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designgroup

Proposed Countdown supermarket at Pokeno

URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

01 May 2019

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Executive Summary

This report concerns the application by Woolworths NZ Ltd to establish a Countdown Supermarket on a currently undeveloped site at 58 Great South Road, Pokeno.

The report focuses on the frontage boundary of the site to Great South Road, where the District Plan calls for a traditional retail frontage and verandah over a public footpath, with, commercially-required car-parking located behind the frontage building(s).

While the proposed supermarket is set back from the frontage with a customer car-park between the building and the street frontage, the report concludes that:

- the benefits of having a full-service supermarket in the heart of the future commercial area are substantial, and
- The proposed built environment along the frontage, consisting of substantial soft landscape, paved public gathering spaces and an overhead canopy meet, to a large extent, the intentions of the District Plan to provide a sheltered and enclosed street edge.
- The overall effect of the proposal will be to support the development of a quality urban design outcome for the future town centre.

I consider the proposed development responds appropriately to the vision set out in the District Plan in urban design terms, consistent with the commercial requirements of the applicant, and I am pleased to support consent being granted.

Graeme Scott | 01 May 2019

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1 Introduction

This report provides an urban design assessment of the proposal by Woolworths NZ Ltd to establish a supermarket at 58 Great South Road, Pokeno. The site is in the Business zone of the Waikato District Operative Plan, and is situated in the centre of what will become a vibrant town centre as Pokeno continues to grow in population.

The proposal does not meet all the expectations set by the District Plan, and the separate planning assessment should be relied upon to establish the overall merits of the application.

In urban design terms, the main areas of District Plan non-compliance addressed in this report are the requirement for a continuous retail frontage along the Great South Road boundary, and the related requirement for a continuous street verandah over the public footpath.

2 Scope and involvement

I have been engaged to assist the design team in achieving an acceptable outcome that satisfies the applicants commercial requirements while also meeting the urban design qualities expected by Council.

To that end, I have visited the site and have participated in three meetings with Council officers and their appointed advisors, and have had a separate meeting with Lauren White, the Council's urban design advisor for this project.

Several design approaches have been explored and work-shopped over the last six months, such as including a vehicle crossing off Great South Road, a more centralised canopy design over a more formal plaza on Great South Road, fewer trees and various versions of rock walls.

Feedback from Council has been carefully considered in arriving at the proposed design which is fully described on ASC Architects drawings accompanying this application, dated 23 April 2019.

3 Pokeno past and future

Pokeno's location in the northern end of the Waikato Valley, at the base of the Bombay Hills separating the valley from the Auckland region, has ensured it has played a significant part in the history of the area. A Māori village (Pokino – 'place of refuge') had existed just to the north of the current town well before the arrival of Pākehā, taking advantage of the very fertile soils and the proximity to the Waikato River some 3km south. Pākehā immigrants were offered land in the area (1850's), their presence reinforced by the establishment of the Queens Redoubt (1862) immediately south of the current town. This was a staging post from which the Waikato land wars were launched, and also a camp for troops involved in building what became the Great South Road from Drury southwards (1863-1865).

Settlement in the area was dispersed, and the centre of community activity seems to have moved around the valley over time, even after the arrival of the railway in 1874. The focus for some time was up on the hill nearer the intersection of highways 1 and 2, where the church (St Mary's) still stands. The railway also served Pukekohe and Tuakau, and Pokeno's importance as a staging post was therefore diminished somewhat until the advent of motor-car transport in the twentieth century, when it once again became a significant stopping-off point on the Great South Road. The village settled at its current location during the 1920's.

The physical presence of Pokeno has therefore always had a somewhat temporary character, and little in the way of an urban fabric has been generated in spite of a long history. The old Post Office Building, the Hall and the WW1 monument across the road from it, together with the mature trees around them, constitute a small civic presence.

The undeveloped site is at a key location for the future of Pokeno as a growing town centre. The residential growth of Pokeno is likely to continue, and concentrating the provision of goods and services in the existing centre is important to the future vitality of the town.

There is high value in having the full-service supermarket in the centre of town. Pokeno is at an early stage of developing a townscape, and it's good to have this activity hub in the town – both in pedestrian numbers and economic activity – to boost other development. In older towns of a more traditional format, such as Matamata and Morrinsville, the supermarkets have been forced to locate at the edge of town, effectively becoming drive-to destinations, separate from the main shopping district, and unable to contribute to its vitality.

I consider having the supermarket located on this site is, in itself, a strong urban design move.

