



02 2010

THE BROADSHEET OF THE AUCKLAND BRANCH OF THE NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

BLOCK

Imagine That

Sean Flanagan Considers the Decline of the Architectural Imagination

"I gotta feeling that tonight's gonna be a good night; That tonight's gonna be a good, good night!" - so chanted hundreds of Na'vi warriors as they pumped their spears and beers skywards in time with the beat that echoed round the stadium. But this was not Pandora. Instead, Wellywood's Cake Tin, home to the Sevens tournament that brings together thousands bound by a love for the contracted form of our national game and a penchant for fancy dress. The Sevens is a spectacle on and off the field, with the competition for best costume as fierce as any sporting encounter. And given the December release of James Cameron's 3D extravaganza Avatar, it was not surprising that 'the Na'vi' proved a popular choice of garb with hundreds bearing the big ears, blue skin, braids and ethnic jewelry required of tribe members.

There is an irony to the Na'vi. For a fun day out, whole groups got-together a convincing costume in the week or so leading up to the tournament, and yet just over the hill is the digital wonderland of WETA workshop where committed individuals spent thousands of hours perfectly rendering digital Na'vi for Cameron. It would be hard to think of two more divergent routes leading to essentially the same place. On the one hand, Joe-Blue kits him/herself up cheap-as-chips for a day at the rigger. On the other, a fair wack of Avatar's estimated US\$300M is spent on several years of computing. Markedly different paths to the same tall blue guys and gals with big ears.

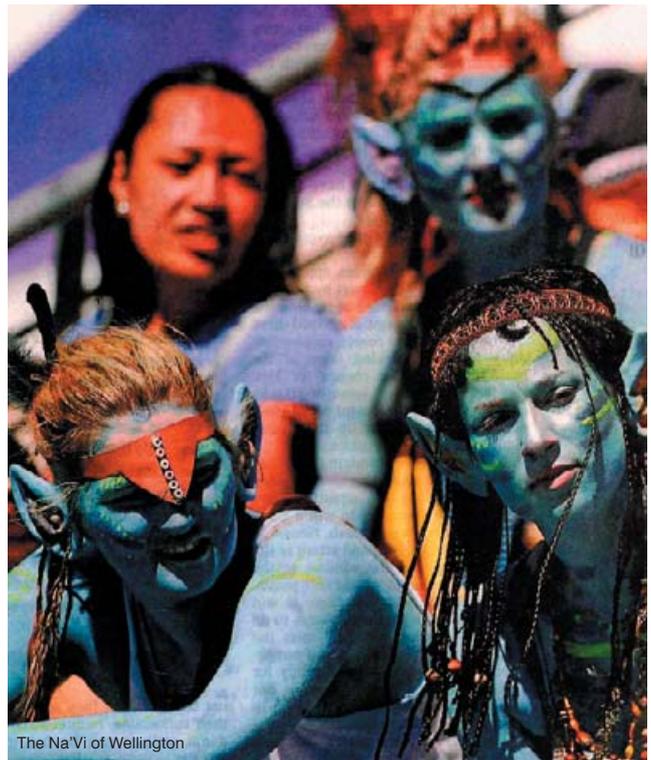
This observation is of course disingenuous to the efforts of Cameron and his crew for whom Avatar was, according to the Hollywood hype, a movie unimaginable without the technical revolutions in CGI that have informed 21st century filmmaking. And Cameron's Na'vi are arguably more pliable than their Sevens counter-parts. With the real actor's movements digitised, Cameron's Avatars stood ready to do all sorts of dangerous things like jump off cliffs onto the back of soaring pterodactyl. While it would take a few more beers and a gaggle of bikini-clad onlookers to get the average male Sevens spectator to attempt such a feat, questions must still be raised about what Cameron and the movie-going public value in film-making.

Clearly Cameron values high realism, for this is where WETA spent its processing power, making sure Na'vi hair waved naturally in the Pandoran breeze, and ensuring the minutiae of the real actors' expressions were realistically represented in their Avatars. To this end, as one web-site reports, Cameron's "image-based facial performance capture system" makes "the dead-eye look of performance capture films a thing of the past." The real and imagined are radically intertwined and the salivating movie industry challenges audiences peering through 3D goggles to distinguish between the two. Just because we have the computing power, is this a direction we wish to head with our storytelling? What is the value of rendering things to a point where the real

and the imaginary are indistinguishable? Indeed, what are the implications of this for the imagination?

