

\$210K to replace Ferns

The new replacement orb is planned to be the same size, position and colouring as Neil Dawson's original *Ferns*. It will also use the existing lighting.

JARED NICOLL

There's been an orb-shaped hole in the skyline above Wellington's Civic Square but now there's a plan to fill it.

Neil Dawson's aluminium *Ferns* sculpture was removed about 16 months ago after Wellington City Council learned it was no longer safe to keep the popular artwork suspended due to metal fatigue from wind damage.

After weighing up the mounting cost of keeping *Ferns* above ground - where the artwork had been since 1998 - the Wellington Sculpture Trust announced yesterday that it needed to raise a total of \$210,000 for Dawson to create an upgraded stainless steel model.

The sculptor said his original work, which has become a landmark in the city captured in countless tourism photos, would probably be recycled rather than re-homed in order to keep the display unique.

"Since it was installed, it's had a special place in Wellington... it just seems to lift people's spirits.

"It's a positive thing... adventurous. Throwing something up in the air in a city with some of the strongest wind in the world."

The Christchurch-based artist said the new orb would be the same size, position, and colours, and would use existing lighting.

However, the thin cables used to delicately suspend it would increase from 3mm-thick to 4mm.

Little movements in the cables contributed to metal fatigue over



The original damaged piece will be destroyed and recycled to maintain the unique integrity of the popular artwork in Wellington's Civic Square. PHOTOS: FAIRFAX NZ

"Since it was installed, it's had a special place in Wellington... it just seems to lift people's spirits."

Artist Neil Dawson

time so thicker ones as part of an upgraded suspension system should keep fatigue to a minimum in future - and stop it wobbling so much. "I've been fighting to keep them thin because the magic is the way it floats in the sky. It will retain its delicacy." The layout of the punga ferns is

also being re-jigged to ease strain.

Prometal Industries in Christchurch will construct the replica, before the final touches are done in Wellington. It will base the work off a 1:5 scale model made by Dawson.

Extensive planning had taken place over the past year, with the final product expected to be up by March.

Trust chairwoman Sue Elliot said they had considered fixing the original sculpture again, but it was getting harder and harder. "We're really trying to keep the character of the previous work."

The trust has already raised about \$55,000 from sponsors.

Wellington City Council is a major funder. It will support the artwork's installation costs and be responsible for its ongoing maintenance.

After the sculpture's latest removal last year, the New Zealand International Arts Festival's former executive chairman, Sir David Gascoigne, described it as a city landmark that arrived with the dawn almost 20 years ago.

"The night before, the globe was transported to the square under cover of darkness. It was elevated and secured in place. Work finished shortly before those taking part in the festival's opening ceremony started to arrive - in darkness.

"As dawn broke and the ceremony got under way, the crowd became aware of the sculpture hanging high overhead, glistening in the dawn's new light. There were gasps of amazement and a spontaneous ovation."