

Good afternoon, my name is Frances Ross and I am a long time resident of Dunedin city, having attended Otago University, and after a period in the UK and Europe, I chose to return to Dunedin and make it home.

My reasons for choosing to live here were because of the size of Dunedin and its amenities, many of which are linked to the rich heritage of this city. I am talking of the university itself, which is centred around its beautiful historic buildings and gardens. These have caused it to be ranked by two international publications as one of the most beautiful universities in the world. Think for a moment about where Otago graduands choose to have their graduation photos taken – against the backdrop of the clock tower building.

It is these historic buildings – the University, the Railway Station, the inner city churches, the restored buildings in and around Vogel Street – which give Dunedin its architectural richness, its edge. In no other city in NZ have the heritage buildings been so well preserved and form such a large part of the cityscape. Perhaps Christchurch before 2011, but sadly, no more.

What has this to do with a proposed 5 star hotel near the heart of the city, near the Octagon, near the Town Hall, near the Cathedral, near the Fortune Theatre, near the Stuart Street Terrace Houses?

Well, quite a lot really.

Dunedin is a small city in population and stature. No building stands by itself, dwarfing all other structures around it, being completely alien in its immediate surroundings and totally exceeding the allowable height restrictions. This is what this proposed building would do. On so many counts, it would be out of place. Let me just touch on a few:

Character – an enormous glass tower among solid stone buildings, many of them with heritage status. I think another submitter has referred to a recent TED talk in which an urban design expert describes the increasing use of glass in cityscapes. The introduction to the TED talk goes like this:

There's a creepy transformation taking over our cities, says architecture critic Justin Davidson. From Houston, Texas to Guangzhou, China, shiny towers of concrete and steel covered with glass are cropping up like an invasive species. Rethink your city's anatomy as Davidson explains how the exteriors of building shape the urban experience -- and what we lose when architects stop using the full range of available materials.

He is talking about character.

Height – 17 storeys, 62.5 m. among neighbouring buildings which run to 3 or 4 storeys or 13 m. That's a lot of non-compliance.

Location – the Octagon and Moray Place are the heart of our city. That is where local people come to gather, to eat and drink, to visit the Art Gallery, to go to the theatre, to use the library, to attend concerts, to protest. It is there where our Dunedin City Council meets and represents the ratepayers, in a chamber, which in itself is a striking example of our city's heritage. The Octagon is where visitors

come to seek information, to take photos, to capture the vista down to the Railway Station, to visit St. Paul's Cathedral, to enjoy the space and trees, to visit cafes and to sit outside when the sun is shining, and to shop for souvenirs. The proposed new building would be quite out of place in these surroundings.

Warmth – as a city, we may be judged by the warmth of our welcome but we do not rate highly for the warmth of our weather. Visitors and local people are warmed by sunshine and it is a precious commodity. We value it much more than places further north because it provides us with a few more degrees Celsius. To allow a building to be built which will reduce afternoon sunlight in the Octagon by fully 2 hours during the winter months when we crave that extra warmth and light is an irresponsible act. To allow a building to be built which will by its size create cold winds swirling around between it and the Town Hall is an irresponsible act.

Economic gains – some seem assured that wealthy visitors will flock to Dunedin to stay in a 5 star glass tower with views of the harbour. I am absolutely convinced that tourists will not flock here for that reason. Visitors will come for conferences; they will come for the wildlife of Otago Peninsula, they will come because Dunedin is a delightful heritage-rich city which is continually adding to that heritage resource and I applaud all those who are investing in our grand old buildings to restore them and make them useful again. If we can offer luxury as part of a truly heritage experience then we will be offering something unique.

I am not aware of any need to apologise for our city, but if this proposed glass tower goes ahead, I would find myself having to say to our guests that I am very sorry that our Council allowed a building to be built that is so out of keeping with the rest of our city. I very much hope that I will not have to make that apology.