Writing a genealogy of the imagination, Richard Kearney raises a telling question when he asks "if postmodernism subverts the very opposition between the imaginary and the real, to the point where each dissolves into an empty imitation of the other, can we still speak of imagination at all?". While the emphasis on dissolving the opposition of the imagined and the real may produce characters who no longer have a 'dead-eye' look, is this worth pursuing if the audience now looks with dead-eyes, no longer having to enter into the opposition between the imagined and the real, no longer having to take responsibility for conjuring things for themselves? Indeed, this criticism has been leveled against Avatar. For all its technological showmanship it has left some disappointed with the story told, for stories are more than just realistic depiction, and beneath the blue skin and braids critics found Avatar to be severely lacking as a story and disappointingly unimaginative – a dead story.

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The Na'Vi of Wellington

Imagine That

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Like filmmakers, architects are intimately involved in the creation of images and utilise the same image-making technologies that propel the film industry in order to depict architecture in a photo-realistic manner. It would not be a surprise to find a graduate somewhere in a local office using the same software that spawned Cameron's creatures, setting it to work in order to make a montage for a Resource Consent hearing or an animated walk-through to sell a proposal to a funding committee. The pick-up and exchange between architecture and film is very quick and it is inevitably an exchange, with graduates and experienced architects alike finding work in the film industry and allied fields like advertising. Having graduated at a time when 3D Studio Max was beginning to take hold in the school, I knew of several contemporaries who ventured to the Big Apple to take up posts rendering digital environs for advertisers. Meanwhile, local architect Neil Kirkland worked as construction supervisor on Avatar.

Many of the digital image making tools used in architectural offices are geared towards producing realistic images of projects to present to the public, the authorities, and our clients a vision in which real and imagined worlds readily dissolve into one another. This ease of dissolve conveys a sense of the authority with which the architect will realize the design. But there is a need to put to architecture the same questions put to Avatar. What are the implications for our discipline of our capacity to rapidly create images where the opposition between the imaginary and the real are subverted? And where in all of this does the architectural imagination lie?

Robin Evan's 1986 essay "Translations from Drawing to Building" outlines a model for thinking through the architectural imagination. Evans contends that architecture is fundamentally differentiated from other creative enterprises – such as painting and sculpture – by the displacement of the practitioner from the final work. He came to this conclusion whilst reflecting on his time spent teaching in art college. Observing budding painters and sculptors at work, it struck him that architects never lay their hands directly on the object of their thought but are always "working at it through some intervening medium, almost always the drawing, while painters and sculptors, who might spend some time on preliminary sketches and maquettes, all end up working on the thing itself which, naturally, absorbed most of their attention and effort." This is a rather pure observation, as there are ateliers wherefrom emerge paintings and sculptures that are attributable to a master but may not have been touched by their hands; and contemporary sculptures like Damien Hirst's formaldehyde works also challenge Evan's observation. But the idea of the displacement of architects from the objects of their thoughts (the building) and the central role played by a medium (drawing) does help characterize architectural thoughts and actions. This focus on displacement and the medium implicates architecture in a process of translation, in moving things (ideas, instructions, meaning) from one place (the architect's mind and the drawing board/computer screen) to another (the building). And as Evans notes, the recognition of drawing's power as a medium is the recognition of "drawing's

distinctness from and unlikeness to the thing that is represented, rather than its likeness to it." For an architect dissociated from the object of their thoughts and therefore in need of a medium, drawing is powerful precisely because it is not building. As a medium, drawing must be something other than building, even something in opposition to building, in order that it can help us build.

From this point, Evans mines the imaginative possibilities that exist for architects in drawing because the image is distinct from the built reality. Because drawing helps to translate things between realms, if the process of translation is slowed down, drawn out, and given the appropriate respect, then there exist opportunities for imaginative things to happen. If drawing is instead treated like a truck hauling the architect's thoughts into reality, we run the risk of missed opportunities. Here, Evans seems to echo Kearny's warning cited earlier, intimating that the architectural imagination is at risk when we try to dissolve the opposition between the image and reality and try to rapidly truck ideas into building. Or, to put it more positively, in drawings that celebrate the difference between drawing and building, there is a place ripe for imagination.

