



The Politics of Heritage

An Election Year Analysis of Political
Parties' Opinions on Heritage in
Aotearoa New Zealand

2026

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"Parliament House," c.1920s, Wellington City Libraries, 50010-703

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Executive Summary

Heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand enters the 2026 election with new law and reduced funding. The Planning Act 2026 and the Natural Environment Act 2026 replace the long-standing Resource Management Act and change how heritage is identified and protected, while Crown funding has been significantly reduced for the Department of Conservation (DOC) and already stretched Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT).

This report, commissioned by ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, maps the heritage policies of the seven parties invited to take part ahead of the general election on 7 November 2026. It sets out where each party's published position supports heritage and where it falls short, compares those positions with the government's Amplify strategy, and puts the same nine-question survey to every party. Four answered. ACT and New Zealand First did not respond, and the Greens declined to participate.

The four parties that answered agreed that heritage matters. All supported national consistency and adaptive re-use, and none treated heritage chiefly as a tourism asset. They divided most sharply on regulatory relief, which National supports and Labour and Opportunity oppose.

Commitments were scarcer than support. No party committed to a specific future funding level for HNZPT or DOC, to restoring Heritage EQUIP, the now-discontinued central government fund for privately owned heritage buildings, or to a specific measure requiring owners to maintain heritage buildings.

These findings rest on four of the seven parties and on what each party said, not on what it would do in government. The report's five recommendations ask every party, and the heritage sector, for clarity: for parties to state their positions, and for the sector to make its case in forms that decision-makers and the public can use. None says what any party's position should be.

Common Abbreviations

DOC: Department of Conservation

Heritage EQUIP: Heritage Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme

HNZPT: Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga

HNZPT Act: Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014

HPA: Historic Places Aotearoa

ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites

MBIE: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

MCH: Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage

MDRS: Medium Density Residential Standards

MMP: mixed-member proportional (voting system)

MP: Member of Parliament

RMA: Resource Management Act 1991

RNZ: Radio New Zealand

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

In 1910, the government proposed handing over Auckland's Government House and its grounds to a new university.¹ What followed, the Otago Daily Times reported, was "by far the largest petition which has been brought before Parliament this session".² Too bulky to present in one piece, the petition bearing 16,000 signatures came in two rolls – each about 18 inches long – with the local member of Parliament, A. E. Glover, followed into the House of Representatives by two messengers each carrying one roll on their shoulders.³ Despite the House being told the building was in such a state of decay that it would soon have to be "pulled down or burned down", Government House was neither pulled down nor given up, and 59 years after the proposal to give it up for a university, it was transferred to one.⁴

More than a century later, in August 2024, Chris Bishop, the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, stated that "New Zealand's cities can't and shouldn't be museums. They have to change, grow, and adapt into thriving liveable cities."⁵ Heritage has been decided by politicians for as long as it has been protected, and the argument that cities must make way for the new is an old one. Historian Ben Schrader writes that the capitalist idea of "creative destruction", in which buildings are replaced with more profitable structures, and the Victorian belief in "material progress" hindered the retention of historic places.⁶ Profit and progress have long been the measures against which heritage has had to justify itself.

Legal protection for heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand is recent, and it began with objects and scenery, before reaching buildings. The Maori Antiquities Act 1901 restricted the removal of Māori antiquities from the colony.⁷ The Scenery Preservation Act 1903, which NZHistory calls "New Zealand's first law specifically designed to protect sites of scenic and historical interest", allowed land of "scenic or historic interest" to be reserved.⁸ That same year, a New Plymouth society called for the preservation of the former Te Hēnui hospital, soon bought and relocated by a private buyer, making it among the first Pākehā buildings specifically kept for historical

¹ "Government House: The Auckland Residence, Members Determined to Fight," *Auckland Star*, September 2, 1910, Volume XLI, Issue 208, Papers Past, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19100902.2.72>, 7.

² "Government House at Auckland: Protest Against Closing: A Monster Petition," *Otago Daily Times*, August 18, 1910, Issue 14915, Papers Past, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19100818.2.94>, 8.

³ "Government House at Auckland: Protest Against Closing: A Monster Petition."

⁴ "Government House at Auckland: Protest Against Closing: A Monster Petition" (reporting the Hon. R. McKenzie's remarks to the House); "Government House: The Auckland Residence, Members Determined to Fight" (identifying the Hon. R. McKenzie as Minister of Public Works); University of Auckland, "History of the House," 2026, <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about-us/community-services/old-government-house/history-of-old-government-house.html>.

⁵ Tom Hunt, "Heritage Battle Rumbles on Over Wellington Bungalow," *The Post*, August 20, 2024, <https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/350382805/heritage-battle-rumbles-over-wellington-bungalow>.

⁶ Ben Schrader, "Historic Places: Colonial Ideas and Practice," in *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, August 19, 2016, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/historic-places/page-1>.

⁷ Maori Antiquities Act 1901 (1901 No 21), s 4.

⁸ Scenery Preservation Act 1903 (1903 No 54), ss 3 and 5(2); Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, "Scenery Preservation 1903-1953," NZ History, December 20, 2012, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/scenery-preservation/the-scenery-preservation-act>.

reasons.⁹ The first building to receive specific legislative protection followed in 1928, when Parliament vested the Canterbury Provincial Council Chamber in a board and restricted alterations to it.¹⁰ The National Historic Places Trust was created in 1955, archaeological sites over 100 years old gained legislative protection in 1975 (although buildings did not), and Wellington's Residential E Zone, in 1976, was the first to protect a historic district.¹¹ The Resource Management Act 1991, with which this report's timeline begins, made the protection of historic heritage a matter of national importance.

Schrader also writes that for European settlers, historic places belonged to the "old world" of castles and cathedrals, and "few considered New Zealand old enough to have Pākehā equivalents".¹² That view has not entirely gone away. It does not help that in public perception, Aotearoa New Zealand's heritage is seldom considered independently of the heritage in older countries – measured against centuries-old cathedrals and castles rather than valued on its own terms. Aotearoa New Zealand is in a unique position. While much of the world's heritage is constructed with brick or stone, our houses have predominantly been built of wood.¹³ While some of the world ignores its indigenous heritage, we are beginning to actively celebrate it – living up to the bold vision set by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga of "Honouring the past; Inspiring the future".¹⁴ The relative youth of Aotearoa New Zealand is not an excuse to devalue our heritage.

Heritage and politics in Aotearoa New Zealand is at a critical turning point. The Planning Act 2026 and the Natural Environment Act 2026, which replace the Resource Management Act and received Royal assent on 30 September 2026, change how heritage is identified and protected, while Crown funding for the agencies that care for it has been cut.¹⁵ The general election on 7 November 2026 will determine who decides whether those changes continue. This report summarises the heritage policies of the seven parties invited to take part, puts the same survey to each of them, and assesses their positions against the government's *Amplify* strategy.

⁹ Ben Schrader, "Historic Places: Historical Awakenings, 1900s to 1920s," in *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, August 19, 2016, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/historic-places/page-2>.

¹⁰ Christchurch City Libraries Ngā Kete Wānanga o Ōtautahi, "The Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings," 2026, <https://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/canterbury-provincial-council-buildings>; Canterbury Provincial Buildings Vesting Act 1928 (1928 No 38), s 7 and sch 1; Gavin McLean and Manatū Taonga – Ministry for Culture and Heritage, "Canterbury Provincial Council Chambers," NZ History, August 8, 2025, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/canterbury-provincial-council-chambers>.

¹¹ Ben Schrader, "Historic Places: Re-inventing Historic Buildings, 1930s to 1970s," in *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, August 19, 2016, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/historic-places/page-3>.

¹² Ben Schrader, "Historic Places: Colonial Ideas and Practice."

¹³ Nigel Isaacs, "'Free-Standing, Wooden, Upright': The Evolving Cladding and Structure of the New Zealand House, 1858–1981," *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, no. NS28 (June 13, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.26686/jnzs.v0iNS28.5419>, 43.

¹⁴ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, "About Us," 2026, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/about>.

¹⁵ Nicola Willis, "Budget 2025: Summary of Initiatives," *New Zealand Treasury* (New Zealand Treasury, May 22, 2025), <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2025-05/b25-sum-initiatives.pdf>, 9; Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70); Natural Environment Act 2026 (2026 No 71); Department of Conservation, "Budget 2024 Overview," 2024, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/budget/budget-2024-overview/>; Department of Conservation, "Budget 2026 Overview," 2026, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/budget/budget-2026-overview/>.

Scope and Methods

Scope

This report maps political parties' policies on heritage and its management ahead of the general election on 7 November 2026. It reviews the heritage policy information available on party websites and in public statements, then puts the same set of questions to every party through its spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage or its leader, so that the report covers parties that have published no heritage policy as well as those that have. It then analyses how each party's policies and positions align with, or extend beyond, the actions in *Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030*, and summarises the findings.

Parties

This report includes only parties that polled at or above the 5 per cent threshold required to enter Parliament under the MMP system in most polls conducted in September 2026, or that held an electorate seat: National, ACT, New Zealand First, Labour, the Greens, Te Pāti Māori and Opportunity.¹⁶ Independent candidates and independent members of Parliament are not included, as the report is concerned with party policy. It also excludes a number of parties registered with the Electoral Commission Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri: the Alliance Party of Aotearoa New Zealand; Animal Justice Party Aotearoa New Zealand; Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party; Conservative Party NZ; Free Palestine Party; New Zealand Loyal Party; NZ Outdoors & Freedom Party; Te Tai Tokerau Party; Vision New Zealand; and the Women's Rights Party.

Methods

The party summaries are based on publicly available information collected before the parties responded to the survey. Survey responses are reported separately. All statements in this report that no evidence of a policy or action was found are as of 22 October, the date of the final check.

¹⁶ In polls conducted in September 2026, Opportunity polled 7 per cent (Anacta, 4-10 September), 6 per cent (The Post/Freshwater Strategy, 4-11 September), 6.5 per cent (Roy Morgan, 31 August-27 September), 6 per cent (1News-Verian, 23-27 September) and 5.5 per cent (RNZ-Reid Research, 24 September-1 October). The exception was Taxpayers' Union-Curia (1-3 September), at 4.5 per cent. See: Jonathan Milne and Marc Daalder, "Leaked Poll Prompts Hung Parlt Warning, With No Majority for Labour or Nats Bloc," *Newsroom*, September 15, 2026, <https://newsroom.co.nz/2026/09/15/leaked-poll-shows-labour-dropping-but-national-still-unable-to-form-govt/>; Andrea Vance, "Historic Major Party Slump Deepens as Labour Edges National in New Poll," *The Post*, September 15, 2026, <https://www.thepost.co.nz/politics/361079350/historic-major-party-slump-deepens-labour-edges-national-new-poll/>; Roy Morgan Research, "Roy Morgan New Zealand Poll: In September National-led Government Increases Lead Over Labour-led Parliamentary Opposition (52% vs. 41.5%)," *Roy Morgan New Zealand*, October 6, 2026, <https://www.roymorgan.com/findings/10351-nz-national-voting-intention-september-2026/>; 1News Reporters, "Poll: Greens Surge to Best Result Ever as National, Labour Slide Further," *1News*, September 28, 2026, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2026/09/28/poll-greens-surge-to-best-result-ever-as-national-labour-slide-further/>; "RNZ-Reid Research Poll: National Crashes, Greens Surge, Opportunity Kingmaker," *Radio New Zealand*, October 6, 2026, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics_election-2026/1749693/rnz-reid-research-poll-national-crashes-greens-surge-opportunity-kingmaker; Taxpayers' Union, "Taxpayers' Union-Curia Poll: September 2026," September 7, 2026, https://www.taxpayers.org.nz/sept26_pollnztughkuhn.

Each party was also asked to confirm its spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage, so that the survey reached the right person. Opportunity was given additional time in view of its stated resource constraints. The survey itself, and the contact made with each party, are described in the Survey and Party Responses sections.

Quotes from audio recordings have been lightly edited to remove filler words and false starts.

Key legislative and policy changes in the heritage landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand in recent years have resulted from coalition agreements between National, ACT and New Zealand First. Where a policy or legislative change was the result of the coalition, every effort has been made to allocate it to the party most responsible.

Order of the Report

The report begins with a timeline of heritage legislation, followed by the party summaries. These are grouped by each party's position in the 2023–2026 Parliament and ordered within each group by seats won at the 2023 election: the coalition government (National, ACT and New Zealand First); the opposition (Labour, the Greens and Te Pāti Māori); and Opportunity, which won no seats. The survey responses follow, first by **theme** and then by party, with the parties in **alphabetical order** in both. A cross-party analysis then compares the parties' positions, and the report closes with a conclusion and recommendations. These orders are for consistency and ease of reading only, and imply no ranking, preference or endorsement.

Independence and Disclosure

This report was commissioned by ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand. ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand documents, including its Charter, are cited as published standards and not as endorsement of any party's position. The author is an executive member of Historic Places Aotearoa and has previously interned in Auckland Council's Heritage Unit. Material from these organisations is cited only where it is published, attributed to its source and, where possible, corroborated independently.

Aotearoa New Zealand Heritage Legislation Timeline

1991 – 2026



Aotearoa New Zealand Heritage Legislation Timeline: 1991–2026

This section traces the legislation that has shaped heritage protection in Aotearoa New Zealand from 1991 – the year the Resource Management Act was passed – to the 2026 General Election. Each piece of legislation is attributed to the party or parties responsible for introducing or passing it.

Resource Management Act 1991

The Resource Management Bill was introduced under a **Labour** government in December 1989.¹⁷ Labour lost the 1990 election before the Bill had passed, with National, then in Opposition, agreeing to carry it over.¹⁸ The Act received Royal assent on 22 July 1991 under the new **National** government and came into force on 1 October 1991.¹⁹ Simon Upton, the then-Minister for the Environment who enacted it, later attributed its longevity in part to its “bipartisan origins”.²⁰ The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) has served as the principal legislative framework for heritage protection in Aotearoa New Zealand for decades, although its heritage protections have evolved significantly beyond those in the original Act. The 1991 Act did not define heritage or “historic heritage” at all, with the only heritage-related terms formally defined being “heritage order” and “heritage protection authority” – a mechanism and a body for designating and administering protection, rather than any definition of what qualifies as heritage.

While heritage is now considered a matter of national importance, the original Act placed it among Section 7’s “Other Matters”, requiring all persons only to “have particular regard to” the “recognition and protection of heritage values of sites, buildings, places or areas”, rather than to recognise and provide for it as Section 6 requires for matters of national importance.²¹

Resource Management Amendment Act 2003

The Resource Management Amendment Act 2003 received Royal assent on 19 May 2003 under a **Labour**-led government, following a review process begun under the previous **National**

¹⁷ Environment Foundation, “History,” Environment Guide, February 4, 2025, <https://www.environmentguide.org.nz/overview/>.

¹⁸ Simon Upton, “Rethinking the RMA: The Need for Enduring Reform,” Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, January 23, 2024, <https://pce.parliament.nz/our-work/news/rethinking-the-rma-the-need-for-enduring-reform/>.

¹⁹ Resource Management Act 1991, s 1(2) and date of assent.

²⁰ Simon Upton, “Rethinking the RMA: The Need for Enduring Reform.”

²¹ Resource Management Act 1991, ss 6–7 (as enacted).

government, and for the most part came into force on 1 August 2003.²² It introduced many of the specific heritage definitions and protections in the RMA, elevating heritage protection to a matter of national importance for the first time through Section 6(f) – “the protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development”.²³ Section 6(f) is frequently cited as a key heritage protection measure nationwide.²⁴

Central to heritage protection in the RMA today, the concept of “historic heritage” was first formally defined by the 2003 amendment, which set out that historic heritage:

(a) means those natural and physical resources that contribute to an understanding and appreciation of New Zealand’s history and cultures, deriving from any of the following qualities:

- (i) archaeological:
- (ii) architectural:
- (iii) cultural:
- (iv) historic:
- (v) scientific:
- (vi) technological; and

(b) includes–

- (i) historic sites, structures, places, and areas; and
- (ii) archaeological sites; and
- (iii) sites of significance to Māori, including wāhi tapu; and
- (iv) surroundings associated with the natural and physical resources

Defining heritage across six distinct qualities took it well beyond its traditional association with built, architectural heritage. It formally recognised archaeological, cultural, scientific, and technological significance as equally valid grounds for protection, broadening what could qualify as nationally important under the Act. The definition also explicitly incorporated sites of significance to Māori, including wāhi tapu, into the RMA’s historic heritage provisions for the first time – building on the Act’s existing but separate recognition of the Māori relationship with ancestral lands and taonga under Section 6(e).²⁵

The wording of the definition was narrowed before the Bill passed. The select committee that considered the first amendment Bill had added “spiritual”, “cultural landscapes” and “ancestral landscapes” to it, and the terms were removed before the third reading after **United Future**

²² Resource Management Amendment Act 2003, s 2 and date of assent; Marian Hobbs, “Second Reading, Resource Management Amendment Bill (No2),” Press release, May 7, 2003, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/second-reading-resource-management-amendment-bill-no2>.

²³ Resource Management Amendment Act 2003, s 3(7) (inserting “historic heritage” into the Resource Management Act 1991, s 2(1)).

²⁴ Kaipara District Council, “Section 32 Report Part 2: Historic Heritage,” *Kaipara District Council* (Kaipara District Council, April 28, 2025), <https://www.kaipara.govt.nz/uploads/District%20Plan%20Review/PDP%20Chapter%2032%20reports/Historic%20Heritage%20s32%20FINAL.pdf>, 7.

²⁵ Resource Management Act 1991, s 6(e).

raised concerns about them.²⁶ Then-Environment Minister Marian Hobbs said the words “created unnecessary uncertainty”, and that the issues they covered were “still covered by other more understood terms in the definition”.²⁷

Beyond the definition itself, the amendment’s passage through Parliament also saw a dispute over the powers of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust as a heritage protection authority. Speaking in October 2000, while the Resource Management Amendment Bill was still before the select committee, then-Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Judith Tizard stated that the proposed amendments would “contribute to improved opportunities for local communities to effectively manage the protection of their historic buildings” and that the Labour-led coalition government was “not supportive of any provisions in the Resource Management Amendment Bill... that would alter or reduce the role of the Historic Places Trust”.²⁸ Tizard specifically noted that “the government wishes to see the Trust’s role as a heritage protection authority under the Resource Management Act retained”, warning that “the removal of the Trust’s heritage protection authority status would diminish its role as the lead national agency for historic heritage and would impair its capacity to issue Heritage Orders”.

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014

The Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Bill was introduced in October 2011 by then-Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Chris Finlayson, under a **National**-led government.²⁹ The Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 (HNZPT Act) received Royal assent on 19 May 2014 and came into force the following day.³⁰ It established Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) as an autonomous Crown entity and replaced the Historic Places Act 1993 and the former New Zealand Historic Places Trust. The Act was designed to streamline the management of heritage sites and centralise an organisation that was previously a network of smaller, regional committees.

The Act’s purpose is to “promote the identification, protection, preservation, and conservation of the historical and cultural heritage of New Zealand” through a range of statutory, advisory, and educational functions.³¹ These include documenting historical and cultural heritage through assessments and inventories, maintaining the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero, administering archaeological authorities, and offering advice and advocacy.³² On funding,

²⁶ Marian Hobbs, “Third Reading, Resource Management Amendment Bill (No2),” Press release, May 14, 2003, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/third-reading-resource-management-amendment-bill-no2>.

²⁷ Marian Hobbs, “Government Supports United Future Amendment on RMA,” Press release, May 9, 2003, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-supports-united-future-amendment-rma>.

²⁸ Judith Tizard, “Heritage, Identity and Our Shared Future” (Christchurch, October 13, 2000), <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/heritage-identity-and-our-shared-future>.

²⁹ Chris Finlayson, “Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Bill Introduced,” Press release, October 7, 2011, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/heritage-new-zealand-pouhere-taonga-bill-introduced>.

³⁰ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, s 2 and date of assent.

³¹ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, s 3.

³² Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, s 13(1).

HNZPT's own policy commits it to advocating for local authority incentives such as rates relief, loans and grants, for financial support for owners from central government agencies, and for contestable funds for at-risk heritage.³³ It also notes that HNZPT administers the National Heritage Preservation Incentive Fund, which assists with conserving privately owned places on the List. HNZPT's website states there will be no 2026 funding round for that fund.³⁴

However, "promotion" constrains the Act's reach from the outset. HNZPT can identify, list, advocate and advise, yet this report found no provision in the Act allowing it to compel owners to maintain their buildings or to prevent councils from de-scheduling them. Its only powers to stop a demolition are an archaeological authority, which a building that is an archaeological site needs only for demolition of the whole building, and an Environment Court order under Section 92, which is available only to prevent an offence or breach of the Act itself.³⁵ The Act also directs HNZPT, and its Māori Heritage Council, to recognise owners' interests when advocating for heritage: they "must recognise the interests of an owner, as far as those interests are known, in a particular historic place, historic area, wāhi tūpuna, wāhi tapu, or wāhi tapu area".³⁶ Finlayson described the Act as one that "balances the important considerations of heritage protection, public safety and landowners' rights".³⁷ Advocacy therefore has to work around those interests, which leaves the protection of heritage largely contingent on whether individual owners value a place.

New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero

In considering whether to enter a place on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero, HNZPT must consider its "aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological or traditional significance or value".³⁸ While HNZPT has the power to "enter any historic place or historic area" on the List, the Act describes the List as informing the public, notifying owners and providing information under the RMA, and this report found no provision giving listing itself protection from alteration or demolition – despite Category 1 places having not just "historical or cultural heritage significance or value" but value that is "special or outstanding".³⁹ The Act also established a National Historic Landmarks list, which Finlayson said would "set national priorities for heritage conservation and recognise our most important historic landmarks and precincts".⁴⁰

³³ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, "He Tauākī Kaupapahere Whānui Statements of General Policy," *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*, October 2025, <https://hnzpt-rpod-assets.azureedge.net/hdinyiag/statement-of-general-policy-final.pdf>, 14.

³⁴ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, "National Heritage Preservation Incentive Fund," 2026, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/resources/funding/national-heritage-preservation-incentive-fund-open>.

³⁵ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, ss 42(1) and (3), 92(1).

³⁶ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, ss 13(2), 14(2), 27(2).

³⁷ Chris Finlayson, "Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Bill Passes," Press release, May 14, 2014, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/heritage-new-zealand-pouhere-taonga-bill-passes>.

³⁸ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, s 66(1).

³⁹ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, s 65(3), (4)(a)(i); Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, "FAQ," 2026, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/faqs>.

⁴⁰ Chris Finlayson, "Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Bill Passes."

Archaeological Authority

The archaeological authority is the main direct protection the Act provides. The Act prohibits modifying or destroying a site without an authority from HNZPT where the person knows, or “ought reasonably to have suspected”, that the site is an archaeological site – a place associated with human activity before 1900 that provides, or may provide, evidence of New Zealand’s history through archaeological investigation.⁴¹ Where no authority is held and HNZPT has reasonable cause to suspect that an activity will modify or destroy an archaeological site, it may enter and carry out an exploratory investigation, recovering the cost from the owner, occupier or person carrying out the activity if the site proves to be an archaeological site. HNZPT must then take reasonable steps to prevent the activity continuing until an authority has been granted.⁴² HNZPT can also declare places from later periods to be archaeological sites.⁴³ Where Māori heritage is concerned, Finlayson said when the Bill passed that the Act retained the Māori Heritage Council “in its current size and form”, with HNZPT working “in consultation with the council on all applications affecting sites of interest to Māori”.⁴⁴

The Act’s own design limits the authority’s force. Finlayson said the Bill would “simplify and speed up the archaeological consenting procedure, reducing the red-tape burden on people developing their property while ensuring appropriate protection for heritage”.⁴⁵ In 2018, University of Auckland academic Frances Hancock wrote that the Ihumātao decision suggested the Act “almost exclusively favours private property rights and developer interests over protecting the values and benefits of our oldest cultural heritage places”, and reported that HNZPT had granted almost 97 per cent of applications (877 of 907) for developments affecting Māori archaeological sites to March 2017.⁴⁶ These figures suggest that the authority process rarely prevents development affecting Māori archaeological sites.

