

## SUBMISSION TO ANNUAL PLAN 2023 – 2024

Submitted by

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# HERITAGE AMNESIA ?

*"Heritage is the memory of the community"*

Steve Austin

*"Preserve your memories - they're all that's left you"*

Simon & Garfunkel

In 1990 the Marlborough Historical Society (MHS) opened the Marlborough Provincial Museum at Brayshaw Park. This facility was built with help from private bequests, Lottery grants and much voluntary labour, and for the first time provided a home for Marlborough's rich collection of artefacts and archives.

Some ten years later the Marlborough District Council (MDC) agreed to provide a modest sum (initially \$50,000 per year) to support the Museum operation. Although this has grown to the present figure of around \$300,000 annually, it is clear that for many years the heritage sector has been chronically under-funded.

In the past twelve months the inevitable consequence of this has become obvious - ***Marlborough heritage is in crisis.***

### **THE MARLBOROUGH HERITAGE TRUST**

The Marlborough Heritage Trust (MHT) was established in 2014. It was formed after much debate and consultation with the heritage community in order to provide appropriate governance and funding for the sector, in partnership with Council. A formal partnership agreement was signed on 11 August 2014, and among other things promised that:

*"The Council and the Trust are jointly committed to Marlborough's heritage resources being enjoyed by present and future generations and intend to work in partnership to achieve that outcome."*

Council also undertook to:

*"Consult with the Trust on the continued development and implementation of heritage policy in Marlborough" and also to "advocate and promote the activities of the Trust in relevant forums and publications."*

***None of this has happened. The formal heritage partnership has been allowed to wither to its present terminal state, and only bold measures can fix it and progress.***

In the seven years since the Heritage Trust assumed responsibility for the Museum and Edwin Fox, it has gradually been overwhelmed by lack of useful budget, escalating costs, staff frustration and burnout of the volunteer Board. Despite the agreement to “*advocate and promote*”, it has also been the victim of Council indifference, manifested in the absence of consultation and failure to maintain the required Council representation on the Trust Board.

Further compounding the troubles of the Heritage Trust was the loss of Government funding for our schools’ **Heritage Education programme**. This innovative programme, managed by the Trust, was initiated 25 years ago by the Historical Society and is enormously popular with the region’s schools. The Ministry of Education contract ended in December last year, and the programme now only continues to 30 June thanks to local sponsorship and koha. Every one of Marlborough’s 34 schools makes the programme part of their curriculum, 5,000 students enjoying it each year. It’s loss would be a tragic outcome for our children, as would be the loss of the specially trained heritage teachers.

***We all agree the Trust is currently not coping and that something has to change.***

### **COUNCIL TAKEOVER**

At a Special General Meeting of the Historical Society on 6 April 2023, MDC Officer Dean Heiford told members that the Heritage Trust was to be wound up and all its assets transferred to Council. In addition the Chief Executive of the Museum had been replaced and any future staff would be Council employees (*ref MHS Minutes circulated 28 April*).

Although the Marlborough Historical Society actually owns the entire artefacts and archives collection, this was the first the MHS members had heard of this plan. It also became clear that:

- *neither the Trust nor Council had consulted with the wider heritage community, as specifically required by the Trust Deed;*
- *the Historical Society, owner of the collection, had not been consulted in any way;*
- *none of the due legal process specified in the Trust Deed and Partnership Agreement had been followed;*
- *Neither the members of the Historical Society, other parties to the Heritage Trust Deed, nor indeed the elected members of Council appear to have had any opportunity to consider these plans prior to implementation;*
- *the proposed changes have enormous implications for future strategic direction, protection and promotion of Marlborough’s rich but aging heritage assets.*

### **ANNUAL PLAN 2023-24**

“*Arts, Culture and Heritage*” are the three parts of a triad that provides the heart and soul of any community. Marlborough is no exception, and this is reflected in the Council’s own planning documents. It is noted however that these three words do not appear anywhere in this year’s Annual Plan Consultation document. Sadly, when it comes to “*Heritage*”, this is not an uncommon omission.

