



*NELSON CITY COUNCIL*

# **nelson inner city design guide**



**March 2004**

# introduction

## **DI1.1 Why a Design Guide?**

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Nelson is widely regarded as having an attractive and vibrant city centre. Contained in a few blocks within a ring road it has a strong commercial heart.

Many people coming to live here have selected Nelson for its environmental qualities. It has a good climate, strong culture in the arts and crafts, and a beautiful hinterland. Not least, it has an attractive legacy of Victorian and Edwardian buildings which establish a pleasant scale in the city and link us with our past history.

Recognising the importance of our inner city environment to Nelsonians and visitors alike, the Nelson City Council has taken a strong lead in beautifying the city with paved areas, seating and planting. Public demand has dictated that this effort be extended by providing a Design Guide to ensure that new building development is sensitive and enhances the existing visual qualities of our city.

## **DI1.2 How the Design Guide Operates**

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The Design Guide operates on three levels:

- (a) It gives a simple description of the visual characteristics of Nelson buildings, thereby promoting public awareness of, and sensitivity to, our design heritage.
- (b) Building developers and designers will find it a useful reference for preparing sympathetic designs for new buildings or building alterations.
- (c) In reviewing development proposals the Nelson City Council will use the Design Guide as a measure of how well the intended design fits the objectives and policies of the Nelson Resource Management Plan.

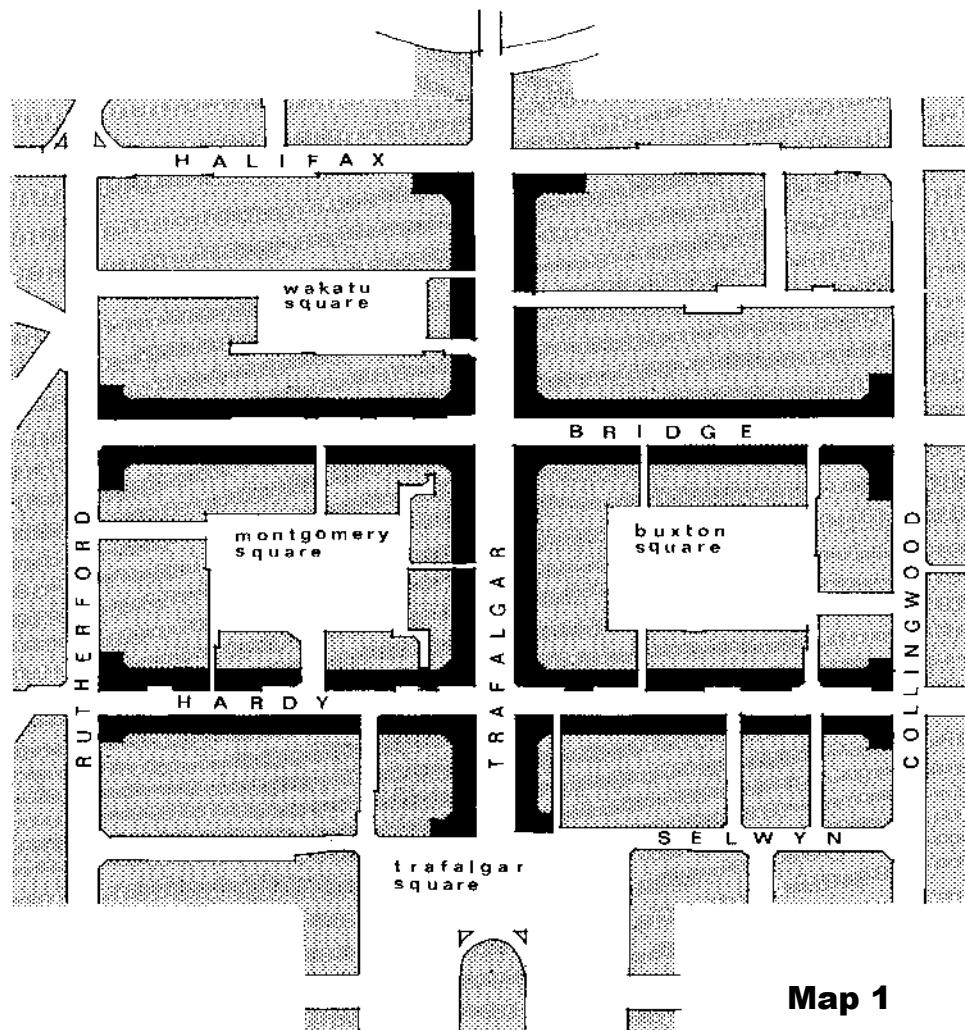
This Design Guide does not take a prescriptive approach to design. It does not for example specify requirements for materials, colours, window to wall ratios, or decoration. Rather, it describes essential features and qualities of the Nelson streetscape in general and Heritage Precincts in particular, to give a picture of the context into which new building development must fit.

