

Old hospital gates may get a reprieve

Public to get say on their future

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The gates at the former Barrett St Hospital may be saved from removal.

In September last year the Office of Treaty Settlements, caretakers of the landbanked property, announced a full-site clearance was planned for the complex.

This clearance was set to include the removal of the ornate gates, which are believed to be about 100 years old.

The proposal was met with a public outcry and the New Plymouth District Council stepped in to try and save the gates.

An independent historian has since appraised the gates and the outer wall of the complex.

Council's manager of environmental strategy and policy, Colin Comber said the gates and the wall had been assessed as satisfying the Category A classification of the District Plan and would be included in the plan if the public wanted them to be.

The public will soon be able to have their say and if the historian's recommendation for the council to rate the gates goes ahead then they will not be able to be knocked down without a resource consent.

The sole resident of the complex, Carla MacKinnon, 30, has been campaigning to save the gates and said she was delighted with the news.

"If worst came to worst I was going to chain myself to them. It looks like I might not have to do that now," she said.

"I'm really happy because these gates are iconic and they were designed by architect Frank Messenger and a lot of his other work, like the TSB Bank, is now an earthquake risk, so these could be one of the few pieces we manage to save."

The matter will be discussed by the council's regulatory committee on April 10, and will then be open for public consultation.

MacKinnon said she would be making a submission about the gates and said she knew of many other people who would do the same.

Since she went public with her plan to save the gates she has been approached by countless people

who used to work in the complex.

"They still really care about this place."

The 7.62 hectare site was sold to the Government in 1996 for \$1 million and has been administered by the Ministry of Justice since 2006 as part of the Office of Treaty Settlements Landbank.

The buildings on the site have been declared a major earthquake risk and are contaminated with asbestos.

The complex has made headlines in the past for the amount of vandalism that occurs there.

MacKinnon, who rents the old doctor's house, said the vandalism had nearly stopped since the site was given a clean up by PD workers last year.

"Someone knocked the door to the Nurses' Mansion down and set fire to it, and people throw the odd bit of rubbish over the walls, but it's still heaps better than it used to be."

High hopes: Carla MacKinnon celebrates after hearing that the ornate gates at the former Barrett St Hospital could be saved when the site is cleared.

Photo: CHARLOTTE CURD/FAIRFAX NZ

