

# Kohukohu Heritage Precinct



Any Heritage Precinct which is fully alive indicates what every other built-environment ideally should be. It is not obsessed with what is old, but neither is it obsessed with what is new. A Heritage Precinct is a link between the past and the future, and through this relationship it gives meaning to the present. Because a Heritage Precinct gives form to the whakapapa of place it makes people feel at home. The residents belong just as their built-environment belongs. This Precinct is the turangawaewae of a community. Here people stand tall, finding strength in the wairua of the Precinct. Here they celebrate who they are through the rituals of life and the rituals of building. This built environment makes people feel welcome. A Heritage Precinct makes aroha visible. Without this manakitanga of place how can any place have mana?  
In an ideal world every place would be a Heritage Precinct.

## Graeme North Architects

*This investigation into the Kohukohu Heritage Precinct was commissioned by the Far North District Council. It was prepared for Graeme North Architects by Graeme North FNZIA, B.Arch, Dip Perm and Tony Watkins, RIBA, FNZIA, M.Arch, Dip TP (Hons). It follows on from the work done by the local community in preparing the Vision Kohukohu document. A series of meetings with the local community and the FNDC were held in late 2008 to discuss this document and it was developed in response to those meetings. The authors thank Council for their assistance and openness to new ideas and debate. This investigation does not deal with individual buildings within the Heritage Precinct. Many of these are listed in the District Plan.  
This report is a work in progress.  
December 2009*

## The first move must be a commitment by all to enhance and enrich the wairua of Kohukohu.

1) Every person seeking to make any change within the Kohukohu Heritage Precinct first needs to resolve to sustain the wairua of this unique place, and to protect the life of the planet. In making this commitment every individual would be resolving to do no harm to the stories, traditions, memories, culture, geology, ecology, and history of Kohukohu.

2) Every person seeking to make any change within the Kohukohu Heritage Precinct then needs to take personal responsibility for this commitment. Each doctor, in the same way, takes personal responsibility for upholding the sanctity of life. Responsibility for the commitment needs to rest with the individual.

3) The application of this ethical principle needs to take precedence over any activities which may be otherwise permitted by law. In life, or in a Heritage Precinct, personal freedom is found only within duties and obligations towards whanau and the community as a whole.

4) This ethical principle becomes binding on organisations, such as local government, through the individual agents of those organisations.

5) This ethical principle should be seen as one aspect of fulfilling the purpose of local government which is stated in the Local Government Act 2002 Part 2, Subpart 1, Clause 10 as being (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future.

6) This ethical position implies that everyone making decisions will have reasonable opportunities to be informed about the stories, traditions, memories, culture, geology, ecology and history of Kohukohu, and will take advantage of those opportunities to be informed.

7) The primary repository of this accumulated understanding of the ancestors is the Heritage Precinct itself, but that Precinct will constantly need to be reinterpreted through art, photographs, music, the telling of stories, celebrations and ritual. Whakapapa needs not only to be protected but also to be enriched.

8) The Kohukohu library is critical as a first point of reference. The Heritage archives should be preserved here, and stories made available through both books and moving images.

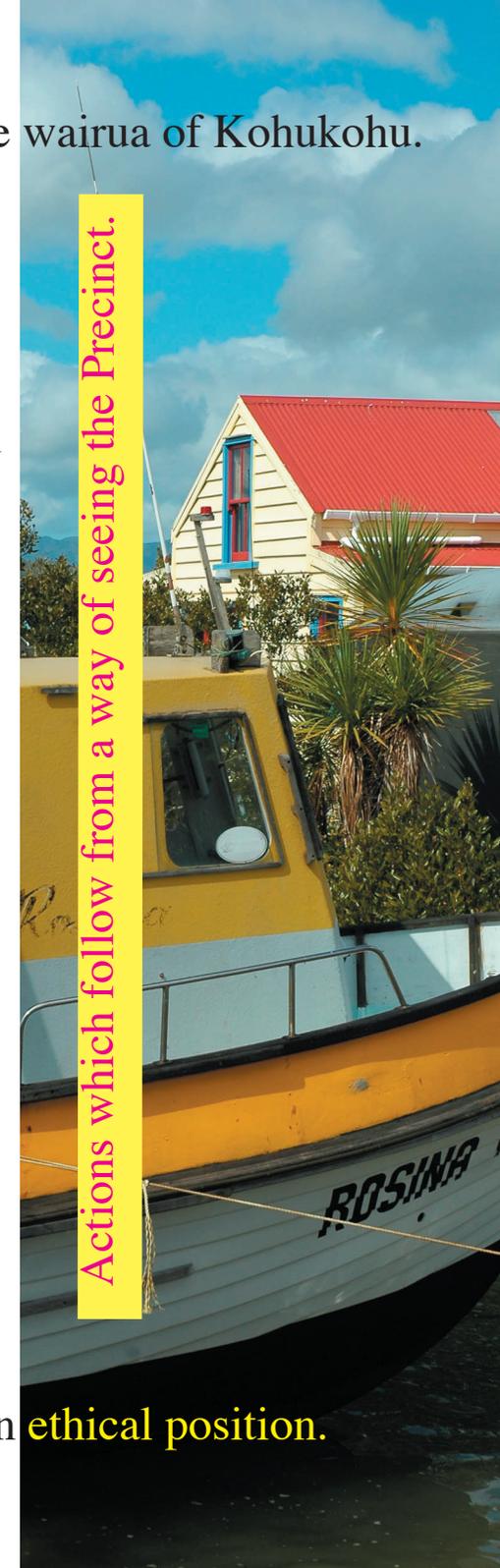
9) Schools need to ensure that an emphasis is placed on local history, local stories, local ways of seeing and local ways of doing.

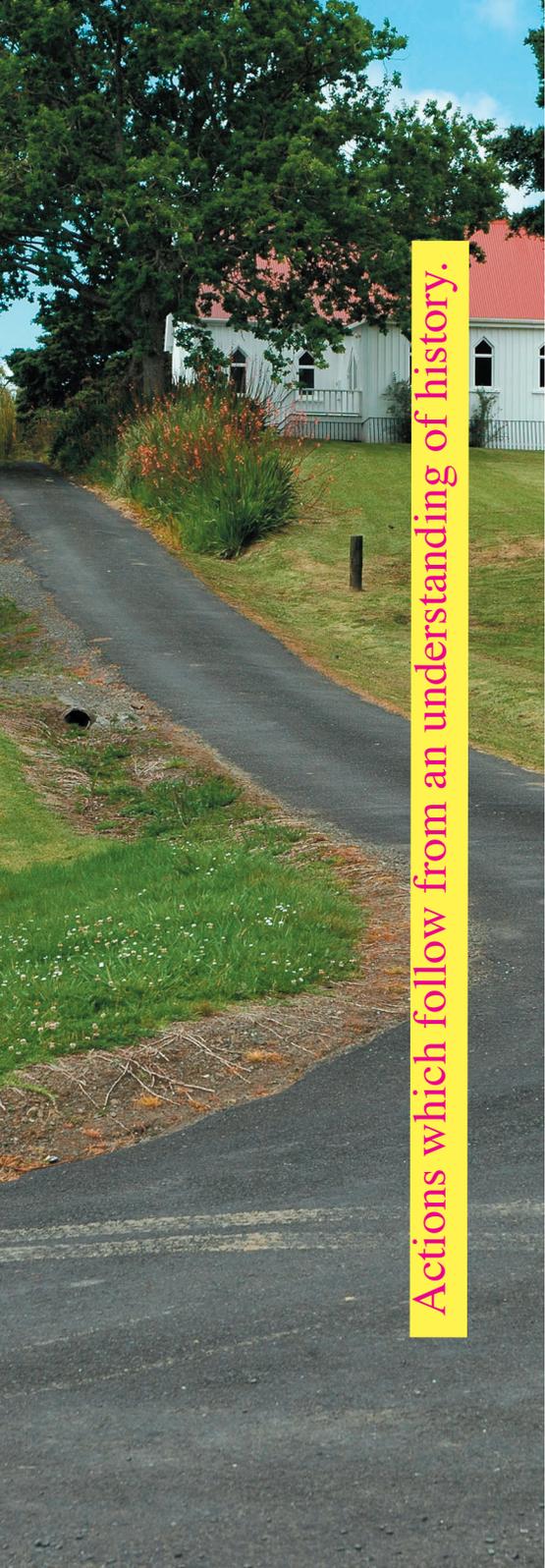
10) It is in the coming together of the community that self-awareness becomes possible. At tangi or hui, at ceilidhs or fairs, a growth of understanding takes place. Community celebrations are more important than planning controls.

11) Uniqueness needs to be seen as normal within any Heritage Precinct. Diversity and complexity are the foundations of sustainability. Growth takes place at the edges of our understanding. Solutions which may be reasonable and appropriate in another context cannot be justified on that account in Kohukohu. Unity is important in a Heritage Precinct rather than uniformity.

12) Every decision must gain a positive answer to one question "Does this action enhance and enrich the wairua of Kohukohu?"

Actions which follow from a way of seeing the Precinct.





Actions which follow from an understanding of history.

## Heritage Precincts are a game in progress, just like history.

13) **Survival depends on responsiveness to change.** Dynamic planning is essential for living organisms. A Heritage Precinct is a living organism, not a fossil. Existing planning processes tend to look backwards rather than forwards and generally are not responsive to change. Environment Court decisions, which are concerned with winners and losers rather than dynamic design resolution, reinforce the status quo. Risk-averse Councils reflect our risk-averse society. In contrast Heritage Precincts stand out from other urban design because they dared to be different.

14) **Heritage Precincts are a game in progress.** Every action needs to be seen as a move in a game. A skilful player knows the game is different from the rules. We admire brilliant unexpected moves, not the ones which merely meet our expectations. Every action in a Heritage Precinct needs to be both brilliant and unexpected. In a sustainable world built-environment moves would be less, but always astonishing. In the same way a chess master thinks for a long time to fully consider the implications but then makes a bold decisive contribution to the game. Muddling through is not an option.

15) Heritage Precincts need to avoid reductionism. Fundamentalist thinking is the curse of our time. Life is a million shades of grey. Any Heritage Precinct decisions need to be infinitely complex. It is wrong to assume that getting the big decisions right will make it possible for the detail to sort itself out. **Life is lived out at the small scale.** Complexity of detail reflects the reality of history. Standardised kerb and channelling is to be avoided. Standardised footpaths are to be avoided. Standardised light fittings are to be avoided. Every built-environment move needs to enhance the uniqueness of Kohukohu.

16) **Sanitising Heritage Precincts is to be avoided.** Sanitising history is to be avoided. The cut and thrust of history is tough and edgy. We live in a time when everything is sanitised and bland institutionalised structures take it upon themselves to achieve this. Perfect, lifeless mediocrity. The “pretty”, the “nice” and the “beautiful” should be avoided. Life is none of these things.