The recent road-smash of a competition for Queen's Wharf demonstrated something of the risks to the architectural imagination in drawing. Whilst accusations of lack of imagination were thrown at architects, it appears the lack of imagination in fact lay elsewhere, and what architects were instead guilty of was giving the public, the media, and the politicians what they wanted.

There is an adage that it is not the architect's job to give the client what they want. It is the architect's job to give the client what the architect thinks the client needs. With Queen's Wharf, we gave the client what they wanted – four perspective renderings from nominated view points. At top speed, architects hauled the complexities of the site and programme into four images – and photorealistic ones are always the best - that people could react to without investing anything in imagining how and why the buildings were they way they were. No wonder we got spanked. We presented dead-eye images to dead-eye politicians.

By making drawings that dissolved the image and reality into one another, we obfuscated the complexities of the task at hand. The public therefore could not understand that it was in fact a complex undertaking and the politicians could deny the complexities ever existed and instead proclaim high and wide the failure of our imagination and the success of their politicking in saving us from these terrible proposals. Of course there were plans, sections and diagrams that delved into the issues at stake, but these never made the front page because the media and politicians are a dead-eye lot. They tend to want to pass judgment quickly and without thought. The media do so to take the path of least resistance. Politicians tend not to want to think about things, because if you think about things and then say something then you have to take responsibility for what you say. This presents a threat and may come back to bite you and tarnish that most precious political asset – your image. Just as John Banks and Mike Lee did, it is better to hold up an architect's perspective and spew forth crass generalisations about how it demonstrates that we're an unimaginative lot, and just let everybody think you've gone through the complexities behind the image. But I doubt they had, for there was so much involved. I was only a peripheral party to the making of a final stage submission but having witnessed the incredible effort that went into the A1 sheets and understanding the amount of information presented therein, it is both staggering and obvious why Banks, Lee, and the public made the comments they did when it should have taken weeks to work through, understand and take responsibility for imagining what was proposed by each finalist. The lack of imagination surrounding Queen's Wharf therefore lies with a lot of other people aside from architects. But architects must take responsibility for giving the client what they wanted, for not encouraging others to dwell in the opposition between the image and the reality where the issues and opportunities of occupying Queen's Wharf could have been be drawn out. In this case, it's not we who lacked imagination, we just didn't engage it. SF



Under the Tuscan Sun

Tony van Raat is Hot on Architecture and Culture in Tuscany

As a development of the relationship which has been established between the Auckland Branch of the NZIA and the Ordine degli Architetti of Prato in Toscana a course has been developed for New Zealand architects and students. It will run for 2 weeks starting on June 28 2010.

Tuscany is a region where both the architecture and the territory are linked by history, distilled through a natural and constructed landscape which creates a unique synthesis of material and art. This exceptional patrimony offers architects and artists the possibility of a unique experience from which can be derived insights about the contemporary city and landscape.

The seminar series proposed is organized partly in classes and partly in site visits and is delivered by university academics, architects working in Tuscany and curators of art who together will be able to respond to any questions related to the relationship of the present to the past in this place, one of the richest and most significant in the development of western culture. The series addresses contemporary as well as historical issues and emphasizes the continuity of a culture of craftsmanship and technology embedded in place. Schedule follows:

Day 1

Welcome and introduction to the course. Introductory lecture: The historical structure of the territory of Tuscany (arch. Luca Piantini, Roberto Vezzosi). (a.m.)

Day 2

Built space, public space: a case study of the City of Prato – lecture (arch. Luca Piantini, Massimo Lastrucci, Marco Meozzi) and guided site visit to the city. (a.m.-p.m.)

Day 3

Built space, private space: houses and villas – lecture (arch. Angelo Formichella) and guided site visits to the Medici villas at Poggio a Caiano and Artimino. (a.m.-p.m.)

Day 4

The restoration of ancient and modern projects including industrial archaeology – lecture (arch. Guanci) and guided site visits of the restoration and reuse of the XIX century textile plant of Campolmi and of the Medici Stables in Poggio a Caiano (restoration in progress- arch. Giulio Bardazzi). (a.m.-p.m.)

