

## LEN LYE CENTRE

### THE PROMISE

Since being proposed more than a decade ago New Plymouth District Council has promised no ratepayer money would be spent on building the Len Lye Centre.

The closest they have come to breaking this "contract" for the \$10m centre is agreeing to underwrite \$750,000 for the fit out, which they will be liable to pay if the Len Lye Foundation can't find those funds by 2015.

But even if that happens it won't be the first time the council has used ratepayer money to secure the centre. In 2006 they spent \$727,000 acquiring the site for the centre. This is not counted in the \$10m.

It has also incurred design costs of \$14.3m, which will be paid back from funding grants.

### THE COSTS

Further confusion, and some conspiracies, about ratepayers funds being used for the centre have arisen because of a decision to build the centre and carry out renewal work and earthquake strengthening at Govett Brewster Art Gallery at the same time.

The total project cost for both is \$15,428,777. Of this \$5,428,777 will come from council's depreciation fund and pay for a new climate control system, weather tightening, remedial work and earthquake strengthening of GBAG.

The remaining \$10m, that has been raised from external sources, will be spent on the Len Lye Centre.

However the successful, and cheapest, tender from Clelands Construction could not complete the centre for \$10m. As such the Len Lye Foundation has agreed to raise a further \$750,000 for the cinema fit out. Council underwrote another \$750,000 for the gallery fit out. These are estimated costs.

### THE RISKS

It is still not definitively known how much it will cost to construct the 20 massive stainless steel panels that will cloak the centre. Though the budget includes \$500,000 in contingency funds, a blow out on these panels could easily consume that and more. If it does and the Len Lye Foundation cannot find extra funds required, council will be under pressure to cough up or have a half finished building on its hands.

Until the steel is up neither is it exactly known how much it will cost to maintain. Architect Terry Boon is predicting the panels will turn tea brown and be extremely difficult to polish. Should he prove correct this could substantially add to the centre's estimated \$362,000 annual running costs. Len Lye Foundation chairman John Matthews says the panels need only be treated like glass and washed regularly.

### THE PROPOSAL

Mr Boon wants the project to stop before the wrecking balls get started. He wants council to order architect Andrew Patterson to produce an alternative design that can be completed within the \$10m budget.

New Plymouth Deputy Mayor Alex Matheson says this is unlikely as the centre has been debated openly and councillors voted in February to proceed as planned.



Stainless centre: Architect Terry Boon's design for the new Len Lye Centre.



"Len Lye is here because of the Govett Brewster. Not the other way around."

Terry Boon



"The entrance takes you into the Len Lye Centre, it doesn't take you into the Govett Brewster. Doesn't that tell you everything?"

John Maynard



"His children and grandchildren are delighted with the centre. They believe Len would have been thrilled with the design."

John Matthews

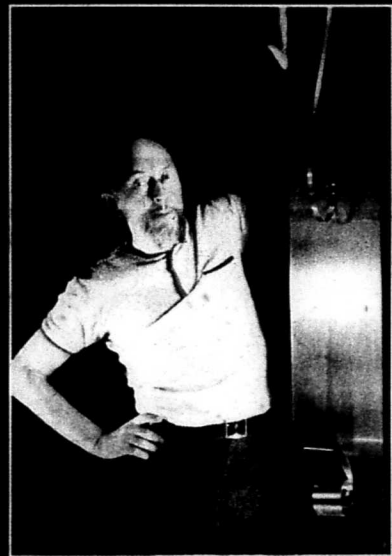


Coming down: Central City's move-in to construct the Len Lye Centre. Monday, the 1998 Govett Brewster Art Gallery demolition will come down first followed by the B&B building in the corner.



"What they are doing, through this innuendo, is causing uncertainty and potentially making it more difficult to raise the extra money we need."

Lance Girling-Butcher



The artist: Terry Boon with his stainless steel panels in situ.

A lightning rod to ratepayer discontent for more than a decade, New Plymouth's controversial Len Lye Centre has also divided the city's art elite. **Matt Rilkoff** reports.

Architect Terry Boon slumps into his leather office chair and groans that he is in agony.