Outside the archaeological authority, this leaves HNZPT largely promoting protection, not enforcing it, while local government controls the protection of sites, zoning, consent decisions, and funding under the RMA. Persons “directly affected” by an authority decision can appeal to the Environment Court.⁴⁷ However, limited resources constrain HNZPT’s ability to engage in a prolonged appeals process, contributing to a pattern of passive compliance. Budget 2025 then cut HNZPT’s operational funding by a further 12 per cent (see “[Heritage Funding Cuts](#)”).

⁴¹ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, s 42(1).

⁴² Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, ss 15, 57(1)–(3).

⁴³ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, ss 6, 43(1).

⁴⁴ Finlayson, “Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Bill Passes.”

⁴⁵ Finlayson, “Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Bill Passes.”

⁴⁶ Frances Hancock, “The Cost of Our Nation’s Cultural Heritage Too High?,” Newsroom, November 18, 2018, <https://newsroom.co.nz/2018/11/18/the-cost-of-our-nations-cultural-heritage-too-high/>.

⁴⁷ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, “Archaeology FAQs,” 2026, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/archaeology/archaeology-faqs>.

Wider Reform: 2016–2026

Heritage protection has been reshaped by further reforms, and responsibility for them is spread across governments: **National**, **Labour** and the coalition of **National**, **ACT** and **NZ First** have each passed laws that affect it. This report found that, across these reforms, heritage has more often been treated as a matter to be balanced against development, infrastructure and cost than as a protection in its own right. The main exceptions were the Natural and Built Environment Act, which barred harm to places of national importance but was repealed four months after Royal assent, and the qualifying matters that let councils limit intensification for historic heritage.

Earthquake Prone Buildings Legislation

National has passed two Acts on earthquake-prone buildings, in 2016 and 2026. The Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016 let owners of Category 1 listed heritage buildings and National Historic Landmarks apply for up to 10 more years to strengthen them.⁴⁸ In 2024, while the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) reviewed the system, the National-led government extended remediation deadlines, and Building and Construction Minister Chris Penk said it was important to give owners “temporary relief from legal compliance and the threat of enforcement”.⁴⁹ The review’s June 2025 report found that “heritage rules pose additional barriers to remediation”.⁵⁰ The Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026 replaces the 10-year heritage provision with an extension of up to 15 years that any owner can ask for, with heritage status one of six matters the council must consider.⁵¹ The government estimates the changes will save more than \$8.2 billion in remediation and demolition costs.⁵²

Urban Intensification

A **Labour**-led government issued the National Policy Statement on Urban Development in July 2020, which required councils to enable intensification in the largest urban areas but allowed them to limit it for a ‘qualifying matter’, including historic heritage and areas subject to a heritage order.⁵³ In 2021, in what RNZ called “a rare show of bipartisanship”, **Labour** and **National**

⁴⁸ Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016, s 24 (inserting s 133AO(1) and (4) into the Building Act 2004).

⁴⁹ Chris Penk, “More Certainty Around Earthquake-prone Buildings,” Press release, August 8, 2024, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/more-certainty-around-earthquake-prone-buildings>.

⁵⁰ MBIE, “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” 26, 1.

⁵¹ Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026, s 9 (replacing subpart 6A of Part 2 of the Building Act 2004); compare Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016, s 24 (inserting s 133AO); Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026, s 9 (inserting ss 133AY(4), (8) and 133AZ into the Building Act 2004).

⁵² Chris Penk, “Earthquake-prone Building System Refocused,” Press release, September 29, 2025, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/earthquake-prone-building-system-refocused%C2%A0>; Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026 (2026 No 68), s 9, inserting Building Act 2004, ss 133AB(3), 133AB(6)(b) and 133AD(8).

⁵³ National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020, cls 1.2, 3.32(1)(a), (e) and 3.33, pol 4 (approved July 20, 2020, in force August 20, 2020).

worked together on the Medium Density Residential Standards, which the Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2021 required councils in Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch to incorporate.⁵⁴ The standards allowed up to three homes of up to 11 metres on most residential sites without resource consent.⁵⁵ Then-Environment Minister David Parker said exemptions “for certain circumstances such as natural hazards or where a site has heritage value will be maintained”.⁵⁶ Historic heritage and heritage orders qualified automatically, whereas special character areas, the planning overlays that protect older neighbourhoods valued for their buildings as a group, had to meet a site-specific test.⁵⁷

Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024

The Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 was passed by the **National**-led coalition government, with **ACT** and **NZ First**, and received Royal assent on 23 December 2024.⁵⁸ Featuring in the coalition’s plan for its first 100 days, it was designed as a “one-stop shop” for expediting infrastructure and development projects that would deliver benefits on both a regional and national level.⁵⁹ For heritage, the Act changes who decides an archaeological authority. An expert panel decides the application, and Heritage New Zealand provides a report that recommends either that the authority be granted, with conditions, or that it be declined.⁶⁰ An authority the panel grants has the same force and effect as one granted under section 48 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014.⁶¹ In weighing an application, the panel must give the greatest weight to the purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Act, above the matters it must also consider under the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act.⁶²

Resource Management Reform: 2023 – 2026

The most significant legislative change to impact heritage is the reform of the long-standing Resource Management Act 1991. The Natural and Built Environment Bill and the Spatial

⁵⁴ Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2021 (2021 No 59), date of assent December 20, 2021.

⁵⁵ Ministry for the Environment, “Housing Intensification Enabled by RMA Amendment Act,” May 31, 2022, <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/urban-and-infrastructure/housing-intensification-enabled-by-rma-amendment-act/>.

⁵⁶ Radio New Zealand, “Housing Density to Increase Across New Zealand Under Rare Bipartisan Solution,” October 19, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/453824/housing-density-to-increase-across-new-zealand-under-rare-bipartisan-solution>.

⁵⁷ Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2021, s 9 (inserting ss 771 and 77L); Daniel Kinnoch, “Understanding MDRS Qualifying Matters: A Property Owner’s Guide to Development Rights,” CoLab Planning, November 22, 2024, <https://www.colabplanning.co.nz/blog/mdrs-qualifying-matters-guide-auckland>.

⁵⁸ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (2024 No 56), date of assent December 23, 2024.

⁵⁹ Ministry for the Environment, “Fast-track Approvals Act,” Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport, November 13, 2025, <https://environment.govt.nz/acts-and-regulations/acts/fast-track-approvals/>; Chris Bishop and Shane Jones, “One-stop Shop Fast-track Bill Passes Third Reading,” Press release, December 17, 2024, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/one-stop-shop-fast-track-bill-passes-third-reading>.

⁶⁰ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, sch 8 cl 3.

⁶¹ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, sch 8 cl 9.

⁶² Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, sch 8 cl 4(1).

Planning Bill were introduced on 15 November 2022 by a **Labour** government to replace the Act. Then-Environment Minister David Parker said there was “cross-party support for the need to repeal and replace the RMA”.⁶³ Both Acts received Royal assent on 23 August 2023.⁶⁴ The Natural and Built Environment Act replaced ‘historic heritage’ with a broader ‘cultural heritage’ that included cultural landscapes, and made Category 1 places, National Historic Landmarks and certain wāhi tapu ‘places of national importance’ that plans had to identify.⁶⁵ Section 420 barred activities with more than a minimal adverse effect on the attributes of an identified place of national importance, unless a framework rule or another listed exception allowed them.⁶⁶ The Act also barred heritage protection authorities from notifying a heritage protection order over private land without the landowner’s agreement, unless they owned the land themselves.⁶⁷ The incoming coalition of **National**, **ACT** and **NZ First** repealed both Acts on 23 December 2023, temporarily reinstating the RMA.⁶⁸

The coalition then amended the RMA itself. The Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 received Royal assent on 20 August 2025.⁶⁹ It allows a council to apply to use the streamlined planning process for a proposed planning instrument that will remove, or enable the removal of, heritage protection from buildings or structures listed in a heritage list in a plan, other than protection provided by a heritage order.⁷⁰ Where the Minister gives that direction, the Minister’s statement of expectations must include criteria on heritage significance, physical condition including seismic risk, current or proposed use and its economic viability, and whether the owner agrees to the removal.⁷¹ The Act also dealt with one building by name: Wellington City’s district plan must not include a rule or heritage order protecting the Gordon Wilson Flats, and their demolition or removal is a permitted activity.⁷²

In December 2025, **National**’s Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, Chris Bishop, revealed the coalition’s replacement for the RMA. The Government said heritage protection under the new system would focus on “places of genuine heritage value while giving families the flexibility to

⁶³ David Parker, “Cheaper, Faster, Better Resource Management Law,” Press release, November 15, 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/cheaper-faster-better-resource-management-law>.

⁶⁴ Natural and Built Environment Act 2023 (2023 No 46); Spatial Planning Act 2023 (2023 No 47), dates of assent August 23, 2023.

⁶⁵ Natural and Built Environment Act 2023, s 11 (definition of “cultural heritage”); Natural and Built Environment Act 2023, s 11 (definition of “specified cultural heritage”), ss 415 (definition of “place of national importance”) and 417.

⁶⁶ Natural and Built Environment Act 2023, s 420(1)–(2).

⁶⁷ Natural and Built Environment Act 2023, s 562(3).

⁶⁸ Resource Management (Natural and Built Environment and Spatial Planning Repeal and Interim Fast-track Consenting) Act 2023 (2023 No 68), s 5.

⁶⁹ Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 (2025 No 41), date of assent August 20, 2025.

⁷⁰ Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025, s 22 (inserting s 80C(2)(ea) and (5) into the Resource Management Act 1991).

⁷¹ Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025, s 87 (inserting sch 1 cl 78(3B) into the Resource Management Act 1991).

⁷² Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025, s 27 (inserting s 85AAA into the Resource Management Act 1991).

adapt their homes for modern life”.⁷³ RNZ’s analysis found the new laws “bear significant resemblance to the one the government repealed in 2023”, while Bishop acknowledged “some similarities, to be fair” but pointed to differences including “the regulatory relief components”.⁷⁴ The Planning Act 2026 and the Natural Environment Act 2026 received Royal assent on 30 September 2026, the *day before* Parliament was dissolved for the 7 November general election, and the RMA is to be repealed on a date set by Order in Council.⁷⁵ The Planning Act lists significant historic heritage among the values that plans should seek to protect from inappropriate development, as one of nine goals with no order of importance.⁷⁶ It also requires a council to include a relief framework in its plan if a rule on significant historic heritage in an identified area, or on another specified topic, is reasonably likely to have a significant adverse impact on the reasonable use of land. Relief can include monetary payment, reduced rates or fees, additional development rights, land swaps or targeted grants.⁷⁷ RNZ reported that, by comparison, **Labour’s** approach did not dramatically change the RMA’s limiting of compensation to extreme cases where land is incapable of reasonable use.⁷⁸

The Planning Act also will end the heritage order system. Its amendments to the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 repeal the definitions of heritage order and heritage protection authority, and Heritage New Zealand’s function of acting as a heritage protection authority. Existing authority approvals cease to apply on the transition date, and councils need only have regard to existing heritage orders when preparing their first land use plan.⁷⁹

⁷³ 1News Reporters, “Govt Reveals Big Consenting Reforms, ‘Once-in-a-Generation Shift,’” *1News*, December 9, 2025, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/12/09/govt-reveals-big-consenting-reforms-once-in-a-generation-shift/>.

⁷⁴ Russell Palmer, “Duelling RMA Reforms: How Different Is the Coalition’s Solution From Labour’s?,” *Radio New Zealand*, December 10, 2025, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/581427/duelling-rma-reforms-how-different-is-the-coalition-s-solution-from-labour-s>.

⁷⁵ New Zealand Parliament, “Election 2026 Timeline,” March 17, 2026, <https://www3.parliament.nz/en/visit-and-learn/parliament-in-election-year/election-2026-timeline>; Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70); Natural Environment Act 2026 (2026 No 71), dates of assent September 30, 2026; Planning Act 2026, ss 2(7) and 344.

⁷⁶ Planning Act 2026, s 13(1)(g)(iii) and (3).

⁷⁷ Planning Act 2026, s 3 (definition of “specified topic”), sch 3 cls 65(1) and 69.

⁷⁸ Palmer, “Duelling RMA reforms: How different is the coalition’s solution from Labour’s?”

⁷⁹ Planning Act 2026, sch 1 cl 71; sch 12 (amending the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, ss 6, 13(1)(i) and 21(j)).

Party Summaries

Parties are presented in the same order throughout these summaries: first the coalition government elected in 2023 (National, ACT and New Zealand First), then the opposition (Labour, the Greens and Te Pāti Māori), and finally Opportunity, which holds no seats in the 2023–2026 Parliament but meets the polling criterion set out in Scope and Methods. This order is for consistency only and implies no ranking, preference or endorsement. Later sections list the parties in [alphabetical order](#), as explained there.

National Party

HERITAGE SPOKESPERSON: Hon. Paul Goldsmith

National describes its foundational values as “ambition and success”, with “lower taxes” and “equal opportunity for all” at its core – also presenting itself as “doing the hard work required to deliver real solutions”, guided by values that include personal responsibility and limited government.⁸⁰ As the largest party in the coalition government, National has had the greatest influence over heritage policy and legislation in recent years, and has passed several pieces of legislation affecting heritage across its history. The party in New Zealand politics most known for its strong focus on the economy, National’s recent heritage efforts include reviewing heritage protections and ensuring that current heritage provisions do not have a negative impact on “economic growth, development capacity, or employment”.⁸¹

Where National Supports Heritage

National has supported heritage through legislation, funding for earthquake strengthening and, more recently, investment in heritage tourism and a creative and cultural strategy. In July 2025, Conservation Minister Tama Potaka announced \$4.5 million over three years from the International Visitor Levy to expand Tohu Whenua to Manawatū-Whanganui and Murihiku Southland. The programme, a partnership between HNZPT and DOC, began in 2016 and now covers 39 sites. Potaka said tourism to the 15,000 heritage places DOC is responsible for was estimated to be worth around \$1.3 billion a year.⁸²

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014

The Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) Act replaced the Historic Places Act 1993. It was passed in 2014 by a National-led government, under then-Minister for Arts, Culture and

⁸⁰ National Party, “Our Values,” 2026, <https://www.national.org.nz/values>.

⁸¹ Chris Bishop, “Consultation Opens on Wellington Heritage Provisions,” Press release, August 3, 2026, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/consultation-opens-wellington-heritage-provisions>.

⁸² Tama Potaka, “Heritage Tourism Boost to Support Local Economies,” Press release, July 31, 2025, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/heritage-tourism-boost-support-local-economies>.

Heritage Chris Finlayson. The Act renamed the Historic Places Trust, retained the Māori Heritage Council, and provided for a National Historic Landmarks list and an emergency archaeological authority for use after natural disasters such as earthquakes.⁸³ Finlayson said it “balances the important considerations of heritage protection, public safety and landowners’ rights”.

Heritage EQUIP

On 12 August 2016, at an event in Feilding, then-Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Maggie Barry announced the Heritage Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme (Heritage EQUIP), which dedicated \$12 million over four years towards the cost of strengthening privately owned heritage buildings.⁸⁴ The contestable fund was open to privately owned Category 1 Heritage New Zealand listed buildings nationwide and Category 2 listed buildings in areas of high to medium seismic risk, with applicants expected to match the funding from local government, philanthropic and community sources, and their own funds. Applications were open by 16 December 2016 and closed on 10 February 2017.⁸⁵ Barry said: “We don’t want to see valued buildings empty and deteriorating, or even demolished, because it isn’t economical to strengthen them.”⁸⁶

In August 2017, Barry announced \$1.5 million from Heritage EQUIP towards the seismic strengthening of Auckland’s St James Theatre, so that it could keep operating. She described the 1928 building as having “significant cultural and heritage value”.⁸⁷

A 2025 government review later pointed to the fund’s results in Whanganui. Buildings in the Drews Avenue precinct that had been “vacant, derelict and unproductive for up to a decade” received \$178,451.25 from Heritage EQUIP, which the review described as now discontinued, and total restoration costs exceeded \$3 million.⁸⁸ The review said the tax intake from the restored buildings was estimated to be four times higher than the grant, and that Heritage EQUIP had been “attributed as an essential source of support and advice to overcome the numerous unexpected challenges and difficulties arising in the remediation process”.⁸⁹

⁸³ Chris Finlayson, “Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Bill Passes.”

⁸⁴ Sam Kilmister, “Government Announces \$12 Million to Support Quake-prone Heritage Buildings,” *Stuff*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/82951187/government-announces-12-million-to-support-quakeprone-heritage-buildings>; Maggie Barry, “\$12 Million to Support Quake-prone Heritage,” Press release, August 13, 2016, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/12-million-support-quake-prone-heritage>.

⁸⁵ Maggie Barry, “Heritage EQUIP Fund Open for Applications,” Press release, December 16, 2016, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/heritage-equip-fund-open-applications>.

⁸⁶ Barry, “\$12 Million to Support Quake-prone Heritage.”

⁸⁷ Maggie Barry, “Government Funding for Auckland’s St James Theatre,” Press release, August 12, 2017, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-funding-aucklands-st-james-theatre>.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” *Beehive: Official Website of the New Zealand Government* (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, June 2025), <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2025-09/Report%20of%20Seismic%20Risk%20Management%20Review.pdf>, 26–27.

⁸⁹ MBIE, “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” 27.

Earthquake Prone Buildings Legislation

The Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016, passed by a National-led government, received Royal assent on 13 May 2016.⁹⁰ It set deadlines for owners to strengthen buildings of 15, 25 or 35 years, depending on local seismic risk. It also allowed owners of Category 1 listed heritage buildings, and buildings on the National Historic Landmarks List, to apply for up to 10 more years.⁹¹

In April 2024, Cabinet directed the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to review the system.⁹² While the review was under way, the National-led government extended the remediation deadline by four years for buildings whose deadlines had not lapsed before 2 April 2024, and allowed a further two years to be added. While the extension was not specific to heritage buildings, Building and Construction Minister Chris Penk said it was important to provide owners with “temporary relief from legal compliance and the threat of enforcement”.⁹³

The review’s June 2025 report found about 800 earthquake-prone heritage buildings scheduled on district plans and said that “heritage rules pose additional barriers to remediation”.⁹⁴ It added that heritage rules “make demolition, change of use or substantial alteration more complicated and expensive”, and that some heritage buildings were suffering from “demolition by neglect”.⁹⁵

In September 2025, Penk announced a refocused earthquake-prone building system, saying the cost of strengthening meant buildings were “often left empty and become derelict”.⁹⁶ Parliament passed the reforms unanimously, and the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026 received Royal assent on 25 September 2026, coming into force on 1 July 2027.⁹⁷ From then, requirements apply only to unreinforced masonry buildings and tall buildings of heavy materials designed before 1976, in medium and high seismic zones. One and two-storey unreinforced masonry buildings need only their façades made safe in urban centres, and have no required work outside them, though they stay on the earthquake-prone building register. The government estimates the changes will save more than \$8.2 billion in remediation and demolition costs.⁹⁸ The Act removes the 2016 provision that let owners of Category 1 listed heritage buildings and National Historic Landmarks apply for up to 10 more years. In its place, any owner can ask the council for up to 15 years in total, and heritage status is one of six matters

⁹⁰ Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016 (2016 No 22).

⁹¹ Building Act 2004, s 133AO(1)(b) and (4) (as in force until 30 June 2027).

⁹² MBIE, “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” 6.

⁹³ Chris Penk, “More Certainty Around Earthquake-prone Buildings,” Press release, August 8, 2024, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/more-certainty-around-earthquake-prone-buildings>.

⁹⁴ MBIE, “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” 26, 1.

⁹⁵ MBIE, “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” 18, 26.

⁹⁶ Penk, “Earthquake-prone Building System Refocused.”

⁹⁷ Stuff, “Thousands of Buildings No Longer Deemed Earthquake-prone After New Law Passes Unanimously,” *Stuff*, September 19, 2026, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/politics/361035576/thousands-buildings-no-longer-deemed-earthquake-prone-after-new-law-passes-unanimously>; Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026 (2026 No 68), s 2(1).

⁹⁸ Penk, “Earthquake-prone Building System Refocused”; Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026 (2026 No 68), s 9, inserting Building Act 2004, ss 133AB(3), 133AB(6)(b) and 133AD(8).

the council must consider.⁹⁹

Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030

In August 2025, Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Paul Goldsmith announced that the Government had published *Amplify*, the creative and cultural strategy for 2025 to 2030.¹⁰⁰ It describes heritage places as playing “an important role in preserving New Zealand’s history and cultural identity”, and says “it is important that heritage places are appropriately maintained”.¹⁰¹ *Amplify* also sets a combined target of a 10 per cent increase in New Zealanders attending arts events, heritage and cultural sites or activities, or New Zealand screen content by 2030.¹⁰² It cites HNZPT’s Saving the Town toolkit as showing that the conservation and adaptive reuse of heritage buildings “can serve as a key driver for social and economic regeneration of our towns and cities”.¹⁰³ For owners, its supporting activity is exploring “regulatory solutions to address the cost burden of seismic risk in heritage buildings” as part of a review led by MBIE.¹⁰⁴

The strategy acknowledges that “there is a lack of suitably qualified staff in practices related to heritage conservation”, which “may add complexity and cost to the conservation and restoration of New Zealand’s heritage places”, and says the Government will explore options for succession planning for specialist roles “where expertise is at risk of being lost”, such as in cultural conservation.¹⁰⁵ It also says the Ministry for Culture and Heritage “will continue to support work to repatriate Māori and Moriori cultural heritage”, which the strategy describes as including taonga and ancestral remains.¹⁰⁶

Where National Falls Short

National’s heritage support is strongest where it helps owners or tourism and weakest where protection competes with development. Under the National-led government, Chris Bishop legislated to remove heritage protection from the Gordon Wilson Flats on grounds of economic cost, and announced the removal or modification of heritage provisions at sites in Wellington on housing, economic growth and employment grounds. Wider Budget savings have also cut funding for the agencies that look after heritage places. In practice, this makes protection

⁹⁹ Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2026 (2026 No 68), s 9, replacing subpart 6A of Part 2 of the Building Act 2004 and inserting ss 133AY and 133AZ(e). For the former provision, see Building Act 2004, s 133AO(1)(b) and (4) (as in force until 30 June 2027).

¹⁰⁰ Paul Goldsmith, “Government’s Creative Sector Strategy Goes Live,” Press release, August 28, 2025, <https://www.national.org.nz/news/20250828-hon-paul-goldsmith-governments-creative-sector-strategy-goes-live>.

¹⁰¹ Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH), “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030,” *Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage* (Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, August 28, 2025), <https://www.mch.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2025-09/Amplify-A-Creative-and-Cultural-Strategy-for-New-Zealand-2025-2030.pdf>, 32.

¹⁰² MCH, “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030,” 9.

¹⁰³ MCH, “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030,” 32.

¹⁰⁴ MCH, “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030,” 42; MBIE, “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review.”

¹⁰⁵ MCH, “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030,” 26.

¹⁰⁶ MCH, “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030,” 18.

something that has to justify itself against development, with the burden falling on heritage and not on the change proposed.

