

## **URBAN DESIGN specialist report**

**To:** Ross Cooper, Senior Planner, Tattico Limited

**From:** Yvonne Weeber, Principal Urban Designer

Region Wide Urban Design Policy, Auckland Design Office,  
Auckland Council

**Date:** 13 October 2015

**Subject:** **URBAN DESIGN REPORT**

## **PLAN CHANGE 79, REZONNING OF QUEEN ELIZABETH SQUARE**

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# 1     **Scope**

- 1.1     I am providing an urban design assessment of effects of the proposed plan change by Precinct Properties Downtown Limited (PPNZL) of Queen Elizabeth Square (QE Square).
- 1.2     In preparing this report I have read the Plan Change Assessment of Environmental Effects and Section 32 Analysis by the applicant, Submission and Further Submissions.
- 1.3     I know the site well having travelled regularly to the city by bus, train and ferry over the past year. I have visited the site and undertaken a visual and urban design assessment in relationship to this report and evidence given on the Unitary Plan.
- 1.4     I have read all relevant documentation including past reports, assessments, masterplan and redevelopment proposals set out in Appendix B.
- 1.5     I have provided evidence to the Auckland Unitary Plan Independent Hearing Panel on Topic 050 City Centre for Downtown West Precinct which includes the QE2 Square which is the subject of this report.
- 1.6     The matters that will be addressed in this report include the following:
  - Urban design background information and past urban design evaluations
  - Assessment of existing facades facing on to QE Square
  - Assessment of application documents
  - Summary of submitters issues
  - Urban design assessment of the proposed plan change
  - Amendments to the plan change

- Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan (PAUP) and the Downtown West Precinct

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 My full name is Yvonne Beth Weeber. I am a Principal Urban Designer in the Region Wide Urban Design Policy team in the Auckland Design Office at Auckland Council. I have been in this position since 28 July 2014. Prior to this I was a Senior Analyst with the Ministry for the Environment principally working on the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol and Canterbury Earthquake Recovery.
- 2.2 I hold a Bachelor of Science Honours first class, Post Graduate Diploma of Landscape Architecture and a Masters of Arts in Urban Design. I have approximately 28 years professional experience as a Landscape Architect and 18 years professional experience as an Urban Designer. Full details of my qualifications and relevant past experience are set out in Appendix A of this report.
- 2.3 I am a National Committee member of the Urban Design Forum (UDF). The UDF have made a submission on the plan change of Queen Elizabeth Square. I was not involved in the UDF submission and will not take part in any of the UDF plan change process for QE Square in the future.

