to coordinate the preparation of a report on the proposed New Regent Street revitalisation project, with cost estimates.

### HISTORY

The New Regent Street shops are listed as a Group 2 Heritage Items in the City Plan and are registered as a Category I Historic Place by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, Pouhere Taonga. The 40 shops were designed in the Spanish Mission Revival style by Francis Willis in 1930 and the street was officially opened in 1932 as one of the few large scale building projects undertaken in the South Island during the Depression. The street consists of two, two storey blocks fronting onto the now pedestrian and tram only street. Excluding the two corner units, the shops within New Regent Street were designed in two basic architectural forms, those with a decorated parapet roof and those with a projecting, tilted concrete panel supported on four iron brackets. This panel originally carried Spanish tiles, but these were removed some time prior to 1973. The two designs alternate with each other down both blocks.

New Regent Street's architectural style, continuity of streetscape and high public recognition value give it considerable landmark significance. The street is of special significance, as it is the only commercial street in the city to have been designed as a single unit.

In 1994 the street became a pedestrian mall and the tramline was installed. At this time cobblestone paving, wrought iron railings, planter beds and period lighting were also introduced. The facades were also repainted at the same time.

Recently some individual shop owners have investigated options for maintaining and restoring their shops, and a number of opportunities for improvements in the street as a whole have become apparent through this process, as well as the necessity of remedial maintenance.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The range of works which would contribute to the refurbishment of New Regent Street is as follows:

- External decorative tile repairs and replacement;
- Parapet repairs, painting, pointing and flashing replacements;
- Possible re-roofing to some units;
- Strengthening of cavity brickwork panels and linking them to concrete frame;
- Cavity tie renewal;
- External concrete frame repairs;
- Weep hole cleaning, enlargement and increase in number;
- Fire escape repairs and renewal;
- Verandah roof and soffit repairs including gutter clearing and improvements;
- Rainwater downpipe repairs and renewal;
- Ventilation to sub-floor void maintained;
- New security doors to alley ways (four in total);
- New fence to east alley way to enhance security;
- Repainting of facades after all plaster repair work completed, including window frames
- Lighting to New Regent Street building facades;
- Removal of obtrusive elements on facades;
- Interpretation sign;
- Rationalisation of signage;
- Parking and vehicular traffic.

## **Decorative Tile Replacement**

Over the years, a number of the unique tiles that decorate the shop fronts in the street have gone missing. This has resulted in unsightly gaps with exposed bare unfinished plaster and unsympathetic partial repairs in painted plaster, or with incompatible tiles. In their current condition many of the tiles are at risk from further theft. Almost half of the shops have no remnants of the original tiles left. Without every shop front fully tiled the original character of the street is diminished, and the impact of the shops as a group is reduced. It is important that the tiles are replaced, because they are an important decorative element in the street and contribute to its special character.

Council staff working with the Historic Places Trust have sourced tilemakers and glazers who are able to reproduce the decorative tiles, of which there are six different types.

Total estimated cost for replacement of tiles street wide is: \$60,000.

This estimate does not include laying the tiles and this is a cost that remains to be determined.

## **Building Repairs**

Structurally the buildings are based on an exposed concrete frame with infill panels of cavity brick. The facades to the street have then been plastered and painted, completely obscuring the concrete and brickwork. The ground floor shop fronts include substantial metal beams and there is a continuous suspended verandah to both sides of the street.

The original architectural drawings were retrieved from the Council's records and these have helped in the analysis of the building, although damage to the drawings has resulted in the loss of important details, particularly the detail section through the front facade.

To prevent any further damage to the building fabric, further water ingress must be prevented. A number of substantial measures may be required, such as new roofing and new flashings to the parapets. Detailed on-site inspection will be required to confirm whether water is entering via mechanical breaches in these elements.

All parts of the parapet wall will need to be sealed to prevent the initial entry of rainwater. It is crucial to ensure storm-water is discharged efficiently from all of the roof surfaces and the verandahs. There are currently numerous broken storm water downpipes that require repair or replacement. Alterations to ensure boxed gutters remain unblocked include mesh guards placed at the top of boxed gutters at the rear of verandahs and the tops of all down pipes. The removal of stored or dumped items on the roofs or verandahs and regular inspection and cleaning to ensure the roof is clear and in good condition are essential.