4 Site analysis

The site of the proposed supermarket is in the block south of the old Post Office Building, on the other (north-eastern) side of the Great South Road. It is currently farmland, with an unformed frontage of some 60 metres to Great South Road. There are no significant trees on the site.

It is directly opposite the main shopping block of Pokeno, which consists of older commercial buildings with street verandahs, both one and two storeys.

In the next block south on the south-western side, the truck-stop provides a poor urban edge to the street, although some new two-storey developments on both sides of Great South Road further to the south suggest a tentative defining of the street corridor.

There are views from the site (and from the other side of Great South Road) of the rising land to the north up to the Bombay Hills, and generally pleasant up-land rural views beyond the immediate low-level buildings in most other directions.

The site falls some 6 to 7 metres to the north away from Great South Road, necessitating some substantial retaining walls on the north-east and north-west boundaries.

An integral part of the proposal is the formation of a new formed street on Wellington Street, giving vehicle access to the supermarket site for both customers and goods deliveries, avoiding the need for a vehicle crossing off Great South Road.



Above:
The Great South Road looking south-east, with the site on the left beyond the service station sign. The Pokeno shops are on the right.
In the foreground, Marlborough Street leads off to the right, and may become the access street to a future Pokeno train station.



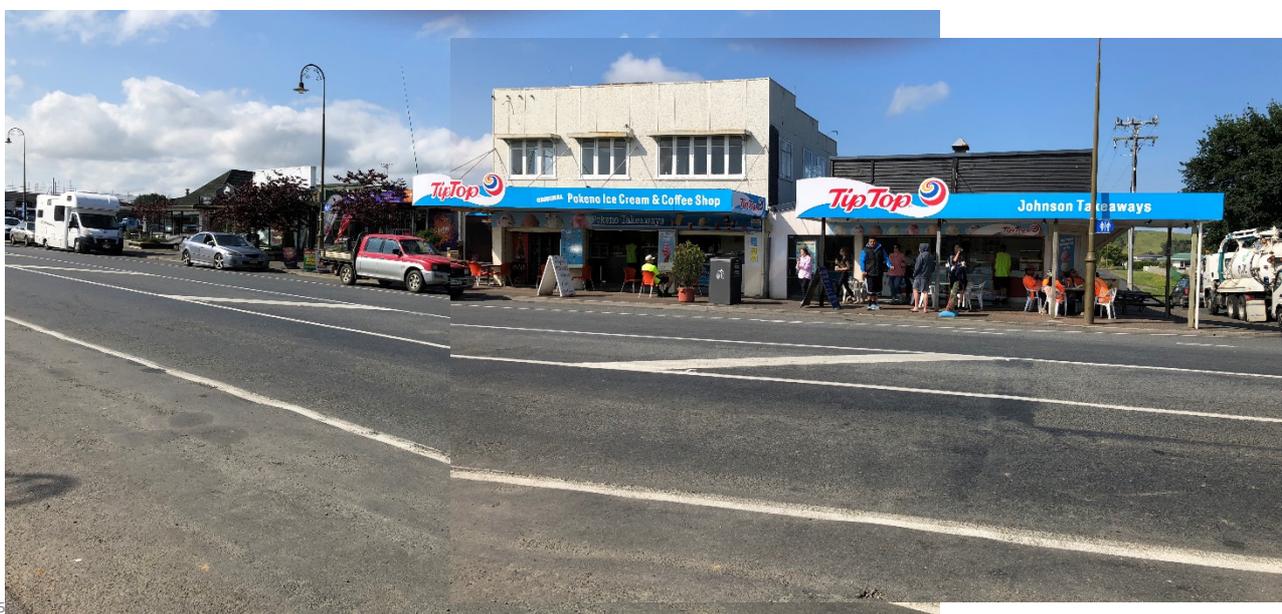
Existing site:
[More photos are included in Appendix 2]

Top:
The site in the Foreground, with views north to the Bombay Hills. The existing frontage on the site is within the site.



Middle:
The frontage of the site looking north-west to the service station beyond.

Bottom:
The retail heart of Pokeno, directly opposite the site on Great South Road.



Site analysis diagram



5 Design response - the site plan

The operational criteria to achieve a successful supermarket influences the site layout. The customer parking and supermarket entry must be highly visible from the Great South Road, and the large trucks used to deliver goods must be kept completely separate from customer vehicle circulations for safety reasons. This results in the site plan as shown on the ASC Architects drawing.