17) **Heritage Precincts should never be finished** just as no building should ever be finished. The idea of the completed “object” belongs within a materialistic consumer society. In the broad sweep of history this idea of buying and selling the built-environment is a new idea. Putting a value on objects makes rating possible and that in turn sustains a power structure which mitigates against architectural democracy. Our great building traditions have always celebrated the unfinished building.

18) **Heritage Precincts should celebrate imperfection.** For the Japanese Wabi-sabi is the art of seeing perfection through imperfection. Most cultures enshrine a similar concept. Ideally every move made in Kohukohu would be made in the spirit of seeing perfection through imperfection.

19) **Imperfection leaves the path open to discovery.** A wise person knows how much they do not know. Every built-environment move needs to open up possibilities rather than close off options.

Heritage Precincts need to celebrate the imperfection of life.

## Every decision should be taken at the lowest possible level.

20) **Every decision should be taken at the lowest level at which it is possible to take that decision.** In the vernacular tradition most building decisions were made on the site. Local materials, local skills, and local knowledge came together to produce buildings which belonged in both place and culture. The centralising of built-environment power homogenises the built environment into placelessness. In contrast local depots and local networks can easily take account of local idiosyncrasies and the oddities of local personalities.

21) **Disaggregated infrastructure is to be preferred to integrated alternatives.** Disaggregated infrastructure leads to both the distribution of power and the delegation of responsibility. It also makes slow changes over time possible. When you have your own water tank good management becomes part of your way of life. You know where the water comes from and where it goes to. You can understand your own place in the water cycle. Disaggregated systems allow for incremental change. Heritage Precincts thrive on independence.

22) **Slow growth is always to be preferred to rapid change.** Slow urban design acknowledges the cellular nature of any Heritage Precinct. Imperceptible changes take place over time, while allowing for total transformation. Slow growth avoids the confrontation, anger, resentment and ill-will which is the inevitable result of rapid architectural change. Moving from one “complete position” to another “complete position” is not an appropriate strategy for a Heritage Precinct. Slow growth means that the possibility of change must always be an option.

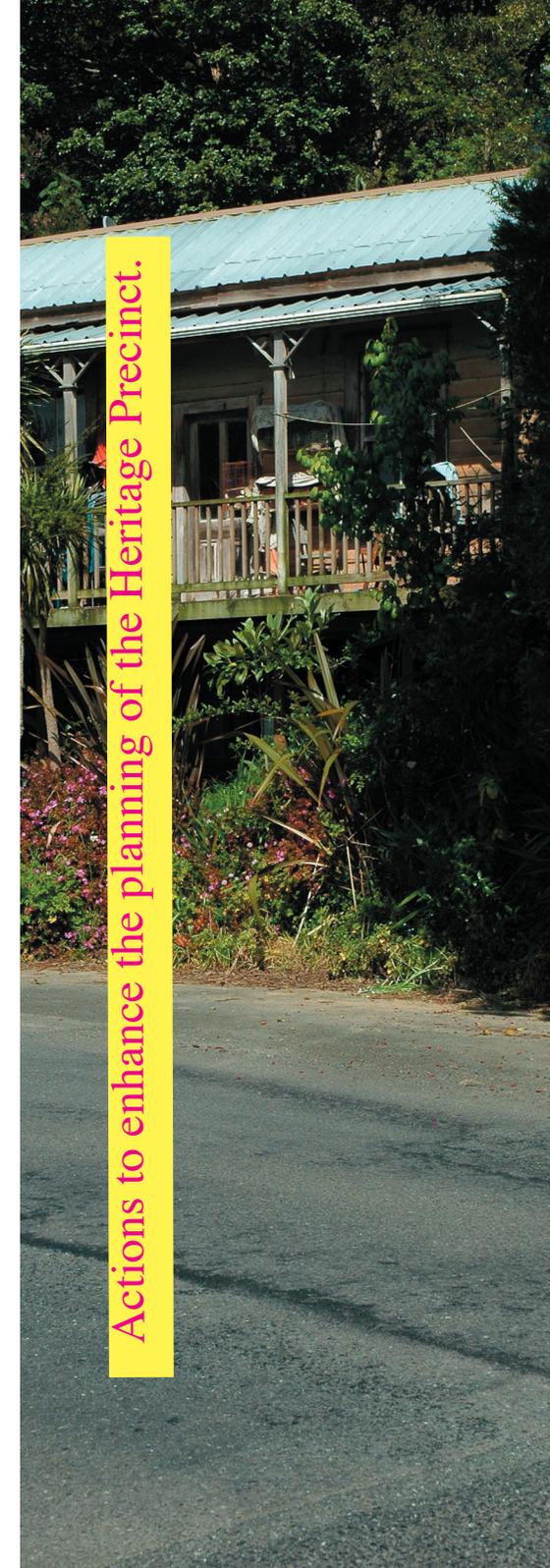
23) Decay is not a tragedy. We need to allow people to grow old. **Any Heritage Precinct needs places where old people can sit in the sun, talk, read a book, or play chess.** The young are impatient to get their cup of coffee, while the old are happy to linger for a whole day just enjoying their single cup. It is the essential timelessness of a Heritage Precinct which makes a rich diversity of community life possible. The elderly person who takes a year to scrape down the bottom of a boat has time to talk to the youngsters.

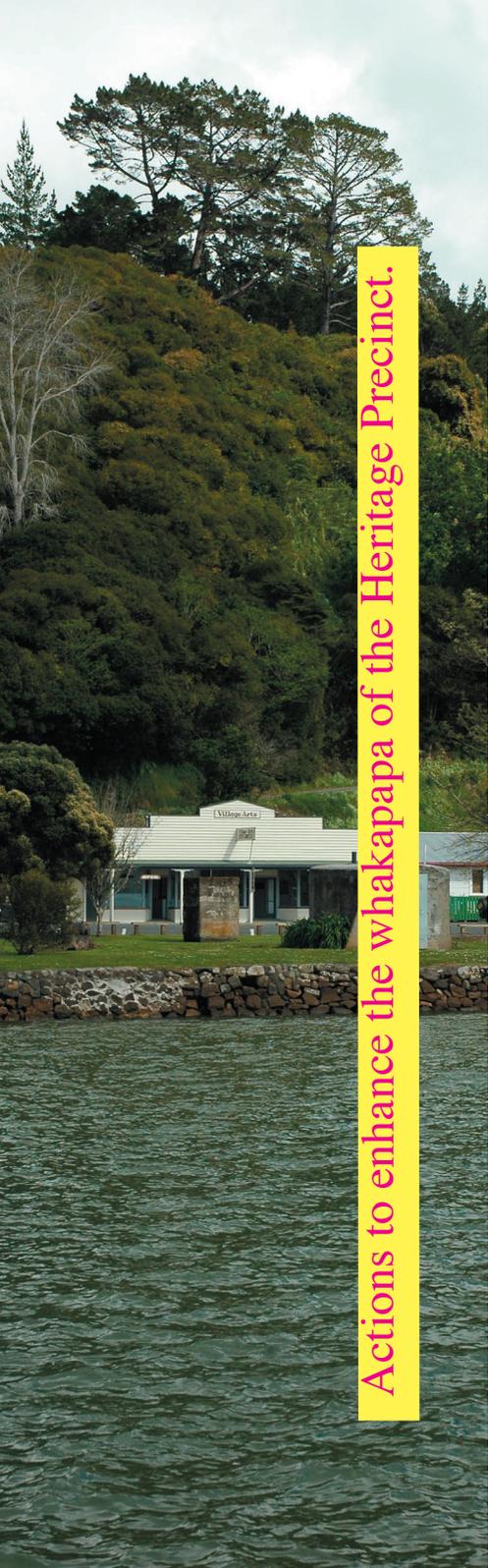
24) Economic strategies which marginalise some people in society have no place in a Heritage Precinct. **The coastline may be priceless but it comes free.** The wealthy are the only people who cannot possess the coastline because their wealth takes away their freedom. The Foreshore and Seabed debate is not about who should own the coast but rather about the nature of ownership.

25) Ruins have stories to tell. **Tourists do not think they are odd when they go to look at ruins.** People who object to ruins on the section next door need to get over it.

26) No decision should be made unless it is essential for that decision to be made. Making too many decisions saps the life-blood of a community. Every decision which is made should ideally open up possibilities rather than restricting options. Planners have a tendency to want to plan everything because they think planning is a good thing and there should be more of it. **The best planning is known for the fact that no one thinks there is any.**

Actions to enhance the planning of the Heritage Precinct.





Actions to enhance the whakapapa of the Heritage Precinct.

## Whakapapa comes warts and all, making east very different from west.

27) History suggests that **planning in the West should be very different from planning in the East.** The contrast between east and west in New Zealand existed long before the first canoes arrived. The trade winds swept across the southern oceans battering the west coast with wind and rain. The east was the soft underbelly of the land. Tasman found the west coast and sailed away from this inhospitable land. Cook found the land of plenty on the east coast and stayed on to enjoy good anchorages, fresh water, and plentiful food. Cook foreshadowed the lifestyle of the Kerikeri orchardist. Out west it was much tougher. The captain of the “Dromedary” looked over the bar and turned back to return to the Bay of Islands. The first whare wananga was in the west. Thinking rather than conforming. Pompallier told his priests to retain te reo and ancient customs. He was two hundred years ahead of his time. In the east Marsden sought conversion to the security of the establishment. In the west rugged self sufficient pakehas took Maori wives and merged into the mangroves with hardly a trace. In the east there was settlement because the English knew what a town was. The east was bi-cultural and cultured. In the west the marae remained dominant. The east became materialistic. The west remained deeply spiritual. Dark and foreboding. Lost in the fog. **Local whakapapa is local whakapapa, and it comes warts and all.** The problem to avoid is revisionist planning which sets out to rewrite history.

28) **It is the differences between one Heritage Precinct and another which are important.** Planning which looks for the common ground misses the whole point. There is none. A long straight line of kerbing and channelling is perfect in the East, but ludicrous in the west. The nondescript road which belongs nowhere in particular is the perfect design solution when a street sign will eventually proudly name this place “Ocean Vista Crescent” although no sign of the sea is to be seen. Rakautapu Road is different in every way. The name speaks to us, but so does the design of the road. Revisionist engineering thinks that one road is like any other road.

29) **In a perfect world every place would be different from every other place.** Heritage Precincts are only the places which have not yet been homogenised by dull conformity. We love our friends because they are such an odd bunch with such a peculiar assortment of eccentricities.

30) Heritage Precincts are not remnants. They are rather **an indication of what might be.**

We need to learn from them so that one day every township, every road, and every building will be absolutely local.

31) We do not speak of classical English. English may be a universal language, but thousands of words are absolutely local. English has always been vernacular. On the West Coast of the South Island there is a sign “A vegetarian is just another name for a piss-poor hunter”. It could belong nowhere else. You know where you are. The planning process tends to look for common ground. It would do better to begin observing differences.