The intention of the Design Guide is to promote sympathetic development. However it is recognised that imitation of the past is not necessarily appropriate, and that within this context designers can utilise their imagination to create harmonious modern buildings appropriate to today's technology.

In this way today's new buildings will reflect qualities appropriate to their time while still sitting comfortably with past styles.

## DI1.3 Area Covered by Design Guide

Refer to Map 1 of the inner city area. The Design Guide covers all the dark shaded street frontages including the corner sites on the ring road. Within this area special consideration is given to Heritage Precincts (see Map 2).



## DI1.4 Areas Excluded from the Design Guide

Excluded from the Design Guide are:

- a) The ring road comprising Halifax, Collingwood and Rutherford Streets and Selwyn Place, because they exhibit a wide variety of uses with no consistent visual pattern.
- b) Buxton, Montgomery and Wakatu Squares because these areas are appropriate for a wide variety of uses ranging from multi-storey offices to outdoor restaurants, to which the application of the Design Guide is impracticable.

Within these streets and squares there are however some areas which do show a consistency of character. Examples are the office buildings in eastern Halifax Street and the developing retail frontages complete with verandahs in Montgomery and Buxton Squares. Although not directly covered by the Design Guide, development proposals in these areas will be expected to show reasonable sensitivity to the context of surrounding buildings.

# guidelines - nelson inner city

## **IC2.1 Context**

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Taken in context, Nelson City is situated within a ring of encircling hills and attractively treed residential areas. It has a confined heart serviced by a perimeter ring road and by generous inner city parking squares. Buildings are predominantly of two storeys. With very few exceptions, only in Trafalgar Street have some buildings risen to three storeys or more.

Because of its containment and convenience, Nelson's inner city area is densely developed. Like many other New Zealand cities and towns, lot sizes are generally small with the usual site frontage being approximately 10 metres. Almost all development within the city centre has followed the historical pattern of building from boundary to boundary with an attractive facade backed by a simple utilitarian structure. The over-riding feature of the city centre is therefore the continuity given by buildings to form a street wall, usually two storeys in height, and modulated to fit the historical allotment size. At this two storey height, the buildings are nicely in scale with the width of Nelson streets.

## **IC2.2 Objective**

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The underlying objective of the Design Guide is to preserve this scale and continuity by ensuring that new building development observes the visual characteristics of the city.

## **IC2.3 Visual Characteristics**

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### *IC2.3.1 Building Height*

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The most significant threat to street wall continuity comes from buildings which are of markedly different height from their neighbours. Both high and low buildings break the general continuity of the predominant two-storey cornice line. Also, because of fire rating requirements which place severe limits on windows, side walls of higher buildings can be featureless and dominating. Conversely, new low buildings expose the side walls of their neighbours which were not designed to be on show and are frequently a visual embarrassment.

For these reasons new development should seek to preserve approximate continuity in height with neighbouring buildings wherever it is reasonably practicable to do so. Designers of single storey buildings should give consideration to architectural devices to increase the height, for example by including a mezzanine floor or staff office and tearoom areas on a first floor at the street frontage. Where new buildings must rise above their neighbours, visual treatment of exposed side walls should be carefully considered.



*Disparities in height disrupt continuity and expose large areas of side wall...*

### ***IC2.3.2 Verandahs***

Nelson's city streets are characterised by continuous verandahs which unify building frontages and give shelter to pedestrians. The verandahs also provide an attractive scale to the street and give opportunities for well placed signage.

The usual form of verandahs is a near flat roof. The line of the outer fascia or roof is occasionally varied to express an entry. Any significant departure from the usual verandah form can threaten the unity of the streetscape.



*Common verandah design brings unity to the streetscape...*

### ***IC2.3.3 Set Backs***

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The established pattern is of building facades constructed parallel to the street and on the front boundary. Any departure from this must be substantiated. Possible reasons may be to include balconies, sunscreens or other design features which contribute to the character of the building and add to the richness of the streetscape. The underlying objective however must be to preserve the character of the street wall.