The pain is not physical. It is one felt in friendships lost and hatred found for his outspoken opposition to the design of New Plymouth's Len Lye Centre and his efforts to stop it.

Today, at the 11th hour, his faction put their case and concerns in an advert on Page 5. Those backing the council endorsed plan are already preparing their response.

"I know it's a lost cause but somewhere you have to have integrity," he says. "Sometimes you have got to say to people, look, we tried. Maybe just a little too late." Almost certainly too late. After more than 10 years of debate New Plymouth District councillors voted 9-6 in February to give the centre final approval. The contract to build the centre has been let. The Govett Brewster Art Gallery - GBAG - has been closed and the wrecking balls swing on Monday. The chances of it being stopped now are virtually nil.

Which makes it even more intriguing as to why Mr Boon would bother to risk damaging a 55-year legacy of architecture and artistic benevolence in the city he has lived all his life.

Except that, from his perspective, it is part of that legacy the stainless-steel clad Len Lye Centre will destroy.

He fears it will subsume and dwarf the internationally respected Govett Brewster Art Gallery, a famous space he designed in 1971.

While that outcome is arguable, who is not up for debate is the project requires the destruction of the 1998 gallery extension he designed or that Mr Boon was dropped from the Len Lye Centre project in favour of the highly rated Andrew Patterson.

Accusations of sour grapes have stopped him going public with his concerns until now. Now he is numb, he says.

"Here we are destroying 40 years of heritage to have a single artist dominate two-thirds of the gallery," says Mr Boon.

"I know Len Lye wouldn't want to destroy the Govett Brewster. Because Len Lye is here because of the Govett Brewster. Not the other way around."

He is not the only one who can claim to know what Len Lye would want or not want. Despite his relatively short presence in New Plymouth, the artist who died 33 years ago left a legacy of friends, acquaintances and even lovers.

More than once he dined with Mr Boon and the architect says the centre is not fit for purpose and is an extension of Mr Patterson's ego rather than a celebration of Lye.

Not everyone feels the artist would agree. Renowned artist, Len Lye Foundation member and friend of Len, Max Gimblett, has declared the Patterson's vision a "channelling of Len".

John Matthews, the city's most influential and powerful link with the artist and chairman of the Len Lye Foundation, says Lye's children and grandchildren are "delighted" with the centre.

"They feel it reflects Len's work really well. They believe Len would have been thrilled with the design," he says.

Mr Matthews parries away concerns about maintenance of the stainless-steel facade, the way it lets in light and charges it domin-

ates the Govett Brewster.

The light is dealt with by a shuttling device and far from dominating the gallery, it saves it, he adds. "Neither one is higher than the other. I think it's done very respectably."

The Govett Brewster's founding director John Maynard is squarely allied with Mr Boon on opposition to the centre. He fears GBAG is the victim of a reverse takeover and will lose its niche as the pre-eminent contemporary gallery for work from the Pacific Rim.

"The entrance takes you into the Len Lye Centre, it doesn't take you into the Govett Brewster. Doesn't that tell you everything?" he says.

"I have big and wide and exten-

sive contact in New Zealand with artists, because a lot of them I worked with early on in their careers and they are life-long friends. There is not a lot of enthusiasm among them for what is going on with Len Lye."

For those who are enthused, the fear is such talk from such high places will make it harder for the Len Lye Foundation to raise the money to complete the centre.

Nearly \$8m has already been raised but they still want at least \$2.7m. A majority of that is to cover the \$1.3m underwritten by the TSB Community Trust to ensure the project got started and a further \$750,000 is needed to cover the council's own underwriting of

the gallery fit out. The last \$750,000 is to meet their own promise of funding the cinema.

Failure to secure that cash will force council to break its long-held promise that no ratepayer money would be spent on the capital cost of the centre.

Continued opposition to the projects frustrates Len Lye Committee chairman Lance Girling-Butcher.

He does not see it splitting the arts community but repeatedly hears the same few voices in opposition.

"I just think there are a couple of people who don't like decisions that have been made.

"They are not going to stop it. A