**It is our differences which define who we are.**

It is the differences between Heritage Precincts which are important.

## Governance should never seek to control.

### 32) **Heritage Precincts need to have control of their own destiny.**

Heritage Precincts are the source of their own understanding. Any outsider will always be an observer. An individual accumulates through their lives millions of experiences, and any decisions they make are informed by all that wonderful complexity. We can anticipate how we think someone will act, but they may surprise us. It becomes easier when we look at what an individual does to conclude that their actions were what we might have expected. It is impossible however to live someone else's life for them,

33) **We can never fully understand a Heritage Precinct.** A person we love, a work of art, or a Heritage Precinct, never cease to surprise and delight us. When a person no longer enriches our lives we tire of the relationship. When we longer see an art work every day as though we have never seen it before it has ceased to communicate and we may as well replace it. When we no longer are constantly astonished by a Heritage Precinct either the wairua has withered or our own life has ceased to be fully alive. If we think we have understood a Heritage Precinct we can be certain that we have not understood.

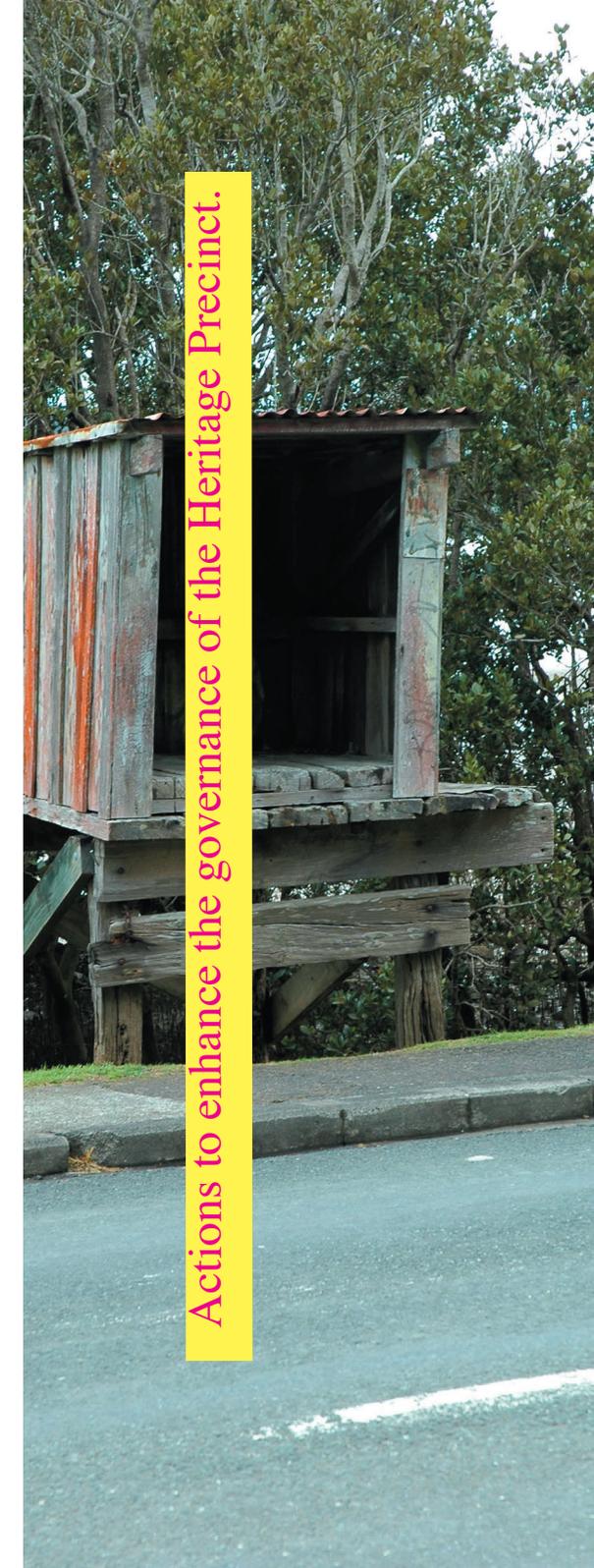
34) If we are not grateful for the existence of governance structures we can assume they are fundamentally flawed. Governance systems which seek to control are fundamentally different from **governance systems which set people free.** This is similar to the difference between teaching and education. Teaching is concerned with one group of people imposing their values on another group of people. Education is concerned with looking inside an individual to release the potential which is waiting to be set free.

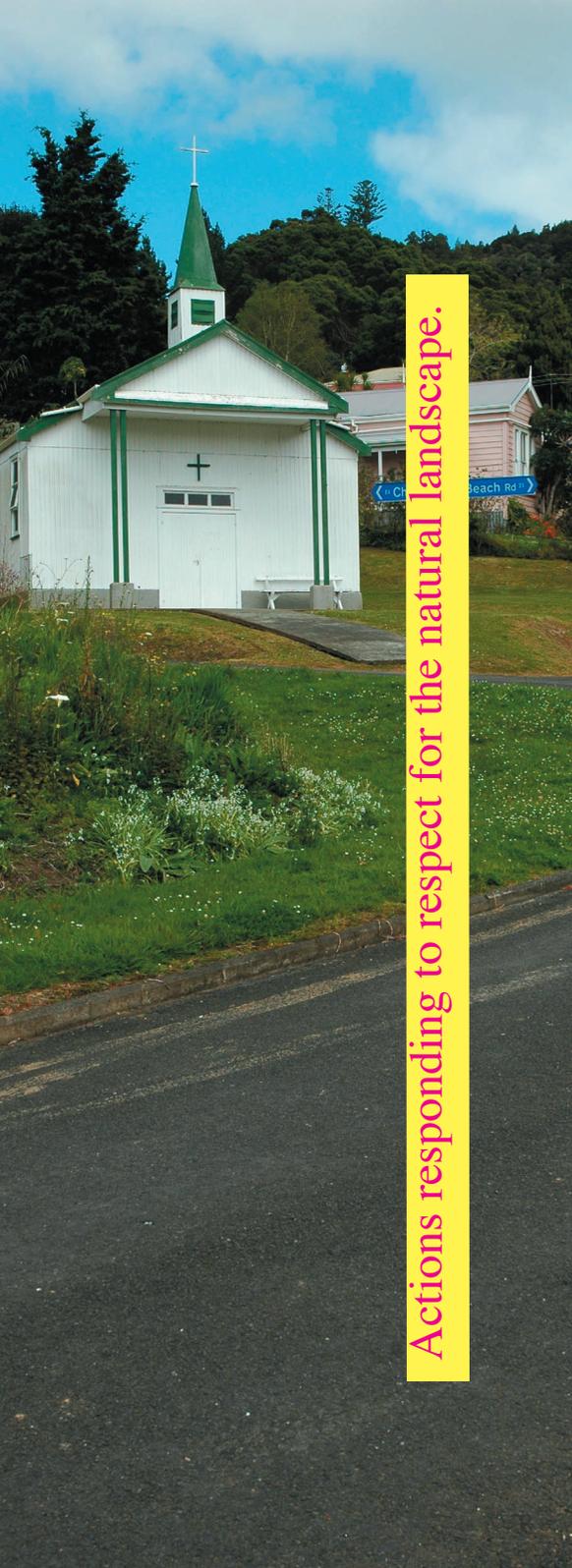
35) **The purpose of governance is to release the potential of a Heritage Precinct.** Seeking to impose an outside set of values on a Heritage Precinct which is steeped in its own values will result not only in anger, resentment and frustration but also in the destruction of the Precinct. The first question we always need to ask is very simple. "Is this governance for the good of the Heritage Precinct or for the good of somebody else?"

36) **The boundary of a Heritage Precinct is not a physical line** concerned with built-form, but rather a spiritual line which is concerned with "belonging". Some people may live in a place for a long time, but never belong. Other people may be newcomers, but they truly belong. In part this is concerned with the emptying of self so that the Heritage Precinct is able to speak on its own terms and partly it is concerned with mana. The respect which that person holds within the Heritage Precinct.

37) **Once the local-ness of a Heritage Precinct is recognised this automatically implies that governance should be local too.** Questions of defence or international relations may have wider implications, but built-environment questions are always local.

Actions to enhance the governance of the Heritage Precinct.





Actions responding to respect for the natural landscape.

## Protect the natural character of the Hokianga Harbour.

38) **Protect the natural character of the Hokianga harbour.** This one sentence is all that the District Plan needs to say about landscape. The Environment Court then would only have one question to ask. “Does the proposal protect the natural character of the Hokianga Harbour, or does it not?” Lawyers can twist, squirm, and distort the truth but the lack of small print leaves little to argue about.

39) The context of Kohukohu is all important. **It is the context which makes Kohukohu what it is.** The primary relationship to the water, for example, should be strengthened. The powerful form of the wharf does this. In contrast the impact of the road, for example, should be softened. Any strong visual form of kerbing and channelling or any straight harsh line of a road, which is built for movement rather than enjoyment, is destructive of an essential understanding of Kohukohu. Those who do not see the Heritage Precinct can make choices which prevent others from seeing the Heritage Precinct. These choices are much more significant than the colour or form of any buildings.

40) In Kohukohu there is space between the buildings. Not only is the whole village to be seen within landscape, but **individual buildings are also to be seen within landscape.** The Masonic Lodge on the hillside, for example, the old school on the spur, or the houses of the newly wealthy overlooking the sawmill, all gave a primary recognition to landscape.

41) A distinction needs to be made between buildings which occupy landscape and **buildings which are set apart from landscape and serve to define it.** The marae is the space not the buildings. The wharenui or wharekai define the marae but they do not occupy it. A materialistic consumer society is concerned with objects which can be possessed, and objects which take possession. The Kohukohu Heritage Precinct speaks for a different set of values.

42) Some cultures live life out of doors. A farmer lives with mud and rain and retreats to shelter. The pohutukawa or the wind-break provide the clue as to where that shelter might be found. A person from Auckland begins their life inside and they look out at views. They talk about an indoor/outdoor relationship, but do not notice either the pohutukawa, except when it blocks their view, or the wind-break. **The built-environment of the Kohukohu Heritage Precinct reflects the culture of those who live first and build later.** Planning for these people is concerned first with landscape. They have difficulty understanding a culture which is obsessed with building.

43) **Sustainability begins with re-establishing and strengthening our relationship with nature.** Insulating our buildings can in contrast mean divorcing us from the wairua of the planet, which gives us life. The Kohukohu Heritage Precinct is ahead of its time. We have come through a time of easy environmental credit, and slowly people are beginning to realise that this is not sustainable. Kohukohu offers an alternative. Getting the landscape right means that we need less building.

Live first in the natural world, and only then in buildings.

## Enhance water transport and disadvantage road transport.

44) **Enhance water transport in the Hokianga.** Water transport is primary in the Hokianga. It is impossible to understand the urban form of the Hokianga without first traversing the harbour by water.