### ***IC2.3.4 Scale***

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Scale is the relationship of the parts of a building to the whole and to the human observer. It is the use of scale which can architecturally relate a building to its neighbours. Scale has little to do with size. A designer may cleverly use scale to make a large building look smaller, or a small building look monumental.

Considered in a landscape context, Nelson City is given a small scale by the dominance of its surrounding hills. Within a street context, individual buildings are scaled to the width of the street and to the historically narrow allotment frontages.

Each individual building is further scaled, both vertically by the number of floors and horizontally by the structural elements supporting the floors which historically could not be too far apart because of the spanning limitations of available materials.

Thus the scale of Nelson buildings is generally small, and related to its historic origins. It is a pedestrian friendly scale highly appropriate for a city which enjoys a climate conducive to year round street activity. Buildings which depart from this small scale look obviously out of place.



*Expression of floors and columns scales a two-storey building to the street and neighbours...*

### ***IC2.3.5 Modulation***

Modulation describes the vertical and horizontal divisions of a building which help to establish its scale. Buildings which lack modulation become bland and featureless, the extreme examples being blank walls and curtain glass facades.

Nelson buildings are modulated horizontally by verandahs, bands of windows and in older buildings, a decorative cornice. Visually therefore, buildings have a base, a middle and a top. Newer buildings sometimes use sunscreens to achieve horizontal modulation as well as to provide useful shading.

Older buildings are also modulated vertically, frequently by columns or pilasters which extend from the verandah for the full height of the building and may relate to pediments or other decorative cornice features. It is this vertical modulation together with spacing of windows which creates rhythm as an essential unifying feature of the streetscape. Where this rhythm is broken (for example by sheet metal lining over older facades) there is a disruptive change to the pattern of the street wall.



*Modulation establishes a smaller scale and creates repetitive rhythms...*

*Lack of building modulation creates a bland featureless effect.*



after for their visual prominence

and prestige. They have the added advantage of allowing more natural light to the interior. From a public standpoint, corners assist with orientation and visual mapping of the city. For all these reasons, buildings constructed on corner sites have historically been given special architectural attention and in fact in many cases have become landmarks. It is important to Nelson's character that this tradition of maintaining architecturally significant buildings on corner sites is continued.



*Good and bad examples of corner buildings...*



### ***IC2.3.7 Details and Finishes***

Although by metropolitan standards Nelson has a clean atmosphere, buildings which are not well detailed or properly maintained can deteriorate quickly. Particular problems occur where rainwater is allowed to run off roof surfaces or the tops of parapets and dribble water-borne dirt down the vertical surfaces below to cause staining. This problem can be overcome by sloping the tops of parapets back to the roof of the building and ensuring that all rainwater can be disposed of without disfiguring surfaces.

Further problems occur where textured surfaces are not rainwashed, and in particular where there is no maintenance regime for cleaning buildings underneath verandahs. Consideration given by designers to using self-cleaning surfaces wherever possible can result in buildings retaining a good appearance over their life.



### ***IC2.3.8 Signs***

By their very nature, signs depend for their effectiveness on capturing attention. To do this they utilise bright colour and other strong visual signals. The architectural integrity of a building can be easily destroyed by uncontrolled application of signage.

The established pattern of signage in Nelson is carried by the verandah. The outer fascia carries signs parallel to the street while pedestrian attention is captured by signs at right angles to the building slung beneath the verandah ceiling.

Any signage above verandah level should be carefully integrated with the building design. The most successful examples are where the building has been specifically designed to take a carefully placed sign or logo. Older buildings sometimes incorporated features specifically designed for placement of such signs. The worst examples occur where large areas of signage are applied to the sides of buildings or in such a way as to obscure architectural features of the street facade, or where the whole building becomes a sign through the use of corporate colours and signage.



