

Council yanks hook artwork

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PLANS for a 35-metre-high illuminated sculpture at the bottom of Ngauranga Gorge have been ditched because of fears for aircraft – and of a massive budget blowout.

Hook of Maui was due to have been completed by June next year. However, Wellington City Council said yesterday that the project, which included *Receding Waters*, a series of light sculptures along the motorway to the Terrace Tunnel, had been canned and a new design competition would take place.

The project, which has taken five years of planning, featured a towering hook split by the motorway. A laser would pierce the night sky, portraying a fishing line.

But the Civil Aviation Authority has ruled the laser would be a danger to aircraft after recent incidents in which people have shone lasers into plane cockpits.

"This has led the aircraft industry in general to be more wary of the use of lasers and to caution organisations like us against locating one on the flight path to the airport," council project manager Geoffrey Snedden said.

The council even considered installing a switch in aircraft so pilots could turn the laser off. But there were fears that pilots might forget.

A plan to move the sculpture 100 metres further south was also ditched.

The cost of the project was pegged at \$1.32 million in December, but has blown out to \$3m due to its huge scope. Martin Rodgers, the council's city arts manager, said officials "couldn't justify spending that amount of money".

Private donors have already given \$600,000 toward the project.



One that got away: The planned 35-metre-high *Hook of Maui*.

The Wellington Sculpture Trust has been forced to go back to them, with some donors saying they would wait for more information before deciding whether to commit the money for a new project.

"None of them have said, 'Give me my money back'," trust chairman Neil Plimmer said.

Wellington Mayor Kerry Prendergast was "very disappointed" but said the sculpture's integrity was compromised without the laser. "We were left with no choice."

The gateway project was selected by the sculpture trust in 2004. The council gave \$500,000 in 2004, and a further \$120,000 when *Hook of Maui* and *Receding Waters* were selected as the winning design.

Artists involved included Oscar-nominated director Taika Waititi, Swiss-New Zealand lighting designer and installation artist Claude Hibder and landscape architect Megan Wraight.

Ms Wraight said *Hook of Maui* would not be the same without the laser. "Without it, the hook just becomes an object – it loses a poetic and transcendent element. But we understand why the decision has been made."

A new design competition will start later this year, with a budget of about \$1.1m.