45) **Always give priority to water transport over road transport.** The ferry-bridge debate was actually a debate about Heritage Precincts. If roads are free then the ferry must also be free. It is part of the State Highway network. The Wiseman Ferry in Sydney is free. Canadian ferries are free. A free ferry would result in increased demand, which would result in improved service, which **would result in a more extensive ferry network.** Backwaters are created by infrastructure decisions. Horeke has been marginalised although it is very close to Kohukohu.

46) **Through traffic needs to be slowed down to walking pace.** The road network needs to be designed so Kohukohu becomes a destination, not a through route.

47) The design of the road needs to avoid any lineal emphasis or the formation of a channel through the Heritage Precinct. Thus, for example, standard kerbing and channelling is totally inappropriate and should be avoided. **A soft visual edge to the road**, such as might be found in the Waipoa forest, is appropriate.

48) A **generous promenade** on the harbour side of the road would emphasise the one-sided urban design characteristic of the road. A soft edge between this promenade and the road would emphasise that the road is a pedestrian space too.

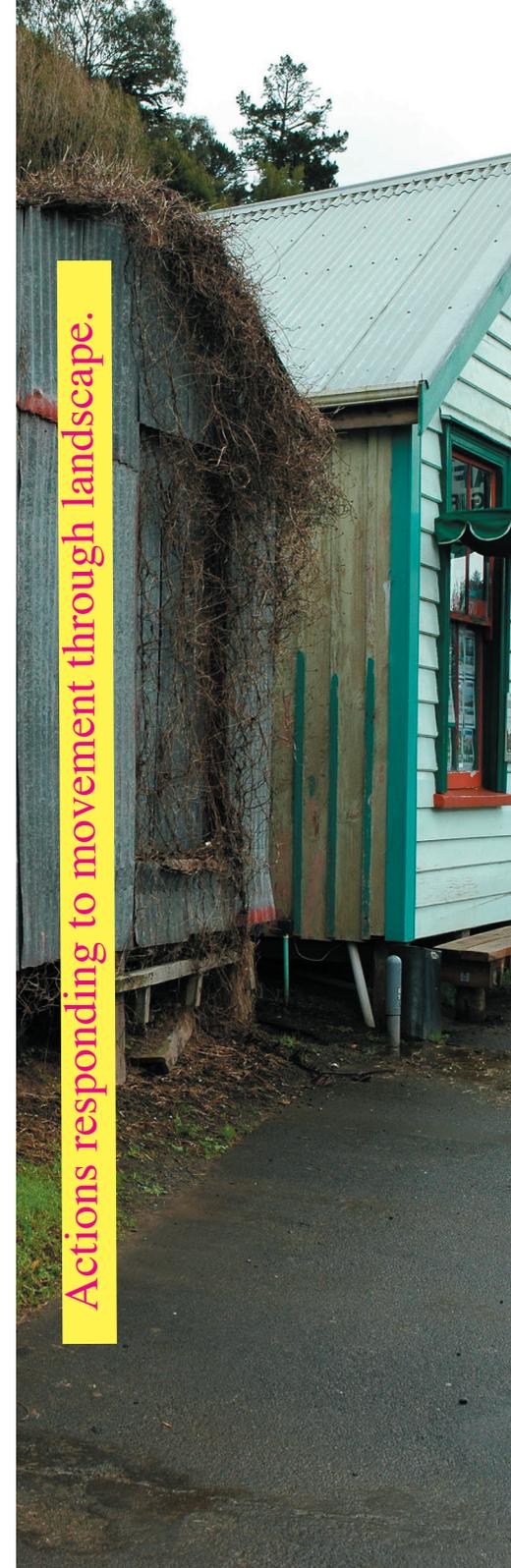
49) Standardised road design is to be avoided. Roads have become placeless, taking away identity. There is no more reason why a road should be like every other road than there is reason for every person to be like every other person. **A Kohukohu road needs to be a Kohukohu road.** If this means that a different engineering approach is required this would seem to be a modest request to make.

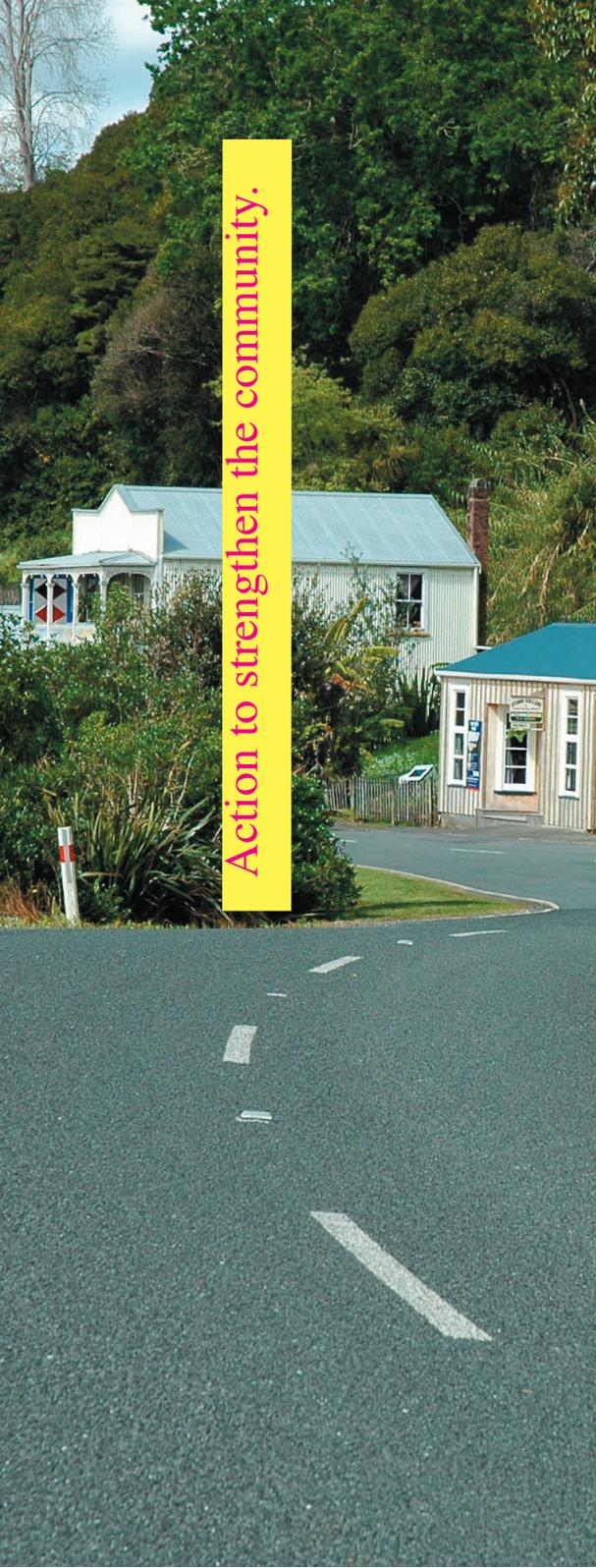
50) **The curved entrance and exit roads need to not only be retained but also emphasised.** Straightening any road is to be avoided. Landforms should not be destroyed by roadworks.

51) Angry, aggressive, boring roads which generate both high-speed expectations and road rage are to be avoided. **Roads need to achieve traffic calming through design**, not angry speed bumps. Getting the design right at the beginning is always preferable to trying to patch up bad and inappropriate design.

52) **A friendly process is essential if a friendly road is to be achieved.** Friendship is not a technical issue.

Actions responding to movement through landscape.





## Strengthening the community is the most important action to be taken.

53) **Strengthening communities** so that they will be able to protect their own inheritance is far more important than protecting buildings in the hope that this will build community.

54) In practice this means focusing on, and building upon, strengths rather than weaknesses. This is different from the normal planning process. This creative positive approach to planning has the potential to get everyone excited and involved. **In fulfilling the destiny of the Heritage Precinct there is potential for people to recognise that they are also fulfilling their own destiny in their own lives.**

55) **The library**, for example, has been a great success. Building on that success might mean extending the opening hours, developing an outreach programme, possibly through using the rural delivery system to deliver and return books, or restoring the original roof of the building.

56) **The Waterline Café** has been a brilliant success. Building on that success might mean reducing rates to ensure ongoing economic viability, and recognising that it performs an important community function.

57) **Village Arts** has been an astonishing success. Building on that success might mean stabilising the staffing situation so that it is not dependent on volunteers. Supporting community initiatives is more important than spending money on infrastructure. The local people repair and upgrade buildings within the Heritage Precinct in a modest and unpretentious way. No expert could even begin achieving what these local people have achieved.

58) **The Kohukohu village store** is excellent, and full of local character, but it is at risk. If it is sold the community could lose the store. Spot zoning in place before any sale would limit future more lucrative options. Planning should limit development potential rather than enhancing it.

59) **The Post Office** was once a centre for every community. The seeming inability of Post Offices to reinvent themselves is not inevitable. Communication is critical in a democracy. This is the hub of a wonderful rural delivery service. The Heritage Precinct needs to be of service to the whole of the North Hokianga, just as it once was. Remote areas need to have their medicines or groceries delivered, but these people also need to find a community when they come to town. An ATM machine at the Post Office would be a wonderful local service.

60) **The local market** becomes a meeting place as much as a place of exchange. Local produce and local people.

61) With a strong community much more could be done.

**Build on strengths rather than overcoming weaknesses.**

## What exactly is a Heritage Precinct?

62) **A Heritage Precinct is a repository of the whakapapa of place.** It is where those who belong to this unique location feel at home. This is their turangawaewae. This is where they stand tall. This is the gathering together of the accumulated understanding of ancestors so that the community might move forward with intense self-awareness.

63) At a superficial level a Heritage Precinct could be seen as a museum collection of buildings but it is much more than this, just as buildings are much more than weatherboards and corrugated iron. **Buildings are stories, memories and anecdotes.** Buildings are constant growth, and the development of understanding about who we are.

64) You either plane both sides of any kauri timber you are recycling or you quickly discover that the timber has never died. The strong scent as you plane the kauri is the scent of a thousand year old forest. **A Heritage Precinct can only be understood by those who have an emotional response to the smell of the forest.**

65) Building is more than a noun. Building is also a verb. The way you go about building when you are motivated by love is different from the way you go about building when you are motivated by profit. **Any Heritage Precinct reeks of passion, hope, commitment and dreams.** It is alive, like the kauri.

66) Through buildings, their urban context, and the relationship between them we are able to access the wairua of place. Buildings may pass away in the same way that generations pass away, but **if the wairua is strong the continuity of whakapapa is assured.**

67) **In an ideal world the whole built environment would be a Heritage Precinct.** Every building would grow from and give form to urban design whakapapa. Architecture would sustain the wairua of place. Anything less than this is unacceptable in a time when sustaining the life of the planet is a moral imperative as never before.