*Carefully placed and well designed signs can enhance buildings...*



*Poorly placed and over-stated signage creates visual clutter...*



## **IC2.4 Performance guidelines**

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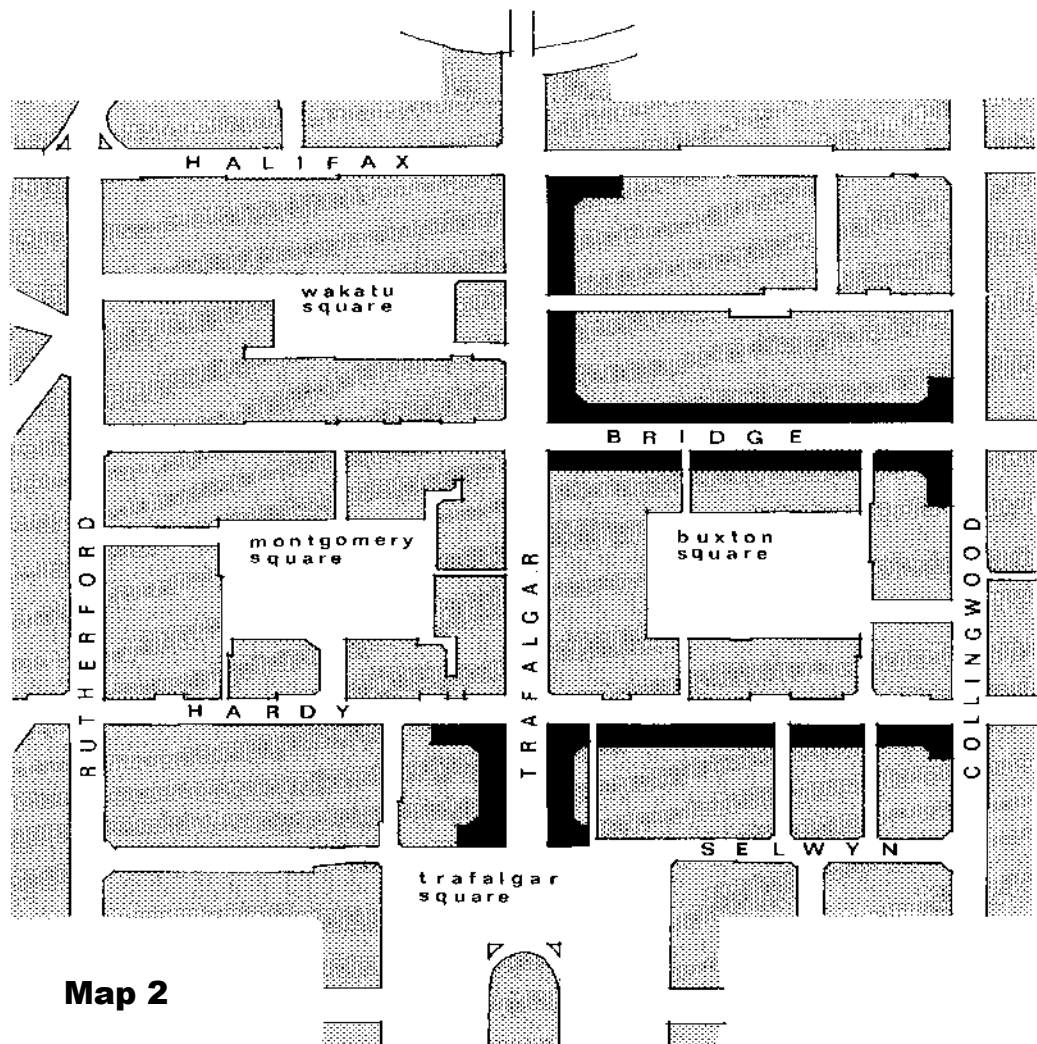
- a) Buildings shall have a minimum height at the street frontage of two storeys and shall where practicable relate approximately to the height of their neighbours.
- b) Building facades shall be modulated to relate appropriately to the pattern of the streetscape.
- c) Any setbacks or angles shall be designed so that the continuity of the street wall is not adversely affected.
- d) Signage shall be integrated with building design and be generally limited to verandahs.
- e) The Performance Guidelines for Heritage Precincts listed under clause ID3.5 shall also apply to any building sited next to a listed Group A or B Heritage Building (ie Group A or B heritage buildings listed in the Nelson Resource Management Plan).

# heritage precincts

## IC3.1 Context

Within Nelson's city centre there are some significant groups of buildings which have similar size and scale and relate together well. Many buildings are of historical interest and are protected under the Nelson Resource Management Plan. Some buildings within these areas are in fact new but have been designed to relate well to their neighbours. The key element is that as a group they provide a continuity of attractive character to the streetscape, and preserve evidence of our architectural history within a supportive setting.