The customer carpark is between the building and Great South Road, accessed off the proposed Wellington Street. Supplementary parking and customer pick-up is beside the building, while truck access is in a secure space behind the building, separately accessed off Wellington Street.

The three major elements - the customer carpark, the supermarket building and the truck unloading area, have been kept as far to the rear of the site as practicable in order to allow the generous landscaped area along the Great South Road frontage described in section 9.

6 Design response – the building

The supermarket building has been designed to align with Woolworths' standards for a full-range and sized supermarket, and the site-specific design seeks to minimise negative impacts on, particularly, the residentially zoned land to the north-east of the site. The usual mezzanine floor back-of-house functions have been brought down to the ground floor to enable the overall height of the 'box' to be reduced to 7.6 metres. Additionally, the building floor level is approximately 1 metre lower than the Great South Road frontage, further reducing its visual bulk from external viewpoints.

The exterior has a full parapet to conceal the sloping roof, and the enclosing wall panels have been varied in height, colour and texture to avoid a monolithic box appearance. Canopies have been used to break-down the scale and to give clear signals about entrance and pick-up points.

Locating the back-of-house office functions on the ground floor has allowed windows on the Wellington Street frontage which give further scale and texture to the overall form.

Refer to the elevations of the building on ASC Architects drawings.

7 Design response – the rear boundary

There is an overall 6 to 7 metre fall across the site from Great South Road to the northern corner. While it has been possible to absorb some of that fall across the carpark in front of the supermarket, the necessity of the supermarket floor being on the same level as the truck unloading area has resulted in a maximum 5.2 metre high retaining wall at the northern corner, with a 2 metre high acoustic fence on top of it..

This complies with the height-in-relation-to-boundary rule in respect of the rear boundary, and further efforts have been made with the design of the wall to soften its visual impact from the properties beyond. The wall is made of mechanically stabilised earth modules that can be planted, and it is proposed to install vegetation to make this a completely green wall in time, as described by the landscape plan.

Additionally, a line of five specimen trees are proposed for this boundary, at the end of Wellington Street, to shield the view of the supermarket from the residential property nearby.

8 Design response – Wellington Street boundary

Wellington street will be formed to give vehicle access to the site at two points as shown on the drawing.

The north-western side of the street will be complete with a grass berm, public footpath and four street trees between parallel car-parks, all to Council standards.

9 Design response – Great South Road boundary

The vision of the District Plan to have retail frontage to both sides of Great South Road is understood to be sound urban design. The double-sided street activated by continuous retail / hospitality uses protected by street verandahs is a common aspiration for towns and cities, but the applicability of this solution for Pokeno could be questioned. In Te Kuiti and Taumarunui, for instance, the commercial strip is effectively along one side only of the main street, with the other side being largely a green landscape. This works well in these towns

The Great South Road frontage has been the focus of our attention over the last six months, given the District Plan requirements for a retail frontage and verandah along the length of this boundary.

The finalised design successfully delivers many of the outcomes envisaged by the District Plan by providing:

- definition of the street edge on this side of Great South Road to face the existing good edge definition on the other side of this block, thereby introducing some street enclosure to this portion of Pokeno’s “main street”
- pedestrian protection from sun and rain for a good portion of the frontage, anticipating connection to future development on adjacent sites

- an attractive and innovative enclosure of the street through the use of layered vertical elements, trees and a densely planted ground plane
- opportunities for people to inhabit the spaces formed on new paved areas, complete with some sense of enclosure, and protection from street traffic
- the possibility of traffic calming and safe pedestrian crossing of the street in a well-defined street corridor.

The proposed frontage establishes a strong street edge incorporating vertical elements and horizontal shelter, while retaining an open view from the street to the supermarket building. Inhabitation of the spaces created is invited through the provision of substantial landscape with paving and seating set within it, and with sun and rain protection overhead.

The primary design feature is a high-quality open-space treatment of the frontage of Great South Road in this block, complementing the open space around the WW1 memorial to the north. This area of some 650sq.m, with a minimum frontage depth of 10m, is heavily planted to reinforce the street edge, and to separate pedestrian amenity from the supermarket carpark beyond.

The proposed landscape to the Great South Road frontage, while predominantly low in order to preserve sightlines to the supermarket entrance, has strong visual interest. It is generally less than 900mm above ground, which serves to prevent CPTED issues that may arise with a higher and more concealing landscape design.