68) This ideal world has unfortunately been compromised in at least two significant ways. **First a materialistic ethic has resulted in the cult of the object.** Architectural magazines are now crowded with buildings which have nothing to say.

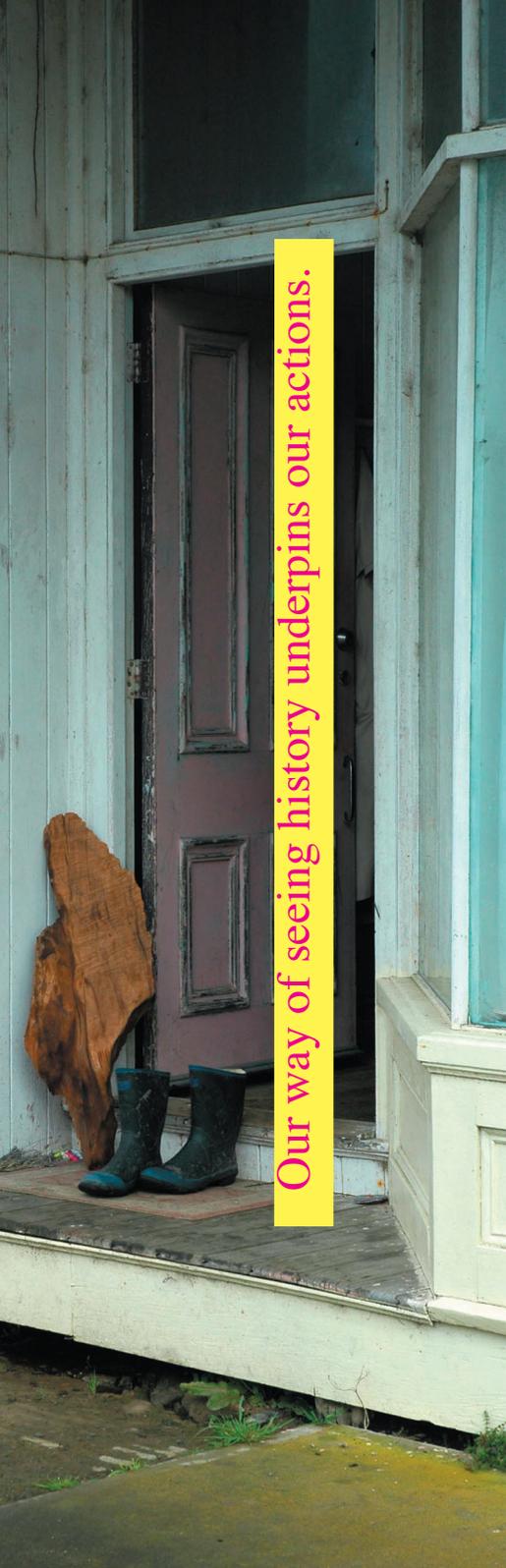
69) The second great compromise in the built environment has been **a lack of architectural ethics.** Building normally begins by destroying. Buildings destroy stories, memory, love, context, place, traditions, geology, history and almost everything which they should respect.

70) In this context Heritage Precincts become **those few remnants which have not yet been destroyed.** All this would change if we all resolved to protect and nurture life and to do no harm. A Heritage Precinct is what might be rather than what has been.

71) **Our heritage is everything which has been passed down to us.** Our role is to sustain and enrich our inheritance so that it might be passed on to future generations. This is the only sense in which “sustainable development” has any meaning.

Our way of seeing a Precinct underpins our actions.





Our way of seeing history underpins our actions.

## History is dynamic. Metamorphosis is normal.

72) The era which grew out of the industrial revolution is drawing to a close. At that time people felt disempowered by machines and by a capitalist system over which they had no control. Where once **people had grown their own food, and artisans had passed their arts, crafts or building skills from one generation to the next**, people were now seen as nothing more than human resources. Displaced and disadvantaged some escaped to new lands where they could be free, while others were, over time, lifted by utopian idealism to a hard-won level of decency.

73) Kohukohu as a European settlement was **a heady mix** of sawmill industrialisation, individuals giving meaning to their lives through seeking to be free, and exploitation of natural resources. Individuals became wealthy but at the same time the human habitat, which remains the source of life, was degraded. Success and affluence found expression in gracious homes. Stability and continuity found expression in community buildings.

74) Utopian idealists today have moved far beyond inventing technical fixes to a consumer-driven industrial revolution. They are concerned with **the health of the planet as a prerequisite for the health of individuals**. This spiritual quest recognises that there are material limits to a physical world, even though there may be no limit to the human spirit.

75) Planning, as we know it today, began with the **idealism** of correcting the worst excesses of the industrial revolution. Over time all that has changed so that what began as a process of empowering the individual has morphed into a process of disempowering people so that now almost no one builds for themselves to satisfy their own needs.

76) Planners and other bureaucrats now not only control the built environment but also support a building process which disempowers people and saps the wairua out of the built environment. Planners are committed to fundamentalist materialism. For them building and towns are objects. Things. For them a town is something which grows out of their minds. Intellect, but neither heart nor hand. Fast urban design. Planners see process as nothing more than the means of bringing their materialistic world into being. People are seen only as consumers. The Building Act is concerned with consumer protection. Dictatorship has replaced architectural democracy.

77) Slow urban design is concerned with how change occurs over time. It focuses on continuity. It builds upon what UNESCO would call “intangible heritage”. What we see becomes but an expression of what we cannot see. Kohukohu is a process and a way of seeing. It is an attitude.

78) Understanding why Kohukohu has become the way it is can be more important than understanding what it has become. **Seamless continuity with the past sustains the life force or wairua of any historic precinct.**

The way Kohukohu has become what it is,  
is more important than what it has become.

## An understanding of heritage suggests a planning process.

79) A clear understanding of the nature and importance of history and heritage is necessary **before any other planning steps are taken.**

80) Heritage by its very nature is diverse. Our lives all tell different stories. We are all unique individuals. It is incorrect to seek for planning uniformity in relation to Heritage Precincts. **Planning diversity and complexity are necessary foundations for any Heritage Precinct.**

81) This diversity and complexity sit uneasily with any centralising of power and control. When communities or individuals seek for their own solutions, which will give form to their own culture, they move outside the comfort zone of those who seek to have power over others. Planning tends to restrict when it **should set people free.**

82) The greatest dilemma facing the built environment in our time is globalised uniformity. Buildings look like other buildings. Cities look like other cities. **Placelessness has become a socially destructive force.** People do not know who they are or where they are. Anger, resentment and alienation are the inevitable results. We recognise road rage, but building rage is a much more significant problem.

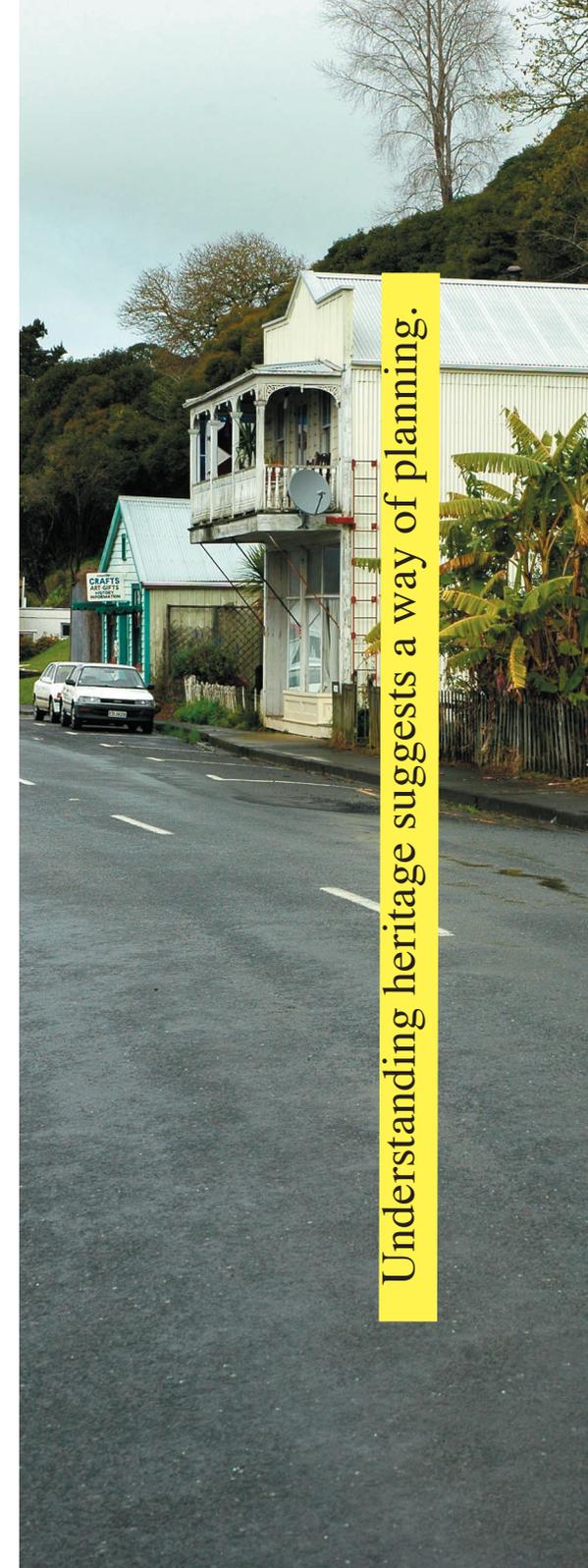
83) **Sustainable architecture belongs in place.** It responds to climate and landscape, embracing the natural world. The least possible amount of building is appropriate for our time. The meltdown of the planet itself is much more important than the meltdown of an economic system which creates credit to make destruction possible.

