

Objection could hinder project



Hāwera

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Plans for an \$8 million cultural hub in South Taranaki could be delayed because Heritage New Zealand is opposing the demolition of a 118-year-old building on the site.

The South Taranaki District Council (STDC) bought the property, on the corner of High St and Regent St, Hāwera, in 2016, choosing it for its central location.

STDC wants to demolish the building to make way for Te Ramanui o Ruapūtahanga, a key part of the council's plans to revitalise the town centre.

The development will include a bigger library, meeting rooms, public toilets, heritage exhibition space, the Lysaght Watt Gallery, i-SITE visitor centre and a café, as well as a communal public outdoor space.

The council was required to apply for a resource consent for the project because it is both the applicant and the consenting authority, and an independent commissioner was engaged to make the decision.

Independent commissioner Alan Withy heard submissions from the council and Heritage NZ, at a hearing in Hāwera on Tuesday.

Council chief executive Waid Crockett said they expected a

decision before the end of July.

In its submission opposing the demolition, Heritage NZ said the category 2 listed building "is of cultural heritage value and is considered an important heritage asset in its own right and as part of a historical main street townscape".

It recognised that the building requires seismic strengthening but said it was not considered beyond repair and it wanted all other avenues explored before demolition was considered.

During public consultation late last year, 170 submissions were received in favour and only two were against, neither from the South Taranaki community.

One was Fire and Emergency New Zealand, which sought a change in the fire hydrants and water supply requirements for the new building, and this had since been resolved.

In a pre-hearing report, council environment and hearings committee chairman Andy Beccard said engineers experienced in seismic strengthening had conservatively estimated the cost of reinstating the building would be \$1 million, not including any fit-out costs.

The name Te Ramanui o Ruapūtahanga refers to the beacon, or signal fire, that Ruapūtahanga, a famous Taranaki Māori ancestress, would light so iwi could gather to share ideas and knowledge.



Above: The South Taranaki District Council needs to demolish this building to make way for its new \$8 million library and cultural centre. Below: An artist's impression of the new Te Ramanui o Ruapūtahanga cultural hub in Hāwera.



WARREN AND MAHONEY