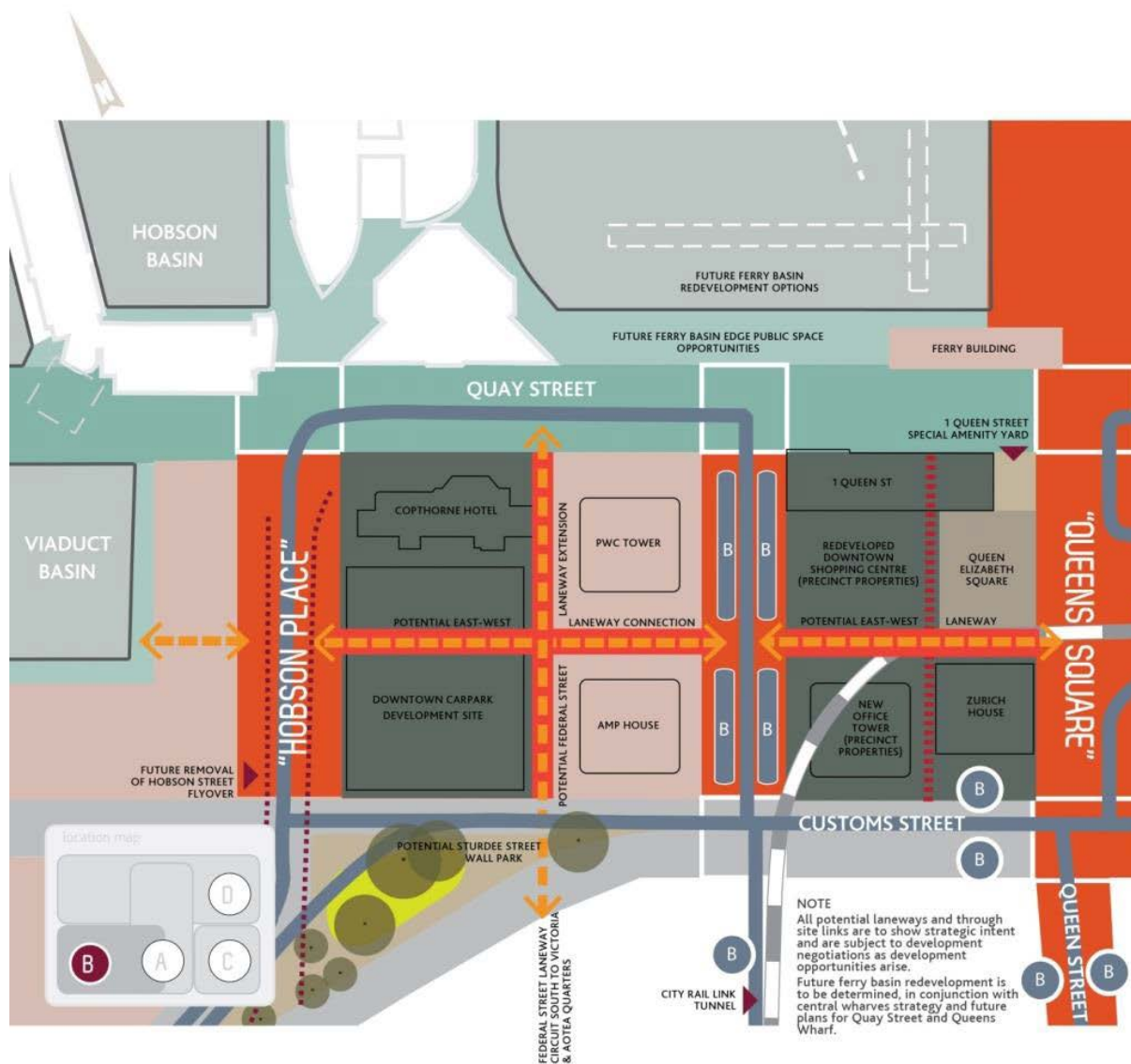
## 3 Background

- 3.1 Documents, studies, analysis, masterplans and frameworks considered in this report are listed in **Appendix B**.
- 3.2 Precinct Properties Downtown Limited has proposed a private plan change to the Auckland Council District Plan (Operative Auckland City – Centre Areas Section 2005) to the zoning of QE Square. The proposed plan change to the Precinct and planning overlay maps would delete QE Square as a public open space and generally bring the overlay maps of the square to be consistent with the provisions that currently apply to the surrounding block of a pedestrian orientated zone.