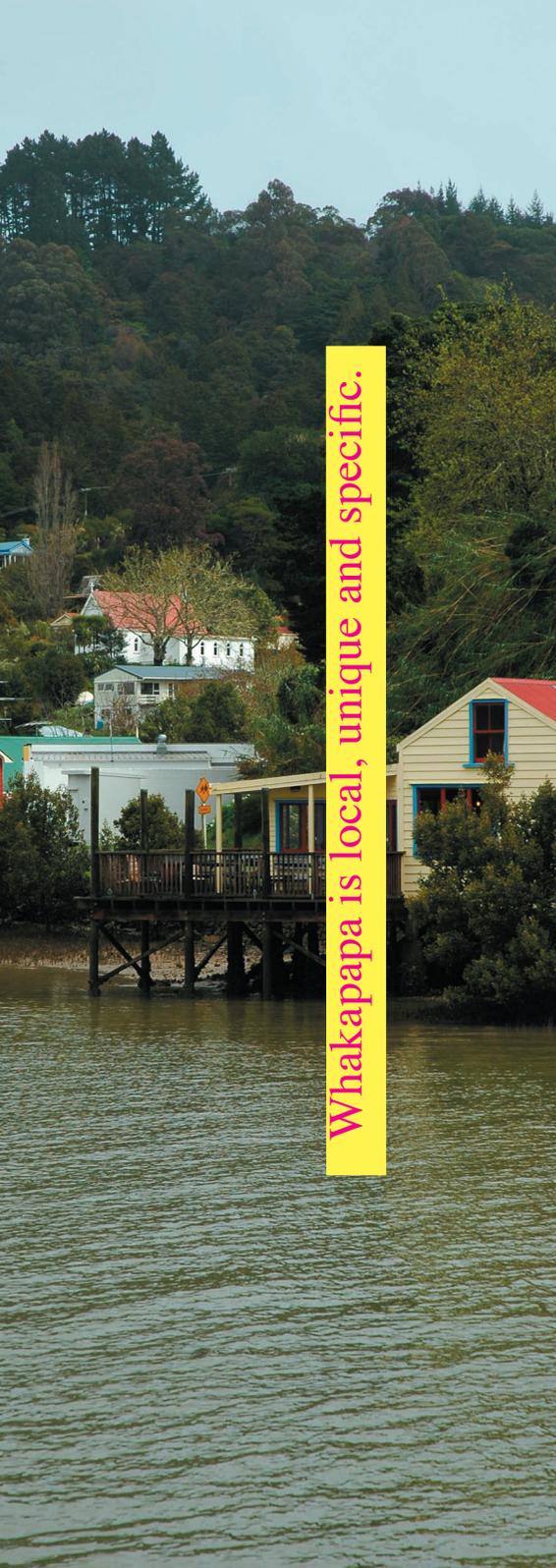
84) The cult of the object is but one aspect of a materialist, consumer society. Form without substance. The objects may be very beautiful and the craftsmanship may be superb but they do not carry forward a culture and a tradition.

85) In our materialistic world buildings become frozen in time. We are surrounded by dead buildings slowly deteriorating until they are demolished. They are defined as having a life only to support an economic system of rates and revenues to sustain a power structure. The rating base has become a substitute for wairua. In contrast **living buildings are constantly enriched by accumulating the patina of life.**

86) In a Heritage Precinct some buildings are falling apart and some are coming together. The planning process lets the old grow old gracefully, and restrains the energy of the young without compromising their enthusiasm.

Understanding heritage suggests a way of planning.





Whakapapa is local, unique and specific.

## Our role is to sustain and develop our whakapapa.

87) **All civilisations contain the seeds of their own destruction.** There is no evidence to suggest that Western Civilisation will be any different. Indeed all the evidence suggests that we are well on the way to destroying ourselves. The rate at which we are consuming the world's resources is clearly not sustainable. The levels of pollution we continue to generate are clearly not sustainable. Perhaps debate is needed on issues such as climate change but the loss of species or desertification, for example, are beyond debate.

88) The Roman Empire passed away. The Ottoman Empire passed away. The Mongol Empire passed away. **The signs that all these empires were about to pass away were clear enough and yet no effective action was taken.** They all passed away for different reasons but in common they had an inability to be responsive to change.

89) Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat the mistakes of history. Those who do not know their whakapapa do not know who they are.

90) **Effective planning is responsive to change.** This is what you look for in a District Plan.

91) The ruins of Troy are far from the sea, although once this was a thriving port. The ruins of Ephesus are far from the sea, although this was once a thriving port. The ruins of Pergammon are far from the sea, although this was once a thriving port. All over the world we can see civilisations which destroyed themselves because those in power failed to read the ecological signs. **A District Plan reads the signs.**

92) The lesson of history is that power structures are not responsive to change because they are afraid to lose power. Concentrations of power are doomed to collapse. Greed is insatiable. In contrast whakapapa is generous.

93) Above all else **sustainable civilisations have been concerned with the distribution of power.** Whakapapa embraces whanau.

94) No great insight was required to know that our global credit system would collapse. The only question is whether we have learned anything.

95) **In a time of crisis a Heritage Precinct becomes a place of contemplation.** It is here that enough of the past remains for us to be able to ask fundamental questions about the nature of change. A Heritage Precinct makes it possible to step back from day to day concerns and ask the really big questions.

96) **The only thing which is certain is that tomorrow will be very different from today.** There is no alternative. We can choose to ignore the inevitable but it will still be inevitable. **We can grasp our moment in history or let it pass us by.**

97) In a Heritage Precinct everyone needs to take responsibility for themselves and the consequences of their actions. This is democratic urban design.

Rather than seeking to control the future we should read the signs of our times.

## The purpose of local government is to enhance the well-being of the community.

98) The rich history of the Hokianga was marginalised by the Local Government amalgamations of 1989. Someone who knew nothing about the Hokianga, but was obsessed with delusions of power, decided that destroying the rich texture of small-scale activity would lead to economic efficiency. A whole vernacular culture was forced underground as the land was occupied by an invasion of “globalised” power.

99) Once everyone in the Hokianga had built their own houses. Globalisation changed all that. People became dislocated from their heritage.

100) Only in Auckland or Wellington do people assume that you need a developer from somewhere else, who is only concerned with making money, to build an affordable house. Everyone else knows that if you want an affordable house you build it yourself.

101) This is a governance issue. **Empowering the local people is essential if life is to be breathed into what otherwise would be mere architectural pastiche.**

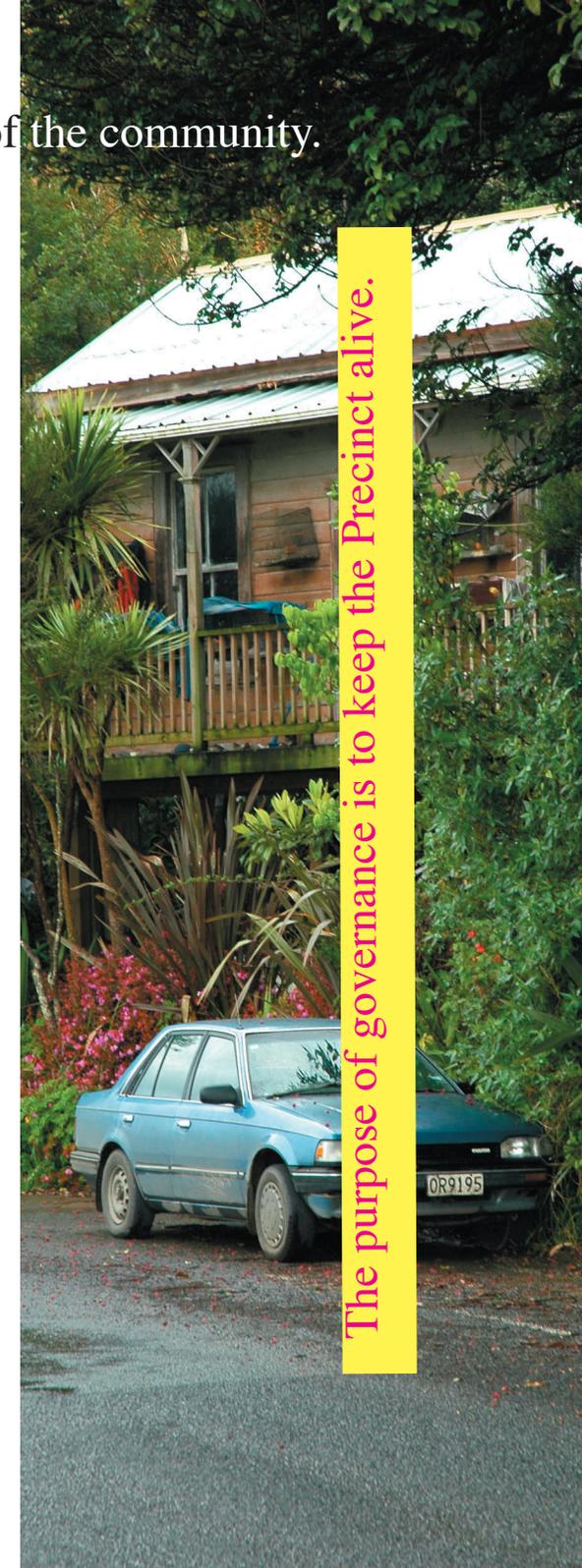
102) In so many other ways Hokianga communities have been disempowered. The planner and the building inspector moved away from Rawene. Banks and post offices closed down. The “local” disappeared out of government.

103) However the brilliance of a subversive Hokianga was that the community survived. The Hokianga Film Festival, for example, must be one of the best in the world. Most people eat on the marae and many stay there as well. Directors, producers, actors and film lovers share endless conversations over kai before heading off to watch another film. Guidance and inspiration is freely given. The Festival builds community.

104) **In Kohukohu the Kauri Festival led to tours of kauri buildings** as well as exhibitions and talks. The failure of electricity with the resulting failure of water and the abysmal weather only made the wood range oven scones seem more exquisite.

105) Taking governance away from the Hokianga was the intellectual head action of a written culture. **The built form of Kohukohu in contrast results from heart action giving form to an oral culture of storytelling,**

106) **Empowering the local community**, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2002, which states very clearly that the purpose of local government is to enhance the well being of the community, is an essential first move in giving life to any Heritage Precinct.





The Hokianga landscape is both strong and unique.

## Strengthening our relationship with nature is the first “climate change” move.

107) The Hokianga landscape is both strong and unique, and **all the settlements in the Hokianga have traditionally been subservient to that dominating landscape.**

108) **All landscape is unique.** In the natural environment we know where we are. Too often in the built environment we could be anywhere because much modern architecture belongs nowhere in particular. Global placelessness has become a characteristic of our time. Uniformity has replaced the rich diversity of a **vernacular architecture which was not only strongly rooted in place but also sourced in local communities, local skills, and local traditions.**

109) The good news, although not everyone may see it that way, is that we are at the end of an era where the primary purpose of the built environment has been seen as sheltering us from, and dominating, the natural environment. Human beings, like all species, are now suffering from habitat loss.

110) The first move in addressing the global “climate change” environmental crisis must be to **re-establish our relationship with nature.** We need to feel the wind, the rain, and the sea once again in the way that our ancestors did. Heritage preservation begins with strengthening relationships. Kohukohu is the rising of the sun and the full moon. Kohukohu is eastern solar light.

111) Shutting ourselves away in isolated heavily insulated, double glazed, closed boxes, is rather like climbing into a coffin to protect ourselves from a world which wants to give us life. Winter is winter. Spring is spring. Taking away the seasons takes away our understanding. **We need to open ourselves up to the world,** not close ourselves away. We need to love the outdoors, in the way that New Zealanders traditionally have. Urban design is not about taking away gumboots and mud. We need to be constantly surprised by the awe and wonder of the universe.

112) Architectural obesity makes a significant contribution to climate change. Too much gets in the way. **We need to rediscover the meaning of enough.** Architectural comfort can make us soft, sapping our energy and making us lethargic.

