

Historic Places Aotearoa

ICOMOS New Zealand



24 April 2020

Rt Hon Jacinda Arden  
Prime Minister  
Minister of Arts, Culture and Heritage  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

c.c. Hon Grant Robertson, Assoc Minister of Arts, Culture and Heritage  
Hon David Parker, Minister for the Environment

Dear Prime Minister

### **COVID-19 Recovery and New Zealand Aotearoa's heritage**

We are writing to applaud the fast and decisive action taken by you and your Government to control the COVID19 situation, also noting the impact that this action has and will continue to have on our economy and local communities.

As we move out of lockdown we appreciate that the Government and wider public's thoughts are rightly turning towards recovery and what can be done to re-stimulate the economy – this is evidenced by recent moves you and your colleagues are taking to identify and accelerate major 'shovel ready' infrastructure projects.

Although we are supportive of these efforts, we would also request that consideration is given to the significant role that heritage can play in the recovery process as a primary contributor to our social, cultural and economic well-being.

We note, for instance, that economic research in the US has demonstrated that:

- Dollar for dollar, heritage conservation is one of the highest job-generating economic development options available
- Rehabilitation of existing buildings has a far greater impact on the local economy than the same amount of new construction

The retention and conservation of our historic heritage is also fundamental to our ongoing sustainable development as a nation, and is reflected in such factors as:

- Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings reduces our environmental footprint by minimising construction waste and the loss of ‘embedded energy’ inherent within these buildings (environmental sustainability)
- Retention of original elements of built form and fabric helps maintain the character of local areas and neighbourhoods (socio-cultural sustainability)
- Due to their relative affordability historic buildings are often used as incubators for small businesses, thereby enabling such enterprises to make a demonstrable contribution to the local economy (economic sustainability)

Equally, our historic and cultural heritage provides New Zealanders with a tangible link to their past as well as contributing to their sense of national, regional and local identity – these are factors which both help to bind and ground us in times of uncertainty. In doing so they help to sustain our overall cultural, social and economic well-being by enhancing the quality of the environments in which we live.

We stress that “heritage” is not just built structures; it also includes archaeology and sites of significance to Māori. These places tell unique stories of our land and its people.

In light of this we would encourage the Government as part of its recovery strategy to accelerate national, regional, and local projects that support and promote conservation of our heritage.

We note that the issue is not just the potential for adverse effects that construction projects can have on heritage values, but also delays that can arise from inadequately informed or executed project planning. Appropriate consideration of heritage matters at the front end of projects can prevent delays and ensure smoother delivery. It can also help avert unintended impacts on heritage resources resulting from neglect due to unanticipated project delays.

We are firmly of the view that heritage can play a key role in assisting the recovery process. There is huge potential to create jobs through identifying projects that involve the identification, protection and conservation of heritage assets (including through repair, maintenance and adaptive reuse) throughout the country. These projects could be stimulated by relying and building on existing mechanisms such as the Heritage EQUIP fund administered by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. They could also be a result of the Government adopting a more active stance in undertaking repair and maintenance of Government-owned heritage, consistent with the Policy for Government Departments' Management of Historic Heritage approved by Cabinet in 2004.

Equally, community projects have the potential to offer considerable benefits for heritage and communities locally. These can include identification, maintenance, repair and seismic stabilisation of local heritage resources, and the corresponding strengthening of community identity and collective pride arising from such works.

In the pursuit of projects to re-stimulate the economy we ask that the Government not lose sight of the importance of our heritage resources and put protective measures to one side. We strongly advocate for the Government to continue its work to strengthen the heritage protection system including developing national direction for historic heritage.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you and Ministry officials to progress these ideas and would be happy to meet with you if this would assist.

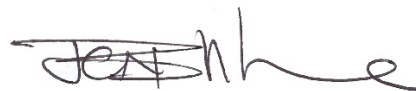
Nga mihi

Pam Dziwulska

Chair, ICOMOS New Zealand

James Blackburne

President, Historic Places Aotearoa

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Blackburne', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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