- 3.3 At present QE Square is 1892m<sup>2</sup> rectangular lot bounded by buildings to the north, west and south. The square is open towards Queens Street and the Britomart Transport Centre. The property details are described by the applicant on page 4 of the Barker and Associates Section 32 Report.
- 3.4 On the 15 May 2014 the Auckland Development Committee approved in principle the disposal of QE Square to be part of the Downtown Shopping Centre Block Redevelopment (Resolution number AUC/2014/64).
- 3.5 On 11 September 2014, the Auckland Development Committee confirmed approval to sell or lease QE Square to PPNZL subject to successful commercial negotiations and statutory processes (Resolution number AUC/2014/111). This resolution also noted draft design requirements of the terms of sale in the form of two laneways cutting the block. These laneways being an:
- a) at grade, publicly accessible (24hrs/7 days), open with weather protection, east-west pedestrian laneway connection between Lower Queen Street and Lower Albert Street through the block
  - b) north-south pedestrian link through the block referencing the historic little Queen Street.
- 3.6 At the same time on the 11 September 2014 the Auckland Development Committee (Resolution AUC 2014/110) endorsed the Downtown Framework document and noted that details and costs would be developed progressively.
- 3.7 The Downtown Framework outlines the different future projects planned for Downtown West. The document is a living document that will continue to evolve, however it brings together the vision and thinking of the Council at that time.
- 3.8 The public space, movement network and development potential are set out in **Figure 1**. One of the important proposals is the bus relocation from Lower Queens Street to Lower Albert Street to free up space for pedestrian and event capability in the Lower Queen Street area. The laneway connection through the Downtown site will provide significant functional pedestrian

connections between public transport facilities in a east-west and north-south direction for the transport interchange functions of the area.

**Figure 1** Downtown West desired future outcomes including laneways<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Downtown Framework page 61

## 4 Past urban design evaluations of QE Square

- 4.1 Subsequent to the building of No. 1 Queen Street (now HSBC Tower) a twenty storey office block on Quay Street, QE Square has been a compromised public open space. The HSBC tower blocks any connection between the water and QE Square (except through the Queen Street Special Amenity Yard to the east of the square). QE Square is very shady due to the HSBC Tower with the sun being present in the square in the lunchtime period only 25% of the year<sup>2</sup>. Conditions are not helped by the prevailing north-east winds in the square making it an unpleasant and windy space<sup>3</sup>.
- 4.2 There have been a considerable number of surveys and analysis of QE Square since the construction of the HSBC Tower. The latest the Downtown Public Open Space Evaluation by RESET (September 2014). The RESET study considered the site attributes as primarily negative with the environment being windy and shady, making it little more than a forecourt to the Downtown mall and a failed open space<sup>4</sup>. The RESET study is contained in the application material.
- 4.3 The Gehl Architects report *Urban Design Advice Queen Elizabeth Square Auckland City Centre June 2014* presented on the 11 September 2014 to the Auckland Development Committee undertook an evaluation of QE Square using 12 qualities. They found that four of these qualities were poor and created serious issues for QE Square. The serious issues are:
- a) No mitigation against the wind and glare issues with insufficient weather protection
  - b) The transport elements are blocking views to and from Queen Street
  - c) QE Square is overshadowed for the majority of the day.
- This report is contained at Appendix C.
- 4.4 The QE2 Square also has a number of other below average qualities including:
- a) Perceptions of poor safety

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<sup>2</sup> Downtown Public Open Space Evaluation – RESET (2014)

<sup>3</sup> Downtown Public Open Space Evaluation – RESET (2014)

<sup>4</sup> Downtown Public Open Space Evaluation – RESET (2014)

- b) No interesting frontages on the building facades surrounding QE Square
- c) The edge of the buildings offering no places for people to linger
- d) QE Square materials and elements are uncoordinated creating a poor design profile.

## **5 Facades and Features fronting on to QE Square**

- 5.1 In addition to the Reset and Gehl Architects evaluations I have undertaken a survey of the facades and features that front on to the QE Square to understand not only the role of the open space but the edge of this space. This is important as not only will the QE Square space be removed if the plan change proposal is accepted but also the building facades will ultimately be replaced by a building. I have also used RESET's evaluation of the Spatial Attributes (page 10) which provides cross-sections and information on the widths and heights of the facades.
- 5.2 The southern façade of the square has the most recently refurbished building fronting on to the QE Square that of Zurich House (18 levels at parapet 66.91m high, roof 74.88m high and 36.6 m wide<sup>5</sup>). This has a new green/blue glass façade building that has a colour linkage with its coastal location. The tickertape display of the New Zealand stock market and other financial news indicators provide constant visual interest into the square and along Queen Street. On the ground floor of this southern façade there is a café making good use of the only continual sunny space on the square. The south eastern side of this façade has the main entrance into Zurich House via escalators from the ground floor to the upper lift level creating activity at this point of the Square.
- 5.3 Western façade Downtown complex (51.73 m wide) has over the years improved from an almost blank façade to one of having the upper level food court having views on to the square and a ground floor with one café open onto the square with tables and chairs. On the ground floor there is a main entrance into Downtown at the middle of the eastern façade. This is the main