113) **Community in the Hokianga has always been more important than the individual.** The marae is more important than the house. The churches and the pa sites mark unique moments in the landscape. The houses of individuals are subservient to those formal expressions of community. The relationship between those marks on the land weaves a network of relationships through the natural landscape.

114) Urban design which grows out of, and is sensitive to, landscape, is also unique. **Each of the settlements in the Hokianga has a particular reason for being where it is.** Motuti or Panguru are at the navigable limits of their inlets. Rawene or Matawera reach out from the shallows. Horeke or Kohukohu are where the waters run deep.

115) The ridgelines, the mountains, the silhouette and the harbour of the Hokianga are sacred. They are not negotiable. **Landscape establishes a sense of place.**

Hokianga settlements are dominated by landscape.

## Movement is a cultural act.

116) **Different cultures move through the landscape in different ways.** They pause at different locations.

117) Traditional water transport established the urban design pattern of the Hokianga. The harbour did not divide. It was the link. To understand the Hokianga you must travel by water.

118) **The primary relationship of the Historic Precinct is to the water.** To understand Kohukohu you need to arrive by water. There is urban design logic in the “Crossings” boat bringing strangers in from the sea. The roading pattern is secondary to the axis of the wharf. It came much later.

119) New Zealanders have normally travelled along ridges, staying well away from the tortuous twisting paths of our streams. Ridges in turn became pathways and often roads. In a city like Auckland all the main roads run along ridges. However **the steep terrain of the Hokianga set a different pattern,** The ridges contained the harbour and they were crossed to go to other places.

120) **The road in Kohukohu is a classic one-sided coastal road.** It is concerned with edge. Protecting and enhancing the form of that road is necessary if the heritage precinct is to be understood. The footpath on the water side of the road needs to become a promenade.

121) Arriving in Kohukohu is a different experience from passing through Kohukohu. **The historic precinct can only be understood if it is seen as a destination.** This is a key design issue. Those who pass through need to tolerate some disadvantage. Those who arrive need to be made welcome.

122) **Traditionally North Hokianga roads have been places of social interaction.** You did not pass another car. You stopped for a yarn, often in the middle of the road. Other vehicles were happy to wait if they did not want to join in the conversation. If you did not have time to stop drivers would always exchange a friendly wave. “Upgrading” the roads has resulted in a “downgrading” of human interaction. Some people now drive by without even a friendly wave.

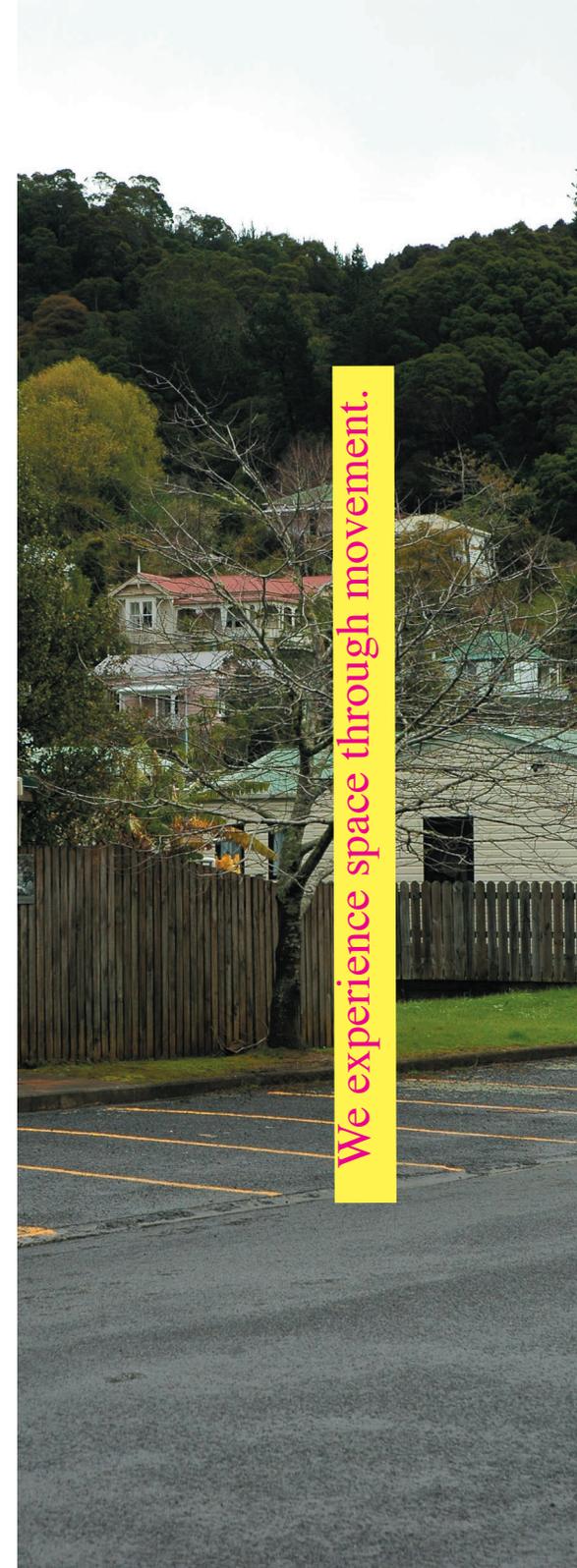
123) Roads now are designed for individuals, not communities. That is not the Hokianga way. The ferry is a community event where people meet, catch up on gossip, and share their lives. You can pick the strangers. They sit inside their cars with the windows up, impatient to be on the road again. Any township needs to be like the ferry. **In a Heritage Precinct there should be no strangers.**

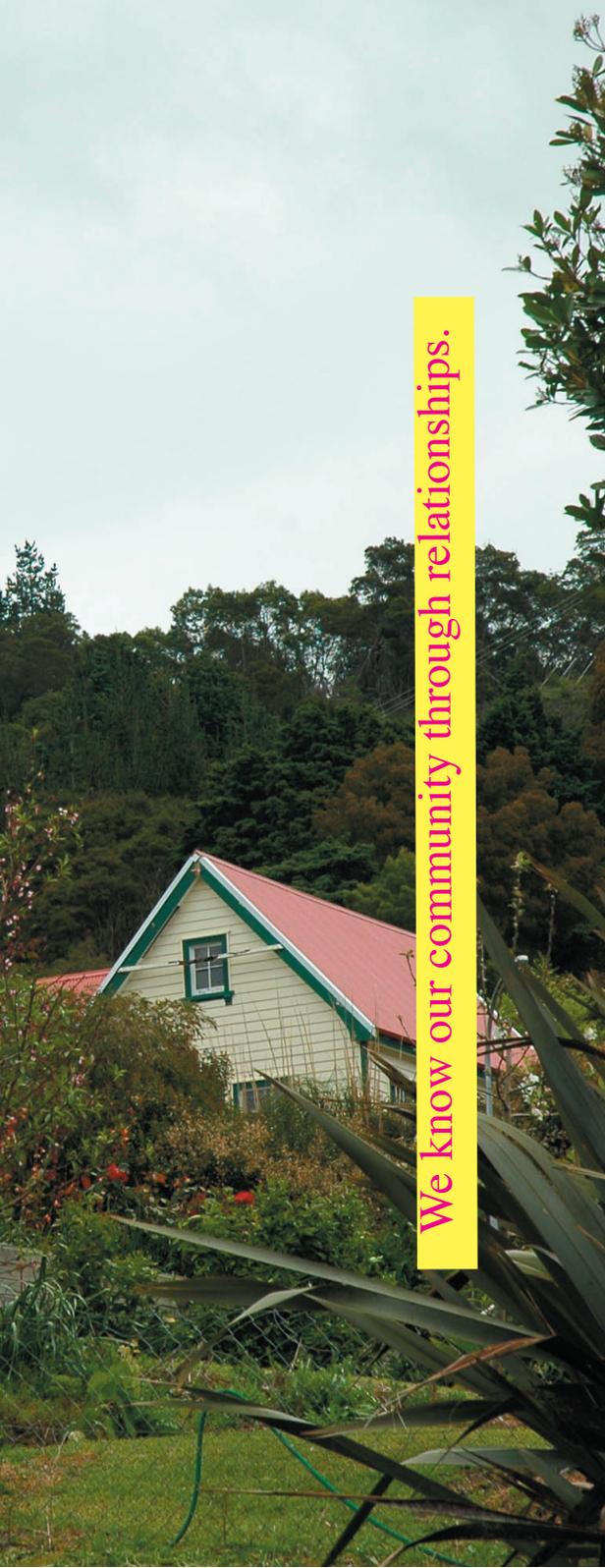
124) Attitude is important in the Heritage Precinct. **Through design it is possible to make or destroy attitudes.**

125) A speed limit of 30km/hour needs to be imposed and enforced within the Heritage Precinct. **Slowing people down would allow their community life to speed up.** Ideally traffic would be slowed to pedestrian speeds, so that people could happily jay-walk and stop to talk, if necessary safely in the middle of the road. People need to arrive at the Heritage Precinct, not pass through it.

We experience space through movement.

Water transport established the urban design patterns of the Hokianga.





We know our community through relationships.

## Clear edges intensify relationships.

126) **Edges are more important than what is contained within.** Edges are those transitions which contrast changes of character. Containment of Kohukohu intensifies the character and liveability of the township.

127) Setting limits to urbanity was once a natural process. You were either a town person, perhaps a craftsman, an artisan, a baker or a shopkeeper, or you were a country person, perhaps a farmer or a horticulturist. Degradation of the built environment has brought about a change. Most people find that it is no longer delightful to live in towns. Those who feel they do not belong in towns have no commitment to improving the environmental quality of towns. A downward spiral is established, Kohukohu is at a critical point of transition. It is still delightful to walk down the road for breakfast or a coffee at the Waterline, but the roar and danger of the logging trucks, or the lack of interest of tourists going somewhere else with their car windows firmly up could easily destroy the delight of the town. **Above all else the Heritage Precinct needs to be a place where people want to be,** just because it is so enriching and fulfilling.

128) Entry and exit are critical in setting limits to urbanity. For Kohukohu **entry and exit are already defined by landscape,** just as effectively as a mediaeval town might have been defined by the town wall.

129) The proposed “eco-development” above the ferry landing indicates what should not be done. People living there would be too far from the Heritage Precinct to be able to walk into town. They would need to drive, bringing the noise and fumes of their cars with them. They would dilute rather than intensify the urban experience making the Heritage Precinct less enjoyable for themselves as well as everyone else. The new residents do not belong in Kohukohu, but they do not belong anywhere else either.

130) It is **the intensity of urban life** within the Kohukohu Heritage Precinct which **makes relationships possible.** Here is here and there is there. The Precinct is limited and through achieving that it is without limit.

131) People can only be understood in relationship to others. It is **the same with townships.** Key relationships need to be respected.

