

Heritage lost in new buildings

MATT RILKOFF

A rash of heritage buildings being demolished has prompted calls for more to be done to protect New Plymouth's historic character.

Just weeks ago two industrial buildings from the 1920s were demolished on Gill St to make way for a 37 room motel, and in April the Kibby's Building on Devon St West was torn down to make space for new office block.

History graduate Hannish Crimp grew up in New Plymouth and said the loss of such buildings was shameful and has called for the New Plymouth District Council to take a lead role in making heritage buildings harder to demolish but easier for developers to use.

"I think it's too late for a lot but we can definitely save what we have. Council policies need to protect heritage but also need to make it easier for owners to protect heritage," he said.

"Heritage buildings provide unique spaces for our favourite restaurants and shops, add vibrancy and character to our streets, and are tangible reminders of our city's fascinating past," Crimp said.

"It's about making sure that the people of New Plymouth understand their heritage and if someone wants to demolish a building they kick up a stink about it."

There are close to 800 heritage buildings and sites in the New Plymouth district but only 103 Category A listed buildings are afforded some protection against renovation, removal or demolition.

Category A buildings in New Plymouth include Hurworth Cottage, the hen and chicken cottages on Pendarves St, St Mary's Church and the White Hart Hotel.

Category B and C buildings, which a vast majority of heritage

buildings are, have no protection under the district plan.

New Plymouth property developer Harvey Dunlop said the council had a good strategy to protect heritage buildings and he and Jeremy Thomson had worked closely with them on the multimillion dollar redevelopment of the White Hart Hotel precinct.

"But there is always more that can be done. Mainly in regard to getting the word out there and telling people they are here to help with these sorts of buildings," he said.

Dunlop said businesses

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increasingly looked at heritage areas as desirable places to be but they weren't easy to develop.

Dunlop and Thomson spent 14 years reestablishing the White Hart Hotel and have turned it into New Plymouth's most fashionable precinct with a mix of office, retail, accommodation and hospitality space.

The council granted Dunlop and Thomson \$135,000 from its Heritage Fund for the reroofing, fire protection and restoration of

the hotel's verandah.

"The funding was important but as a proportion of the total cost of the development it wouldn't have stopped it if we didn't receive it."

"More important is the necessity to have a council on your side in redeveloping these buildings," Dunlop said.

More help jumping through regulatory requirements and supporting a building's change of use through more "a more liberal interpretation of the rules" might encourage other building owners to redevelop their properties, he said.

"There is a bit of a barrier to people investing in buildings when they come against regulations they don't know how to navigate."

"The council need to be more proactive in taking a role in education and making it planer what can be done to assist people in the process."

Council spokesman Liam Hodgetts said the council had decided long ago to only protect the "best of the best" heritage buildings and the buildings on Gill St were not considered significant enough to be protected under the District Plan.

"Of course council would always prefer that landowners and their designers try to retain and integrate heritage elements into any redevelopment."

"We encourage retention by offering free architectural advice and a heritage grant scheme (\$50,000 per annum) to help facilitate this," Hodgetts said.

Submission to the council's heritage policy can be made in September 2016 when the new district plan is released.

"In 2017 they will have the opportunity to have their say on the actual heritage rules and whether the individual buildings themselves should have heritage status or not," Hodgetts said.



Two industrial buildings from the 1920s have come down on Gill St to make way for a motel.

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