Day 5

Stonework in Italian architecture – lecture (arch. Prof. Marco Petrelli, Univ. Alma Mater, Bologna). (a.m.)

Day 6 (Saturday)

Guided tour of the historic masterpieces of Florentine architecture or bus tour of the historic masterpieces of Siena with a special visit to the recent restoration of the complex of S.Maria della Scala.

Day 7

Guided site visit to the marble quarries at Apuane and to the Campolonghi, Massa's internationally renowned Marble Company. (a.m.-p.m.)

Day 8

Site specific: contemporary art in Tuscany – lecture (art curator Miranda MacPhail) and guided site visit to the Gori collection, the landscape sculpture park at Villa Celle, Pistoia (a.m.-p.m.).

Day 9

Architecture and wine, design and plant – lecture (arch. Angelo Formichella and Ing. Luca Vannucchi) and guided site visit to the Capezzana cellars. (a.m.-p.m.)

Day 10

The Florentine School of XX century and the Tuscan avant-garde – lecture (Prof. arch. Marco Brizzi – Siracuse University) and guided site visits to various major 20th century works by Michellucci (Chiesa dell'Autostrada, S.M. Novella Railway Station etc.), Savioli (Via Piagentina apartments, Casa Savioli, public housing in Sorgane, etc.), etc. (a.m.-p.m.)

Day 11

Eco-Friendly contemporary and historical architectural practice in Italy – lecture (Arch. Luca Piantini e Ing. Vittorio Bardazzi). (a.m.-p.m.)

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Under the Tuscan Sun

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The organizers plan for the course to be offered to a group of between 15 and 25 New Zealand architects and/or students of architecture. The days will usually be organized with a lecture starting at 9:00 and lasting for about 3 hours including discussion and questions. This will be followed by lunch and/or the site visits. The schedule is somewhat flexible and may be subject to rearrangement to suit the needs of the participants.

The cost of the program is NZ\$1,200 inclusive of all lectures, notes, entry to buildings and bus tours to the sites.

Accommodation is additional. As the lecture series is in Prato (25 minutes from Florence by frequent train service) we recommend that single participants may wish to stay in the recently refurbished hostel Magnolfi Nuovo in Prato where single rooms are available for a cost of about NZ\$60 per night, and kitchen and laundry facilities are provided. Apartments in Prato or Florence may also be rented for larger groups or families. Airfares and food costs are not included but may be assumed to be about NZ\$2,400 per person for return flights to Rome and between NZ\$50 – 100 per day for food.

Further information can be obtained from Tony van Raat (021 649433 or tvnraat@unitec.ac.nz)

Each Block is laid by a dedicated editorial team, three of whom happen to work at Cheshire Architects - Pip Cheshire, Nat Cheshire & Sean Flanagan - and one of whom - Andrew Barrie - is Professor of Design at the University of Auckland.

nat@cheshirearchitects.com for a colour pdf or back issues

City Underworlds

Auckland Branch NZIA, in conjunction with Auckland City Libraries, presents a free talk by David L. Pike from American University in Washington DC

David Pike explores the representation of underground space in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period during which technology and heavy industry transformed urban life. As the complex drainage systems, underground railways, utility tunnels, and storage vaults of the modern cityscape superseded the countryside of caverns and mines as the principal location of actual subterranean spaces, ancient and modern converged in a mythic space that was nevertheless rooted in the everyday life of the contemporary city. Pike delineates a working theory of modern underground space that explains why our notions about urban environments remain essentially nineteenth-century in character, even though cities themselves have since changed almost beyond recognition.

Professor Pike teaches literature and film at American University. His books include *Metropolis on the Styx: The Underworlds of Modern Urban Culture, 1800–2001*; *Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800–1945*; and *Passage Through Hell: Modernist Descents, Medieval Underworlds*, all from Cornell University Press. He is co-author of *Literature: A World of Writing* co-editor of the *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, and has published widely on 19th- and 20th-century urban literature, culture, and film. He is currently completing a history of Canadian cinema since the 'eighties and a study of Cold War bunkers since the end of the Cold War.