Gordon Wilson Flats

In August 2024, the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, Chris Bishop, said he was “actively looking at the vexed issue of heritage listings and what people are allowed to do with heritage buildings”, and that New Zealand’s cities “can’t and shouldn’t be museums”.¹⁰⁷ At that point he had rejected Wellington City Council’s attempt to remove the flats’ heritage listing, citing insufficient evidence from the council.¹⁰⁸

However, in June 2025, Minister Bishop announced an amendment to remove heritage protection from the Gordon Wilson Flats in Wellington, making their demolition a permitted activity under the RMA 1991.¹⁰⁹ The flats, owned by Victoria University of Wellington, had been vacant since 2012, and both the university and Wellington City Council wanted them demolished. Bishop described the existing system as “a failed planning system that prioritises preservation of heritage, no matter the economic cost”.¹¹⁰ The release said Victoria University “may choose to demolish” the flats once the Bill was enacted, and would still need a demolition consent under the Building Act 2004 to manage hazardous materials, silt runoff, noise and dust. The change, which Bishop said would not apply to other heritage buildings, passed into law on 20 August 2025 as Section 85AAA of the RMA.¹¹¹ The university announced its demolition plans in December 2025, with the work expected to take about 12 months. With the protection gone, HNZPT Central Region director Dr. Jamie Jacobs said there was “no viable lever to compel Victoria University to reinvent this iconic building”.¹¹²

Wellington Heritage Provisions

The Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 made it faster and easier for councils to remove heritage buildings from district plans, while also adding Section 360I to the RMA, which enables the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform to modify or remove district plan provisions that negatively affect economic growth, development capacity or employment.¹¹³

In May 2026, Wellington City Council asked Bishop to use that power, and the investigation report he released on 3 August found that “some heritage provisions are having negative

¹⁰⁷ Hunt, “Heritage Battle Rumbles on Over Wellington Bungalow.”

¹⁰⁸ Hunt, “Heritage Battle Rumbles on Over Wellington Bungalow.”

¹⁰⁹ Chris Bishop, “Gordon Wilson Flats’ Heritage Protection Goneburger,” Press release, June 17, 2025, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/gordon-wilson-flats%E2%80%99-heritage-protection-goneburger>.

¹¹⁰ Bishop, “Gordon Wilson Flats’ Heritage Protection Goneburger.”

¹¹¹ Resource Management Act 1991, s 85AAA, inserted by Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 (2025 No 41), s 27.

¹¹² Lyric Waiwiri-Smith, “Why Wellington’s Gordon Wilson Flats Won’t Go Down Until 2027,” *The Spinoff*, January 28, 2026, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/28-01-2026/why-wellingtons-gordon-wilson-flats-wont-go-down-until-2027>.

¹¹³ Resource Management Act 1991, s 360I, inserted by Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 (2025 No 41), s 86; Bishop, “Consultation Opens on Wellington Heritage Provisions.”

impacts on economic growth and employment”.¹¹⁴ The report covered the Karori Tunnel, the Kelburn Viaduct, the former General Headquarters (GHQ) building, a bulk oil storage tank in Miramar and height limits in the Courtenay Place Heritage Area. Around 230 owners, occupiers and agencies, including HNZPT, were invited to respond first, before public comment opened for 10 days from 5 August.

On 1 October, after 162 submissions, Bishop announced that the heritage listings for the tunnel, viaduct and oil tank would be removed and the Courtenay Place height limits for non-heritage buildings modified, with Cabinet deciding that the heritage listing for the GHQ building would stay.¹¹⁵ He also acknowledged “the strength of public interest in Wellington’s heritage” but said “Wellington needs planning rules that support investment, more housing and productive use of land and infrastructure”. The release estimated that the Courtenay Place changes could enable about 550 additional apartments and \$200 million of construction supporting around 1,100 jobs, and that removing the oil tank’s listing would allow commercial activity, including film studio facilities, for around 300 jobs. It also said the combined annual maintenance cost of the Karori Tunnel and Kelburn Viaduct, which had risen from about \$350,000 to around \$2.5 million, was partly tied to heritage listing requirements.¹¹⁶

Carrington Hospital's Building One

Asked at the bFM Votes candidates’ debate on 12 October how action could be ensured on Building One at the former Carrington Hospital, National’s Melissa Lee placed responsibility for Building One with those now responsible under the transfer of ownership, explaining that “part of that contract actually includes management of that land, and buildings...health and safety, and also looking after day to day operations of that site”.¹¹⁷ She said she hoped “the people who have responsibility can actually...decide what they’re going to do...fix it...or actually...build something that the community can actually feel happy about”, and that “there needs to be consultation on that as well”.¹¹⁸ Lee said “all of us...feel disappointed”, but her answer did not call for action by National or the Government. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, now the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT), was responsible for the building until October 2025, when it handed ownership responsibilities to the developer.¹¹⁹ Lee was speaking as National’s candidate at the debate, so these are a candidate’s remarks, not party policy. Her answer is the only National position on the building this report found.

¹¹⁴ Bishop, “Consultation Opens on Wellington Heritage Provisions.”

¹¹⁵ Chris Bishop, “Planning Changes to Support Wellington’s Growth,” Press release, October 1, 2026, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/planning-changes-support-wellingtons-growth>.

¹¹⁶ Bishop, “Planning Changes to Support Wellington’s Growth.”

¹¹⁷ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” October 12, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwN1B8Tnygo>, 40:36.

¹¹⁸ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 41:02; Sam Smith, “Mt Albert Candidates Agree Derelict State of Former Psychiatric Hospital Must Be Addressed,” *Stuff*, October 13, 2026, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/361045690/mt-albert-candidates-agree-derelict-state-former-psychiatric-hospital-must-be-addressed>.

¹¹⁹ Sam Smith, “Mt Albert Candidates Agree Derelict State of Former Psychiatric Hospital Must Be Addressed.”

Budget Cuts to Heritage Funding

In Budget 2025, the National-led government cut HNZPT's operating funding by \$2 million a year from 2026/27, reducing its baseline from \$17.151 million to \$15.151 million – a fall of about 12 per cent.¹²⁰

The same Budget took a further \$2 million a year from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage from 2025/26, or \$8 million over four years.¹²¹ In September 2025 it was reported that the Ministry's restructure would disestablish the two historian positions at the education centre at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park in December that year, and cut the carillonist's role after Anzac Day 2026.¹²² The Ministry's secretary, Leauanae Laulu Mac Leauanae, was also reported to have written in a July 2025 decision document that "Activation and non-commemoration-related engagement activity at Pukeahu will no longer be delivered by the ministry". The Ministry also noted that "Our education programme will continue to be delivered to the end of this school year, then we will be looking at our options".¹²³

When the Queen Elizabeth II Education Centre opened in August 2016, it was named in honour of the Queen as a 90th birthday gift from New Zealand. The Pukeahu education programme had already hosted more than 12,000 students before the centre opened, with then-Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Maggie Barry stating that "Its importance to the legacy of Pukeahu for our young people makes it a particularly fitting gift for Her Majesty".¹²⁴

Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Paul Goldsmith's office said the cuts were an "operational" matter for the Ministry.¹²⁵ Asked whether he would intervene over the carillon or education centre, Goldsmith said in a statement that the government's priority in the arts was to maintain grants available to the sector, and that "We're operating in a tight fiscal environment and tough decisions had to be made".¹²⁶

Budget 2025 also ended DOC's co-funding contribution to the Tohu Whenua Heritage Visitor Programme, worth \$130,000 a year.¹²⁷ The Budget document said that future decisions on the programme's scope and scale "will be determined by remaining contributors". The programme is a partnership between HNZPT and DOC, and in July 2025 the government announced \$4.5

¹²⁰ Willis, "Budget 2025: Summary of Initiatives," 9.

¹²¹ Willis, "Budget 2025: Summary of Initiatives," 9.

¹²² Phil Pennington, "Children's War History Lessons at National Memorial to End as Historians Lose Jobs," *Radio New Zealand*, September 4, 2025, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/572010/children-s-war-history-lessons-at-national-memorial-to-end-as-historians-lose-jobs>.

¹²³ Pennington, "Children's War History Lessons at National Memorial to End as Historians Lose Jobs."

¹²⁴ Maggie Barry, "Queen Elizabeth II Pukeahu Education Centre Opens," Press release, August 18, 2016, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/queen-elizabeth-ii-pukeahu-education-centre-opens>.

¹²⁵ Pennington, "Children's War History Lessons at National Memorial to End as Historians Lose Jobs."

¹²⁶ Pennington, "Children's War History Lessons at National Memorial to End as Historians Lose Jobs"; Julia Gabel, "Ministry of Culture and Heritage Mulling Restructure After \$2m Annual Funding Cut," *NZ Herald*, June 12, 2025, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/ministry-of-culture-and-heritage-mulling-restructure-after-2m-annual-funding-cut/UFMPGLURMVGWZO2COSCWWLSAPM/>.

¹²⁷ Willis, "Budget 2025: Summary of Initiatives," 17.

million over three years from the International Visitor Levy to extend it to more regions.¹²⁸ The expansion is paid for from the levy, so the programme is growing at the same time as the Department's own contribution has ended.

Budget 2026 then introduced further baseline savings across the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and 13 entities in Vote Arts, Culture and Heritage, including HNZPT, worth \$6.476 million in 2026/27 and \$27.077 million over five years.¹²⁹ The Budget document says the specific areas of savings "will be determined by entity boards or leadership teams", so HNZPT's share is not stated.

Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030

While supporting heritage and recognising the pressures it faces, the *Amplify* strategy commits little to relieving them. It places its action on heritage places under its pillar on "reducing barriers to growth", and says "Government recognises the need for heritage requirements to be simple and facilitate urban development so our country can plan for the future", and that owners "often struggle with conservation costs and requirements that are not nationally consistent".¹³⁰ It also says it "does not come with new central government funding", and its actions on heritage places and heritage skills are to explore regulatory solutions and options.¹³¹

The strategy describes its final phase, 2029 to 2030, as the "exploration of actions that require additional funding and/or significant collaboration with stakeholders".¹³² The Implementation Plan places the activity on succession planning for specialist roles in that phase, with cultural conservation as its example.¹³³ This report found HNZPT mentioned only once in the strategy, as the author of a toolkit, and DOC not at all – even though it manages the largest heritage portfolio in the country.¹³⁴

ACT Party

HERITAGE SPOKESPERSON: Todd Stephenson

The ACT Party (ACT) positions itself as the party of individual freedom and personal responsibility, with its constitution holding that individuals "are the owners of their own lives and must be free to act according to their own judgments so long as they accept and respect the like

¹²⁸ Potaka, "Heritage Tourism Boost to Support Local Economies."

¹²⁹ Nicola Willis, "Budget 2026: Summary of Initiatives," *New Zealand Treasury* (New Zealand Treasury, May 28, 2026), <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2026-05/b26-sum-initiatives.pdf>, 7.

¹³⁰ MCH, "Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030," 8, 32.

¹³¹ MCH, "Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030," 13, 42.

¹³² MCH, "Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025-2030," 6.

¹³³ Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH), "Amplify: Implementation Plan," *Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage* (Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, August 28, 2025), https://www.mch.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2026-03/Amplify_2025-2030_Implementation-Plan_Mar-2026-update.pdf. The file name indicates a March 2026 update, but the document does not state its version date.

¹³⁴ Department of Conservation, "Our Heritage," 2026, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/heritage/>.

freedom of others.”¹³⁵ This principle of individual ownership and responsibility underpins ACT’s approach to heritage, framed primarily as a matter of private property rights and red tape, rather than any collective value a building, site or wider area may hold. Therefore, ACT tends to treat heritage protection as a restriction imposed on owners – one that must be justified, and where possible, reduced.

ACT’s view of heritage as a cost to owners predates the current government. In his 2017 State of the Nation speech, ACT Party Leader and MP for Epsom David Seymour proposed that the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area could be “taken back to a sensible boundary”. He cited a 50 hectare block of rural-zoned land in the foothills, three minutes’ drive from a train station, as land that should be freed up for housing: “there you have the New Zealand housing crisis in a nutshell.”¹³⁶ In 2022, ACT’s then-Conservation spokesperson Nicole McKee called a visitor cap on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing “a kick in the guts to local tourism operators”. McKee argued the government needed to “show clear evidence that this cap is required”, after the Department of Conservation said its aim was to “protect the dual world heritage values, both cultural and environmental in the Tongariro National Park.”¹³⁷

In 2023, Seymour commended the ministers who approved the demolition of the Mount Eden Shot Tower after Cyclone Gabrielle.¹³⁸ With some residents displaced for a week due to concerns about the structural integrity of the Category 1 tower – the last of its kind in Australasia – he argued that demolition must start immediately, adding that “the wider issue, for another time, is why so much bureaucracy was required in the first place.”¹³⁹ In February 2026, an ACT release by Resources spokesman Simon Court answered the late Sir Sam Neill’s campaign against the Santana gold mine in Central Otago by invoking the region’s mining past: “Gold mining is part of Central Otago’s heritage.”¹⁴⁰ The same release said projects “get bogged down by negative plonkers objecting on aesthetic grounds”, and pledged to back “productive enterprise that meets the rules over the aesthetic objections of woke, leftist film stars”.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ ACT New Zealand, “Constitution and Rules of ACT New Zealand,” ACT (ACT New Zealand, July 13, 2025), https://assets.nationbuilder.com/actnz/pages/24128/attachments/original/1752459529/250713_ACT_New_Zealand_Constitution.pdf?1752459529, 3.

¹³⁶ Simon Smith, “Protecting Heritage Land With ‘No Amenity’ Is the ‘Housing Crisis in a Nutshell’ – ACT,” *Stuff*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/88731668/protecting-heritage-land-with-no-amenity-is-the-housing-crisis-in-a-nutshell--act>.

¹³⁷ ACT New Zealand, “Tourist Numbers Can’t Be Slashed for No Reason,” Press release, May 12, 2022, <https://www.act.org.nz/news/tourist-numbers-cant-be-slashed-for-no-reason>.

¹³⁸ ACT New Zealand, “Shot Tower Demolition Must Start Now,” Press release, February 20, 2023, <https://www.act.org.nz/news/shot-tower-demolition-must-start-now>.

¹³⁹ Karanama Ruru, “The Historic Tower That Was Pulled Down After Fears of Toppling During Cyclone Gabrielle,” *Stuff*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/350151775/historic-tower-was-pulled-down-after-fears-toppling-during-cyclone-gabrielle>; ACT New Zealand, “Shot Tower Demolition Must Start Now.”

¹⁴⁰ ACT New Zealand, “Sam Neill Can’t Put Aesthetics Ahead of Livelihoods,” Press release, ACT New Zealand, February 20, 2026, <https://www.act.org.nz/news/sam-neill-can%E2%80%99t-put-aesthetics-ahead-of-livelihoods>.

¹⁴¹ ACT New Zealand, “Sam Neill Can’t Put Aesthetics Ahead of Livelihoods.”

Where ACT Supports Heritage

New Zealand Remembrance Army Commitment

The one heritage commitment this report found from ACT is support for restoring service graves. In April 2026, Veterans spokesperson Mark Cameron announced the party would back the New Zealand Remembrance Army, a volunteer group that has restored more than 300,000 service graves across Aotearoa New Zealand.¹⁴² True to its anti-red-tape positioning, ACT framed the commitment as cutting through council bureaucracy: Cameron said the group had to deal with “62 different councils” which had “different processes and interpretations of cemetery rules”.¹⁴³ ACT signalled it would:

- Require councils to accept grave restoration work under a national standard developed by Veterans’ Affairs in consultation with the Remembrance Army, “instead of under dozens of local rulebooks”.
- Designate the Remembrance Army and similar groups as nationally recognised heritage restoration partners.
- Remove additional red tape on organisations doing nationally significant work.

ACT said it was prepared to set aside up to \$1 million for this framework and a direct grant from the Crown to the Remembrance Army to clear the backlog of neglected graves.¹⁴⁴

Where ACT Falls Short

ACT’s heritage support is largely conditional on owner choice. Where protection is imposed on owners, ACT treats it as a restriction that councils must justify, and under the Regulatory Relief framework it championed (described below), councils may also have to compensate owners for imposing it. In practice, this makes heritage protection harder to defend, and this report found no answer from ACT on how councils would pay, which risks councils dropping protections rather than compensating owners.

ACT and Regulatory Relief

As part of the coalition government’s reform of the RMA, ACT championed a regulatory relief framework, where local government “must provide practical relief mechanisms when imposing restrictions such as heritage protections and significant natural areas.”¹⁴⁵ This reform, according to Parliamentary Under-Secretary for RMA Reform and Infrastructure, ACT’s Simon Court, would put property rights “at the core”, and force local government to justify restrictions that “for too

¹⁴² Mark Cameron, “ACT Will Back Volunteers Who Restore War Graves,” Press release, April 24, 2026, <https://www.act.org.nz/news/act-will-back-volunteers-who-restore-war-graves>.

¹⁴³ Cameron, “ACT Will Back Volunteers Who Restore War Graves.”

¹⁴⁴ Cameron, “ACT Will Back Volunteers Who Restore War Graves.”

¹⁴⁵ Chris Bishop and Simon Court, “A Better Planning System for a Better New Zealand,” Press release, December 9, 2025, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/better-planning-system-better-new-zealand>.

long have been costless to them”.¹⁴⁶ Announcing Cabinet’s decisions in March 2025, Court said that the “best way to stop unnecessary red tape is [to] attach a price to it”, with landowners able to seek compensation if “unjustified restrictions have been placed on their land.”¹⁴⁷ In December 2025, Party Leader and Deputy Prime Minister David Seymour made a similar point, stating that “for decades, councils could load rules onto private land as if the cost was zero”.¹⁴⁸ On 22 September 2026, the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill passed their third reading. Simon Court said that “Regulatory relief will discipline over-zealous councils by forcing them to face the cost of specified ‘public good’ controls over private property”.¹⁴⁹

New Zealand First

HERITAGE SPOKESPERSON: Jenny Marcroft

NZ First promotes itself as the party that stands for “national pride” and for protecting the “national identity” of Aotearoa New Zealand – the terms Peters used in July 2025 to justify a bill limiting the flags that government buildings may fly.¹⁵⁰ Heritage appears explicitly in the party’s purpose statement, with NZ First aspiring to be “an enduring voice of common sense that protects our natural and cultural heritage”.¹⁵¹ In his “One Clarion Call” speech closing the party’s 32nd Convention in Palmerston North on 7 September 2025, Peters declared: “We are all New Zealanders, the heirs of a once world leading country now seeking to restore that heritage for our children and generations yet to come.”¹⁵² NZ First’s policy commitments to heritage are largely concentrated on tourism and conservation, with heritage consistently framed in economic terms.

Where NZ First Supports Heritage

NZ First’s 2023 manifesto included two commitments that mention heritage. Under “Tourism and Destination Management”, it proposed to “use tourism to protect, restore and champion New Zealand’s natural environment, culture and heritage”.¹⁵³ Under “Conservation”, it proposed to “enhance and protect the rights of all New Zealanders to access their cultural heritage sites

¹⁴⁶ Bishop and Court, “A Better Planning System for a Better New Zealand.”

¹⁴⁷ Chris Bishop and Simon Court, “New Planning Laws to End the Culture of ‘No,’” Press release, March 24, 2025, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-planning-laws-end-culture-%E2%80%98no%E2%80%9999>.

¹⁴⁸ ACT New Zealand, “Regulatory Standards Shine Through in New Planning System,” Press release, ACT New Zealand, December 11, 2025, <https://www.act.org.nz/news/regulatory-standards-shine-through-in-new-planning-system>.

¹⁴⁹ Chris Bishop and Simon Court, “RMA Era Ends as New System Passes Parliament,” Press release, September 22, 2026, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/rma-era-ends-new-system-passes-parliament>.

¹⁵⁰ New Zealand First, “NZ First Bill: Only Official New Zealand Flag to Fly on Government Buildings,” Press release, July 2, 2025, https://www.nzfirst.nz/nzf_bill_only_official_nz_flag.

¹⁵¹ New Zealand First, “About Us: Purpose and Principles,” 2026, <https://www.nzfirst.nz/principle>.

¹⁵² Winston Peters, “One Clarion Call” (Palmerston North, September 7, 2025), https://www.nzfirst.nz/one_clarion_call.

¹⁵³ New Zealand First, “New Zealand First 2023 Policies,” *New Zealand First* (New Zealand First, 2023), https://www.nzfirst.nz/2023_policies.

through clarifying and amending legislation associated with protecting these heritage sites, buildings and objects”.¹⁵⁴

KiwiRail and the Rail Heritage Trust

NZ First has delivered one measurable heritage outcome this term. As Minister for Rail, NZ First leader Rt Hon Winston Peters asked KiwiRail to lift its annual \$120,000 contribution to the Rail Heritage Trust, to further support the restoration of industrial heritage across the country. On 28 August 2025, Peters announced that the KiwiRail board, chaired by Suzanne Tindal, had decided to increase the contribution to \$500,000 per annum, making the announcement at Mātaura Railway Station in Southland – the first site to benefit from the funding boost.¹⁵⁵ Both the speech and accompanying press release were titled “Demolition by Neglect Stops Here”, with Peters declaring that “only fools steam ahead without any knowledge of where they have been, and communities that value their past are not fools.”¹⁵⁶

Complete the Christchurch Cathedral

Of the parties reviewed for this report, this report found that NZ First is the only one to have announced a policy dedicated to a built heritage site this election cycle: “Complete the Christchurch Cathedral”. On 27 March 2026, NZ First Party Leader Winston Peters announced a campaign commitment of an extra \$15 million to the rebuild of Christ Church Cathedral – mothballed since 2014 because of lack of funds, with a remaining shortfall of \$40 to \$45 million.¹⁵⁷ Peters described the cathedral as a “vitally iconic symbol of Christchurch City” and “part of the city’s heritage”, and said that “rebuilding the cathedral will catalyse further development around the area and boost important tourism numbers in the city.”¹⁵⁸ The funding boost would help complete the first stage of the project, which would reopen the cathedral and remove the hoardings from Cathedral Square. In the announcement, Peters pointed to the \$25 million government contribution he said NZ First “ensured” when last in government in 2018 – made up of a \$10 million grant and a \$15 million interest-free loan.¹⁵⁹ The release does not say whether the new \$15 million would be a grant or a loan.

The pledge is far from new. On 28 May 2017, before that year’s election, Peters stood in front of the damaged cathedral and promised to restore it if NZ First held power. At the time, National Party Christchurch Regeneration Minister Nicky Wagner called it “grandstanding”, stating that

¹⁵⁴ New Zealand First, “New Zealand First 2023 Policies.”

¹⁵⁵ Winston Peters, “Demolition by Neglect Stops Here” (Mātaura, August 28, 2025), https://www.nzfirst.nz/demolition_by_neglect_stops_here.

¹⁵⁶ Peters, “Demolition by Neglect Stops Here,” August 28, 2025; Winston Peters, “Demolition by Neglect Stops Here,” Press release, August 28, 2025, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/demolition-neglect-stops-here>.

¹⁵⁷ New Zealand First, “NZ First Campaign Announcement: Funding for Christ Church Cathedral Rebuild,” Press release, March 27, 2026, https://www.nzfirst.nz/campaign_announcement_funding_for_christ_church_cathedral_rebuild.

¹⁵⁸ New Zealand First, “Complete the Christchurch Cathedral,” 2026, https://www.nzfirst.nz/complete_the_christchurch_cathedral.

¹⁵⁹ New Zealand First, “Complete the Christchurch Cathedral”.

Peters had “said exactly the same thing in 2014”.¹⁶⁰ NZ First *did* enter government after the 2017 election. However, nine years later in 2026, the cathedral is still mothballed, and Peters is again making a funding pledge in an election year.

Where NZ First Falls Short

NZ First’s most significant effect on heritage places this term came through the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, described below, which moved decisions on archaeological authorities from HNZPT to a panel directed to give the greatest weight to the Act’s own purpose of facilitating development. Its other heritage commitments are narrow. While the KiwiRail funding increase helps one trust, it does not change the law that allows demolition by neglect in the first place, despite the title of the announcement. Demolition by neglect continues to occur across the country. Likewise, while the cathedral policy is titled “Complete the Christchurch Cathedral”, the \$15 million would fund only the first stage of the rebuild, which faces a remaining shortfall of \$40 to \$45 million, with the rest left to the Church and Christchurch City Council. The Christ Church Cathedral is ultimately a single, high-profile building, justified mainly on tourism and economic grounds, and Peters made a similar pledge in 2017.