132) Farmers traditionally built their houses so that no house could be seen from any other house. Settlements in the Hokianga also nestled into the landscape so that **no settlement could be seen from any other settlement.** The idea of dominating the landscape with architecture is new, and is sourced in a deeper desire to dominate nature. Thus from Kohukohu you cannot see Horeke, but you know that it is very close, just around the corner. A sense of infinity is created because limits cannot be seen. This design trick was consistently used in Japanese gardens. A small garden could seem to be without limits. For Kohukohu a relationship with the cosmos is primary. You know and yet the mystery of what you do not know remains.

Intensify the liveability of Kohukohu.

## Overall good design is the sum of incremental good decisions.

133) The broadband ariel on top of the library has a high visual impact. It could easily have been on the fire station, grouped with other “high-tech” infrastructure.

134) The design of a fence is important, and it is also essential to ask if the fence is really necessary. The fence around the playground suggests that the world is somehow not a playground. The fence around the swimming pool only sends children off to drown in the harbour. The fence around the sewage ponds speaks of another culture. “Intangible heritage” is concerned with what a “local” fence is.

135) Most cultures have a relationship to the cosmos. Western civilisation has streetlights. Streetlights are not a solution, they are a problem. The Hokianga night sky is incredibly beautiful, and that beauty should never be destroyed by poor design. Street lights should be under verandahs or at low levels, and only where needed. Glare should be restricted.

136) The dominance of the rubbish tip and the sewage ponds on the road leading to the Heritage Precinct present an image of dysfunctional urban design. Design is concerned with integrity, not appearance.

137) Prohibit the amalgamation of land titles.

138) Purchase land so that a public park or village green is created at the land end of the wharf.

139) Protect the economic viability of the town by re-establishing a commercially zoned area, with a height limit of 7 metres and a maximum of two stories.

140) Treat all road verges gently and shape them so they can be mowed, only putting in any curbing, piping or channeling when absolutely necessary to direct water to prevent damage or scouring. Build pedestrian-friendly road verges so that two people at least can walk safely side by side, with grades and surfaces that are user-friendly.

141) Design structures to retain rain water and help it infiltrate the ground to prevent increased run-off or scouring.

142) Build seawalls that are in keeping with the existing stone sea walls.

143) Design and place infrastructure thoughtfully to enhance the overall design quality of the town.

144) Ban the use of toxic sprays in the Heritage Precinct.

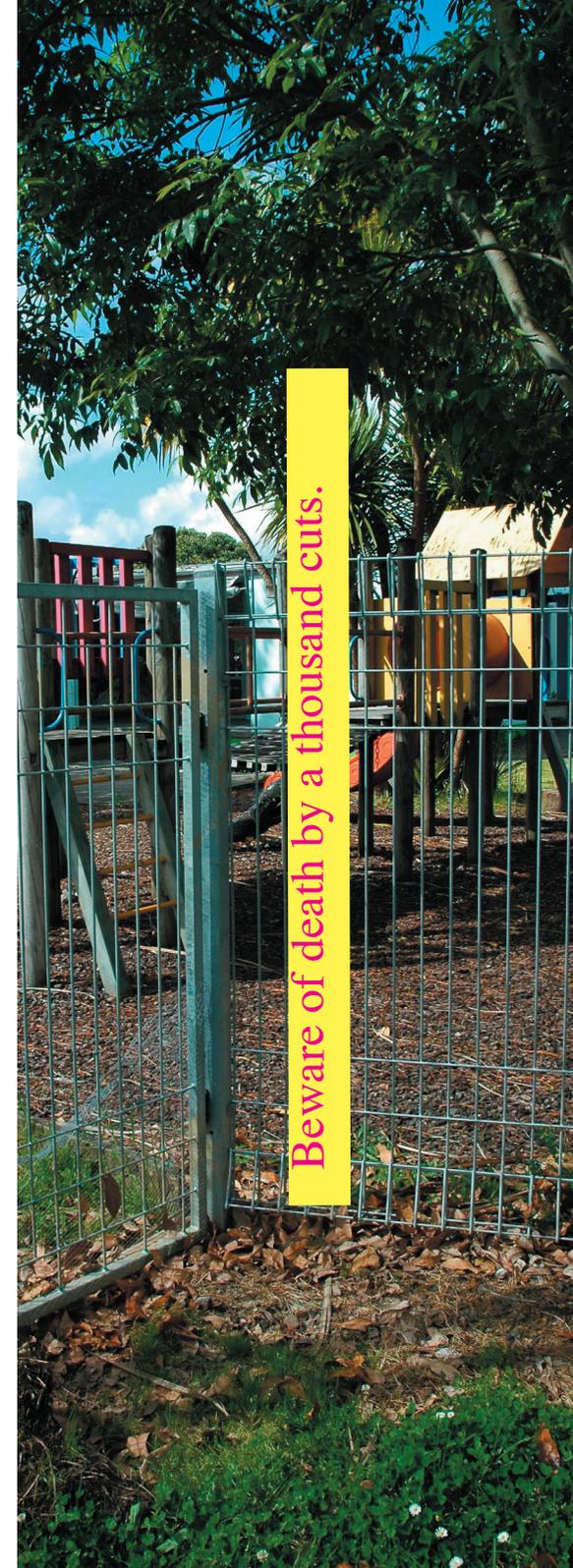
145) Respect existing open space and look after existing trees.

146) Alter buildings in sympathy with existing structures, land forms, neighbouring buildings, and the environs.

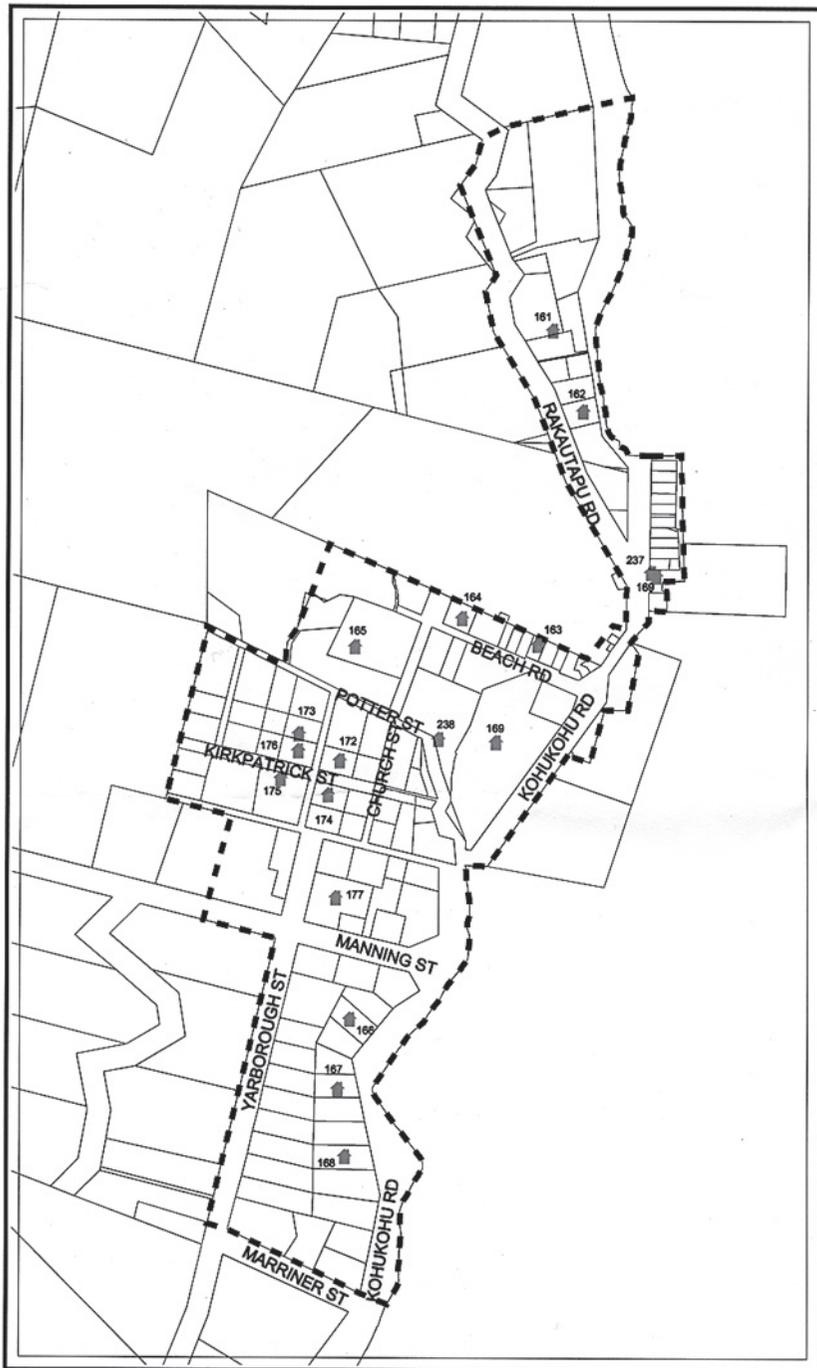
147) Alter the exterior of listed historic buildings only in consultation with the Historic Places Trust.

148) Maintain neighbours’ views and access to sunlight.

149) Build any new buildings in keeping with their surrounding historic buildings in scale, texture and materials. Respect the physical and historical context of each site.



Every move needs to be a good one.



**KOHUKOHU**

The first move must be a commitment by all to enhance and enrich the wairua of Kohukohu.

Unity within diversity can be achieved by a common ethical position.  
 Heritage Precincts are a game in progress, just like history.  
 Heritage Precincts need to celebrate the imperfection of life.  
 Every decision should be taken at the lowest possible level.  
 Slow growth is to be preferred to rapid change.  
 Whakapapa comes warts and all, making east very different from west.  
 It is the differences between Heritage Precincts which are important  
 Governance should never seek to control.  
 Only those who belong should govern.  
 Protect the natural character of the Hokianga Harbour.  
 Live first in the natural world, and only then in buildings.  
 Enhance water transport and disadvantage road transport.  
 Make Kohukohu a walking-pace township.  
 Build on strengths rather than overcoming weaknesses.

Strengthening the community is the most important action to be taken.

A Heritage Precinct is a repository of the Whakapapa of place.

History is dynamic. Metamorphosis is normal.  
 The way Kohukohu has become what it is, is more important than what it has become.  
 An understanding of heritage suggests a planning process.  
 Precincts are unique, diverse and complex.  
 Our role is to sustain and develop our whakapapa.  
 Rather than seeking to control the future, we should read the signs of our times.  
 The purpose of local government is to enhance the well-being of the community.  
 A Heritage Precinct needs to be seen as slow theatre.  
 Strengthening our relationship with nature is the first “climate change” move.  
 Hokianga settlements are dominated by landscape.  
 Movement is a cultural act.  
 Water transport established the urban design patterns of the Hokianga.  
 Clear edges intensify relationships.  
 Protect edges and relationships.  
 Overall good design is the sum of incremental good decisions.

Every move needs to be a good one.