

Submission to the Independent Hearing Commissioner

Alistair Aburn

Re: the Demolition of the Town Hall and the Municipal Building.

Cophthorne Hotel, April 15, 2025.

The heart of a community is its soul, others have different terms for it, but in essence it is an essential part of a thriving, vibrant community. The soul determines a community's culture, its priorities, and its values. A town without a soul is dead. Many things contribute to a town's soul, but one of the most important elements is its architecture, along with its gardens, whether it has tree lined streets, or whether it is a barren, soulless stream of commercial buildings, often gaudy, often ugly and few, if any, with architectural merit.

Masterton has precious few of its heritage buildings remaining in Queen St and even less in Chapel Street, also State Highway 2, the street which most travellers pass along. There is little to encourage them to pause and avail themselves of our hospitality. Instead, they carry on to that quaint little heritage town of Greytown. It does have a soul.

Masterton citizens have little to enjoy and uplift them along Chapel St and this does affect the town's spirit. (*See attachment 1.*)

The photos in Attachment 1 show the two approaches to the central area of Masterton along Chapel St and the remainder of the heritage buildings along that street. On page 1, the view from the north shows the Chilton Building on the east side, a concrete building, built in 1934. It sits alone.

Also on page 1, but from the south, on the east side, is the Old Masonic Lodge building, built in 1926, also concrete. On the west side, not quite opposite, is the Masterton Club, a beautiful heritage villa built in 1903.

A short distance north of these two, is the Chapel St/Perry St heritage precinct, or what is left of it, shown on pages 2 and 3. Three magnificent buildings sit on three corners of this intersection, which leads directly to the town centre. On the north-west corner, sits the heritage listed (in the Councils own literature) town hall and municipal building with its open area, enjoyed by citizens as a quiet place, a place to gather and for children and small dogs to romp. Built and opened by 1918, it is built with reinforced columns and beams with brick infill panels, a proven belt and brace system.

Opposite on the south-west corner, sits the beautiful art deco Times Age building, built in 1938 from reinforced concrete.

Page 3 shows a closer view of the town hall and on the north-east corner, the magnificent former Public Trust building, built circa 1922, a concrete and frame building.

All of these buildings remained reasonably intact after the 1942 earthquake and are still standing today, despite a number of other earthquakes. The loss of one of these buildings, will be significant.

Since submissions closed for the Notified Resource Consent, on the destruction of the Masterton Town Hall, there have been developments that are most concerning. Minister Chris Penk visited Masterton in late February and warned that a review underway on earthquake prone building system legislation could affect the seismic assessment process and went further to say, that it was "quite possible" it could have an effect on whether buildings like the town hall would continue to be classified as earthquake prone. (*See attachment 2 for the full report on the Times Age*).

With such an obvious shot over the bow from the Minister of Building and Construction, one could have reasonably believed that all thought of demolition, in the short term, could be put to rest. The minister has also extended the period by four years, before action will be required on earthquake prone buildings, and in that time many buildings could see their status changed. Our councils excuse, for continuing headlong towards destruction of our iconic building, is because it will never be cheaper! What an absurd excuse to demolish a heritage building that may not even require demolishing.

The extension also allows for a deeper analysis of the building's construction, and for experts to be consulted, who are experienced heritage advisors and architects, rather than ones chosen for their opinion which supports demolition.

There is definitely an undercurrent of lack of trust in the Council staff, the majority of the councillors and their reasons for the rush and the demolition. Loose-lipped staff have said that they won't go back into a revamped and renovated Municipal building, they prefer the luxury accommodation Waiata House affords them. They want the town hall gone, so Waiata House can be extended and if the new town hall isn't built, the area can be carparks.

When the Thursday food trucks were hurriedly moved from the town hall forecourt, months before the submission process was completed, a food truck owner was told when they enquired about the rush, given no decision was made, that the decision would be for demolition, so they were getting ready to proceed with it straight away.

Despite the fact that council staff have been in and out of the town hall for months, along with the council hired experts, and local supporters of demolition, no-one who is suspected of being against the demolition has been allowed in. The CEO has expressly forbidden it. Various trades people know, through their networks, that dismantling of cubicles in the bathrooms in the Municipal building has been completed and door-knobs removed.

This process is not an example of democracy in motion. It is very much a process of steam rolling a pre-determined outcome based on some pretty suspect premises, as other submitters have, or will outline, far more eloquently than me. My concern is that a group who don't grasp the importance of a town having a soul, a rich culture, have used any means to achieve an outcome that has no concrete substance to it. Under the pretence that the buildings are unsafe, they are determined to clear the land for a town hall that has no plans, no business case, and is based on a financial limit plucked out of the air. The figures worked to "prove" that restoration and strengthening, if required, are more expensive, have been found seriously wanting and are currently sitting with the office of the Auditor General.

New doesn't mean better, this is not the financial climate to commit our citizens to this sort of unnecessary expense. We have a beautiful building that can patiently wait until its final status is known, and until work on it is affordable. It is not hurting anyone, cars still drive along Chapel St, we use the forecourt and grassed area, there have never been orange fences around it keeping us away.

First and foremost, this grand old lady adds to the ambience, spirit and culture of our town, even as it is. If you allow it to be destroyed, you will take something irreplaceable away from us, and our community will be the poorer for it.

Robyn Prior
Submitter #49.

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Seismic review could change town hall situation, minister says



Piers Fuller | Wairarapa Times-Age

February 27, 2025

Comment (1)

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A decision on whether to demolish the Masterton Town Hall was set to be made in the coming months.
PIERS FULLER

With Masterton District Council poised to make a decision on whether to demolish the town hall, the minister in charge of earthquake prone building reform warns that a review could change the parameters.