The same economic framing extends to natural heritage. When the Green Party objected to a prospecting permit covering 157 square kilometres of Te Wāhipounamu, one of New Zealand’s three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Resources Minister Shane Jones said that New Zealand had “been able to maintain luxury beliefs such as not mining the DOC estate” and that “We’re going to have to open up areas of the DOC estate for development, if we can have the correct guardrails and mitigation initiatives”.¹⁶¹

Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

NZ First’s Shane Jones, as Minister for Regional Development, joined the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, Chris Bishop, in announcing the third reading of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 on 17 December 2024, with Bishop describing it as “part of the coalition agreement between National and NZ First”.¹⁶² Its purpose is “to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits”.¹⁶³ The Act replaces separate approval processes with a single application to an expert panel, which decides whether to approve a project and sets any conditions.¹⁶⁴ That includes archaeological

¹⁶⁰ Michael Wright and Jamie Small, “NZ First Leader Winston Peters ‘Grandstanding’ Over Christ Church Cathedral Debacle, Regeneration Minister Nicky Wagner Says,” *Stuff*, May 28, 2017, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/93068880/new-zealand-first-leader-winston-peters-critical-of-cathedral-debacle>.

¹⁶¹ Felix Walton, “Green Party Disapproves of Government Granting Prospecting Permit for UNESCO Site,” *Radio New Zealand*, April 27, 2026, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/593506/green-party-disapproves-of-government-granting-prospecting-permit-for-unesco-site>.

¹⁶² Chris Bishop and Shane Jones, “One-stop Shop Fast-track Bill Passes Third Reading,” Press release, December 17, 2024, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/one-stop-shop-fast-track-bill-passes-third-reading>.

¹⁶³ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (2024 No 56), s 3.

¹⁶⁴ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, s 81(1).

authorities, which would otherwise be sought from HNZPT under the HNZPT Act. HNZPT and the Māori Heritage Council report to the panel and can recommend that an authority be granted with conditions or declined, but the panel makes the decision.

In deciding an application for an archaeological authority, the panel must take into account the matters in the HNZPT Act, while giving the greatest weight to the purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Act itself.¹⁶⁵ The same weighting applies to resource consents, where the panel must consider the Resource Management Act's Part 2 matters, which include protecting historic heritage, but again must give the greatest weight to the Act's purpose.¹⁶⁶ A panel may decline an approval because of adverse impacts only where they are "sufficiently significant to be out of proportion to the project's regional or national benefits", and it cannot reach that view solely because an impact is inconsistent with a provision of a specified Act – a term that includes the HNZPT Act.¹⁶⁷

The Act also limits who must be invited to comment. At the referral stage, the Minister must invite comments from local authorities, certain Ministers, Māori groups, owners of Māori land and the relevant administering agencies, which include HNZPT for the HNZPT Act, and may invite any other person.¹⁶⁸ At the panel stage, the panel must invite comments from groups including local authorities, iwi, the owners and occupiers of the land and adjoining land, and relevant Ministers and administering agencies.¹⁶⁹ This report found no heritage or community organisations among the groups the Act requires to be invited, so they have no right to comment unless invited at the Minister's discretion.

Labour Party

HERITAGE SPOKESPERSON: Rachel Boyack

Labour describes its purpose as ensuring that "no matter who you are or where you come from, everyone deserves the opportunity to fulfil their potential and live life to the fullest".¹⁷⁰ The party has historically supported arts, culture and heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand, with its 1999 manifesto for Arts, Culture and Heritage stating that "historical heritage is a legacy which we hold in trust for future generations".¹⁷¹ At time of publication, this report found no Labour heritage policy. The only arts, culture and heritage policy listed for Labour on the policy website [policy.nz](https://www.labour.org.nz/policy) concerned data sovereignty and copyright, so that creators keep control of – and are

¹⁶⁵ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, sch 8, cl 4(1) and (2).

¹⁶⁶ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, sch 5, cl 17(1) and (2)(a); Resource Management Act 1991, s 6(f).

¹⁶⁷ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, s 85(3) and (4).

¹⁶⁸ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, ss 4 (definition of "administering agency"), 17(1) and 17(5).

¹⁶⁹ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, s 53(2) and sch 5, cl 13.

¹⁷⁰ Labour Party, "NZ Labour Party," Labour Party, 2026, <https://www.labour.org.nz/>.

¹⁷¹ 1999 manifesto quoted in: Judith Tizard, "Heritage, Identity and Our Shared Future" (Christchurch, October 13, 2000), <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/heritage-identity-and-our-shared-future>.

paid for – work used by AI.¹⁷²

Where Labour Supports Heritage

In a speech opening Carter Group Heritage Week in Christchurch on 13 October 2000, then-Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Judith Tizard described arts, culture and heritage as “not an optional extra but a necessity for a civilised society”. Built heritage, she argued, matters because “the existence of our built, physical, material heritage enables compelling evidence of the past to be available for interpretation or review by present and future generations”, and “the more of our heritage that is preserved, the stronger the basis for the evolution of knowledge”.¹⁷³ The government, Tizard said, envisaged “a partnership between central government, local government, iwi and private property owners” to achieve “the protection and restoration of historic heritage”. The Prime Minister taking on the arts, culture and heritage portfolio was “an absolutely key indicator of the status accorded the sector by the government”, and a May funding announcement had increased support for heritage and museum activities, including Te Papa and the conservation of the Edwin Fox.¹⁷⁴ A year of policy work on heritage management, overseen by the Minister with Tizard’s assistance, would include preparing legislation to protect moveable cultural property and advice on “enhanced arrangements for the protection of land-based historic heritage”.¹⁷⁵

In June 2025, Labour’s Arts, Culture and Heritage spokesperson Rachel Boyack said that cuts at Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage sat amid wider public service cuts by the National-led government, and that “Telling our history, telling the stories of the nation, is an essential part of who we are as a nation”.¹⁷⁶

Funding and Protecting the Historic Places Trust

In 2000, the Labour-led government moved to strengthen the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, the statutory agency created under the Historic Places Act – now Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT). On 21 February, Prime Minister and Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Helen Clark announced that the government had cancelled the previous National government’s decision to make the Trust’s funding contestable from 1 July 2000, with the associated press release claiming it was “an indication of the priority that the new government placed on the protection of New Zealand’s historic sites and places”.¹⁷⁷ On 18 May, the government announced \$3 million for the Trust that financial year to establish a Preservation Fund: \$1.25

¹⁷² Labour Party, “Policies for Party Vote - NZ Election 2026 - Policy.nz,” Policy.nz, 2026, <https://policy.nz/2026/party-vote/policies/media-culture-and-recreation/policy/POL54946>.

¹⁷³ Tizard, “Heritage, Identity and Our Shared Future.”

¹⁷⁴ Tizard, “Heritage, Identity and Our Shared Future.”

¹⁷⁵ Tizard, “Heritage, Identity and Our Shared Future.”

¹⁷⁶ Tom Hunt, “Protesters Claim Cuts Will ‘Decimate’ Heritage Staff,” *The Post*, June 17, 2025, <https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/360725891/protesters-claim-cuts-will-decimate-heritage-staff>.

¹⁷⁷ Helen Clark, “Government Removes Threat to Historic Places Trust,” Press release, February 21, 2000, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-removes-threat-historic-places-trust>.

million for deferred maintenance and development at Crown-owned properties the Trust manages, \$1.25 million for a Māori heritage development fund and \$500,000 to upgrade the national register of New Zealand's heritage. The Trust's operating budget also rose by \$170,000 that year, with an annual increase of \$500,000 in following years, which Clark said would let the Trust meet its statutory obligations, including prosecuting breaches of the Historic Places Act.¹⁷⁸ In October 2000, Associate Minister Judith Tizard said the government was not supportive of any provisions in the Resource Management Amendment Bill "that would alter or reduce the role of the Historic Places Trust".¹⁷⁹

Heritage EQUIP

Heritage EQUIP (the Heritage Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme) was a four-year earthquake-strengthening fund for privately owned heritage buildings, introduced by the National government in 2016 to help owners meet the requirements of the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016 (see "Heritage EQUIP" under "Where National Supports Heritage").¹⁸⁰ The Labour-led government elected in 2017 continued the programme, with Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Grant Robertson announcing in February 2019 that owners in regional, medium and high seismic risk areas would receive extra support.¹⁸¹ These owners became eligible for new Professional Advice Grants covering up to 50 per cent of costs, to a maximum of \$50,000.¹⁸² Many regional building owners could also apply for up to 67 per cent of upgrade works costs, compared with 50 per cent elsewhere, to a maximum grant of \$400,000, and multiple-building applications could seek up to 67 per cent of professional advice costs.¹⁸³ Budget 2020 added \$3.12 million, extending the programme for a further year (see "Heritage EQUIP Funding Not Renewed in Budget 2021" under "Where Labour Falls Short").¹⁸⁴

St James Theatre Funding

On 22 July 2023, Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Carmel Sepuloni announced that the government had agreed to a conditional \$15 million contribution towards conserving the St

¹⁷⁸ Helen Clark, "New Zealand Historic Places Trust (Pouhere Taonga)," Press release, May 18, 2000, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-historic-places-trust-pouhere-taonga>.

¹⁷⁹ Tizard, "Heritage, Identity and Our Shared Future."

¹⁸⁰ Maggie Barry, "\$12 Million to Support Quake-prone Heritage," Press release, August 13, 2016, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/12-million-support-quake-prone-heritage>.

¹⁸¹ Grant Robertson, "Better Regional Assistance for Earthquake-prone Heritage Buildings," Press release, February 11, 2019, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/better-regional-assistance-earthquake-prone-heritage-buildings>.

¹⁸² Grant Robertson, "Better Regional Assistance for Earthquake-prone Heritage Buildings"; Adam Burns, "Leaders Welcome Help for Heritage Buildings," *Otago Daily Times*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.odt.co.nz/otago/central-otago/leaders-welcome-help-for-heritage-buildings-amg8iv4r>.

¹⁸³ Robertson, "Better Regional Assistance for Earthquake-prone Heritage Buildings"; Mary-Jo Tohill, "Funding Shake-up for Earthquake-prone Buildings," *Stuff*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/114815210/funding-shakeup-for-earthquakeprone-buildings>.

¹⁸⁴ New Zealand Treasury, "Wellbeing Budget 2020 - Rebuilding Together," *New Zealand Treasury* (New Zealand Treasury, May 14, 2020), <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2020-05/b20-wellbeing-budget.pdf>, 53; Grant Robertson, "Government Provides \$2.2m to Heritage Buildings for Quake Strengthening," Press release, August 5, 2020, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-provides-22m-heritage-buildings-quake-strengthening>.

James Theatre. The contribution would match, and was contingent on, a \$15 million pledge from Auckland Council, and would sit alongside funding from the theatre's owner, with further conditions to be developed through engagement with HNZPT, mana whenua and the community. Sepuloni said the contribution "underlines not only the importance of protecting our heritage buildings, but the significance of the theatre's place in our history", and that "Successive Governments have signalled their support for the project".¹⁸⁵ By February 2025, Auckland Council had confirmed its \$15 million grant as part of an agreement with central government and the theatre's owner.¹⁸⁶ By 1 August 2025, the National-led coalition government had confirmed the commitment, and the Crown's contribution of \$16.5 million had been paid to the council after 25 funding conditions were met.¹⁸⁷

Labour MPs and Heritage Buildings

Two Labour MPs have spoken publicly, in their own names, about the challenges facing heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand. This report found no evidence at time of publication that these positions have been adopted as Labour policy.

On 28 July 2016, in a Labour press release titled "Council must build on heritage, not destroy it", Arts, Culture and Heritage spokesperson (and later Prime Minister) Jacinda Ardern criticised an Auckland Unitary Plan panel recommendation to remove some protections from neighbourhoods with pre-1944 houses.¹⁸⁸ Ardern accepted that Auckland needed to "build both up and out in order to meet the huge demand for housing", but said "there are ways to do that without losing the character of our communities". Heritage, she argued, should not be "an either/or": "We're a young country when it comes to built heritage and we should be doing everything we can to preserve what we have."¹⁸⁹

Helen White on Demolition by Neglect

In August 2026, Labour MP for Mt Albert Helen White called for better protections for historic buildings, after learning about properties like Grey Lynn's Carlile House and Building One at the former Carrington Hospital. Both are Category 1 historic places and scheduled as Category A

¹⁸⁵ Carmel Sepuloni, "Government Helps to Unlock the Doors of St James Theatre," Press release, July 22, 2023, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-helps-unlock-doors-st-james-theatre>; Radio New Zealand, "'We Did It' - \$15m Government Pledge to Help Restore Auckland's St James Theatre," *Radio New Zealand*, July 22, 2023, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/494253/we-did-it-15m-government-pledge-to-help-restore-auckland-s-st-james-theatre>.

¹⁸⁶ Auckland Council, "Council Backs Funding for Auckland's St James Theatre," *Our Auckland*, February 28, 2025, <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2025/02/council-backs-funding-for-auckland-s-st-james-theatre/>.

¹⁸⁷ While the 2023 announcement referred to a \$15 million Crown contribution, Newsroom reported \$16.5 million had been paid. This report did not find an explanation of the difference. See Tim Murphy, "Finally, the Stars and Dollars Align to Save an Auckland Jewel," *Newsroom*, August 1, 2025, <https://newsroom.co.nz/2025/08/01/finally-the-stars-and-dollars-align-to-save-an-auckland-jewel/>.

¹⁸⁸ Jacinda Ardern, "Council Must Build on Heritage, Not Destroy It," *Scoop News*, July 28, 2016, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA1607/S00413/council-must-build-on-heritage-not-destroy-it.htm>.

¹⁸⁹ Ardern, "Council Must Build on Heritage, Not Destroy It."

historic heritage in the Auckland Unitary Plan.¹⁹⁰ White called the situation “simply unacceptable” and said she had met officials from MCERT, who “are in a situation where they don’t believe they can influence the protection of the building”. She said there was “a real gap in the law here that needs plugging”.¹⁹¹

“Fairly early in becoming an electorate MP”, White noticed the deterioration of Carlile House, making several enquiries only to find that “there just really weren’t the tools in the toolbox to deal with that situation effectively”.¹⁹² When the same appeared to be happening to the Carrington buildings, she “had real alarm bells” and wanted to give councils more teeth to enforce the rules.¹⁹³ She was considering a members’ bill that would make it an obligation for owners or managers of heritage buildings to protect them from neglect, with rewards for doing so.¹⁹⁴ The proposed bill would require anyone taking on a protected building to “at least protect the status quo”, and White acknowledged that extra funds might be needed for maintenance, adding that “Historic buildings have gone through a process where we’ve decided that they’re really important to the neighbourhood, and to the nation”.¹⁹⁵

When asked at the Great Mt Albert Debate on 30 September 2026 whether they would “fight to save the former Carrington Hospital”, White was the only candidate to raise her hand.¹⁹⁶ At the later bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026 on 12 October, all four candidates, from Labour, the Greens, Opportunity and National, agreed that something needed to be done about the state of Building One. White said she had repeatedly written to Marutūāhu director Paul Majurey on behalf of a group “prepared to fix the roof”, and had “no answer yet”.¹⁹⁷ She was “a bit shocked” that no one else had raised their hand at the Great Mt Albert Debate, and said the building “matters to people in our community”. At the debate she committed to the bill: “If you take on a building with that kind of heritage status you owe it to the community to at least preserve the status quo – so I’m going to introduce that Bill and I’d love you to support me.”¹⁹⁸ She urged the other candidates to “join me on this one”, acknowledging the sensitivities and the

¹⁹⁰ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, “Costley Training Institute (Former),” 2026, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/9584/Costley-Training-Institute-Former>; Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, “Carrington Hospital (Former),” 2026, [https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/96/Carrington%20Hospital%20\(Former\)](https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/96/Carrington%20Hospital%20(Former)); Auckland Council, “Auckland Unitary Plan Schedule 14.1 Schedule of Historic Heritage,” *Auckland Council* (Auckland Council, July 2026), <https://unitaryplan.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/images/Auckland%20Unitary%20Plan%20Operative/Chapter%20L%20Schedules/Schedule%2014.1%20Schedule%20of%20Historic%20Heritage.pdf>, 54, 63.

¹⁹¹ Sam Smith, “Local MP Seeks Law Change as Historic Auckland Building Falls Into Ruin,” *Stuff*, August 13, 2026, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/361019736/local-mp-seeks-law-change-historic-auckland-building-falls-ruin>.

¹⁹² Morning Report, “Auckland MP Calls for Better Protections for Historic Buildings,” audio, in “Auckland MP Considers Members Bill to Strengthen Protections for Historic Buildings,” Radio New Zealand, 14 August 2026, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/regions/1000168/auckland-mp-considers-members-bill-to-strengthen-protections-for-historic-buildings>, 1:00.

¹⁹³ Morning Report, “Auckland MP Calls for Better Protections for Historic Buildings,” 1:22.

¹⁹⁴ Smith, “Local MP Seeks Law Change as Historic Auckland Building Falls Into Ruin.”

¹⁹⁵ Morning Report, “Auckland MP Calls for Better Protections for Historic Buildings,” 1:56.

¹⁹⁶ “The Great Mt Albert Debate | The Spinoff,” September 30, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZO7gu6rhQg>, 14:04.

¹⁹⁷ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 42:04.

¹⁹⁸ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 43:08.

cost but arguing that “it’s not actually getting any cheaper if you leave those tiles off the roof”.¹⁹⁹

An MCERT spokesperson said the developer, Marutūāhu Ockham Limited No.6 Partnership, “has the same obligations and responsibilities as any other owner of a heritage building”, and Auckland Council issued a bylaw notice over the building’s security in May 2026.²⁰⁰

Where Labour Falls Short

Labour’s most visible recent advocacy for heritage places comes from one MP, Helen White, and not from the portfolio spokesperson, Rachel Boyack. While Boyack has criticised the National-led government’s cuts to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, this report found no statement from her setting out what Labour would do for heritage.²⁰¹ White’s members’ bill on demolition by neglect – which she has said she will introduce – is the only concrete heritage proposal this report found from a Labour MP. Heritage advocacy within Labour therefore currently seems to rest on one MP, without a party policy behind it.

Heritage EQUIP Funding Not Renewed in Budget 2021

Budget 2020 provided \$3.12 million for 2020/21 “to continue the Heritage EQUIP programme”, citing “increased demand arising from compliance with earthquake-prone buildings’ regulatory requirements”, but this report found no funding for the programme in Budget 2021.²⁰² In August 2021, Historic Places Aotearoa (HPA) president James Blackburne raised concern about the loss of Heritage EQUIP funding, warning that “time is running out for owners to strengthen priority buildings in areas of high seismic risk” and that “demolition may be the only option for some owners if funding is not available”.²⁰³ A 2025 government review describes the programme as discontinued.²⁰⁴

Green Party

HERITAGE SPOKESPERSON: Kahurangi Carter

Part of the Green Party’s vision is to be “good ancestors so that our environment can be enjoyed

¹⁹⁹ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 42:50, 41:55.

²⁰⁰ Sam Smith, “Local MP Seeks Law Change as Historic Auckland Building Falls Into Ruin.”

²⁰¹ Tom Hunt, “Protesters Claim Cuts Will ‘Decimate’ Heritage Staff.”

²⁰² New Zealand Treasury, “Wellbeing Budget 2020 - Rebuilding Together,” 53; New Zealand Treasury, “Wellbeing Budget 2021 - Securing Our Recovery,” *New Zealand Treasury* (New Zealand Treasury, May 20, 2021), <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-07/b21-wellbeing-budget-v2.pdf>.

²⁰³ Historic Places Aotearoa, “Loss of Heritage EQUIP Funding a Blow,” Press release, August 11, 2021, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK2108/S00175/loss-of-heritage-equip-funding-a-blow.htm>. The author is an executive member of Historic Places Aotearoa, but was not associated with the organisation when these comments were made in August 2021; Ethan Griffiths, “Whanganui Concerns Raised After Heritage Earthquake-strengthening Programme Scrapped,” *NZ Herald*, August 12, 2021, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/whanganui-chronicle/news/whanganui-concerns-raised-after-heritage-earthquake-strengthening-programme-scrapped/37U4JWJQ7LENFR2DXSBBA5HIQM/>.

²⁰⁴ MBIE, “Earthquake-prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” 26.

for generations to come.”²⁰⁵ The party, known especially for its focus on the environment, frames heritage through this lens, along with communities, housing and Māori leadership. Its main heritage policy is the Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy, with further commitments in its Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy. Both state the same strategic goal: “People will be part of caring communities with a strong heritage fabric”.²⁰⁶

Two Green MPs have questioned whose heritage is being protected. At the bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026 on 12 October, Green MP Ricardo Menéndez March said “demolition by neglect is definitely not okay” but did not commit to White’s bill on it. Menéndez March added that “we also need to be mindful of us just imposing what that building should be for”, noting that the land had been “given back to mana whenua”, and asked the debate panel “whose heritage are we looking after?”²⁰⁷ In *Under the Surface*, a 2024 short documentary about heritage and housing in Wellington, Green MP Tamatha Paul said the term heritage was “often referring to Pākehā heritage”, that it was “decided by whoever has the power to decide it”, and that “once something is heritage protected it is almost untouchable”.²⁰⁸ These are statements by individual MPs, not Green Party policy.

Where the Greens Support Heritage

The Greens’ most visible heritage campaign this report found is the Save St James Theatre campaign in Auckland, but their most direct proposals on heritage are in policy.

Section 5 of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy, “Protecting and Preserving our Heritage”, is the Greens’ main statement on built heritage.²⁰⁹ It identifies “significant challenges in protecting and preserving built heritage, including cost, seismic and climate risks, and pressures from urban development”, notes that “neglected buildings require expensive fixes to avoid demolition”, and states that “heritage losses are irreplaceable”. Its actions fall into two groups:

1. To “strengthen heritage policy and funding”, it commits to “establishing national direction for heritage, requiring local authorities to place more weight on recognising and supporting heritage places in district plans” (5.1.1), and “providing funding schemes for the maintenance and earthquake strengthening of privately-owned heritage buildings” (5.1.2).

²⁰⁵ Green Party, “About Us,” 2026, <https://www.greens.org.nz/about>.

²⁰⁶ Green Party, “Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy,” *Green Party* (Green Party, June 17, 2026), https://assets.nationbuilder.com/beachheroes/pages/64500/attachments/original/1781650645/Policy-Greens_Arts_Culture_Heritage_Policy_2014-2026.pdf?1781650645, 2; Green Party, “Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy,” *Green Party* (Green Party, June 17, 2026), https://assets.nationbuilder.com/beachheroes/pages/64752/attachments/original/1781650001/Policy-Greens_Housing_and_Sustainable_Communities_Policy_2022-2026.pdf?1781650001, 2.

²⁰⁷ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 38:20, 38:34, 38:32, 43:18.

²⁰⁸ Paul in Nate Oakley, “Under the Surface (2024) - Documentary Short Film,” YouTube video, March 26, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZS8a8BuZFLI>, 3:23, 3:00, 1:26.

²⁰⁹ Green Party, “Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy,” Section 5.

2. To “enhance Māori and community leadership and engagement in heritage protection”, it commits to programmes that “enable communities to safely explore the diversity and tensions in local heritage and traditions” (5.2.1), more support for Te Papa’s National Services to assist local museums and galleries with heritage collections (5.2.2), “prioritising areas of cultural value to communities, whānau, hapū and iwi when resourcing climate change adaptation” (5.2.3), and resourcing artistic and community activities that challenge “entrenched harmful narratives” (5.2.4).

Section 5 also recognises that heritage extends beyond built form. It states that “negative and systemic biases towards built and colonial heritage sideline and erode pre-colonial history, wāhi tapu, stories, and skills”, and 5.2.3 ties that recognition to climate adaptation funding. The housing policy makes a similar commitment: as part of its aim to “seek to return whenua Māori to Māori ownership and restore the rights of Māori as its kaitiaki”, it would include “the return of Māori land in climate change adaptation and heritage protection programmes” (1.3.2).