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<sup>5</sup> Precinct properties – Downtown Resource Consent Application 19 March 2015

pedestrian movement access through QE Square to and from Queen Street. The Downtown Shopping Centre Door counts average daily total is 4,125 (between June 2013 and May 2014)<sup>6</sup>. There are also entrances into individual shops.

- 5.4 The northern façade of the square has the building of 1 Queen Street (20 levels at parapet 80.90m high, roof 85.86 high<sup>7</sup>). The Ground floor of 1 Queen Street has little of interest except a cash point machine and covered glass windows of HSBC. The first and second level of the HSBC have even less visual interest due to the grills of two levels of carparking facing on to the QE Square.
- 5.5 The building facades that surround QE2 Square therefore address the Square in a piecemeal way. While the northerly café gets sun for the longest amount of time and is busy and active, a large amount of the remaining ground floor activities are passive. A large amount of the windows that face the square are no longer open and are only used for advertising.
- 5.6 To the south east next to Queen Street there is the entrance and exit in a glass box building to the Britomart train station. This building though low in height forms a wall to a large proportion of the south eastern space and blocks the public interaction between QE Square and Queen Street. Within the square the features such as the northern Kauri Trees form further barriers to movement within the square.
- 5.7 One of the most active spaces next to the QE Square is formed by the kiosk in the Amenity Square to the north. This space gets sun, has pedestrian traffic from the Ferry passengers and has provided night time activity to this corner of the square. However like the Britomart Train Station this kiosk forms a block to public interaction between from the QE Square and the Ferry Terminal Building.
- 5.8 To the east of QE Square across Lower Queen Street is the Britomart Transport Centre (54.1m long at approximately parapet 25 m high and approximately at top of roof dome 35m high) forming an important

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<sup>6</sup> Downtown Public Open Space Evaluation – RESET (2014)

<sup>7</sup> Precinct properties – Downtown Resource Consent Application 19 March 2015



Edwardian heritage link with the past and an impressive entry into the Britomart underground rail station. It is this façade that any new building on Lower Queen Street built on to QE Square would face.

## **6 Applicant's assessment and proposed mitigation**

- 6.1 The applicants 2015 *Assessment of Environmental Effects and Section 32 Analysis – Request for Plan Change Percent Properties Downtown Limited Queen Elizabeth Square* report by Barker and Associates Ltd (Applicant's Report) describes the plan request, the strategic framework, statutory considerations, assessment of effects and undertakes a brief Section 32 analysis.
- 6.2 In the Applicants Report section 6.1 *Provisions of Open Space in Downtown Auckland*, past officers reports to and the decisions of the Auckland Development Committee (outlined in section 3 Background of this report) are relied upon to consider the plan change being 'less than minor' in respect to the removal of public open space in the central city.
- 6.3 The reliance on similar controls than those currently applying to the surrounding block are proposed by the applicant to provide a built form that is consistent with existing development of the surrounding land.
- 6.4 Shading diagrams of a hypothetical 19 metre building on the QE Square site are provided by applicant (Appendix 3 of the Applicants Report). These studies show that HSBC is a major negative shade influence not only on the existing QE Square but also Queen Street. A building of 19 metres would create edge shading on the Queen Street footpath but then be subsumed by the shadow of the HSBC tower in the afternoon.
- 6.5 Wind effects (Appendix 4 of the Applicants Report) are assessed. The model of the building assessed was 16.5m not 19m as in the shading assessment. There are small negative changes resulting in three areas including the entrance to Britomart and Lower Queen Street north of Customs Street. While the applicant considers these changes acceptable it is worth noting the high pedestrian traffic that does occur in this area and how even slight changes in wind intensity could affect the future use of this area.