A planted ground plane of two sorts of long grasses, in contrasting colours such as brown and green, that will grow to around 800mm high are complemented with six specimen Titoki tall-form trees. A hedge, around 1200mm high, marks the northern end of the landscape, separating it from the service station.

The linear quality of the road edge is further reinforced by a canopy structure extending out over the public footpath along the Great South Road. This will provide rain cover and shade from the sun to those passing along the frontage, and to those occupying the spaces with seating further back in the landscaped area.

The canopy, tapered in plan, extends for approximately half of the total frontage length, and is at its widest at the north-western end where the paved area is largest and where the Council proposed pedestrian crossing may land on this side of Great South Road. From this informal plaza area, the path to the supermarket entrance runs directly across the supermarket carpark. This therefore is a nodal point where an informal community focus can develop.

The area could be further enhanced with interpretive displays of Pokeno's history, a statue, or other items to be discussed with Council. These elements have the potential to involve the local community as they are developed, and may also have a form that further defines the community space and adds additional verticality to the street edge.

To the south of this community focus there are informal seating areas backing onto the landscaped area, providing places to sit back from the road under shelter.

The canopy has expressed steel structural detailing and a high-quality timber-look soffit of Trespa or similar durable material. It is supported on five vertical steel frames that establish a vertical rhythm to the street edge and, by having vines growing up them, add to the overall landscape treatment of the frontage. Moving from south to north, each frame steps back further from the street and is higher than the one next to it, thus creating visual interest. Vertical wires within them provide a key for the vines to grow up.

The main pylon sign has similar steel detailing to provide consistent vertical elements in the landscape along the site frontage. The location of this sign serves to mark the street corner where the new Wellington Street intersects the Great South Road.

The paving of the area will be in two colours of concrete, one of which will have an exposed aggregate finish. A natural stone edging will demarcate particular areas such as the larger paved space at the northern end of the canopy, and possibly the community / iwi artwork site, suggested to be further north.

The same paving and canopy detailing forms a route from the plaza to the supermarket entry, together with small areas of the grass planting at the minor canopy locations. Some vertical green landscape is incorporated into these also.

The community focus area will be a valuable and appreciated place for people to meet, to let children play while eating ice-creams from the famous store opposite, and to allow them to get a bit further away from the road than is possible on the other side of Great South Road. The overhead canopy will facilitate this in most weather conditions.

The materials used – grasses, timber and steel – all have references to the rural and rail history of Pokeno. Their natural and durable characteristics will enhance the quality feel of the environment.

Lighting at night will illuminate the area. Soffit lights under the canopy will illuminate the seating area, while high level lights mounted on the canopy supports will flood-light the landscaped area.

Soffit lighting under the smaller canopies will illuminate the route to the supermarket.

Lighting along the street edge is to be discussed with Council as part of the overall lighting strategy for Pokeno village.



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Top:
Overall view of the Great South Road frontage proposal, showing paving, landscaping and verandah.

Middle: View from the corner of Great South Road and Wellington Street.

Bottom:
View looking south-east along Great South Road.

10 The design assessment criteria

Appendix 29.2 of the Waikato District Plan sets out the design criteria for the Pokeno town centre against which developments are to be assessed. These criteria are further emphasised by the Waikato Urban Design Guidelines for town centres prepared by Beca .

Both documents require the applicant to ‘provide a written assessment describing how the criteria for each design element are addressed’ by their proposal. In the guidelines, this is called a “Design Statement”.

This document as a whole is intended to address that requirement, but some specific comment on each individual criterion is perhaps appropriate to demonstrate that the design team has properly considered each point in turn.

Considering first **Appendix 29.2: Business Zone (Pokeno) Design Assessment Criteria:**

The criteria for **Design Element 1 : Site Planning** are not fully met, for the reasons explained in section 5 of this assessment.

In meeting the design and layout framework sought by Woolworths to achieve a successful full scale supermarket within the town centre, it has not been possible to achieve the criteria 1 to 4 covering continuous building frontages to streets, street verandas and generally perimeter block development. The proposed street verandah along the Great South Road frontage is partly meeting some of these criteria as set out in section 9. Criterion 5 suggesting two vehicle access points to parking areas from separate side streets is not met due to the site abutting only one side street. Criterion 7, suggesting no more than one double row of car-parks between building and street is largely un-met, due to the need to aggregate all customer parking in one legible area as near as possible to the building entrance.

Criteria 6 and 8, suggesting public entrances be highly visible from the street, and that outdoor storage areas be screened from view, are both met. Care has been taken with the pedestrian entry location and the canopies leading to it to make it very legible from all viewpoints, and the storage / loading area to the rear of the site is fully fenced and gated.