On 27 April 2026, Green resources spokesperson Steve Abel called the government’s approval of a prospecting permit within Te Wāhipounamu – one of New Zealand’s three UNESCO World Heritage Sites – “utterly unacceptable”, saying heritage areas like this should be “out of bounds” to exploration, prospecting and mining.²¹⁰ The permit allows prospecting across 157 square kilometres of the World Heritage Site for every mineral except uranium. Resources Minister Shane Jones defended the permit as “innocuous”, arguing the permit holder only wants a “relatively small area” and will not be performing any physical interventions.²¹¹

A more indirect form of support for older buildings appears in the Greens’ housing policy. The party encourages the “relocation and renovation of existing timber houses” where sites are redeveloped or intensified, or where a house is at risk from natural hazards (3.8.2).²¹² The policy frames this as reducing construction waste and does not mention heritage, but keeping existing houses in use is consistent with the “strong heritage fabric” its strategic priorities describe.

St James Theatre

Closed in 2007 after a fire in a neighbouring building, the Category 1 St James Theatre in Auckland had only just reopened when an electrical fault started a fire in July 2015, after which it hosted pop-up events until 2016.²¹³ In 2022, Auckland Central MP Chlöe Swarbrick, now the party’s co-leader, released a video as part of the Save St James Theatre campaign, highlighting the deteriorating condition of the building and the significant impact of vandalism and break-

²¹⁰ Walton, “Green Party Disapproves of Government Granting Prospecting Permit for UNESCO Site.”

²¹¹ Walton, “Green Party Disapproves of Government Granting Prospecting Permit for UNESCO Site.”

²¹² Green Party, “Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy,” 8.

²¹³ Radio New Zealand, “Electrical Fault Caused St James Blaze,” *Radio New Zealand*, July 9, 2015, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/regions/278309/electrical-fault-caused-st-james-blaze>; Mitchell Hageman, “Inside Auckland’s St James Theatre Restoration and Plans for 2028 Reopening,” *NZ Herald*, April 13, 2026, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/inside-aucklands-st-james-theatre-restoration-and-plans-for-2028-reopening/premium/XOUFVUKZ2ZAC5M7AWEHL3UVWQ4/>.

ins.²¹⁴ Viewed 4,500 times, the video showed damaged electrical fittings as well as fungi growing on damp floors. Swarbrick wrote an open letter calling on the government to match Auckland Council's \$15 million commitment to restoring the theatre, arguing that the decision can no longer be kicked down the road.²¹⁵

On 22 July 2023, Swarbrick said she was thrilled to announce government funding for the St James Theatre alongside Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Carmel Sepuloni, saying "We did it. With many hands, years of work and a whole lot of creative campaigning, we've secured the restoration of the St James Theatre, confirming government funding to match and unlock legacy council budget commitments."²¹⁶ While the funding decision was the Labour government's, Swarbrick thanked the thousands of people who had played a part, adding that it was "only because of this coordinated effort that today's announcement happened".²¹⁷

Where the Greens Fall Short

The Greens' built-heritage proposals are clear in direction but thin on detail. Section 5 of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy sets no amounts, timeframes or mechanism. Action 5.1.1 does not say what form national direction would take or how much "more weight" councils would have to give heritage places, with action 5.1.2 giving no funding level or eligibility. The policy does not mention HNZPT or heritage listing. It acknowledges that "neglected buildings require expensive fixes to avoid demolition", but its only related action is the funding scheme in 5.1.2. Neither the Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy nor the Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy defines "strong heritage fabric".

While relocating a house can keep it from demolition, the housing policy's encouragement of the "relocation and renovation of existing timber houses" where sites are being redeveloped (3.8.2) could also work against heritage. The ICOMOS New Zealand Charter, published by ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, states that relocation to clear a site for a different purpose "is not a desirable outcome and is not a conservation process", and the policy does not distinguish houses of heritage value from other timber houses.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Chlöe Swarbrick, "Save the St James: Now or Never," August 14, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/chloeNZgreens/videos/save-the-st-james-now-or-never/430104865803917/>. (4,500 views as of 15 October 2026).

²¹⁵ Radio New Zealand, "St James in Ruins: Greens' MP Reignites Calls for Historic Theatre Revival," *Radio New Zealand*, August 14, 2022, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/crime-and-justice/472834/st-james-in-ruins-greens-mp-reignites-calls-for-historic-theatre-revival>.

²¹⁶ Chlöe Swarbrick, "A New Life for St James Theatre," Press release, July 22, 2023, https://www.greens.org.nz/a_new_life_for_st_james_theatre; Radio New Zealand, "'We Did It' - \$15m Government Pledge to Help Restore Auckland's St James Theatre."

²¹⁷ Swarbrick, "A New Life for St James Theatre."

²¹⁸ Green Party, "Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy," 8; ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, "ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value," *ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand*, 2010, https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/ICOMOS_NZ_Charter_2010_FINAL_11_Oct_2010.pdf, s 10, at 4.

The Greens' housing policy would also review and reduce Special Character Areas, the planning overlays that protect older neighbourhoods whose value lies in their buildings as a group. The policy commits to reviewing and reducing "the extent, scope and significance of 'special character areas'" (4.3.1) in order to equitably increase urban density.²¹⁹ It says the review would refocus them on "Māori heritage, natural heritage, and providing a strong heritage fabric", but does not say how areas would be chosen or what protection would remain for neighbourhoods that lose their status.²²⁰ The Character Coalition, which says it "supports increased housing supply, but not at the expense of Auckland's identity and liveability", has opposed Auckland Council's Plan Change 120, which it says would remove special character protection from about 5000 properties.²²¹

Te Pāti Māori

HERITAGE SPOKESPERSON: Rawiri Waititi

Te Pāti Māori campaigns for tino rangatiratanga and Māori authority over decisions affecting Māori. Its 2026 Policy Manifesto applies that idea to areas from climate to housing, through whakapapa and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.²²² Its Climate chapter describes "a climate policy grounded in whakapapa, regeneration, and justice" that "centres Māori authority".²²³ The party says it stands for "the protection of our taonga tuku iho", and describes kaitiakitanga as a "responsibility of guardianship (spiritual, cultural and physical) over all things, including our taonga tuku iho and resources".²²⁴ Heritage is not a separate policy area in the manifesto, and this report found its clearest heritage-related commitments in the Climate chapter.²²⁵

Where Te Pāti Māori Supports Heritage

Te Pāti Māori's support for heritage is indirect: it would protect marae, urupā and whenua through climate funding and opposition to extraction, with the Climate chapter describing its approach as "grounded in regeneration rather than extraction".²²⁶ According to the party, climate change "directly threatens whenua, wai, moana, marae, food systems, housing security, our livelihoods, and cultural continuity".²²⁷

In March 2020, after HNZPT upgraded the Ōtuataua Stonefields at Ihumātao to a Category 1

²¹⁹ Green Party, "Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy," 9.

²²⁰ Green Party, "Housing and Sustainable Communities Policy," 9.

²²¹ Character Coalition, "Current Campaign 1," 2026, <https://charactercoalition.org.nz/maintaining-character>. The author became a youth representative of the Character Coalition after this section was written.

²²² Te Pāti Māori, "Policy - Te Pāti Māori," 2026, <https://www.maoriparty.org.nz/policy>.

²²³ Te Pāti Māori, "Policy Manifesto: Climate," *Te Pāti Māori*, June 3, 2026, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FzavJoSYNEzsVWhnS9sBMI3XENAb9-Dr/view?usp=sharing>.

²²⁴ Te Pāti Māori, "About Us - Te Pāti Māori," 2026, <https://www.maoriparty.org.nz/about-us>.

²²⁵ Keywords used in the search included: 'heritage', 'Pouhere Taonga', 'wāhi tapu', 'archaeolog' and 'historic'

²²⁶ Te Pāti Māori, "Policy Manifesto: Climate," 7.

²²⁷ Te Pāti Māori, "Policy Manifesto: Climate," 6.

historic place, then Māori Party president Che Wilson said the party would “hand the land back to mana whenua to protect and manage in the first instance, and to develop as they see fit on behalf of their people”.²²⁸

Marae and Urupā Funding

The Climate chapter would establish a \$100 million Māori Taiao relief fund “with an immediate focus on rebuilding and cleaning up marae, urupā and papakāinga impacted by environmental causes” (Action 9), resource “marae and hapū as resilience hubs” (Action 6), and create a \$1 billion Pūngao Auaha Fund to retrofit “marae, kura, papakāinga, and housing with solar energy and insulation” (Action 4).²²⁹ This fund would also invest in “marae and papakāinga energy resilience.”²³⁰ The Climate chapter acknowledges that marae, papakāinga and whenua Māori “are often located in areas most vulnerable to climate impacts”.²³¹ Marae and urupā are among the country’s most significant places of living Māori heritage, and this report found that this is the party’s clearest commitment to looking after them.

Opposition to Extraction and the Fast-track Approvals Act

The Climate chapter commits to banning sea-bed mining (Action 1), repealing the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 and “retrospectively” revoking “all fast-tracked mining consents” (Action 2), and “ending mining on conservation land, including reserves and Significant Natural Areas” (Action 3).²³² The commitment follows the party’s opposition to the Act: before its third reading on 17 December 2024, co-leaders Debbie Ngarewa-Packer and Rawiri Waititi said Te Pāti Māori had placed 16 Fast-track applicants on notice that it would “immediately revoke their consents when we form the next Government”.²³³ On its face, repealing the Act would also remove the panel route for archaeological authorities described under “Fast-track Approvals Act 2024” in the NZ First section, although both the manifesto and the 2024 statement frame the opposition around mining.

Where Te Pāti Māori Falls Short

This report found no heritage-specific policy in Te Pāti Māori’s 2026 Policy Manifesto, and no commitment that names HNZPT, wāhi tapu or archaeological sites. The \$100 million Māori Taiao relief fund covers marae and urupā only where they are “impacted by environmental causes”, so

²²⁸ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, “Ōtuataua Stonefields,” New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero List No. 6055 (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, March 11, 2020), <https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/6055/Listing>; Te Pāti Māori, “Māori Party Welcomes New Life For Ihumātāo,” Press release, March 3, 2020, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO2003/S00033/maori-party-welcomes-new-life-for-ihumatao.htm>.

²²⁹ Te Pāti Māori, “Policy Manifesto: Climate,” 8.

²³⁰ Te Pāti Māori, “Policy Manifesto: Energy Sovereignty,” *Te Pāti Māori*, September 20, 2026, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CPy0C0fICQ71RKuSmtaD3CNsoShG7QAc/view>, 78.

²³¹ Te Pāti Māori, “Policy Manifesto: Climate,” 7.

²³² Te Pāti Māori, “Policy Manifesto: Climate,” 8.

²³³ Daniel Perese, “Te Pāti Māori Issues Warning to Future Fast-Track Applicants,” *Te Ao Māori News*, December 17, 2024, <https://www.teaonews.co.nz/2024/12/17/te-pati-maori-issues-warning-to-future-fast-track-applicants/>.

the manifesto offers no funding for maintaining or conserving them against other threats.²³⁴ The Fast-track repeal is likewise framed around mining, and says nothing about the archaeological authorities the Act brought into the panel process or what would protect wāhi tapu once it is repealed.

Opportunity

HERITAGE SPOKESPERSON: Romeo Tevaga

The only party featured in this report not currently represented in Parliament, Opportunity describes itself as standing to “fix politics, build the next economy and restore nature.”²³⁵ With no voting record to assess, its position on heritage is drawn from published policy and statements. The closest the party comes to a heritage position is a single reference in its “Affordable Housing” policy, explained below.

Where Opportunity Supports Heritage

Opportunity’s support for heritage rests on one policy and three statements: a remark by its leader at a candidates’ debate, a submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill and a press release on its website.

At the bFM Votes candidates’ debate on 12 October, Opportunity Party leader Qiulae Wong said letting Building One at the former Carrington Hospital sit in “disrepair” was “not good” for “safe and thriving communities”, and that “we do need to make sure that developers and mana whenua who are responsible for that land do make quick decisions on it”.²³⁶ These are a leader’s remarks, not party policy, and Building One is the only specific heritage place this report found Opportunity addressing.

The policy that features heritage is “Affordable Housing”, listed under the party’s “Innovation” theme. Its September 2026 policy paper commits Opportunity to “Build on the Planning Bill with a simplified set of 10 nationally consistent zones”, which “will cut red tape that holds back the higher density development we need, while affording automatic protections for highly productive farmland, civic assets, heritage buildings and nature reserves”.²³⁷

Conservation Amendment Bill

Opportunity’s submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill states that the party does “not

²³⁴ Te Pāti Māori, “Policy Manifesto: Climate,” 8.

²³⁵ Opportunity Party, “Opportunity Party,” 2026, <https://www.opportunity.org.nz/>.

²³⁶ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 39:40; Smith, “Mt Albert Candidates Agree Derelict State of Former Psychiatric Hospital Must Be Addressed.”

²³⁷ The party’s website summarises the same commitment as “cutting red tape while still protecting farmland, heritage buildings and nature reserves.” See Opportunity Party, “Affordable Housing,” *Opportunity Party*, September 2026, <https://cdn.opportunity.org.nz/documents/policy/Opportunity%20-%20Affordable%20Housing%20Policy.pdf>, 1.

support this Bill in its current form”.²³⁸ It opposes changes it says weaken DOC’s “conservation-first mandate” and calls public conservation land “a shared national taonga held in trust for future generations”.²³⁹ It also recommends that the Bill or its National Conservation Policy Statement require an “explicit natural capital assessment (covering ecological, recreational and cultural value) alongside any economic assessment” for proposals involving disposal, exchange or significant development of conservation land.²⁴⁰

Opportunity’s press release “When the bill comes due” says the Bill “looks to make up to 60% of public conservation land available for disposal, exchange, or development”, and that New Zealand has been “blowing the budget on nature for decades”.²⁴¹ The release also says that in many cases the Bill’s changes seem aimed at small, low-value parcels, which “might be legitimate cases for DOC to dispose of the land”, but that “the public needs to be assured that land with actual ecological, heritage or cultural value is suitably protected and not disposed of”.²⁴²

Where Opportunity Falls Short

Opportunity’s heritage position is brief and thin on detail. The Affordable Housing policy names heritage buildings only once, in a list of things that would receive “automatic protections”.²⁴³

The press release lists “old quarries, village halls, access strips” among the small parcels it says might be disposed of.²⁴⁴ Neither the policy nor the press release says how heritage would be identified or what protection would involve. The Conservation Amendment Bill submission refers to heritage only as “natural heritage”.²⁴⁵ This report found built heritage addressed only in the housing policy’s single reference to “heritage buildings” and in Wong’s remarks about Building One at the bFM Votes debate.

In those remarks, Wong also raised the cost of the building, saying “I think it was about \$150 million that it was quoted, just to get it to standard in terms of earthquake strengthening...and that’s not even turning it into a school or anything else”.²⁴⁶ She did not say in those remarks whether the building should be protected or restored, and the figure was her recollection of a quote, with no source given. This report found no heritage policy from Opportunity.

²³⁸ Opportunity Party, “Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill,” *Opportunity Party*, September 19, 2026, <https://cdn.opportunity.org.nz/documents/news-policy/Conservation%20Bill%20Submission.pdf>, 8.

²³⁹ Opportunity Party, “Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill,” 2, 6.

²⁴⁰ Opportunity Party, “Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill,” 6.

²⁴¹ Qiulae Wong, “When the Bill Comes Due,” Press release, June 19, 2026, https://www.opportunity.org.nz/when_the_bill_comes_due.

²⁴² Wong, “When the Bill Comes Due.”

²⁴³ Opportunity Party, “Affordable Housing,” 1.

²⁴⁴ Wong, “When the Bill Comes Due.”

²⁴⁵ Opportunity Party, “Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill,” 2, 5.

²⁴⁶ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 39:30.

Survey

Several key themes in heritage and its protection were identified for the purposes of this report: heritage funding cuts; heritage protection versus development, including Heritage EQUIP (Heritage Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme); regulatory relief; demolition by neglect; adaptive re-use; heritage and private investment; heritage and economic growth; heritage and tourism; and notable tree protection. The nine questions put to each party covered these themes.

In the interest of maximising party responses, the survey was reduced from twelve proposed questions to nine. Two questions were merged into one (resulting in the longer Question 2), while two were deleted outright. The deleted questions were:

- Does your party believe private property rights should take precedence over heritage protection, or is there a point at which the public interest in a heritage place should override an owner's right to alter or demolish it?
- The Gordon Wilson Flats showed that aesthetics often drives the public and political opinion of heritage. How does your party weigh aesthetic value against other forms of heritage significance, such as archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological or traditional significance (with these and aesthetics being the criteria set in the 2014 Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act when considering eligibility on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero)?

After discussion with ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand President Dr Stacy Vallis and Legislation and Policy Committee Chair Chessa Stevens, the author judged these questions the least essential to the report's core themes, and the most likely to deter parties from responding.

The survey was formatted to be visually appealing and to encourage a basic level of engagement – making it easy for parties to respond. To further support parties' responses, a glossary was included to explain two key heritage terms, both specific to the heritage sector. The survey also provided a summary of ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand and its work – particularly the [2010 ICOMOS New Zealand Charter](#), which sets out principles to guide the conservation of places of cultural heritage value in New Zealand.

Survey Distribution

The nine-question survey below was sent as an email attachment on 14 September 2026 to each party's general contact address. Follow-ups were then directed to more specific contacts, including party spokespeople for Arts, Culture and Heritage, and party leaders. The seven parties invited, ACT, the Greens, Labour, National, New Zealand First, Opportunity and Te Pāti Māori, met the criteria set out in [Scope and Methods](#).



Questions

1. The two biggest government agencies tasked with caring for Aotearoa New Zealand's heritage (the Department of Conservation, who manages the largest heritage portfolio in the country, and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga) have had significant funding cuts in recent years. **Would your party increase the funding of these two agencies to care for heritage above and beyond pre-reduction levels?**
2. The government's 2025 *Amplify* strategy acknowledges both the financial burden of conserving heritage places and the need for heritage requirements to facilitate urban development. The strategy further lists exploring regulatory solutions to address the cost of seismic risk in heritage buildings as a supporting activity, noting heritage requirements in Aotearoa New Zealand are not nationally consistent. **What is your party's position on balancing heritage protection with urban development? Do you believe these objectives can be achieved together, and how important is national consistency in heritage requirements? In addition, would your party reinstate the Heritage EQUIP (Heritage Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme) fund, or otherwise increase funding for the seismic strengthening of heritage buildings both privately and publicly owned in Aotearoa New Zealand?**
3. What is your party's position on the proposed regulatory relief for landowners affected by heritage protections, particularly given the currently limited incentives available at central and local government levels to encourage private heritage conservation?
4. What are your party's thoughts on the issue of demolition by neglect, a key threat to historic heritage, and what concrete action would you take, or intend to take, to prevent this from happening in future?
5. Architect Carl Elefante once said that "the greenest building is the one already built." **Do you and/or your party think that the practice of adaptive re-use should be encouraged and promoted to a greater extent in Aotearoa New Zealand?**
6. England recently produced (through national heritage public body Historic England) a Heritage Investment Prospectus, showcasing historic sites where owners are actively seeking investment partners or buyers to create homes, workspaces or mixed-use developments in large unused heritage buildings. These include former mills or historic public and commercial buildings. **What are your party's thoughts on this initiative, and would your party advocate for a similar prospectus to be produced for New Zealand?**
7. Research by Donovan D. Rypkema has identified a range of economic benefits associated with heritage conservation, including employment and household income, property values, tourism and the revitalisation of urban areas. This research suggests that heritage conservation can be understood not only as a cultural and social good, but also as a contributor to local economic development. The *Amplify* strategy notes that the Government will work with the sector to improve "the quality of research on the value of cultural heritage to wellbeing and economic growth." **What role does your party see heritage playing in New Zealand's economic growth, and how would you support greater recognition of the economic value of heritage while ensuring its protection?**

8. Tourism and heritage are often closely linked, with heritage contributing to visitor experiences, and tourism a key income stream for many heritage properties. **Does your party see heritage primarily as an asset for tourism, or as having value independent of its contribution to the visitor economy? What role, if any, should tourism play in supporting the protection and conservation of heritage?**
9. The proposed Resource Management reform significantly narrows the protection of notable trees. Some organisations even suggest that up to “three-quarters of currently protected notable trees on non-council land may no longer qualify for protection, because their importance is in their ecological, botanical, amenity, landscape or community value rather than historic heritage.” (NZ Notable Trees Trust, as cited by EDS, 2026) **Would your party strengthen these protections, recognising that notable trees can contribute to the character, amenity and heritage value of neighbourhoods across the country?**

Glossary

- **Demolition by Neglect:** The intentional or passive destruction of a building through abandonment or a persistent lack of maintenance until it is deemed unsafe and is demolished. Notable New Zealand examples of this occurring is the Toomaths Building, and the former Erskine College in Wellington, while Antonio Hall in Christchurch is confirmed for demolition and further buildings remain at risk, such as Auckland’s Carlile House in Grey Lynn and the former Carrington Hospital in Point Chevalier.
- **Adaptive Re-use:** The process of updating an existing historic building for a new function while protecting its cultural, architectural, and historical value.

About ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand

ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand Te Mana o Nga Pouwhenua o Te Ao is a professional organisation for the support and advancement of individuals and organisations engaged in the conservation of places of cultural heritage value in New Zealand.

A key aspect of ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand’s work is the development of the New Zealand Charter in 1993, with a revised version being published in 2010. This Charter is widely used in the New Zealand heritage sector and forms a recognised benchmark for conservation standards and practice. It is used by central government ministries and departments, by local bodies in district plans and heritage management, and by practitioners as guiding principles.

The charter can be found here: <https://www.icomos.org.nz/charter>

The website can be found here: <https://www.icomos.org.nz/>

Survey Questions and Responses

The survey was sent to all seven parties on 14 September with a deadline of 30 September. Parties that had not responded received follow-ups from 1 October, and the final date for responses was 17 October. Four parties answered; the Greens declined to participate, and ACT and New Zealand First did not reply. The contact made with each party is recorded in the [Party Responses](#) section after the survey responses.

Responses to the survey are organised thematically rather than by party, so that each party's answer to the same question can be read side by side. Each theme opens with a short overview of the key issue and the context in which the question was asked, followed by the question itself and the responses received. Responses are reproduced *exactly* as received, without correction of spelling, grammar or punctuation, including the answers to the additional questions in the Party Responses section. Within each theme, they appear in **alphabetical order** for consistency only; this implies no ranking, preference or endorsement. Where a party did not respond to a question, this is noted. Some parties were also asked additional questions in the body of the email, tailored to their position in Parliament. These are listed in the [Party Responses](#) section.

Heritage Funding Cuts

The two Crown agencies most responsible for heritage, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) and the Department of Conservation (DOC), have both faced significant funding reductions in recent years. In Budget 2025, HNZPT's operating budget was cut by \$2 million a year from 2026/27 – a 12 per cent reduction, totalling \$6 million over three years.²⁴⁷ The organisation retains approximately \$15.2 million a year in operational Crown funding. Budget 2026 then introduced further baseline savings across the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and 13 other entities, including HNZPT (see "Budget Cuts to Heritage Funding" under "Where National Falls Short").²⁴⁸

HNZPT was struggling to deliver what was expected of it before these cuts. Its 2017–2021 Statement of Intent noted that a further 20 per cent of its baseline funding was self-generated, through membership fees, property admission and function charges, grants, interest and bequests, and warned: "The demand for our services consistently exceeds our ability to supply. Rather than spreading our available funding too thinly across all our properties and functions we will continue to deliver the best value for money by being selective about the activities and

²⁴⁷ Willis, "Budget 2025: Summary of Initiatives," 9; Gabel, "Ministry of Culture and Heritage Mulling Restructure After \$2m Annual Funding Cut."