Four such areas have been designated as Heritage Precincts. These are shaded dark on the accompanying map.



## IC3.2 Objectives

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The key design objectives within Heritage Precincts are:

- a) Where realistically achievable, preserve facades of listed Heritage Buildings (i.e. heritage buildings listed in the Nelson Resource Management Plan). (Note that in a few cases the Plan seeks protection of the whole building).
- b) Ensure any alterations made to listed buildings maintain the architectural integrity of the original.
- c) Ensure any alterations made to unlisted buildings are respectful of nearby listed buildings and maintain the visual qualities of the Precinct.
- d) Design new buildings to be respectful of nearby listed buildings and maintain the visual qualities of the Precinct.

## IC3.3 Building Alterations and Extensions

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Where refurbishment or upgrading is carried out, existing features should be preserved so that the historical authenticity of the building is maintained. Where historical facades have been previously modified it may be possible to restore original features, including ornamentation.

Extensions to existing buildings should be designed so that the original building maintains its integrity in the streetscape. This requires that extensions harmonise with the whole and are not so visually dominant that they overpower the original.

## IC3.4 Historical Design Features

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### *IC3.4.1 Roofs*

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Buildings generally take the form of a decorative street facade rising to a cornice which conceals the main roof area. Roofs are therefore invisible from the street.

### *IC3.4.2 Edges*

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The building facade is usually contained at the outer edges by an expressed column, coverboard or some form of raised relief.



### *IC3.4.3 Cornice*

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Parapet walls are given a cornice to create a strong cap to the building. The

cornice is frequently sculpted to pick up light, cast shadow, incorporate decoration and provide a strong termination to the facade.

#### ***IC3.4.4 Pediment***

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Above the cornice line, pediments or other variations of the parapet are frequently used to create an attractive silhouette and provide for the name or date of the building. Many of the original pediments have now been removed due to earthquake risk or physical decay.



*Buildings are characterised by strongly expressed edges, cornices, pilasters and pediments...*

#### ***IC3.4.5 Columns and Pilasters***

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These are frequently expressed on the facade to provide vertical modulation. They rise full height to the cornice and sometimes beyond and may relate to pediments or other inflexions in the parapet. Columns and pilasters play an important role in contributing to the rhythm of the street wall.

#### ***IC3.4.6 Window Openings***

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Window openings have a predominantly vertical proportion and symmetrical arrangement on the facade. They are sometimes grouped in pairs or threes. Like columns and pilasters they set up a strong vertical rhythm.

The older buildings have a balance of wall to window area so that windows become punctuated openings which emphasise the solidity of the wall. Windows are trimmed with substantial mouldings to enhance this feeling of depth. The heads of window and door openings are frequently shaped or capped.

*Windows generally have a vertical proportion and are placed symmetrically. Ornament emphasises architectural features ...*



### ***IC3.4.7 Ornament***

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The extent of ornamentation usually depends on the building's original importance. Civic buildings and banks for example were often heavily embellished.

Over time much original ornament has been removed from Nelson's buildings, particularly above cornice level. What remains however is evidence of the care and attention given to detailing building features. A wall area which today might receive a simple flat sheet cladding would historically have been given a plinth, columns, cap, decorated openings and other expressed relief, some of which might be embellished with ornament. The play of light on carefully designed mouldings, trim and ornamentation gave buildings individuality and a visual richness.

### ***IC3.4.8 Verandahs***

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Verandahs are predominantly flat roofed and supported at their outer edge by posts. The verandah posts set up a visual rhythm to the street and created an arcade effect to the pavement. They were often shaped or featured some embellishment.

For reasons of safety the Nelson Resource Management Plan requires that verandah canopies be supported from the building. Ornamental verandah posts are however permitted and are particularly appropriate in Heritage Precincts.



*Verandah posts can create an arcade effect...*

### ***IC3.4.9 Colour***

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Historic buildings originally used a limited range of colours. Ongoing maintenance requirements have required frequent repainting and with the passage of time preferences have changed. Building colours have altered accordingly.

There is no fixed formula for the colour of buildings. Most importantly, colour should be used to enhance design. Bearing in mind that light colours read more strongly and darker colours recede, variations in colour and tone can be used to emphasise modulation and decoration. In selecting colours for a building facade, general principles include limiting the number of colours, using variations of depth within a common colour and avoiding large areas of bright or garish colour.

