

To the Hearing Panel,

My husband and I are working parents raising three young children—aged 10 months, 3 years, and 5 years. Due to our family commitments and work obligations, we are unable to return to Dunedin to speak at the hearing in person.

We strongly oppose the proposal to list our home as a heritage property. The house does not meet any formal heritage criteria beyond its size and visual appeal. While someone notable may have stayed in this house in the past, the activities they are known for were not carried out at this residence. There is no historical event or cultural legacy associated with the property itself. Aesthetic charm alone does not constitute historical value, and although the house is attractive, it is neither architecturally unique nor innovative. By law, visual appeal alone is not a valid reason to impose heritage designation.

When I first received the letter informing us that our home was being considered for heritage listing, I reached out to Councillor Sophie Barker for clarification. At the time, she assured me that heritage listing would not negatively affect property value. However, the Council's own research showed that her claims were false. I have included a screenshot of her message as Appendix A to this statement for your reference.

In reality, heritage listing can significantly reduce a property's market value—something that would cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to the council's own Mar Economic Study. We have a mortgage. We have young children. The financial impact could bankrupt us and leave our family without a home.

Despite its perceived prestige, heritage listing often deters buyers due to its restrictions and costs—leading to a substantial drop in market value, with the burden falling entirely on the homeowner. Worse still, the cost of maintaining a heritage-listed property can become so overwhelming that owners are unable to keep up. As a result, many of these homes fall into disrepair and eventually must be taken down. We've already seen this in Dunedin, such as with buildings along Princes Street, and around the world—where even grand heritage buildings and castles across Europe have been abandoned or demolished after becoming financially unsustainable. Ironically, the very effort to “protect” these structures leads to their decay and eventual loss.

Meanwhile, any benefit to the city—whether through consent fees, renovation profits, insurance premiums, or visual appeal (which should never be the sole reason for listing a property)—will never come close to the personal and economic loss borne by affected families.

We purchased this home after it sat unsold on the market for five years. If it truly held such significant public value, why was it on the market for years? If those advocating for its preservation believe it must remain unchanged, then they—or the Council—should consider

purchasing it at market value and bearing the cost themselves, rather than forcing a single family to carry a public burden.

In the High Court decision *New Zealand Rail Ltd v Marlborough District Council* [1994] NZRMA 70, Justice Greig clarified the relationship between Sections 5 and 6 of the Resource Management Act. He stated that “the preservation of natural character is subordinate to the primary purpose of the promotion of sustainable management.” This applies equally to Section 6(f) concerning historic heritage. These matters are not standalone mandates—they must align with the overarching purpose of sustainable management under Section 5. Heritage protections must be based on clear public benefit that equals or exceeds the private cost. If the cost outweighs the public gain, the listing is inconsistent with the Act.

Other councils across New Zealand initiate dialogue with homeowners before beginning a listing process. Unfortunately, we received no such communication. Instead, we were issued a formal letter with no prior discussion. It is frightening to think that if it had rained and soaked our mailbox, we may never have even seen the notice. We were one missed letter away from being blindsided by a life-altering decision.

This process has shown how disconnected the Council is from the people it serves. Bureaucracy should never shield decision-makers from accountability or compassion. We are not a statistic. We are a family fighting for our home.

I’ve read stories in online communities like the “Voluntary Heritage Group,” where homeowners reluctantly accept unwanted listings because the system is too hard to fight. Perhaps I’m still naive to believe my voice matters. It’s now 3:25 a.m. as I write this—after working on my script, with my children crying in the background. But I still want to believe in justice.

This is not a country where the powerful should impose their will unchecked. This is New Zealand.

If we lose this battle, we lose our home. If the Council gets it wrong, it faces no penalty. That lack of accountability enables the Council to propose listings that go beyond national guidelines, regardless of whether the property truly qualifies. This results in regulatory creep that strays from the original intent of the RMA—to preserve genuine heritage while balancing environmental protection with the social, economic, and cultural wellbeing of communities. Please do not disregard the law.

We ask you to hear us—and to reconsider.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission and for ensuring our views are considered.

Ngā mihi nui,

Isabelle Ang

APPENDIX A