²⁴⁸ Willis, "Budget 2026: Summary of Initiatives," 7.

properties on which we will focus our efforts.”²⁴⁹

Its responsibilities have since grown. The Tohu Whenua programme, delivered with DOC, now covers four regions and 39 heritage sites, and is working towards nationwide coverage, with Manawatū-Whanganui and Murihiku Southland next.²⁵⁰ The Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 has added new statutory advisory work. Under the Act, HNZPT is invited to comment on fast-track applications as an administering agency and prepares reports on those that seek an archaeological authority, which the expert panel decides in its place.²⁵¹

DOC, which manages Aotearoa New Zealand’s largest heritage portfolio, has also faced reductions in its operating funding. Budget 2024 set DOC a baseline savings target of \$31.341 million a year from 2024/25, about 6.5 per cent of the baseline eligible for savings.²⁵² By February 2025, DOC had announced cuts to 124 jobs.²⁵³ Its director of heritage and visitors, Catherine Wilson, said of its huts, tracks and other visitor facilities: “Our estimate is that we have the funding to properly maintain and support about 70 percent of the current network.” Storm damage added to the pressure, with DOC estimating that repairing the more than 500 assets damaged in Cyclone Gabrielle, including bridges, tracks and huts, would cost \$90 million, counting facilities, heritage and biodiversity.²⁵⁴

Budget 2025 ended DOC’s co-funding of the Tohu Whenua programme, worth \$130,000 a year, and allocated an ongoing \$20 million a year from the International Visitor Levy.²⁵⁵ Budget 2026 followed with ongoing savings of \$9.428 million a year, or \$37.712 million over four years.²⁵⁶

These reductions raise the question of what both agencies can continue to deliver, and what level of Crown funding would allow them to meet their roles.

Each party was therefore asked:

1. The two biggest government agencies tasked with caring for Aotearoa New Zealand’s heritage (the Department of Conservation, who manages the largest heritage portfolio in the country, and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga) have had significant funding cuts in recent years. **Would your party increase the funding of these two agencies to care for heritage above and beyond pre-reduction levels?**

²⁴⁹ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, “Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Statement of Intent 2017-2021,” *Parliament Bills* (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, May 25, 2017), <https://bills.parliament.nz/download/Paper/32ce4461-7461-4e44-a563-def33930ab1b>, 9-10.

²⁵⁰ Potaka, “Heritage Tourism Boost to Support Local Economies.”

²⁵¹ Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, ss 17(1)(c), 51(2)(d) and 53(2)(k).

²⁵² Department of Conservation, “Budget 2024 Overview.”

²⁵³ Kate Green, “DOC Faces 30% Shortfall in Funding Huts and Tracks,” *Radio New Zealand*, February 12, 2025, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/541585/doc-faces-30-percent-shortfall-in-funding-huts-and-tracks>.

²⁵⁴ Kate Green, “DOC Faces 30% Shortfall in Funding Huts and Tracks.”

²⁵⁵ Department of Conservation, “Budget 2025 Overview,” 2025, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/budget/budget-2025-overview/>.

²⁵⁶ Department of Conservation, “Budget 2026 Overview.”

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

Labour values the work of the Department of Conservation and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga. Our record shows it: in Government we increased Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga funding to strengthen its work on built heritage and sites of significance to Māori. We're concerned about the effect of recent cuts on the agencies that care for our most important places. Labour will fund the Department of Conservation and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga appropriately, so they have stable, sustainable funding to do their job.

National

New Zealand's heritage is an important part of our national identity, and we want to see it protected and enjoyed by future generations. Our focus is on getting better results from the funding available, while making it easier and more affordable to maintain and conserve heritage places. Through our Amplify strategy, we're working to reduce unnecessary costs and regulatory barriers, so more heritage buildings can remain in use rather than falling into disrepair.

Our focus has been on progressing a legislative and regulatory programme that supports the long-term protection of significant heritage while making it easier to maintain, strengthen, adapt and make use of those assets. Alongside these reforms, the Government has continued to invest in heritage and conservation assets, including providing \$4.2 million from the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy to the Backcountry Trust since 2024 to help restore and maintain New Zealand's backcountry huts and tracks.

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

Successive governments have cut the conservation budget, and we will reverse that. Our Healthy Land and Water policy raises Vote Conservation funding to a level where species and ecosystems begin to recover. We've also opposed changing DOC's purpose to facilitating development. Its core job should stay protecting New Zealand's natural heritage, including its cultural values.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports a focus on protecting sites of significance to hapū and iwi, strengthening

specialist heritage capability, and ensuring Māori communities have access to advice and support for conservation work.

Heritage Protection versus Development + Heritage EQUIP

Heritage protection has increasingly been framed by government as an obstacle to development. Bishop legislated in 2025 to remove heritage protection from the Gordon Wilson Flats, describing the existing system as “a failed planning system that prioritises preservation of heritage, no matter the economic cost” (see “Gordon Wilson Flats” under “Where National Falls Short”).²⁵⁷ He has since announced the removal or modification of heritage provisions at sites in Wellington on housing, economic growth and employment grounds (see “Wellington Heritage Provisions” under “Where National Falls Short”).²⁵⁸

The government’s Amplify strategy acknowledges both the financial burden of conserving heritage places and the need for heritage requirements to facilitate urban development.²⁵⁹ It also lists exploring regulatory solutions to the cost of seismic risk in heritage buildings as a supporting activity, noting that heritage requirements in Aotearoa New Zealand are not nationally consistent.²⁶⁰

The same framing appears in public debate. A 2024 article aimed at young audiences asked whether heritage buildings were “precious history, or waste of space?”, and a documentary released the same year presented heritage protection as an obstacle to housing affordability in Wellington.²⁶¹

Some heritage professionals reject the link between protection and the housing shortage. Dr Jamie Jacobs, Director of HNZPT’s Central Region, argues that “heritage and densification are not mutually exclusive” and that developers should look first at land that sits undeveloped or underdeveloped.²⁶² He adds that such land is likely too valuable for development on it to deliver affordable housing for first-time buyers.

Heritage EQUIP (the Heritage Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme) was established in Budget 2016 to assist private owners of heritage buildings with earthquake strengthening work. By June 2018 it had supported 22 projects with a total of \$4 million in grants.²⁶³ It has since

²⁵⁷ Bishop, “Gordon Wilson Flats’ Heritage Protection Goneburger.”

²⁵⁸ Chris Bishop, “Planning Changes to Support Wellington’s Growth.”

²⁵⁹ MCH, “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025–2030,” 32.

²⁶⁰ MCH, “Amplify: A Creative and Cultural Strategy for New Zealand 2025–2030,” 42.

²⁶¹ Janhavi Gosavi, “Heritage Buildings: Precious History or Waste of Space?,” *Re:News*, February 23, 2024, <https://www.renews.co.nz/heritage-buildings-precious-history-or-waste-of-space/>; “Under the Surface (2024) - Documentary Short Film.”

²⁶² Gosavi, “Heritage Buildings: Precious History or Waste of Space?”

²⁶³ Carmel Sepuloni, “Seismic Funding Supports All Manner of Heritage Buildings,” Press release, June 27, 2018, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/seismic-funding-supports-all-manner-heritage-buildings>.

been discontinued (see “Heritage EQUIP” under “Where National Supports Heritage” and “Heritage EQUIP Funding Not Renewed in Budget 2021” under “Where Labour Falls Short”). In a 2021 media release from Historic Places Aotearoa (HPA), Helen Craig, then a Whanganui district councillor and an HPA executive member, said that Heritage EQUIP was “revolutionary in that it funded private owners of buildings”.²⁶⁴ A 2025 government review of the earthquake-prone building system points the same way in Whanganui’s Drews Avenue precinct, where EQUIP provided \$178,451.25 towards restoration costing more than \$3 million. The review estimates that tax from the restored buildings is four times the grant, and says the programme has been attributed as “an essential source of support and advice”.²⁶⁵

These competing views raise the question of whether heritage protection and urban development can be achieved together, how consistent heritage requirements should be across the country, and whether the Crown should restore or increase support for the seismic strengthening of heritage buildings.

Each party was therefore asked:

2. The government’s 2025 Amplify strategy acknowledges both the financial burden of conserving heritage places and the need for heritage requirements to facilitate urban development. The strategy further lists exploring regulatory solutions to address the cost of seismic risk in heritage buildings as a supporting activity, noting heritage requirements in Aotearoa New Zealand are not nationally consistent. **What is your party’s position on balancing heritage protection with urban development? Do you believe these objectives can be achieved together, and how important is national consistency in heritage requirements? In addition, would your party reinstate the Heritage EQUIP (Heritage Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme) fund, or otherwise increase funding for the seismic strengthening of heritage buildings both privately and publicly owned in Aotearoa New Zealand?**

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

New Zealand has unique heritage sites that need protection. Labour believes heritage protection and urban development can and should work together. More national consistency

²⁶⁴ Historic Places Aotearoa, “Loss of Heritage EQUIP Funding a Blow,” Press release, August 11, 2021, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK2108/S00175/loss-of-heritage-equip-funding-a-blow.htm>. The author is also an executive member of HPA.

²⁶⁵ MBIE, “Earthquake-Prone Building System and Seismic Risk Management Review,” 27.

would give owners, developers and councils greater certainty, and communities need a real voice in what matters locally. Labour believes decisions around heritage sites and funding should be worked through pragmatically and in consultation with communities.

National

We can protect important heritage without putting a handbrake on growth. Our RMA reforms, passed into law this week, strike the balance between protecting significant historic heritage while creating a simpler and more nationally consistent planning system.

More than 100 existing plans will become just 17 combined regional plans, with nationally standardised zones and rules to reduce unnecessary variation across the country.

We've also passed major earthquake-prone building reforms, expected to remove around half of currently designated buildings from the system and save owners an estimated \$8.2 billion. That means fewer unnecessary strengthening bills, while continuing to address serious risks to people's safety.

The goal is to protect what genuinely matters while making it easier to build homes and infrastructure, strengthen and reuse existing buildings, and support economic growth.

EQUIP was time-limited funding made available under the previous earthquake prone-building settings, which meant some owners faced strengthening bills running into the millions. Our Government has since changed reformed the system to be appropriately focused on risk to life. There are no plans to renew this fund.

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

Yes, the two can be achieved together. We reject the false choice between growth and protection. Set firm protections first, then let development go ahead quickly and with certainty inside them.

National consistency is central to our housing policy. This includes certain and consistent heritage protection alongside certain and consistent opportunities for higher density development.

Te Pāti Māori

Māori heritage is not a barrier to growth. It is part of the cultural foundation that makes Aotearoa unique. Te Pāti Māori believes development must respect local Māori heritage.

Sites of cultural significance, wāhi tapu, pā sites, heritage buildings, natural taonga and other places of importance to Māori are not obstacles to progress. They are part of the identity and

whakapapa of our people and communities. We support decision-making led by hapū and iwi, and a development approach that works around heritage wherever possible rather than removing heritage to accommodate development.

Te Pāti Māori supports clear and consistent heritage protections across Aotearoa while upholding the rights of hapū and iwi to exercise tino rangatiratanga over places of significance to them. We also support increased investment in the protection and seismic strengthening of heritage sites and buildings, including support for communities, hapū and iwi carrying responsibilities as kaitiaki.

Regulatory Relief

Under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), the protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is a matter of national importance.²⁶⁶ In practice, councils give effect to this by scheduling heritage items in district plans, which can restrict what owners are permitted to do with their property. The cost of complying with those restrictions is also a live public issue. In 2025, a news article reporting that Mount Eden villa owners had been told their aluminium-framed double-glazed windows violated heritage rules drew more than 800 comments on social media, and its headline was revised after the Media Council upheld a complaint.²⁶⁷

The coalition government's reform of the RMA changes how those restrictions are treated. ACT championed a regulatory relief framework, under which local government "must provide practical relief mechanisms when imposing restrictions such as heritage protections and significant natural areas".²⁶⁸ Simon Court, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for RMA Reform and Infrastructure, described the aim as putting property rights "at the core" and forcing local government to justify restrictions that "for too long have been costless to them".²⁶⁹ The Planning Act and Natural Environment Act, which carry the framework, passed their third reading on 22 September 2026 and received Royal assent on 30 September.²⁷⁰

Under the Planning Act, a council must include a relief framework in its proposed plan if a rule on a specified topic is reasonably likely to have a "significant adverse impact on the reasonable use of land".²⁷¹ The specified topics include significant historic heritage sites and structures (to the extent they relate to an identified area), and sites of significance to Māori.²⁷² A relief

²⁶⁶ Resource Management Act 1991, s 6(f).

²⁶⁷ Ben Leahy, "Auckland Mt Eden Villa Owners Told Aluminium-framed Double-glazed Windows Violate Heritage Rules," *NZ Herald*, May 17, 2025, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/auckland-mt-eden-villa-owners-told-double-glazed-windows-violate-heritage-rules/VTRS7R7VX5F4PPXP24LAUQTUGQ/>.

²⁶⁸ Bishop and Court, "A Better Planning System for a Better New Zealand."

²⁶⁹ Bishop and Court, "A Better Planning System for a Better New Zealand."

²⁷⁰ Bishop and Court, "RMA Era Ends as New System Passes Parliament"; Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70) and Natural Environment Act 2026 (2026 No 71), dates of assent September 30, 2026.

²⁷¹ Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70), sch 3 cl 65(1).

²⁷² Planning Act 2026, s 3 (definition of "specified topic", paras (a) and (c)).

framework may include monetary payment, reduced rates or fees, additional development rights, land swaps or targeted grants.²⁷³ Relief need not fully address the impact, and only those who own the land when the plan is made operative are eligible.²⁷⁴ Analysis of the proposals notes that the threshold for relief is lower than under Labour's replacement legislation, which would have kept compensation to extreme cases where land is incapable of reasonable use. Chris Bishop, the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, acknowledged that how councils would afford compensation if a future government changed the national plans was "something we'll need to work through", given the new rates cap.²⁷⁵

In contrast, the incentives available to owners who choose to conserve heritage are limited. The main central government fund for privately owned heritage buildings, Heritage EQUIP, dedicated \$12 million over four years from 2016 and has since been discontinued (see "Heritage EQUIP" under "Where National Supports Heritage" and "Heritage EQUIP Funding Not Renewed in Budget 2021" under "Where Labour Falls Short"). The Planning Act also allows councils to offer voluntary incentives, but does not require them to.²⁷⁶

Relief for owners who bear the cost of heritage protection sits alongside few incentives for owners who conserve voluntarily, and it is unclear how councils will fund relief.

Each party was therefore asked:

3. What is your party's position on the proposed regulatory relief for landowners affected by heritage protections, particularly given the currently limited incentives available at central and local government levels to encourage private heritage conservation?

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

Labour proposed amendments to the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act during the Committee of the Whole stage to delete the regulatory relief provisions and would carry this out in Government. That's because these provisions are unworkable and could shift costs onto ratepayers for heritage protections. It could also make protection unaffordable in practice.

²⁷³ Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70), sch 3 cl 69.

²⁷⁴ Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70), sch 3 cls 67(3)(b) and 70(1).

²⁷⁵ Russell Palmer, "Duelling RMA Reforms: How Different Is the Coalition's Solution From Labour's?," Radio New Zealand, December 10, 2025, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/politics/581427/duelling-rma-reforms-how-different-is-the-coalition-s-solution-from-labour-s>.

²⁷⁶ Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70), s 113.

National

Heritage protections deliver benefits for the wider community, but we recognise that the costs can fall heavily on individual property owners.

That's why our new planning system provides for regulatory relief where certain planning restrictions significantly affect the reasonable use of private land.

This means councils will have to proactively offer relief to affected landowners. The aim is to ensure heritage protections are justified and proportionate, rather than leaving individual owners to carry an unreasonable burden for something that benefits the whole community.

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

We oppose the regulatory relief provisions in the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill. They would weaken councils' ability to protect what matters and to set higher standards.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori believes heritage protection must uphold Māori rights, not diminish them.

We support incentives and assistance that help conserve taonga while maintaining strong protections for wāhi tapu, sites of significance, and historic places. Where land and heritage sites have been taken from Māori, we support their return and the restoration of Māori stewardship and decision-making authority.

Demolition by Neglect

Demolition by neglect is a significant issue facing heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand. It occurs when a historic property is allowed to deteriorate, through abandonment or a sustained lack of maintenance, until its disrepair becomes justification for demolition. Often described as a “loophole” in conservation policy, it exploits the gap between protecting a building and requiring its owner to maintain it.²⁷⁷ The gap is not new: the repair notices in the Historic Places Act 1980 were never used and were not carried into the Resource Management Act 1991 or the Historic Places Act 1993, and in 2007 the Historic Places Trust warned that owners could still let listed buildings deteriorate “without hindrance”.²⁷⁸ The New Zealand Environment Guide

²⁷⁷ Andrea M. Goldwyn, “Demolition by Neglect: A Loophole in Preservation Policy” (M.S. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), <https://archive.org/details/demolitionbynegl00gold/page/n19/mode/2up>.

²⁷⁸ Paulette Wallace and Anita Franchetti, “Heritage at Risk: Addressing the Issue of the Demolition by Neglect of Historic Heritage in New Zealand,” ed. Robert McClean and Lorie A. Mastemaker, *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga* (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, August 3, 2007), <https://hnpzpt-rpod-assets.azureedge.net/zfpdyw24/discussion-paper-no6-demolition-by-neglect-2.pdf>, 4, 6.

recognises it as a key threat to historic heritage, yet this report found no mechanism in either the RMA or the HNZPT Act to prevent it.²⁷⁹

The pattern is visible across the country. The heritage-listed Toomath's Building in Wellington was hit by fire in 2023 after years of neglect, and the former Erskine College, also in Wellington, was lost to sustained neglect.²⁸⁰ Antonio Hall in Christchurch has been demolished, and Auckland's Carlile House and the former Carrington Hospital remain at risk.²⁸¹ The Gordon Wilson Flats in Wellington, vacant since 2012, lost its heritage protection through legislation in 2025, and its owner began demolishing it in 2026 (see "Gordon Wilson Flats" under "Where National Falls Short").²⁸² Condition also shapes public support: a survey of Invercargill residents found that a building's maintenance and condition was the most important factor in support for retaining heritage buildings.²⁸³

These cases raise the question of what can be done to keep heritage buildings maintained before their condition becomes the argument for demolition.

Each party was therefore asked:

4. What are your party's thoughts on the issue of demolition by neglect, a key threat to historic heritage, and what concrete action would you take, or intend to take, to prevent this from happening in future?

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

²⁷⁹ Environment Foundation, "Threats to Historic Heritage," New Zealand Environment Guide, 2017, <https://www.environmentguide.org.nz/issues/heritage/threats-to-historic-heritage/>; Resource Management Act 1991; Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014.

²⁸⁰ Hanna McCallum and Monique Ford, "Heritage-listed Toomath's Building Hit by Fire," *The Post*, October 15, 2023, <https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/350091967/heritage-listed-toomaths-building-hit-fire>; Matt Stewart, "Erskine College \$30m Housing Project Gets Thumbs up From Island Bay Residents," *Stuff*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/83472217/erskine-college-30m-housing-project-gets-thumbs-up-from-island-bay-residents>.

²⁸¹ Geoff Sloan, "Landmark Building Disappearing," *Otago Daily Times*, July 21, 2026, <https://www.odt.co.nz/canterbury/christchurch/abandoned-hall-makes-way-for-450-bed-student-village-j5vja1vj>; Audrey Van Ryn, "Carlile House Continues to Deteriorate," *Civic Trust Auckland* (blog), October 28, 2025, <https://civictrustauckland.org.nz/carlile-house-continues-to-deteriorate/>; Smith, "Local MP Seeks Law Change as Historic Auckland Building Falls Into Ruin."

²⁸² Bishop, "Gordon Wilson Flats' Heritage Protection Goneburger"; Ethan Manera and Azaria Howell, "Gordon Wilson Flats Demolition: Victoria University to Spend \$7.25m, Work to Take Until 2027," *NZ Herald*, April 13, 2026, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/wellington/gordon-wilson-flats-demolition-victoria-university-to-spend-725m-work-to-take-until-2027/YIHWMWQ4TBGV7MPFXAGQZA7RQE/>.

²⁸³ Itohan Esther Aigwi, Olga Filippova, and Bridgette Sullivan-Taylor, "Public Perception of Heritage Buildings in the City-centre of Invercargill, New Zealand," *City, Culture and Society* 34 (August 30, 2023): 100538, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2023.100538>.

Labour

Losing heritage buildings through neglect can be a real loss for communities. New Zealand has unique heritage sites that need protection. Labour believes decisions around heritage sites and funding should be worked through pragmatically and in consultation with communities.

National

Nobody wants to see important heritage buildings left empty and falling into disrepair because the cost of maintaining them has become prohibitive.

That's one reason we've reformed the earthquake-prone building system. Under the previous settings, some owners faced strengthening bills running into the millions, leaving buildings empty or deteriorating.

Our changes focus on genuine risks to life and remove disproportionate strengthening requirements. Combined with our work to make heritage maintenance simpler and more practical, this addresses some of the financial pressures that can leave heritage buildings neglected.

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

We have not developed any policy on this matter. But we note your question and the concerns that lie behind it. We would certainly consider policy options once we are in Parliament.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports stronger measures to prevent owners deliberately allowing sites of significance to Māori, wāhi tapu and other protected heritage places to deteriorate until demolition becomes inevitable.

Adaptive Re-use

Adaptive re-use is the process of updating an existing historic building for a new function while protecting its cultural, architectural and historical value. It is often presented as an environmental and economic alternative to demolition. Heritage economist Donovan Rypkema calls historic preservation “the ultimate recycling strategy” and describes adaptive re-use as cost-competitive with new construction.²⁸⁴ Demolition, by contrast, generates waste: in Aotearoa New Zealand, a report commissioned by the Ministry for the Environment found that 69.4 per cent of waste

²⁸⁴ Donovan D. Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*, 3rd ed. (1994; repr., National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2002), 31, 85–87.

disposed at levied landfills (Classes 1–4) could be attributed to construction and demolition.²⁸⁵ Re-use can also save time and money: the University of Auckland’s Building 201 project retained much of the existing building, which shortened the “design and build time by a year” and saved an estimated 25 per cent compared with a new build.²⁸⁶

Despite this evidence, demolition often remains the default response. This raises the question of whether adaptive re-use should be encouraged and promoted more widely.

Each party was therefore asked:

5. Architect Carl Elefante once said that “the greenest building is the one already built.” Do you and/or your party think that the practice of adaptive re-use should be encouraged and promoted to a greater extent in Aotearoa New Zealand?

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

Labour recognises the value adaptive re-use can bring where is it appropriate, from keeping heritage buildings in active use to reducing the carbon cost of demolition and rebuilding.

National

Keeping heritage buildings useful is often one of the most practical ways to preserve them.

We want to make it easier for owners to repair, strengthen and adapt existing buildings rather than leaving them empty because the rules make redevelopment too difficult or expensive.

Our earthquake-prone building reforms remove unnecessary strengthening costs for many owners, while Amplify commits to making heritage maintenance and conservation simpler and more practical.

Heritage New Zealand also provides guidance through its Saving the Town toolkit, helping councils and communities find ways to retain and reuse heritage places.

New Zealand First

No response received.

²⁸⁵ BECA Limited, “New Zealand Construction and Demolition Waste Baseline & Tracking Methodology Report,” *Ministry for the Environment* (Ministry for the Environment, June 5, 2025), <https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Waste/New-Zealand-Construction-and-Demolition-Waste-Baseline-and-Tracking-Methodology-Report.pdf>.

²⁸⁶ Bill McKay, “Stripped to Its Bones for the Planet,” *Architecture Now* (Architecture Now, n.d.), <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/stripped-to-its-bones-for-the-planet/>.

Opportunity

Yes. Our housing policy changes the Unit Titles Act and other law so it's easier to build a wider mix of uses, from home offices and shop fronts to co-housing and multi-generational homes. That makes converting existing buildings simpler. We'll also let owners write building energy improvements off against tax, and we're expanding Warmer Kiwi Homes. Both make upgrading an existing building more attractive than replacing it.

Te Pāti Māori

Kaitiakitanga is not about freezing places in time. It is about ensuring taonga endure and continue to serve communities.

Adaptive re-use can breathe new life into heritage places while maintaining the whakapapa, stories and identity that make them important. Our focus is on kaitiakitanga led by mana whenua.