## **7 Submitter issues**

- 7.1 There were six submissions on the QE Square plan change with one submitter supporting the plan change with proposed planning controls and remaining five opposing the plan change.
- 7.2 Cooper and Company NZ supports the proposal subject to a set of planning controls to assist in providing high quality building, urban design and environmental outcomes which would be in character of the overall Britomart Precinct and a regenerated waterfront.
- 7.3 Auckland Architecture Association, Urban Design Forum New Zealand, New Zealand Institutes of Architects Incorporated, S Peace, and Charlotte Mary Fisher all oppose and seek the plan change be declined. These five submitters are seeking the plan change be declined on the basis of the:
- Loss of a Public Open Space
  - Lack of features such as the flame sculpture
  - Inadequate provision of alternative Public Open Space
  - Applicants should be undertaking a precinct wide plan change.
- 7.4 Six further submissions were made with four of these submissions supporting submissions that wished to decline the plan change and two of the further submissions supporting the plan change.
- 7.5 While the majority of submitters seek the plan change being declined the majority also generally agree QE Square is an unsuccessful passive thoroughfare space with the major issue being the shade cast on it for significant portions of the day by HSBC Tower at No.1 Queen Street<sup>8</sup>.

## **8 Urban design assessment of the proposed plan change**

- 8.1 The proposed plan change will result in the loss of an existing large public open space in the central city.

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<sup>8</sup>May 2014 Auckland Development Committee report about Queen Elizabeth Square by officers from Auckland Council's Built Environment Unit (now the Auckland Design office).

- 8.2 The proposed plan change will result in building on the 1892m<sup>2</sup> rectangular lot of QE Square.
- 8.3 I concur with the submitters that a loss of a large public open space such as QE Square within the city centre must be considered to be more than minor. However I also concur with submitters that QE Square is an unsuccessful passive thoroughfare space shaded throughout the day.
- 8.4 I consider that the facades around QE Square (as outlined in section 5 of this report) are not of status that they are worthy of protection or are being used in a way that requires them to be retained. A new building built on the QE Square could be of a design that enhances the frontage of Lower Queen Street, compliments the Britomart Transport Centre façade and defines the lower end of Queen Street.
- 8.5 I consider that the proposed plan change could provide positive urban design improvements in Lower Queen Street.
- 8.6 I cannot in this report consider alternative public open spaces to replace QE Square in size and relationship to Queen Street but note that the Auckland Development Committee (Resolution number AUC/2014/111) resolved to sell QE Square on the basis that at least two of three identified new/improved waterfront public open spaces of commensurate size and improved quality would be delivered with the proceeds of the sale. I can however consider the factors required for a redevelopment of QE Square to provide positive change, vibrancy and character to the Lower Queen Street area.
- 8.7 I consider what happens within the space in relationship to public movement through a redeveloped QE Square and through the existing Downtown buildings in relationship to the transport interchange in this area is extremely important.
- 8.8 Within the *Downtown Framework* document endorsed by the 11 September 2014 Auckland Development Committee, one of the important proposals was the bus relocation from Lower Queen Street to Lower Albert Street. For this to work there needs to be laneway connections between public transport

facilities both in an east-west and north-south direction as envisioned in Figure 1.

8.9 In my opinion specific requirements (as detailed in my Topic 050 Downtown West Precinct Evidence for the PAUP) are needed to create vibrant public laneways that support the transport interchange functions and these are:

- a) Open and accessible to the general public 24 hours/day and 7 days a week without doors, gates or wind lobbies.
- b) At grade and provide the shortest straight route between street and have straight lines of sight.
- c) A minimum pedestrian width of 5 metres clear for unimpeded flow of public transport users between streets.