6:00pm Wednesday 31st March 2010 (wine at 5.30pm)
Central City Library, level 2
Bookings (free) highly recommended:
(09) 377 0209 or Karen.Craig@aucklandcity.govt.nz

City Overworlds

HOME Magazine and First Windows & Doors present Charles Renfro, of the New York architecture firm Diller, Scofidio + Renfro.

DS+R is behind some of the world's most talked-about projects of the moment, including New York's High Line, the redesign of the Lincoln Centre, and the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art. Not bad for a firm that until recently was considered to be a bunch of architectural theoreticians who would never get anything built. You can view more of the firm's work at dillerscofidio.com.

Renfro's New Zealand visit will include lectures in Auckland and Wellington:

Auckland lecture
Tuesday April 13 at 6pm
Fisher & Paykel Auditorium
The University of Auckland.

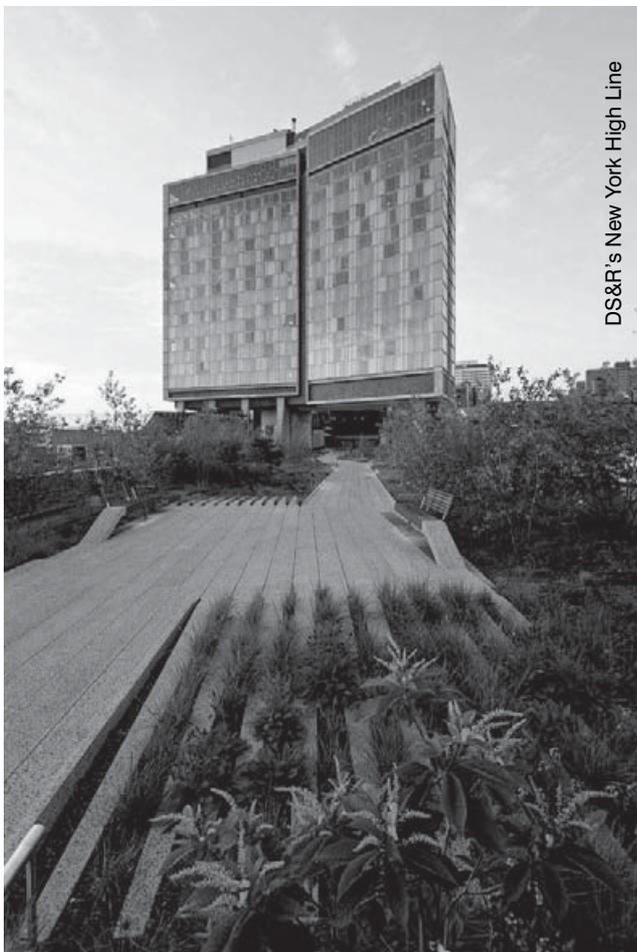
Wellington lecture
Wednesday April 14 at 6pm
Adam Auditorium
City Gallery.

There will not be door sales, so please purchase your tickets in advance from Ticketek. Subscribers (which includes architects) pay \$15, while regular tickets cost \$20. Ticketek booking fees apply. Architects get CPD points, of course.

You Lucky Little...

Aside from Pike and Renfro's riffs on the works above and below our metropolii, BLOCK hears rumours of impending visits by exciting Japanese practitioners Atelier Bow-Wow and Akihisa Hirata.

You're also about to be spoilt by a bevy of fine speakers lined up in the University of Auckland's *Communique* series. See enclosed flyer for details.



The Fine Print

Combined Excerpts from the Reports to NZIA Auckland Branch meetings of February 2010

CHAIR'S REPORT: Christina van Bohemen

The AGM has been scheduled for Wednesday 24 March. Summary reports for each portfolio required by 1 March.

Committee Membership:

I am aware of 2 resignations, plus the vacancy for Committee Secretary. Three people have responded to the "Call to Arms"; there is still time for those who would like to contribute to collegial activities. Please email Christina@svb.co.nz or phone 307 5252.

Visiting Speaker/Events coming up: Antoine Predock – good attendance; Ingenhoven: original February visit postponed until further notice; Professor Michael Pike: Underground Cities. 31 March at Central Library

GRADUATE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PORTFOLIO: Sarah MacKenzie & James Pearce

The GDP starts again in March with the Introductory Presentation in Auckland on March 23. Note the NZRAB has redefined the Experience Areas. The new structure will be introduced at this session.