Heritage and Private Investment

In 2025, Historic England, the national heritage public body, launched a Heritage Investment Prospectus showcasing historic sites and buildings where owners are actively seeking investment partners or buyers, with advice available to investors early in the development process.²⁸⁷ The first edition featured 17 sites, from mills to a former bank and a market hall, while the recent 2026 edition features 20 sites, particularly focused on residential-led regeneration.²⁸⁸ Historic England says historic buildings “will be better conserved if they are relevant and in use, rather than standing empty”.²⁸⁹

This report found no equivalent national publication in Aotearoa New Zealand that brings together heritage buildings whose owners are seeking investment partners or buyers, but investment has already brought heritage buildings back into use. Auckland's Britomart precinct was “successfully transformed from a disparate collection of run-down historic buildings into a cohesive heritage precinct”.²⁹⁰ In Palmerston North, the Safari Group bought the former post office in 2022 and proposed a hotel that keeps the original façade. Mayor Grant Smith said the council had supported the redevelopment but needed the commercial sector to step forward,

²⁸⁷ Historic England, “Heritage Investment Prospectus: 2025,” *Historic England* (Historic England, 2025), <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/heritage-investment-prospectus-2025/>.

²⁸⁸ Historic England, “Heritage Investment Prospectus: 2025,” 3; Historic England, “Heritage Investment Prospectus: 2026,” *Historic England* (Historic England, 2026), <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/heritage-investment-prospectus-2026/>, Contents.

²⁸⁹ Historic England, “Heritage Investment Prospectus: 2025,” 1.

²⁹⁰ Glen Hazelton, “Case Study 2.3 - Britomart, Auckland and the Warehouse Precinct, Dunedin,” in *Saving the Town* (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 2020), https://issuu.com/heritagenz/docs/saving_the_town/26?e=36&o=1, 28.

as buying the building was not its role.²⁹¹ Others are still looking for partners: in July 2026, Christchurch City Council, having committed \$20 million to restoring the Canterbury Provincial Council Buildings, invited expressions of interest from potential partners to help fund the rest of a restoration expected to cost around \$100 million.²⁹²

This raises the question of whether a national prospectus could help match owners of large unused heritage buildings with investors.

Each party was therefore asked:

6. England recently produced (through national heritage public body Historic England) a Heritage Investment Prospectus, showcasing historic sites where owners are actively seeking investment partners or buyers to create homes, workspaces or mixed-use developments in large unused heritage buildings. These include former mills or historic public and commercial buildings. **What are your party's thoughts on this initiative, and would your party advocate for a similar prospectus to be produced for New Zealand?**

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

Historic England's prospectus is an interesting example of how other countries are finding new uses for underused heritage buildings. Labour is always interested in learning from international approaches.

National

There's real potential in connecting heritage buildings with people who have the investment and ideas to give them a new lease of life.

Our Amplify strategy recognises the importance of attracting private investment and alternative funding to support heritage and cultural assets.

We're also reducing regulatory barriers that can make it difficult to maintain and redevelop older buildings. The aim is to create an environment where heritage can be preserved, buildings

²⁹¹ Judith Lacy, "First Look at Safari Group's Hotel for Old Palmerston North Post Office," *Manawatu Guardian*, March 7, 2023, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/manawatu-guardian/news/first-look-at-safari-groups-hotel-for-old-palmerston-north-post-office/PYCGQQMIOVDMZD3ML4URYTBP4/>.

²⁹² Ryan Boswell, "Private Investors Sought to Save Significant Christchurch Heritage Site," *1News*, July 16, 2026, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2026/07/16/private-investors-sought-to-save-significant-christchurch-heritage-site/>; Inside Government NZ, "Partnership Sought for Council Buildings Restoration," *Inside Government NZ*, July 11, 2026, <https://insidegovernment.co.nz/partnership-sought-for-council-buildings-restoration/>.

can be put to productive use and communities can benefit.

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

We have no set policy, but are open to exploring this idea further.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports models that return heritage sites, buildings and lands of significance to Māori ownership, stewardship and decision-making wherever appropriate.

Too often, heritage funding and investment frameworks treat Māori as stakeholders rather than tangata whenua. We believe hapū and iwi should be empowered to lead the restoration, management and future use of sites connected to their whakapapa.

We would support initiatives that help unlock investment into heritage places, but the priority must be strengthening tino rangatiratanga, protecting cultural heritage, and ensuring future generations inherit these taonga, and that Māori are the decision makers where it relates to sites of significance to them.

Heritage and Economic Growth

Public debate about heritage tends to focus on its costs: maintenance, consent restrictions and earthquake strengthening. Heritage economist Donovan Rypkema has long argued that conservation is an economic asset, saying that “far from being the antithesis of economy, historic preservation is at the heart of it”.²⁹³ He identifies job creation, downtown and small-town revitalisation, heritage tourism, property values and small business incubation as sources of economic value.²⁹⁴ Because heritage projects are labour-intensive – with labour accounting for 60–70 per cent of project expenditure compared with about half for new construction – more of the spending stays in the local economy.²⁹⁵ A European study by Nypan likewise found that historic rehabilitation created 16.5 per cent more jobs than new construction.²⁹⁶

Rypkema’s research is largely American, but research in Aotearoa New Zealand points the same way. A 2023 study of Auckland’s Special Character Areas found median capital values 33 per

²⁹³ Donovan D. Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader’s Guide*, 3rd ed. (1994; repr., National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2002), 7.

²⁹⁴ Rypkema, *The Economic Power of Restoration* (Washington, D.C.: Restoration & Renovation Conference, 2001), <https://ihbc.org.uk/consultations/docs/PDF/The%20Economic%20Power.pdf>, 6.

²⁹⁵ Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader’s Guide*, 14.

²⁹⁶ Terje Nypan, *Cultural Heritage Monuments and Historic Buildings as Value Generators in a Postindustrial Economy: With Emphasis on Exploring the Role of the Sector as Economic Driver* (Oslo: Directorate for Cultural Heritage, 2003), https://mapa.valpo.net/sites/default/files/repositorio-documentos/nypan_ch_und_tourismus.pdf, 12.

cent higher in Freemans Bay and 9 per cent higher in Onehunga than in the wider study area. The Freemans Bay figure is well above the 4.3–5 per cent found in earlier New Zealand studies, a gap the authors put down partly to their smaller sample and use of capital values.²⁹⁷ Of the 99 homeowners surveyed, 78.8 per cent were satisfied living in a Special Character Area, although 52.7 per cent of those who had applied for resource consent reported a negative or very negative experience.²⁹⁸ Britomart shows the same pattern at precinct scale. Its heritage character has been used to create “a sense of place and point of difference” that attracts visitors, workers and businesses, and the precinct is now home to more than 4,000 workers.²⁹⁹ In Dunedin, the city council’s \$1.6 million investment in the Warehouse Precinct between 2012 and 2017 leveraged an estimated \$50 million of private investment.³⁰⁰

Economic considerations also feature in the process for removing heritage protection. Under the 2025 Resource Management amendments, the criteria for a Ministerial direction to remove heritage protection from a listed building include “the economic viability of any proposed use”, alongside heritage significance, physical condition and whether the owner agrees.³⁰¹

This raises the question of what role heritage should play in economic growth, and how its economic value can be recognised without weakening its protection.

Each party was therefore asked:

7. Research by Donovan D. Rypkema has identified a range of economic benefits associated with heritage conservation, including employment and household income, property values, tourism and the revitalisation of urban areas. This research suggests that heritage conservation can be understood not only as a cultural and social good, but also as a contributor to local economic development. The Amplify strategy notes that the Government will work with the sector to improve “the quality of research on the value of cultural heritage to wellbeing and economic growth.” **What role does your party see heritage playing in New Zealand’s economic growth, and how would you support greater recognition of the economic value of heritage while ensuring its protection?**

ACT

No response received.

²⁹⁷ Lucy Rossiter and Kai Gu, “The Impact of Special Character Areas on Property Values and Homeowners’ Experiences: Cases From Auckland, New Zealand,” *Land* 12, no. 6 (2023): 1181, <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/12/6/1181>, 10–11.

²⁹⁸ Rossiter and Gu, “The Impact of Special Character Areas on Property Values and Homeowners’ Experiences: Cases From Auckland, New Zealand,” 12.

²⁹⁹ Hazelton, “Case Study 2.3 - Britomart, Auckland and the Warehouse Precinct, Dunedin,” 27–28.

³⁰⁰ Hazelton, “Case Study 2.3 - Britomart, Auckland and the Warehouse Precinct, Dunedin,” 28.

³⁰¹ Resource Management Act 1991, sch 1 cl 78(3B), inserted by Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 (2025 No 41), s 87(17).

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

Labour recognises that heritage contributes to communities in many ways, including economically. We support efforts to better understand and support that value.

National

Heritage is not only a cultural asset. It contributes to tourism, local economies, urban revitalisation, community identity and economic growth. A good example is our recent \$8 million investment in the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, preserving nationally significant heritage buildings and cultural facilities at a site that attracts more than 160,000 visitors a year and supports Northland tourism, jobs and economic activity.

Through Amplify, we also want to improve our understanding of the contribution cultural heritage makes to wellbeing and economic growth. Additionally, the strategy aims to grow the creative and cultural sectors' contribution to GDP from \$17.5 billion in 2024 to at least \$22 billion by 2030.

We're supporting that ambition by reducing unnecessary regulatory barriers, encouraging investment and making it more practical for owners to maintain and conserve heritage places.

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

We have no policy on this matter, but this accords with our wider approach. Our policy directs Treasury to develop standards for counting nature as an asset in cost-benefit analysis. That's because values that are real but unpriced get discounted next to a dollar figure for development. Heritage has the same problem. We'd support better evidence on its economic value so decisions weigh what would be lost.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports better recognition of the economic benefits that flow from protecting heritage, including employment, tourism and regional development. However, the true value of heritage lies in preserving the whakapapa, histories and connections that bind people to place. Investment in heritage should be seen as investment in both economic resilience and cultural wellbeing. Heritage is a source of identity, belonging and cultural continuity.

Heritage and Tourism

Tourism is one of the most visible ways heritage contributes to the economy. In July 2025, Conservation Minister Tama Potaka said tourism to the 15,000 heritage places DOC is responsible for was worth an estimated \$1.3 billion a year.³⁰² Heritage events draw visitors too. The Art Deco Trust aimed for Napier's 2024 Art Deco Festival to bring around \$10 million to the local economy, up from an estimated \$6 million before Covid.³⁰³

Research in Aotearoa New Zealand suggests heritage matters to visitors beyond the sights. In a study of international tourists in Hawke's Bay, University of Waikato researchers Gregory Willson and Alison McIntosh found that 46 of the 66 participants in photograph-based interviews chose at least one heritage building to represent their experience of the region, and that most valued the buildings together more than any single one.³⁰⁴ They concluded that heritage buildings make the townscape "an experiential space filled with emotion, mindfulness, engagement and personal meaning", and that their findings "should strengthen support for the preservation of heritage buildings", although the study covered only English-speaking international visitors to one region.³⁰⁵

Relying on tourism to justify heritage, however, risks favouring the places visitors want to see. Economist Xavier Greffe observes that tour operators choose destinations "not always because it is more interesting or culturally rich, but because it is in vogue".³⁰⁶ He asks whether heritage is an asset or a liability, and concludes that cultural tourism must be judged against local conditions and "is not a panacea", warning that smaller towns and rural areas, which often pin their hopes on it, should not base investment on an exaggerated expectation of demand.³⁰⁷ He also cautions that estimates of tourism's value may be biased, because they can be used to justify or to claim subsidies, and that heavy use of heritage without additional resources for its upkeep leads to deterioration.³⁰⁸

Government support for tourism-linked heritage has also changed. Budget 2025 ended DOC's \$130,000 a year co-funding of the Tohu Whenua Heritage Visitor Programme, while the programme was extended to two more regions with \$4.5 million over three years from the International Visitor Levy.³⁰⁹

³⁰² Potaka, "Heritage Tourism Boost to Support Local Economies."

³⁰³ Henry McMullan, "Napier Art Deco Festival Hopes to Bring \$10m Boost to Local Economy," *1News*, February 18, 2024, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2024/02/18/napier-art-deco-festival-hopes-to-bring-10m-boost-to-local-economy/>.

³⁰⁴ Gregory B. Willson and Alison J. McIntosh, "Heritage Buildings and Tourism: An Experiential View," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 2, no. 2 (2007): 75-93, <https://doi.org/10.2167/jht024.0>, 82, 84.

³⁰⁵ Willson and McIntosh, "Heritage Buildings and Tourism: An Experiential View," 88-89.

³⁰⁶ Xavier Greffe, "Is Heritage an Asset or a Liability?," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 5 (2004): 301-9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2004.05.001>, 306.

³⁰⁷ Greffe, "Is Heritage an Asset or a Liability?," 301, 309.

³⁰⁸ Greffe, "Is Heritage an Asset or a Liability?," 302, 306.

³⁰⁹ Willis, "Budget 2025: Summary of Initiatives," 17; Potaka, "Heritage Tourism Boost to Support Local Economies."

This raises the question of whether heritage should be valued mainly for what it brings the visitor economy, and what part tourism should play in paying for its protection.

Each party was therefore asked:

8. Tourism and heritage are often closely linked, with heritage contributing to visitor experiences, and tourism a key income stream for many heritage properties. **Does your party see heritage primarily as an asset for tourism, or as having value independent of its contribution to the visitor economy? What role, if any, should tourism play in supporting the protection and conservation of heritage?**

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

Labour sees heritage as an important part of our national identity and for communities. Tourism is one of the ways people can experience and support heritage places. Labour sees value in both.

National

Heritage has value well beyond tourism. It tells the story of who we are, connects communities with their history and helps preserve our national identity for future generations.

Tourism is an important part of that picture. Heritage attractions bring visitors into our regions, supporting local businesses and jobs, while creating opportunities for communities to share their stories.

Our Amplify strategy recognises both the cultural and economic benefits of heritage, with a focus on increasing public engagement, encouraging investment and supporting the long-term sustainability of the sector.

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

Heritage has value in its own right. Tourism should support it, not define it. That's the line we took on DOC: commercial use has a place where it fits with protection, but it shouldn't become the purpose. We'd also rebalance the International Visitor Levy so 75% goes to recovering the natural heritage visitors come to see.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori views heritage as having intrinsic value regardless of its tourism potential.

Tourism can play an important role in supporting conservation where it is sustainable and community-led. However, heritage should not be protected only because it attracts visitors. Our heritage exists first for the communities and peoples who hold connections to it.

The tourism sector should contribute to the protection and maintenance of heritage assets that underpin visitor experiences.

Notable Tree Protection

Councils list notable trees in their plans to protect them, for heritage, amenity, landscape, ecological and cultural reasons.³¹⁰ A tree can qualify because of its age, stature or history, or because it is an exceptional example of its species.³¹¹ The Environmental Defence Society (EDS) says thousands of trees are protected in council plans across the country, around 6,000 of them in Auckland.³¹²

The Planning Act and Natural Environment Act passed their third reading on 22 September 2026.³¹³ The select committee's report said the Bills "intend to move away from individually listing urban trees for protection, in favour of only demarking trees with significant historic heritage value".³¹⁴ The Planning Act does not mention notable trees, but it requires territorial authorities to regulate and manage "significant historic heritage", and defines "historic heritage" by archaeological, architectural, cultural, historic, scientific and technological qualities, so under the committee's approach a tree would need to meet that definition to be protected individually.³¹⁵ Chris Bishop, the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, said trees with significant heritage value would continue to be protected, but the new system encouraged councils to be more deliberate when applying tree protections.³¹⁶

Groups that work with trees warn the effect could be large. The NZ Notable Trees Trust suggests that up to three-quarters of protected notable trees on non-council land may no longer qualify, based on analysis in Auckland and Nelson, because the trees are valued for reasons other than

³¹⁰ Nine to Noon with Kathryn Ryan, "Special Trees Set to Lose Protections," *Radio New Zealand*, August 19, 2026, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetonoon/audio/2019048244/special-trees-set-to-lose-protections>.

³¹¹ Luka Forman, "'Many, Many More Trees Will Disappear' Under RMA Replacements, Advocate Says," *Radio New Zealand*, August 31, 2026, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/environment/1192700/many-many-more-trees-will-disappear-under-rma-replacements-advocate-says>.

³¹² Environmental Defence Society, "Urban Tree Protections Face the Axe in New Resource Management System," August 25, 2026, <https://eds.org.nz/resources/documents/media-releases/2026/urban-tree-protections-face-the-axe-in-new-resource-management-system/>.

³¹³ Bishop and Court, "RMA Era Ends as New System Passes Parliament."

³¹⁴ Environment Committee, "Planning Bill: Report of the Environment Committee," *Select Committees* (New Zealand Parliament, July 20, 2026), <https://selectcommittees.parliament.nz/v/6/68ac5da4-d3aa-4338-7f1f-08dee6029fb6>, 117.

³¹⁵ Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70), s 3 (definition of "historic heritage") and s 216(2)(f).

³¹⁶ Forman, "'Many, Many More Trees Will Disappear' Under RMA Replacements, Advocate Says."

historic heritage.³¹⁷ The Tree Council, an advocacy group, warns that regulatory relief could also deter councils from keeping tree rules, for fear of compensation claims.³¹⁸ These are advocates' estimates and concerns, not official figures, and Auckland Council's own submission recommended that notable trees remain protected. Canopy cover is already uneven: Māngere-Ōtāhuhu has 9 per cent, against an Auckland average of 20 per cent.³¹⁹

This raises the question of whether notable trees should remain protectable for their ecological, amenity and landscape value, and not only for historic heritage.

Each party was therefore asked:

9. The proposed Resource Management reform significantly narrows the protection of notable trees. Some organisations even suggest that up to "three-quarters of currently protected notable trees on non-council land may no longer qualify for protection, because their importance is in their ecological, botanical, amenity, landscape or community value rather than historic heritage." (NZ Notable Trees Trust, as cited by EDS, 2026) **Would your party strengthen these protections, recognising that notable trees can contribute to the character, amenity and heritage value of neighbourhoods across the country?**

ACT

No response received.

Greens

Declined to participate.

Labour

Yes, Labour will strengthen the protections of trees. Labour proposed amendments to the Planning Act and the Natural Environment Act during the Committee of the Whole stage, including to improve protection and consideration for green spaces and trees in urban areas.

National

Our planning reforms are designed to provide clearer, more consistent rules about what should be protected, while reducing unnecessary restrictions on landowners.

The new Planning Act retains protection for significant historic heritage, alongside other identified environmental and landscape values.

The intention is to focus protections on what is genuinely significant, with clearer national direction rather than inconsistent rules that can make it difficult for property owners to use and develop their land.

³¹⁷ Environmental Defence Society, "Urban Tree Protections Face the Axe in New Resource Management System."

³¹⁸ Tree Council, "No More Urban Trees," August 15, 2026, <https://treecouncil.org.nz/no-more-urban-trees/>.

³¹⁹ Forman, "'Many, Many More Trees Will Disappear' Under RMA Replacements, Advocate Says."

New Zealand First

No response received.

Opportunity

We have no specific policy on this matter, but have reservations about many aspects of the new resource management framework, so we are certainly open to exploring this further. We note in passing the other positive effects of trees in cities, where some of their amenity value arises from removing air pollution and mitigating some of the effects of heat islands.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports protections for notable trees as living taonga.

We recognise that notable trees can sometimes be seen as constraints on development, particularly in high-growth urban areas. However, many of these trees have stood for centuries and hold deep cultural, ecological, historical and spiritual significance.

Their value extends well beyond property boundaries. They are part of the whakapapa of our landscapes and communities and contribute to the character and identity of place.

We are concerned by proposals that weaken protections for notable trees and support planning frameworks that recognise their significance, including the role of tangata whenua as kaitiaki for future generations.

Party Responses

Each party's position before the survey is set out in the [Party Summaries](#) section at the beginning of the report. The dates, deadlines and outcomes of the survey are summarised in the [Survey Questions and Responses](#) section above.

Each party was asked the same nine questions, followed by additional questions that depended on its position. Parties in government (National, ACT and New Zealand First) were asked how the Amplify Strategy action to make maintaining and conserving heritage places "simple and practical for owners" had been achieved, and what work remained. Parties not in government (Labour, the Greens, Te Pāti Māori and Opportunity) were asked for their position on the proposed Resource Management reforms and whether they would continue. National and the Greens were each also asked one party-specific question, and every party was asked to confirm its spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage.

The table below records the contact made with each party. Each party's section then gives a short account of that contact, a summary of its survey response and its answers to the additional questions.

PARTY	ACT	Greens	Labour	National	NZ First	Opportunity	Te Pāti Māori
EMAILS	4	4	6	4	4	9	4
CALLS	2	2	0	0	2	0	0
SURVEY RESPONSE	–	Declined 13 Oct	7 Oct	6 Oct	–	17 Oct	7 Oct

Email counts include follow-ups and thank-you emails. A dash indicates no response.

Opportunity confirmed its spokesperson on 18 October, after the final date.

ACT

For this party's position before the survey, see [ACT Party](#) in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Record of Contact

ACT's survey was sent on 14 September to both its parliamentary office and its general enquiries address. A second email on 1 October also went to Todd Stephenson, the party's spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage, and a follow-up was sent on 6 October. A further email on 8 October also included party leader David Seymour, and ACT's office was phoned about an hour later. A second call followed on 12 October. No reply was received from ACT by the 17 October final date.

Survey Response Summary

ACT did not respond to the survey, so this report's account of its position rests on the public information in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Additional Questions

- 1. In the Amplify Strategy produced by the government, one of the actions it intended to take was listed as: "Work across government to make maintaining and conserving heritage places simple and practical for owners". In what ways do you believe you have achieved this, and what work is still to be done?**

ACT's Response:

None received.

Greens

For this party's position before the survey, see [Green Party](#) in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Record of Contact

The Greens' survey was sent on 14 September. A second email on 1 October copied in Kahurangi Carter, the party's spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage, and a third on 8 October also included co-leader Chlöe Swarbrick. The party's office was phoned the same day, and staff indicated that the request would be followed up or passed on to the relevant people. A second call followed on 12 October. On 13 October, the Greens replied that their parliamentary policy team was "grateful for the opportunity, but they are not prioritising this now". The party suggested contacting the relevant MP after the election. This report's author replied that day, acknowledging the pressure of the campaign and offering to include even a few sentences, or answers to one or two questions, if received by 16 October. Otherwise, the Greens would be assessed on their published policy and public statements. No further reply was received by the

17 October final date.

Survey Response Summary

The Greens declined to participate in the survey, so this report's account of their position rests on the public information in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Additional Questions

- 1. If you were to be in the next government, what is your position on the current proposed Resource Management reforms? Would these continue?**
- 2. Green MP Tamatha Paul has publicly described Wellington's approach to heritage protection as excessive, arguing that heritage listing gets in the way of addressing the housing crisis, and of Wellington that "our city is not a museum" (Interview, "Under the Surface" documentary, 2024). How does the Party reconcile this position with the environmental case for retaining and adaptively reusing existing building stock?**

Greens' Response:

None received.

Labour

For this party's position before the survey, see [Labour Party](#) in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Record of Contact

Labour's survey was sent to its general reception on 14 September. After the 30 September deadline passed, a second email went out on 1 October, copying in Rachel Boyack, Labour's spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage. On 3 October, the survey was also sent directly to Helen White, the Member for Mt Albert, because of her advocacy for the protection of Building One at the former Carrington Hospital. That email invited her comments on the survey and asked whether she would commit to drafting a members' bill to strengthen heritage protection. A follow-up on 6 October went to her as well. The same day, a senior advisor apologised for the delay and explained that "we seem to have missed your original email". The advisor asked for it to be forwarded, promising that Labour would "get a response back to you as soon as possible". The original was sent on immediately, and Labour's responses arrived on 7 October. No reply has been received from Helen White as of 22 October.