8.10 For the legibility and alignment of the laneway connection through the Downtown site to support the transport interchange pedestrian functions, of the area, I consider it is important that:

- a) There is a clear alignment between the main entrance of Britomart Transport Centre (old Central Post Office building) and the entrance/exits into the redesigned Downtown Shopping Centre.
- b) Entranceways are easily identifiable to pedestrians to allow quick flow of public between public transport modes.
- c) It incorporates Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) such as façade set-back from the principal Laneway frontages at ground level is visibly open and avoids recessed internal corners.

8.11 I consider the internal environmental aspects for pedestrians of a laneway to be important. For it to work well the laneway needs to:

- a) Be naturally ventilated
- b) Be naturally lit during daylight hours
- c) Be lit at night by artificial light that is bright enough to create a sense of personal safety
- d) Have full length weather protection.

## 9 Amendments to the plan change

- 9.1 I consider the '6.19 *pedestrian connections*' proposed by the applicant require further amendments to include a number of the factors outlined in paragraph 8.9 to 8.11 of this report. For this reason I consider that 6.19 Pedestrian Connections wording should be amended as follows:

- a) a minimum 5m wide, **straight**, at grade, east-west pedestrian laneway connection between Lower Queen Street and Lower Albert Street that is **with its aligned with the Britomart Transport Centre (old City Post Office building)** that is **internally** protected from the weather, **incorporates natural daylight through glazed canopies or glazed roof structures**, and is publicly accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week and incorporates active uses at ground level.
- b) a north-south pedestrian ~~link~~ **laneway** between Customs Street West and Quay Street.
- c) **Visibly identifiable open entranceways into the laneways with clear sight lines from the principal street into the laneway at ground level.**

- 9.2 The frontage and alignment of height of the any new building within QESquare that faces Lower Queen Street and the Britomart Transport Centre should:

- a) enhance the form and functions of Queen Street
- b) avoid monotonous built form
- c) Complement and respect the scale of the Britomart Transport Centre and the historic heritage buildings.

- 9.3 In the provisions of the City of Auckland District Plan, Central Area Section Part 5 Activities 5.2.6 provide for a 'designed based' approach with all building development and redevelopment required to be assessed against five key components of design assessment criteria. These being:

- a) *Building design should be of a high quality, showing creativity, and responsiveness to the local context in a way that contributes to the identity of Auckland at every scale ....*

- b) Attractive, active and safe streets and public open spaces, which create a sense of community;*
- c) Adaptable building form, encouraging the reuse and conversion of building spaces overtime.*
- d) Sustainable building and site design which takes a long term view of energy and storm water efficiency*
- e) Adequate internal and external amenity for building occupants which provides the opportunity for outlook, daylight access and sufficient internal living space for future residents.*

9.4 I consider that this combination of design assessment criteria can provide the Council with methods of assessing the Lower Queen Street façade in combination of the pedestrian laneway and their entrances.

9.5 Modification of development control 6.19 Pedestrian Connections is to be inserted in a new paragraph under Clause 15.3.1.2.b. Considering the factors outlined in paragraph 8.9 to 8.11 of this report I consider the wording should be amended as follows:

- a) The extent to which there is a safe, legible and **straight** direct link through the block.
- b) The extent to which the width of the lane ~~or link~~ is sufficient to provide a functional connection between the adjoining streets and the transport interchange functions of the area.
- c) **Restrictions on** ~~Where public access is restricted, a shall~~ consideration of the following:
  - i. ~~The operational~~ **functional effects of** needs for the restriction
  - ii. ~~Matters relating to s~~ **Safety and security of laneway users**
  - iii. The duration of the restriction
  - iv. Any benefits to **the laneway users** arising from the restriction