Criterion 9, which calls for stormwater treatment, has been met. A combination of low impact and reticulated systems will provide suitable quality treatment and detention as required. The system is a treatment train arrangement with some stormwater being collected and allowing recharge of groundwater, the rest being treated and disposed of to the Helenslee Stream.

Criteria 10 and 11 do not apply to this site.

The criteria for **Design Element 2 : Building form, public interface, external appearance** are more fully satisfied.

Criteria 1, 2, 5 and 7, suggesting visual interest and articulation of the building form, with the principal pedestrian entrance clearly identified and larger truck/loading doors concealed have been satisfied through the measures set out in sections 6 and 7.

Criterion 3, expecting large roof areas to be visually broken-up, has been partly met by the variation in parapet height and wall panel variation. However, the small-scale gable roofs and parapets portrayed in the Design Guidelines are not appropriate for a building of this scale and type.

Criteria 4 and 6 that call for building frontages on the street and to address the corner architecturally have not been met. The corner pylon sign partially addresses the signalling of the corner, but does not conform to criteria 8, which suggests only signs attached to the building are acceptable. Again, the proposed street verandah and associated vertical structures goes some way to establishing a built street edge as called for by criterion 4.

The criteria for **Design Element 3 : Open space, parking areas and landscaping** are largely satisfied by the proposal.

The carpark has been well-designed to provide a legible and easily understood layout (criterion 6), with good visibility into it from the streets (criteria 2 and 3) and a safe pedestrian route through it (criterion 5). It is not visible from residential areas (criterion 7).

The proposed landscaping is of a high quality and accessible (criterion 1) and Criterion 4 is not applicable to the site.

Now considering the **Urban Design Guidelines | Town Centres (2018)**.

I note that, in Section 3, they emphasise existing context analysis and consultation with neighbours and Council. I consider this has been thoroughly worked through, with discussions around such matters as the future street network, the location of the market, and the future of the residentially zoned land to the north-east all having been resolved to the extent currently possible.

The guidelines then, in section 4, suggest a small-scale, fine-grained architecture, again with a strong contextual emphasis, which is largely irrelevant to the proposal. Not only is the existing architectural context at Pokeno very weak, but this approach fails to appreciate what the future context may be like, and how buildings like supermarkets may fit into it.

In section 5, the interface of buildings and streets are addressed, and that issue in relation to the proposal has been well-canvassed above.

Landscape is covered in Section 6, and I consider the proposal meets the guidelines set out. The landscape is fully accessible, durable, well-lit and planting is designed to avoid 'dark areas'. Plant are low-maintenance and hardy native species.

Section 7 covers movement and access, and the proposal meets all the guidelines listed in 7.3. The movements of vehicles and pedestrians onto and around the site have been carefully considered to avoid conflicts between the different users, and a legible, well-lit movement pattern for each is established.

Mixed-use town centre development is promoted in Section 8 and, while the concept is supported, living accommodation in particular on the supermarket site is not appropriate.

And finally, in Section 9, Environmentally Sustainable Design is suggested. Woolworths incorporate low-energy-use plant and equipment into their buildings, including efficient refrigeration and air-conditioning systems, and LED lighting throughout.

11 Assessment

The proposed supermarket development has been designed to be good fit within a town centre likely to see significant change over the next few years. From an urban design perspective, a traditional supermarket such as this is a challenge, given the design and operational criteria that apply are relatively inflexible. The vehicle-dominated nature of the operation results in a built environment that often breaks many of the basic urban design rules around pedestrian scale, streetscape enclosure, street activation and walkability.

Nevertheless, there are significant positives in capturing the activity associated with a supermarket within the town centre, and it is sometimes necessary to look at ways of achieving a good built environment while accommodating the supermarket's needs.

I consider the design effort applied to the building, the rear boundary and to Wellington Street will result in acceptable visual outcomes for the project as viewed from neighbouring properties.

Regarding the frontage to Great South Road, the classic 'shopping street' solution envisaged by the provisions in the District Plan is but one solution. In developing this design, many options have been explored, including a more centred canopy design over a public 'square', and various pergola arrangements. The need for a significant amount of green landscape has been a constant in the design thinking.