Survey Response Summary

Labour's answers were most specific on two points. It would delete the regulatory relief provisions in the Planning Act and the Natural Environment Act, which it described as "unworkable", and it would strengthen the protection of trees. On funding, Labour said it would fund DOC and HNZPT "appropriately" so that they have "stable, sustainable funding to do their

job". It did not commit to restoring funding above pre-reduction levels or answer the question on Heritage EQUIP. Its answer on demolition by neglect named no action, and it did not address the members' bill raised in the email to Helen White. The remaining answers were general: heritage protection and urban development "can and should work together", national consistency would give "greater certainty", and tourism and adaptive re-use were valued without commitments. This report found no Labour heritage policy before the survey, so these responses are the most detailed statement of the party's position it found.

Additional Questions

1. If you were to be in the next government, what is your position on the current proposed Resource Management reforms? Would these continue?

Labour's Response:

Labour will not repeat the 'repeal and replace' cycle to resource management law this Government has chosen but will make changes in Government because the law needs to be workable and do better for the environment and communities. Labour proposed amendments to the Planning Act and the Natural Environment Act during the Committee of the Whole stage. This gives an indication of what Labour would do in Government.

Additional Questions Summary

Labour did not say whether it would continue the Resource Management reforms. It said it "will not repeat the 'repeal and replace' cycle" but will "make changes in Government", and pointed to the amendments it proposed during the committee stage as "an indication of what Labour would do in Government".

National

For this party's position before the survey, see [National Party](#) in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Record of Contact

National replied on 14 September, the day the survey was sent. Its team explained that it was "only able to provide information on policies that have been officially released" and was "unable to comment on, clarify, or provide further detail on policies that have not been released". With that avenue closed, the survey was sent the same day straight to the offices of Christopher Bishop, Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, and Paul Goldsmith, Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage. On 22 September, Bishop's office noted the comments but, because the subject fell within Goldsmith's portfolio, advised that "we will leave it to his office to respond to your request". On the 30 September deadline, National's Research and Communications Manager replied with answers to the additional questions but did not address the survey attached to the same email. A follow-up reminding the party of the attachment brought a reply on 2 October:

“Yes, we will work towards the 6th of October, and will be back in touch”. National’s responses arrived on 6 October.

Survey Response Summary

National answered largely in terms of the government’s existing reforms, and said they “strike the balance between protecting significant historic heritage while creating a simpler and more nationally consistent planning system”. It did not say whether it would increase funding for DOC and HNZPT, describing its focus as “getting better results from the funding available”. On Heritage EQUIP, it said “there are no plans to renew this fund”. It supports regulatory relief, under which councils “will have to proactively offer relief to affected landowners”. For demolition by neglect, it pointed to its earthquake-prone building reforms and named no further action. It did not commit to a heritage investment prospectus, and its answer on notable trees did not mention them, saying only that the new Planning Act “retains protection for significant historic heritage”.

Additional Questions

- 1. In the Amplify Strategy produced by the government, one of the actions it intended to take was listed as: “Work across government to make maintaining and conserving heritage places simple and practical for owners”. In what ways do you believe you have achieved this, and what work is still to be done?**

National’s Response:

The Government recently passed the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Bill, which ensures New Zealand’s earthquake-prone building system is appropriately focused on risk to life, saving communities billions in remediation costs. This is estimated to save Kiwi building owners and the New Zealand economy a staggering \$8.2 billion. Around half of all buildings currently designated as earthquake-prone are expected to be removed from the system.

Expensive and often unrealistic remediation costs that are disproportionate to risk threaten buildings becoming derelict. Instead, we’re enabling that money to be invested elsewhere. To grow businesses, jobs and the economy.

For buildings that remain designated as earthquake-prone, remediation requirements will be more targeted, helping reduce costs and complexity while ensuring life-safety risks are addressed.

For many communities, particularly smaller towns, meeting the current requirements has been a significant challenge. The reforms take a more proportionate approach to managing seismic risk while ensuring high-risk buildings continue to be identified and addressed.

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/govt-delivers-earthquake-prone-building-reforms>

- 2. Many of those in the heritage sector see the current proposed Resource Management reform as weakening the protection of heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand. Minister Bishop stated in 2024 that “New Zealand’s cities can’t and shouldn’t be museums” and must “change, grow, and adapt into thriving liveable cities.” Can you explain in your own words how your reform positively impacts the protection of heritage? What should be retained as cities change and develop, and how should decisions be made about which heritage places can be altered, replaced or demolished?**

National’s Response:

The Resource Management Act has often created unnecessary barriers to both development and effective heritage outcomes. National believes heritage protection and urban development can be achieved together. Our new planning system is designed to provide clearer national direction about what should be protected while ensuring planning rules are proportionate, evidence-based and take account of factors such as heritage significance, seismic risk, current use and economic viability. We want to protect places of genuine heritage value, while avoiding planning settings that leave buildings derelict, prevent revitalisation, or unnecessarily constrain housing and economic development. Nationally consistent rules and regional planning will provide greater certainty about both protection and development outcomes.

Additional Questions Summary

In answer to the first question, National pointed to its earthquake-prone building reforms, which it said would save owners an estimated \$8.2 billion, and did not say what work remained. In answer to the second, it said heritage protection and urban development “can be achieved together”, and that planning rules would take account of “heritage significance, seismic risk, current use and economic viability”.

New Zealand First

For this party’s position before the survey, see [New Zealand First](#) in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Record of Contact

New Zealand First’s survey was sent on 14 September to its parliamentary office. A second email on 1 October also went to Jenny Marcroft, the party’s spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage, and a follow-up was sent on 6 October. A further email on 8 October copied in the office of party leader Winston Peters. That day, the parliamentary switchboard was phoned and asked to put the call through to Marcroft’s office, where a message was left. A second call to the same number reached Peters’ office, where a staff member said the request would be passed on. No reply was received from New Zealand First by the 17 October final date.

Survey Response Summary

New Zealand First did not respond to the survey, so this report's account of its position rests on the public information in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Additional Questions

- 1. In the Amplify Strategy produced by the government, one of the actions it intended to take was listed as: "Work across government to make maintaining and conserving heritage places simple and practical for owners". In what ways do you believe you have achieved this, and what work is still to be done?**

New Zealand First's Response:

None received.

Opportunity

For this party's position before the survey, see [Opportunity](#) in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Record of Contact

Opportunity replied on 14 September, the day the survey was sent, saying it was forwarding the enquiry to its Policy team. It explained that, as a party outside Parliament, it had no access to taxpayer-funded research support, relied "solely on no-strings-attached donations and a team of volunteers" and could not promise a response by 30 September "given our resource constraints". A clarification went back that day, saying the survey sought the party's positions rather than detailed policy, and extending the deadline to 7 October. After a follow-up on 1 October, the Policy team advised that "we'll do our utmost to have something to you by 7 Oct". Further follow-ups on 8, 12, 15 and 16 October met with replies on 8 and 13 October that each promised a response within a day. The responses to the survey arrived on 17 October, without answers to the additional questions. When asked on 18 October who the party's Arts, Culture and Heritage spokesperson was, Opportunity named Romeo Tevaga, who confirmed it himself that afternoon.

Survey Response Summary

Opportunity's most specific answer was on regulatory relief, which it opposes because the provisions "would weaken councils' ability to protect what matters and to set higher standards". It rejected what it called a "false choice between growth and protection" and said national consistency is "central to our housing policy". On funding, it said it would reverse cuts to conservation funding through its "Healthy Land and Water" policy, but its answer concerned DOC and did not mention HNZPT. It did not answer the question on Heritage EQUIP. On demolition by neglect, a heritage investment prospectus, the economic value of heritage and notable trees, it said it had no policy or no specific policy, and described itself as open to

exploring each. On tourism, it said heritage “has value in its own right” and that tourism “should support it, not define it”.

Additional Questions

1. If you were part of the next government, what is your position on the current proposed Resource Management reforms? Would these continue?

Opportunity’s Response:

None received.

Te Pāti Māori

For this party’s position before the survey, see [Te Pāti Māori](#) in the [Party Summaries](#) section.

Record of Contact

Te Pāti Māori received the survey on 14 September. A follow-up on 1 October also went to its spokesperson for Arts, Culture and Heritage, co-leader Rawiri Waititi, and the 6 October follow-up was sent to both the party and Waititi. The party’s responses arrived on 7 October.

Survey Response Summary

Te Pāti Māori framed its answers around Māori heritage and the authority of hapū and iwi. It supports “increased investment in the protection and seismic strengthening of heritage sites and buildings”, stronger measures to prevent owners from letting significant places deteriorate until demolition becomes inevitable, and protection for notable trees as “living taonga”. On regulatory relief, it did not state a position on the provisions themselves, saying that “heritage protection must uphold Māori rights, not diminish them”. It also supports the return of land and heritage sites taken from Māori. Its answers on a heritage investment prospectus and tourism followed the same line: it would support initiatives that unlock investment, but only where hapū and iwi lead, and it said heritage has “intrinsic value regardless of its tourism potential”. It did not say whether it would raise funding for DOC and HNZPT.

Additional Questions

1. If you were part of the next government, what is your position on the current proposed Resource Management reforms? Would these continue?

Te Pāti Māori’s Response:

Te Pāti Māori opposes the Planning and Natural Environment Acts in their current form. We do not support reforms that weaken environmental protections, reduce community participation, diminish the role of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, or sideline mana whenua in decision-making.

If elected to government, we would reform the resource management system to restore Te Tiriti obligations, strengthen mana whenua authority in environmental decision-making, and reinstate mechanisms such as Mana Whakahono-ā-Rohe agreements that have been removed under recent reforms. Our approach is grounded in protecting the environment while ensuring those with enduring relationships to the whenua have a meaningful role in decisions that affect it.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is one of the strongest protections we have against foreign and corporate exploitation of our whenua, wai and natural resources. Resource management should protect the mauri of our taiao, uphold the authority of mana whenua, and ensure decisions are made in the long-term interests of future generations, not short-term commercial gain. We believe Aotearoa's natural heritage should be protected for our mokopuna, not treated as a resource to be exploited.

Additional Questions Summary

Te Pāti Māori opposes the Planning Act and the Natural Environment Act “in their current form”. In government, it would reform the resource management system to restore Te Tiriti obligations, strengthen mana whenua authority and reinstate Mana Whakahono-ā-Rohe agreements.

Cross-Party Analysis

This analysis compares the four parties that answered the survey: Labour, National, Opportunity and Te Pāti Māori. ACT and New Zealand First, two of the three parties in government, did not respond, with the Greens declining to participate, so they appear only where this report found their positions in public statements – as set out in the [Party Summaries](#) section. Survey responses are treated as each party's position, whereas statements by individual MPs are not party policy. The table shows what each party said, *not* what it would do in government. An unanswered question does not mean a party holds no position.

Where the Parties Agree

The four parties that answered share more common ground than their differences suggest. Labour, National and Opportunity each said heritage protection and development can be achieved together, with Labour adding that they “can and should work together”. Te Pāti Māori put it differently, saying that Māori heritage is “not a barrier to growth” and that development must respect it. All four supported national consistency, though Te Pāti Māori tied it to the authority of hapū and iwi over places significant to them.

All four also supported adaptive re-use, and none treated heritage chiefly as a tourism asset. National said heritage has value “well beyond tourism”, and Te Pāti Māori said it has “intrinsic value regardless of its tourism potential”.

The agreement is mostly in general terms, and the answers divide on funding, regulatory relief and notable trees, as the table shows. It also reflects who answered: ACT and New Zealand First, two of the three parties in government, did not respond, so their positions cannot be tested against it.

Where the Parties Divide

Regulatory relief is the sharpest division. National supports it, saying councils “will have to proactively offer relief to affected landowners”. Labour proposed amendments to delete the provisions, calling them “unworkable” and said it would do so in government. Opportunity opposes them because they “would weaken councils’ ability to protect what matters and to set higher standards”. Te Pāti Māori did not state a position on the provisions themselves.

The other divisions concern what the parties would commit to. No party committed to restoring funding for both DOC and HNZPT to pre-reduction levels. Labour promised “stable, sustainable funding”, Opportunity said it would reverse cuts to conservation funding, and National and Te Pāti Māori made no commitment. Only National named Heritage EQUIP, saying there are no plans to renew it. On demolition by neglect, Te Pāti Māori supported stronger measures, National pointed to its earthquake-prone building reforms, and Labour and Opportunity named

no action. On notable trees, Labour said it would strengthen protections and Te Pāti Māori supported them, while Opportunity was open to exploring the issue and National made no commitment.

The Commitment Gap

Support for heritage was broad, but commitments were scarce. No party committed to a future funding level for HNZPT or DOC. National cited spending already made: \$4.2 million from the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy to the Backcountry Trust since 2024 for backcountry huts and tracks, and \$8 million for the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. Neither is a commitment going forward, and neither goes to the two agencies. None of the parties committed to restoring Heritage EQUIP: National said there are no plans to renew it, Labour and Opportunity did not address it, and Te Pāti Māori supported increased investment in seismic strengthening without naming a fund. Asked what concrete action they would take on demolition by neglect, none described a measure requiring or enforcing the maintenance of heritage buildings: Labour and National answered in general terms, Opportunity had no policy, and Te Pāti Māori supported “stronger measures” without saying what they would be.

The commitments that *were* made are narrow. Labour said it would delete the regulatory relief provisions and strengthen protections for notable trees. Opportunity said it would reverse cuts to the conservation budget, framed around species and ecosystems. National pointed to the planning and earthquake-prone building reforms it has already passed. Opportunity also said it had no policy on four questions – demolition by neglect, a heritage investment prospectus, the economic value of heritage and notable trees – while indicating openness to further work on each.³²⁰ ACT and New Zealand First did not respond, and the Greens declined to participate, so these findings rest on four of the seven parties.

The evidence in this report is consistent with heritage being regarded as discretionary. HNZPT’s operating budget was cut in Budget 2025, Heritage EQUIP was not renewed, and public debate has framed heritage protection as an obstacle to housing (see “[Heritage Protection versus Development](#)”). Donovan Rypkema describes the familiar version of this argument, that conserving old buildings is acceptable “when the economy is strong and we can afford to splurge”, but that “when resources are scarce” it becomes a luxury.³²¹ This report did not test why the parties’ answers stopped short of commitments.

Whose Heritage?

Many heritage places carry more than one history, and in Aotearoa New Zealand the colonial history has often been the one recorded, listed and protected. The histories it overshadows, particularly those of tangata whenua, can be harder to see. Carrington is one example. Building

³²⁰ Survey responses from Opportunity to Questions 4, 6, 7 and 9.

³²¹ Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader’s Guide*, 7.

One is a Category 1 historic place, while the report intended as the primary historic record of the site describes the land as “a significant pre-colonial Māori cultural landscape”, and its archaeological assessment records two shell middens destroyed by development works carried out under HNZPT archaeological authorities.³²²

The patients confined there have a history of their own. The report’s social history notes that their voices become audible mainly through official inquiries in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.³²³ Survivors of abuse at Carrington appeared before the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, and were among those to whom the government apologised on 12 November 2024.³²⁴ Asked about the site, Green MP Menéndez March cited the return of the land to mana whenua and asked “whose heritage are we looking after?”³²⁵

The ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand Charter answers that question directly.³²⁶ It says the indigenous cultural heritage of tangata whenua “shapes identity and enhances well-being”, that the obligation of kaitiakitanga “extends beyond current legal ownership wherever such cultural heritage exists”, and that conservation of such places is “conditional on decisions made in associated tangata whenua communities, and should proceed only in this context”.

This is not a new critique. Laurajane Smith’s concept of an “Authorised Heritage Discourse” describes how institutional power decides whose histories are valued and whose are overlooked.³²⁷ Ellen Andersen, of Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga and Ngāti Kapu, writes that early efforts to recognise Māori architectural heritage were “problematic from the start”, and she argues that iwi and hapū should be recognised as the “primary kaitiaki of their architectural heritage”.³²⁸ HNZPT has said it is working to diversify the list to include more Māori and multicultural heritage.³²⁹ Critics have argued that the system still favours development: writing in 2018, supporters of the campaign to protect Ihumātao said that HNZPT had granted almost 97 per cent of applications (877 of 907) for developments affecting Māori archaeological sites to March 2017.³³⁰

³²² CFG Heritage, DPA Architects, and Heritage Consultancy Services, “Carrington Hospital (Former): Heritage and Archaeology Report,” *Ministry of Housing and Urban Development* (Auckland: Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, January 2025), <https://www.hud.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Documents/Carrington-Heritage-Report-COLLATED-FINAL-.pdf?m=76ed91bcfdcdc2cf73bcb9f86fcf55157269de74>, 2, 15, 17, 25, 64.

³²³ CFG Heritage, DPA Architects, and Heritage Consultancy Services, “Carrington Hospital (Former): Heritage and Archaeology Report,” 24.

³²⁴ CFG Heritage, DPA Architects, and Heritage Consultancy Services, “Carrington Hospital (Former): Heritage and Archaeology Report,” 58.

³²⁵ 95bFM, “bFM Votes: Mount Albert Candidates Debate 2026,” 43:18.

³²⁶ ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, “ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value,” Principle 3.

³²⁷ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Routledge, 2006).

³²⁸ Ellen Andersen, “Conservation of Māori Architecture,” in *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice*, ed. John H. Stubbs et al. (Routledge, 2024), 276–282.

³²⁹ Adrienne Hannan and Jamie Jacobs, “Our Statement on Wellington’s Gordon Wilson Flats,” *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*, June 29, 2025, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/news/stories/our-statement-on-wellingtons-gordon-wilson-flats>.

³³⁰ Frances Hancock, “The Cost of Our Nation’s Cultural Heritage Too High?”

Against that standard, the party responses are uneven. Te Pāti Māori supports “decision-making led by hapū and iwi” and, where heritage sites have been taken from Māori, “their return and the restoration of Māori stewardship and decision-making authority”. Labour mentioned Māori heritage once, in recalling that it increased HNZPT funding to strengthen its work on “sites of significance to Māori”. This report found no mention of it in National’s or Opportunity’s answers. The Green MPs this report found raised the question as individuals: Tamatha Paul said heritage was “often referring to Pākehā heritage” and “decided by whoever has the power to decide it”. These are individual views, and this report found no Green policy statement on the issue. Where that heritage is at stake, the Charter leaves the decision with tangata whenua, and in its survey answers only Te Pāti Māori said so.

Regulatory Relief Tension

Regulatory relief shifts the cost of heritage protection from owners to councils, and the parties’ heritage commitments differ in how much they add to it. The Greens’ commitment to “establishing national direction for heritage”, requiring local authorities “to place more weight on recognising and supporting heritage places in district plans” would sit in tension with the regulatory relief framework.³³¹ That means more heritage rules, and each rule on a specified topic that significantly affects the use of land can oblige a council to offer relief.³³² The cost of that relief falls on councils, and this report found no provision in the Bill for how they would meet it.

ACT championed the framework to make councils bear exactly that cost. It did not respond to the survey, so its position rests on the public statements described above. National supports the framework and said it ensures “heritage protections are justified and proportionate”. Labour described the provisions as “unworkable” and warned they “could shift costs onto ratepayers for heritage protections”. Opportunity opposed them because they “would weaken councils’ ability to protect what matters and to set higher standards”. Te Pāti Māori did not address relief directly, but said it supports “incentives and assistance that help conserve taonga while maintaining strong protections for wāhi tapu, sites of significance, and historic places”.³³³ New Zealand First did not respond. The Greens declined to participate, and their policy sets out neither the form that national direction would take nor a measure of “more weight”. This report found no Green statement on how it would interact with regulatory relief.

What to Watch After the Election

The result on 7 November will determine which of these positions can be acted on. Regulatory relief is the clearest case. It sits in legislation that passed its third reading on 22 September and received Royal assent on 30 September; ACT and National support it, and Labour and

³³¹ Green Party, “Arts, Culture and Heritage Policy,” Action 5.1.1.

³³² Planning Act 2026 (2026 No 70), s 3 (definition of “specified topic”, paras (a) and (c)) and sch 3 cls 65(1) and 71.

³³³ Survey responses to Question 1 from Labour, Opportunity and National.

Opportunity oppose it. Labour has said it would delete the provisions in government. The Greens' national direction for heritage has no stated form, so whether and how it is pursued would depend on whether the Greens are in government and on any agreement they reach. Two gaps identified in this report do not turn on that choice: owners are not required to maintain a heritage building under either the RMA or the HNZPT Act, and Heritage EQUIP, the main central government fund for privately owned heritage buildings, has been discontinued. Coalition agreements, the first Budget after the election, and the national policy direction and regulations made under the new planning system are where any change on these points would first be visible.

THEME	LABOUR	NATIONAL	OPPORTUNITY	TE PĀTI MĀORI
1. Funding for DOC and HNZPT	Stable funding, no figure	No commitment	Reverse cuts (DOC only)	No commitment
2a. Protection and Development Together	Yes	Yes	Yes	Development must respect heritage
2b. National Consistency	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports with hapū and iwi authority
2c. Heritage EQUIP and seismic funding	Not addressed	No plans to renew	Not addressed	Supports more investment (EQUIP not named)
3. Regulatory Relief	Would delete	Supports	Opposes	No position stated

THEME	LABOUR	NATIONAL	OPPORTUNITY	TE PĀTI MĀORI
4. Demolition by Neglect	No action named	Points to earthquake-prone reforms	No policy	Supports stronger measures
5. Adaptive Re-use	Supports where appropriate	Supports	Supports	Supports, led by mana whenua
6. Investment Prospectus	Interested; no commitment	No commitment	No set policy; open	Supports if Māori led
7. Economic Value	Recognises	Recognises	No policy; supports better evidence	Supports recognition; cultural value first
8. Tourism	Values both	Value beyond tourism	Value in its own right	Intrinsic value
9. Notable Trees	Would strengthen	No commitment	No specific policy; open	Supports protection

ACT and New Zealand First did not respond, and the Greens declined. Entries reflect the parties' survey answers only.

Conclusion

The four parties that answered this report's survey agreed that heritage matters, but few said what they would do for it. Labour, National, Opportunity and Te Pāti Māori all supported national consistency and adaptive re-use, and none treated heritage chiefly as a tourism asset. They divided on regulatory relief, which National supports and Labour and Opportunity oppose. No party committed to a specific future funding level for HNZPT or DOC, to restoring Heritage EQUIP, or to a specific measure requiring owners to maintain heritage buildings.

Heritage has long been seen as a 'nice-to-have', and the evidence in this report is consistent with that view: HNZPT's operating budget was cut in Budget 2025, Heritage EQUIP was not renewed, and public debate has often framed protection as an obstacle to housing. Donovan Rypkema describes the familiar form of the argument: conserving old buildings is acceptable "when the economy is strong and we can afford to splurge", but "when resources are scarce" it becomes a luxury.³³⁴ In a cost-of-living crisis, that argument is, simply, easier to make.

Heritage has been decided by politicians for as long as it has been protected. The public perception of heritage is important now, more than it ever has been, and it can shape what decision-makers believe the public will support and what they believe the evidence shows.

These findings have limits. They rest on four of the seven parties: ACT and New Zealand First did not respond and the Greens declined. The survey shows what each party said, not what it would do in government. This report did not test why the parties' answers stopped short of commitments, or whether the way heritage is framed in public debate influences them. Both are questions for further research.

Recommendations

These recommendations ask for clarity. They do not say what any party's position should be, and they apply equally to every party.

1. Every party should publish a heritage policy, or say plainly that it has none. Three of the seven parties did not take part in this survey, so voters cannot compare all seven on the same questions.
2. Every party should state the level of funding it would give HNZPT and DOC's heritage work, and whether it would replace Heritage EQUIP.
3. Every party should say what, if anything, it would do to require or enforce the maintenance of heritage buildings. Owners are not currently required to maintain them under the RMA or the HNZPT Act.

³³⁴ Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*, 7.

4. Where heritage involves tangata whenua, every party should say how decisions would be shared with hapū and iwi, consistent with Principle 3 of the ICOMOS New Zealand Charter.
5. The heritage sector should present the economic and cultural case for heritage in forms that decision-makers and the public can use.

Heritage is a record of who we were, what we valued, and how we chose to build. Whoever forms the government after 7 November will help decide how much of that record is kept.

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