## **10 PAUP and the Downtown West Precinct**

- 10.1 The PAUP considers QE Square in the Downtown West precinct in the Central City. The PAUP process will take at the earliest till late 2016 to provide an Operative Auckland Unitary Plan.
- 10.2 I provided evidence to the Auckland Unitary Plan Independent Hearings Panel (AUPIHP) on this precinct in Topic 050.
- 10.3 I agree with the applicant that the provisions of the notified version of the PAUP would help to facilitate the rezoning of the QE Square site. At the hearing the majority of issues from submitters (including Precinct Properties) to the PAUP on the Downtown West precinct were resolved. I therefore consider that the subsequent track changes presented on the Downtown West Precinct in Topic 050 by the Council at the hearing would result in further positive development on QE Square.
- 10.4 It is for those reasons that I have suggested amendments to the proposed plan change as outlined in section 9 of this report.
- 10.5 In my evidence to the AUPIHP Topic 050 I addressed a number of issues including the functional aspects of laneways that are vibrant and support connections between public transport hubs in the Downtown area.

## **11 Conclusions**

- 11.1 I consider the proposed plan change to delete QE Square as a public open space is appropriate due to:
  - a) the poor quality of this public space and
  - b) if suitable planning measures are included in the plan change that create connections between the public transport hubs, building uses, street and public open spaces.
- 11.2 It is my opinion that laneways in a north-west and east-west direction through both blocks are important to the success of the area. I also consider the proportions, design features and activity along the laneway are important in supporting a successful and functional downtown public transport interchange.

- 11.3 It is my opinion the frontage and alignment of height of a quality designed new building within QE Square that faces Lower Queen Street and the Britomart Transport Centre should enhance the form and functions of Queen Street.

## **Appendix A – Yvonne Weeber’s career summary**

Principal Urban Design, Region Wide Urban Design Policy, Auckland Design Office, July 2014 to Present

Senior Analyst Ministry for the Environment, 2003 till July 2014

Urban Designer, Resource Consents, Wellington City Council, 2001 to 2003

Landscape Architecture Lecturer, Lincoln University, 2000-2001

Senior Landscape Architect, City Design, Auckland City Council, 1998—2000

Urban Designer, Stafford Borough Council, England, 1996—1997

Landscape Architect, PTP Landscape, Birmingham, England, 1995—1996

Senior Landscape Architect, Palmerston North City Council, 1991-1995

Landscape Architect—Whakatane District Council, 1989—1991

Landscape Architect—Upper Hutt City Council, 1987-1989

### **Qualifications**

Master of Arts in Urban Design, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, U.K. 1997

Postgraduate Diploma of Landscape Architecture, Lincoln University, NZ 1987

Bachelor of Science (Hon) First Class, Victoria University, NZ 1984

### **Affiliations**

New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (Registered), 1991 to present

Urban Design Forum, N.Z. Inaugural member 2008 to present

Urban Design Group, U.K. 1997 to present





## **Appendix B - Chronological order of some of the Downtown West precinct studies, analysis, masterplans and frameworks.**

2015	<i>Assessment of Environmental Effects and Section 32 Analysis – Request for Plan Change Percent Properties Downtown Limited Queen Elizabeth Square –Barker and Associates Ltd</i>
2014 September	<i>Downtown Framework- Auckland Council</i>
2014 September –	<i>Downtown Public Open Space Evaluation – RESET Urban Design for Auckland Council</i>
2014 June-	<i>Urban Design Advice Queen Elizabeth Square Auckland City Centre- Gehl Architects.</i>
2015	<i>Downtown Public Spaces: Further review following feedback from public spaces survey and lower Queen Street trail – Buzzchannel</i>
2012	<i>City Centre Masterplan- Auckland Council</i>
1977	<i>Walking Around Town, planning for pedestrians in New Zealand – Ministry of Works and Development</i>

## **Appendix C – Gehl Architects Report**