The weekend seminar will take place in Auckland on 11-12 June. In addition to this current structure, the Institute's office is proposing to run additional 3 seminars on a range of special topics. The Branch GPE programme will be developed to compliment this additional input. Graduates are reminded that they are welcome at all the informal issues groups meetings where a wealth of information is shared by colleagues and external experts.

UNITEC STUDENT REPORT: Brad Balle & Rachel Dawkins

2009 finished up well at Unitec, with students away until the 22nd February. Research Proposals for 2nd year MArch(Prof) were due February 8th for approval before the University year commences.

Following great success last year, a further four Unitec students are heading to Sydney for the Pittwater Summer School, with Richard Leplastrier, Peter Stutchbury and Lindsay Johnston.

The SANNZ AGM took place in Auckland to get the ball rolling for 2010.

PRACTICE ISSUES GROUP: Richard Goldie

The PIG met 2nd Feb 2010. As is its habit, the PIG endeavored to set out some topics that might be covered in its bi-monthly panel discussions. Suggestions were:

1. The basics: possibly two discussions in this, but perhaps more of an opportunity for the Institute to undertake? Or are these issues sufficiently dealt with in Practice Notes? – EOTs, liquidated damages, Construction Contracts Act, personal liability, portability of cover, shop drawings and subcontractor design, QA, etc
2. Get-together with associated professionals and industry types – a good link appreciated by those that attended. Mid-year suggested as timing for this as the one before Christmas last year was embarrassingly poorly attended by Architects.
3. Approaches to risk management
4. Retaining your commission (in the environment of current public procurement methods)
5. AAS agreements – why have them when there are perfectly good ones around?
6. Common complaints (client complaints that is)
7. Design ownership – 'rules of engagement'

8. Fair risk and responsibility (when working with project managers) The thinking was that perhaps some of these might be combined or passed along to John Albert at the NZIA for inclusion in their educational/CPD program. It seems clear that item 1 would be appropriate, if we then have the inter-industry evening independent of program for the bi-monthly panel discussion, this would then allow the remaining six topics to be covered.

Charissa is retiring from the Branch Committee and the PIG accordingly. Volunteers to take up the reins were invited and John Anderson has volunteered. It is noted that at least one PIG coordinator would have to be on the Branch Committee, to report to the Committee on the activities of the PIG. Richard wants to resign too, but he's willing to hang on through a transitional period.

UNITEC REPORT: Tony Van Raat

Applications this year reached a record number of more 370 - a result, probably, of the economic downturn encouraging people to enter training or complete degrees. We expect 90+ in year 1 BAS and about 55 in year 1 Masters.

Nicholas Stevens and Gary Lawson join Marsh Cook and Dave Strachan as Adjunct Professors. Richard Naish steps down as his term of office is now completed. Thanks Richard.

Mid year break? As a development of the relationship which has been established between the Auckland Branch of the NZIA and the Ordine degli Architetti di Prato in Toscana a course has been developed for New Zealand architects and students. It will run for 2 weeks starting on June 28 2010. See pack page of this issue of BLOCK.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES GROUP: Megan Rule

1. The following topics were identified for presentations and discussions this year at our February meeting. Some topics overlap with other issue groups.:

Climate Change -The Science & Policy Direction (Landcare) March Session :

- NZIA Environmental Policy & Heritage Policy (Presentations /Discussion) - HIG
- Urban Metabolism – Resource Life Cycles - UIG
- Natural Building Technologies – Workshop/Seminars
- Passive Design
- Airtight vs Breathable Design (Presentations/Discussions)
- Residential Building Performance Outcomes- Beacon

Pathways & Members

- Sustainable Building Databasing
- AFH US/Pacific Plastiki Voyage – Ocean Waste Awareness

-Est. Arrival April

- Thermal Dynamic Engineering - TIG
- Solar Technologies
- Smart Technology Systems - TIG
- Water Management Systems - TIG
- Soundscapes in Urban Context (Landcare) - UIG
- Green Roof Performance Outcomes
- RMA Amendments – UIG

Suggestions for participants in discussion groups will be sought.

2. Members are keen to see easier search options within the NZIA website to find categories such as environmental architecture, incorporating a self listing mechanism for members, and better two-way links to related sites.