Repairs appear to be needed on a number of the shop units to brickwork parapets, lintels, decaying brickwork mortar, plaster, concrete panels, iron brackets and timber to prevent injury from falling debris to pedestrians and motorists on the street. In particular parts of the structural concrete frame has crumbled to a significant degree at the north end of the eastern block, where the verandah structure is supported. Urgent repairs are needed here to prevent dangerous falling masonry and further damage to the building and verandah. It is suggested that all brickwork be pointed as required and structurally stabilised, as recommended by the structural engineer.

The fire escapes from the first floor level lead down onto the verandah roof. Configurations of the stairs or steps vary and some may not comply with current building code requirements and should be modified to comply. Large areas of rust are evident on some of the escape steps, where the paint surface has failed. Repairs or replacement may be needed to retain the integrity of the escape route.

The existing security door to the alleyway on the eastern block needs renewing to control access to the rear of the shop units and enhance security. The style of the replacement door should be similar to that of the original 1931 doorways.

## **Aesthetic Improvements**

All redundant external electrical wiring should be removed prior to repainting the New Regent Street facades.

There are a number of existing air conditioning units on verandahs and these should be relocated so as not to be obtrusively visible from the street and any future units should be similarly carefully placed.

Window renewal and repair should include the strip windows directly above the verandah which are not directly visible from the street level, but play a major role in admitting light to the shop interiors.

Some of the shop units have installed alarms and under verandah lighting. These may conflict visually with the tile-work of the façade and result in glare to pedestrians in the street.

The entire street could be illuminated in a coordinated façade lighting scheme designed by a lighting engineer. Floodlights carefully placed on the verandah will be able to provide a wash of light onto the painted facades and spotlights should be able to highlight architectural detail.

A co-ordinated colour scheme is suggested to highlight architectural plasterwork and details such as the iron balconies and structural brackets. Building owner co-operation will be required for both lighting and colour schemes, as well as for all the work outlined above.

### **Parking and Vehicular Traffic**

The pedestrian only street is used by vehicles for parking in the evening and this may be causing damage to the mall paving as well as lowering the appeal of the mall as a night-time venue for entertainment and dining. Restrictive bollards may be required to prevent vehicle access at these times (designed so as not to exclude emergency vehicles from the street).

### **ESTIMATED COSTS**

Shipston Davies Ltd were commissioned to carry out a cost estimate for the works outlined in this report. The total estimated cost is \$1,080,000. This estimate excludes: consents; all interior work other than consequential upgrade work; loose furniture, equipment and furnishings; project contingency sum; professional fees; legal and financing costs; and GST. The estimate includes the tiling cost estimate already outlined above, but Shipston Davies did not undertake any work on this component of the project.

The total estimate of cost for essential structural repair, exterior painting and maintenance costs to the buildings and verandas is \$955,000. For guidance, the Council policy for heritage grants is 20% - 40% of this cost, with the remainder being the building owners responsibility.

The estimate of cost for decorative façade tiling is an additional \$60,000. The decorative tiling is a significant and essential heritage feature of New Regent Street. The Council could consider that the cost of restoration of the tiling, which is not a functional requirement, might be met as a full contribution by the Council to the project, subject to building owners' completion of the structural and maintenance works.

### **OTHER INITIATIVES**

#### **Interpretation Panel**

The street is one of the city's most popular heritage, shopping and café attractions, and the tram brings large numbers of tourists through the street every day. However, there is no readily available explanation of the story behind the street and its unique history. An interpretation panel, similar to others throughout the city, could be installed in the street to promote education and understanding for visitors to the street. Interpretation panels commonly cost around \$2,000 for the structure, printing, framing, mounting and site installation. Graphic design would be additional. Heritage staff could source photos and plans and write the text.

#### **Rationalisation of Signage**

With a number of different businesses in the street, there is a lot of signage of varying types and sizes in the street itself which present a cluttered look. It is proposed that the existing signage be reduced or tidied up and for guidelines to be established to ensure that all the shops advertise in a uniform manner- eg one under veranda sign, no above the veranda signs and the use of a uniform painted signage on the veranda fascia, perhaps restricted to a particular 1930s font.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Council support in principle the New Regent Street revitalisation project, subject to a meeting being held with building owners and tenants, to gauge their willingness to support the project.
  2. That the project be carried in conjunction with the Central City Mayoral Forum, as a city revitalisation project.