Minister for Building and Construction Chris Penk was in Masterton late last week speaking to a group of businesspeople.

In an exclusive interview with the *Wairarapa Times-Age*, Penk said the current review of the earthquake prone building system legislation could affect the seismic assessment process.



Building and construction minister Chris Penk is interviewed by Wairarapa Times-Age editor Piers Fuller.
PIERS FULLER / WAIRARAPA TIMES-AGE

Though he was wary of commenting on particular cases, the minister who ordered the review said it was “quite possible” it could have an effect on whether buildings like the town hall would continue to be classified as earthquake prone.

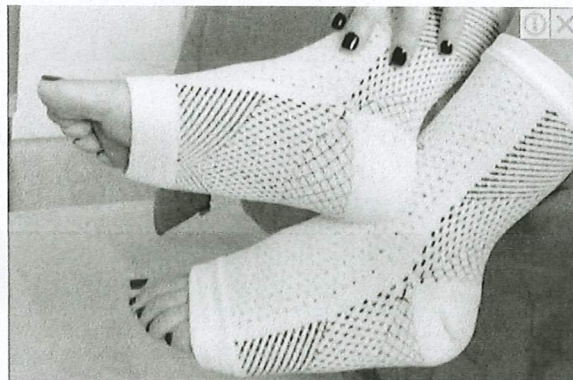
“The overall tenor of the review is to have a system that's clearer and easier to navigate and is risk-based, which inevitably will mean that we will have the opportunity for buildings that might currently be condemned, no longer to be on the chopping block.

“We know that there will be people who aren't in a position to do the earthquake strengthening to retain a building, or are reluctant to demolish one, and we think that some of those will be favourably affected by the outcome of the review.

“I would say to anyone who's contemplating these decisions, which they'll make on an individual basis, we've given an extension for a reason.”

At a Masterton District Council meeting last week, councillor Tim Nelson warned his fellow councillors that it could be foolhardy to proceed with demolition, particularly in the light of the fact that the Government has extended strengthening deadlines by four years while the review took place.

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After hearing the minister's comments, he doubled down on his position.

“If it's a possibility and it's going to save \$4 million to knock it down, it should be halted for absolute sure.”

Mayor Gary Caffell said at the meeting last week that demolishing the buildings would “never be cheaper than doing it now”.

“It will cost a hell of a lot more if we have to do it in four years' time.”

In response to the minister's latest comments, Caffell said it was difficult to take a position without knowing what any review would bring.


“That is not to take issue with the minister's comments, but right now all we can work on are the rules which are in place. The minister uses the words ‘quite possible’ which suggests he is unsure of where all this will end.”

While taking questions at FarmFocus in Masterton on Friday, Penk was asked by Masterton building owner Dick Quinn when the earthquake prone building system review would be done.

“It’s a farcical situation where I’m associated with a building here in town which withstood the 1942 earthquake ... virtually coming through unscathed. In 2017, the MBIE amendments took place to the Building Act and as a result, some guy sitting at a computer pushes a few buttons and tells me it’s earthquake prone. It’s just a joke,” Quinn said.

Penk said they expected the next phase of the review to be complete by the end of the year, but they were not going to rush the process.

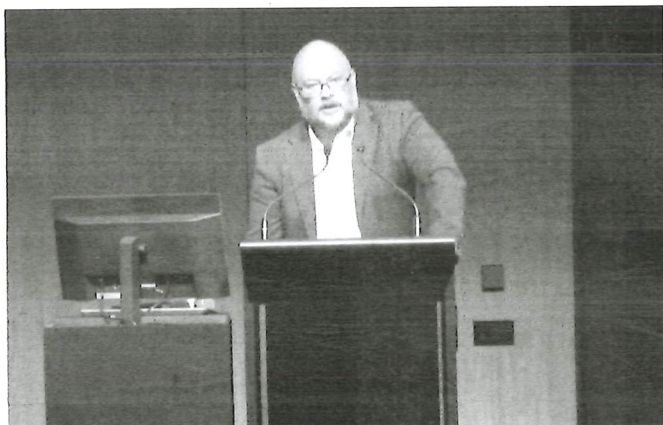
“We’ve got to make sure everyone’s on board, we’ve got to get this right once.”

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- **Wairarapa Times-Age**

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Attachment 1

The Remainder of the Chapel St
Heritage Buildings

①



Approach to town
centre from the north
= heritage building
left.

Chilton Building
1934

North-East corner
Chapel + King
streets.
Concrete

②



Approach to town
centre from south

= heritage buildings:
left: 2

Old Masonic Hall
Built 1926

Chapel St on East
side between
Renall + Jackson Sts
Concrete.

③



Nearly opposite Old
Masonic Lodge,
West side of Chapel
St on Renall St cur
Masterton Club
= heritage wooden
villa

1903

Wooden

The Remains of our Heritage Precinct. - Chapel St

(4)



See Page 3
for details

Town Hall - Municipal Building 1918

Old Public Trust Building 1922

(5)



Times Age Building
South-west corner
of Perry St,
opposite the
Town Hall.
Reinforced Concrete
1938.

Art Deco Times Age Building 1938

(6)



Masterton Town Hall, foundation stone laid 1915

Masterton Town Hall

Completed 1918
& opened

Corner Chapel & Perry
Sts, N-N side,

opposite Former
Public Trust Building
on Chapel St.

Reinforced concrete columns
+ beams with brick
infill panels - proven
belt & brace construction
system.

(7)



Former Public Trust Building, circa 1922

Former Public Trust
Building

Circa, 1922

Corner of Chapel &
Perry Sts on the
N-E side.

Concrete wall +
frame building.