### ***IC3.4.10 Signage***

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Signs should generally be limited to verandahs. Where signs are incorporated

on buildings they should be integrated with the design so that they are not visually obtrusive, do not obscure architectural features and do not dominate the building facade. The definition of signs includes logos, insignia, motifs and corporate colour livery.

## **IC3.5 Performance Guidelines**

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- a) Existing listed buildings or at least street facades of listed buildings shall be retained and their authenticity preserved wherever this is realistically achievable. Modern materials may allow the reinstatement of historical design features.
- b) Extensions to listed buildings shall be designed so that they relate to and enhance the original facade. Where more floors are to be added, extensions shall be set back from the street boundary or otherwise designed so that the original is not overpowered and still reads as a building in its own right.
- c) New or altered building facades shall maintain reasonable continuity of height with their neighbours.
- d) Verandahs shall maintain reasonable continuity with those of neighbouring buildings. Verandah posts are desirable.
- e) New or altered facades shall be modulated horizontally to relate to their neighbours and vertically to maintain a rhythm to the street wall.
- f) Building facades shall have depth and visual interest through a play of light and shade on building detail.
- g) Signs shall be designed and placed so that they do not dominate or intrude on architectural features of the building. Signs should generally be limited to verandahs.
- h) Colour shall be selected to relate to architectural elements of the facade and contribute to the visual character of the streetscape. Roofs visible from the street shall be painted.

# planning applications

## PA1 Application of Nelson Resource Management Plan

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### Permitted Activities

There are some alterations to buildings (non-heritage) and heritage buildings within the Design Guide area that are permitted activities (no resource consent is required). Rules ICr.28 and ICr.66 explain these types of alterations.

*The following work requires a resource consent application:*

- a) all new buildings, and
- b) alterations of any part of an existing building if the work is not a permitted activity according to the definition above.

Different resource consents apply depending on whether the building is a new building, a listed Heritage Building, or within a Heritage Precinct, as summarised below:

		Not in a Heritage Precinct	In a Heritage Precinct	Rule No in Plan
new buildings		controlled activity	restricted discretionary activity	ICr.28 and ICr.66
alteration to buildings (other than Group A or B listed Heritage Buildings)		controlled activity	restricted discretionary activity	ICr.28 and ICr.66
alteration to listed Heritage Buildings	Group A	discretionary activity	discretionary activity	ICr.62 ICr.65
	Group B	restricted discretionary activity	restricted discretionary activity	ICr.62 ICr.65

The rules referred to in the table above can be found in Chapter 8 of the Nelson Resource Management Plan, and should be consulted for details. Restricted discretionary applications do not need to be publicly notified.

The consent application will be assessed for the degree of compliance with the Design Guide. As a condition of any consent the applicant will be required to provide to the Council with the building consent application an accurately scaled line drawing of the approved street façade. This will be used to update the street elevation records maintained by the Council.



## **PA2 Consultation**

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Early consultation with the Nelson City Council Planning Department is encouraged to resolve design issues prior to lodging a resource consent application. Consultation should begin at the commencement of design.

## **PA3 Demolition of listed heritage buildings**

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The Nelson Resource Management Plan (Appendix 1) should be consulted if demolition of any listed Heritage Building is contemplated. Generally only the street facades of the buildings are protected, although the Plan lists a few buildings where the interior is also protected. The Plan provides only limited avenues for demolition of facades of listed buildings. Any application for consent to demolish must satisfy the tests in the Plan. In addition, any demolition application must be accompanied by a resource consent application for the intended replacement development.

## **PA4 Supporting information required**

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Resource consent applications for any building development shall include:

- a) The street elevation of the building facade extended to show the elevations of the buildings. To assist in this respect scaled elevations of buildings within the Heritage Precincts are available from the Nelson City Council Planning Department, either in hard copy, or in digital format on 3.5 inch diskettes (AutoCAD R12 DWG or DXF formats)
- b) Side wall elevations of any new building rising more than 1.5m above the parapet level of its neighbouring buildings at their common boundary.
- c) Planning applications for building developments within Heritage Precincts shall in addition include a written analysis of the manner in which the proposed design responds to the Design Guide and relates to the character of the Heritage Precinct.

**Note:** Under ID4.1 above, as a condition of resource consent the applicant will be required to provide to the Council (e.g. with the building consent application) an accurately scaled line drawing of the approved street façade. This will be used to update the street elevation records maintained by the Council.