In the thirty years since the Marlborough Museum was built, it remains exactly the same size as it was in 1990. The excellent Wine and Wairau Bar exhibitions occupy most of it, but the rest of Marlborough's history is seemingly displayed in the space of a typical home lounge. Despite the best efforts of its Director, staff and volunteers, for too long they have been trying to get several quarts of history into a pint container.

In the past thirty years Council has expended major capital on a fine sports stadium, a magnificent new Theatre and now a twenty million dollar Library and Art Gallery, among other things. In contrast, the only significant capital expenditure on heritage over the same thirty years has been a modest extension to the tiny Renwick Museum.

We can only look enviously elsewhere. Lyttelton, with a population under 4,000, has just announced plans for a \$12.5 million dollar museum. Closer to home, Tasman Bays Heritage Trust gets an operating grant of 2 million dollars annually from its dual council partners. The same councils will shortly grant another 6 million dollars for a new Archive Research facility. Nelson Tasman is bigger than Marlborough - but not ten times bigger! Except perhaps in their vision and commitment to their heritage.

## **IN SUMMARY**

Heritage in Marlborough has been neglected for far too long - and we are now in the inevitable consequential crisis. Our heritage urgently needs a champion - or a team of champions - with the vision, passion and will to save the situation, and save our collective community memory. We know the present Mayor and councillors do have a respect for our history, and will be concerned about the present situation.

We have no objection to the eventual transfer of the present museum buildings and Edwin Fox to Council ownership and care. This will be the only way where the financial and other resources needed to maintain these assets in the long term can be achieved. But such a transfer demands careful consideration for the future of the archives, the various collections and their provenance, the legal implications, the requirements of the Trust Deed and the future of the vital Heritage Education programme. We do not believe sufficient, if any, consideration has in fact been made of these matters.

Simply winding up the Marlborough Heritage Trust achieves nothing except to close a vital communication channel with the heritage community. The Trust was clearly not coping, but should be retained and revitalised. A revived Heritage Trust, relieved of the burden of deteriorating real estate, will be far better placed in its partnership with Council. It would act, as its Deed requires, as an advocate and promoter of heritage matters, a consultant and adviser to Council's heritage team, and a conduit to the community.

It is time to pause, do some serious collective thinking, properly consult with the heritage community and jointly develop some bold and different strategies for the future. It is not too late.

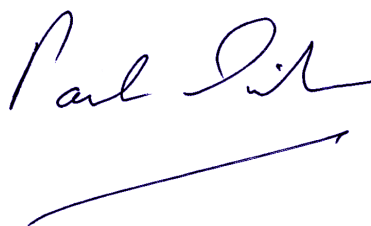
## DECISIONS SOUGHT FROM COUNCIL

We respectfully urge Council to –

- 1) Take no further action regarding transfer of assets pending proper consultation with the Heritage Trust, the Historical Society and all relevant community organisations;**
- 2) Maintain the Marlborough Heritage Trust operating budget (excluding staff) for a further 12 months, reappoint Council and Iwi representatives and support its operation as the Partnership Agreement requires;**
- 3) Underwrite the operation of the Heritage Education programme to the end of the 2023 school year and assist with securing continued Ministry funding for future years;**
- 4) Support and fund an appropriate heritage working group and heritage consultants to develop strategic visions and economic feasibility studies for a future reset of the Marlborough Heritage sector;**
- 5) Include in the this year's Annual Plan a budget for development of a 10 year capital development plan for the region's museums, with project timelines and priorities for inclusion in the next Long Term Plan;**

We do wish to speak in support of this submission at the June public hearings and look forward to the opportunity for further debate, discussion and consideration.

Nga mihi nui



**Paul Davidson**



**Dale Webb**



**Toni Gillan**



**John Orchard**

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8 May 2023