The finalised design prioritises actual rain and sun cover along the street edge when compared to earlier design explorations. I consider this to be a valid and relevant response to the thinking behind the District Plan provisions, which call for verandahs (albeit attached to buildings) along this edge. The need for some vertical emphasis has been met by the distinctive support frames which, at least in the oblique view, add a solidity to the street enclosure

The public paved space now provided has a less formal structure than the previously explored 'square' or 'plaza', with a more linear and irregular outline consistent with its generally informal use for casual seating, and to emphasise its role in connecting along the site frontage to future development rather than simply signalling entry to the supermarket site.

As well as the green frames supporting the canopy, the six Titoki trees will assist in providing an overall green landscape dominant on the frontage, and diminish the visual impact of the supermarket carpark.

I consider that, on balance, the proposal for a strong green edge to the street, strengthened by the vertical landmarks of the canopy supports and the sign, and contributing a new covered paved space that will become a community focus, is a good solution for this site.

The overall proposal is, in my view, an acceptable urban design outcome for this site, which should not preclude other more traditional urban design solutions elsewhere in the emerging town centre.

12 Conclusion

In this assessment, I have analysed the proposal in urban design terms. I have been part of the wider team that has looked at numerous ways the supermarket operation could best meet the thinking behind the District Plan requirements. Given the wider benefits to Pokeno in having the supermarket at its centre, I consider the finalised design response is, on balance, an acceptable response to the District Plan.

I am therefore pleased to support consent being granted for this application.



Graeme Scott

01 May 2019

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Appendix 1

Graeme Scott



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INCORPORATED

Date of Birth:	01.11.49	
Nationality:	New Zealander	
Profession:	Architect	
Specialisation:	Commercial, Residential and Interior architecture Urban design	
Education:	1968-1972	University of Auckland, School of Architecture
	1963-1967	Selwyn College, Auckland
Qualifications:	BArch (Hons)	Bachelor of Architecture with honours Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architects
Work History	2017-now	ASC Architects - Consultant
	1981-2017	ASC Architects - Director
	1976-1980	ASC Architects - Architectural graduate
	1973-1976	Various architecture practices in London

Graeme graduated from the University of Auckland's School of Architecture in 1973, and has been a part of ASC Architects since 1976. He has designed numerous public and corporate buildings over that time, winning numerous awards for them (including nine from the New Zealand Institute of Architects), and has played a leading role in establishing the company's design reputation.

Graeme has a strong interest in design in a New Zealand context and was Convener of the National Awards for Architecture for the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1994 and 1995. He was a member of the NZIA Council and the Honorary Secretary for five years 1996 to 1999.

A large part of his work has been in corporate/commercial architecture, with major commissions completed nationwide for McDonald's, The National Bank and ANZ Bank. Since 1989, Graeme was the principal architect for the National Bank and then the ANZ Bank for their retail premises. Significant buildings have also been completed for local authorities, including new library and community centres at Onehunga and Pukekohe, both winners of NZIA Awards. The recently completed student hub for Unitec in Auckland has received a 2018 NZIA Award.

Graeme's interest in urban design originates from debate around the 1995 scheme for Britomart, which was eventually abandoned in favour of the 2002 completed design. Comment on the ill-fated proposal was led by the NZIA Urban Issues Group, of which he became chair in 2004 through to 2008.

He then became chair of the Urban Design Forum from 2010 to 2018, moving it to a stand-alone professional organisation and building a solid membership base, culminating in the successful conference in Wellington in 2018. In this role, he had significant input into the Auckland Unitary Plan during 2014 to 2016 in conjunction with NZIA representatives, lobbying in favour of the removal of density controls and carparking minimum requirements.

Graeme also led an appeal in the Environment Court opposing the sale of part of Queen Elizabeth Square to a private developer. He has submitted extensively over two decades on the need for Auckland to massively improve its public transport system to underpin efforts to intensify the city, improve liveability and to reduce its carbon footprint.

In the design of urban environments, Graeme has participated in competitions, including Britomart and Matiatia for Auckland Council where our entries were shortlisted, and in the design of large housing projects at McLennan (with Oculus), Market Cove and Unitec (with DGSE and Oculus). Building design work lately has focused on larger apartment developments as Auckland grapples with the housing shortage.

Graeme has received the NZIA President's Award four times for services to the Institute. He is the deputy-convenor of Auckland Council's urban design panels, and chairs design review panels for central Auckland, Hobsonville Point and Tamaki.

Appendix 2 | Further context photos



Top:
The old Post Office across Great South Road, view from the site frontage.



Middle:
The WW1 Memorial on the corner of Market Street.



Bottom:
The site viewed from the shops, looking across Great South Road.