

23 December 2015

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NT File No: B0069

Re: Permit application P23687, Parliament House (VHR H1722 and H1317)

Dear Mr Smith,

I refer to the current application for: the new office building to the east of Parliament House, alterations to the existing building, demolition of the existing annex building, tennis court, and removal of some areas of the historic garden.

The Trust notes that the proposed works are designed to provide office accommodation for all Members of Parliament, which will allow the future reinstatement/restoration of the original building as appropriate. We note that maintenance and upgrade works to Parliament House itself are ongoing, and do not form part of this application. We do question the logic of extensive demolition of the 1880s garden, given the existing car park has little (if any) heritage significance; presumably the car spaces could be put underground with an office building situated above it. Retaining the green roof would then create a net gain in green space as a result of the development – a worthy legacy to future Victorians.

While the Trust does not formally object to the advertised proposal, we were disappointed by the documentation advertised and provide the following comments.

The proposal constitutes the largest alteration to the Parliament House site in nearly 90 years, the last major construction works being the addition of the Refreshment Rooms (North-East Wing) in 1929.

The Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) quotes from the Grounds Conservation Analysis (variously referenced as 1991 (p.3) and 1989 (p.8)), reducing the significance of the garden to simply being the grounds and setting of the Parliament, styled in the 1880s garden fashion. It also downplays the association of Guilfoyle, and though it notes that the layout, structural elements and mature trees are of interest, it fails to specify the significant features.

The Heritage Impact Statement for a permit required under the Heritage Act 1995, should address the impact of the works using the statement of significance as specified by the VHR, and not any other statement of significance without statutory weight.

The VHR Statement of Significance states:

The curvilinear layout of the gardens that surround Parliament House is attributed to William Guilfoyle, designer of Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens. This was modified in 1888 to accommodate the bowling green with its pavilion and the tennis court. However the overall character is one of curvilinear gravel walks edged with brick; open lawn, large specimen trees including the commemorative Federation Oak, and densely planted shrub beds. The ventilation tower built in the form of a classical 'folly' is a significant feature.

The HIS acknowledges that the only significant modification of the 1880s landscape was in 1973 with the addition of the annex and reconfiguration of associated planting beds. However, the HIS states that the 1880s garden has been further diluted by the introduction of later plant species, a more formal planting arrangement and modern horticultural practices which have changed the character of the grounds. This analysis appears out of step with current historic garden conservation practice.

We support the HIS's statement that *'whilst change has occurred, the 19th C structure and its associated planting can still be seen and understood'*.

Plants, by their nature, are added and removed, but it is the structure of the garden - the paths, beds, and some mature plantings - which remains as it was in the 1880s. The introduction of alternative species or modern horticultural practice does not alter the integrity of the garden's heritage. Indeed, the CMP (1998) identifies the Eastern Garden, the area under the construction footprint, as being of Individual Significance.

On that basis, the impacts and mitigation methods proposed for the demolition and alteration of the landscape and grounds, are inadequate.

Federal Oak - p.22

The HIS states that the removal of the annex *'has taken into account arborist advice and seeks to employ protective measure (sic) to avoid damage to the tree, situated within close proximity to the eastern elevation'*.

Removal of the annex must be completed using the Australian Standard *AS 4970-2009 Protection of trees on development sites*. It is expected that a tree protection zone will be established prior to commencement of works, and that a qualified arboricultural consultant will be present to supervise any and all works undertaken within the Tree Protection Zone, at any time during construction. The National Trust submits that it is not adequate to 'avoid damage to the tree'; the Federal Oak must not sustain any damage whatsoever as a result of works. The Oak should be well-documented photographically prior to the commencement of works to provide a baseline for its condition. It is reasonable to expect the contractor to be financially bonded to a sum equivalent to the value of the tree, and be liable for any damage or decline in health attributable to the works.

Tennis Court – p.22

We agree with the HIS' recommendation that the court and environs be recorded prior to its removal. It mentions that the two stone features will be archived, but based on our understanding of the plans, it may be possible to replace them in the courtyard close to their original position following construction, and we encourage that option to be explored.

Garden beds – p.22-23

It is understood that the beds to be removed are only those:

1. Abutting the retaining wall to the lane,
2. Surrounding the tennis court, and
3. Surrounding the annex.

The National Trust does not agree that the loss of these garden beds will not have an adverse impact on the significance of the place. Based on Figure 11 of the HIS, it appears that approximately half of the beds to be removed were part of the 1880s Guilfoyle design.

These beds should be recorded by a horticulturalist with an understanding of 19th Century Victorian garden history, so that a catalogue is recorded in detail and archived appropriately at a public institution. The catalogue should include a detailed map of all species in the beds to be removed, and photographic records of all garden beds, trees and features to be impacted by the works.

We support the retention of the beds on the south-west corner of the bowling green, and the western perimeter of the Parliament House fence.

The HIS notes that an unspecified number of trees are proposed to be removed, but provides no details other than a reference to the Arborist Report which has not been advertised. The National Trust requests a copy of the arborist report for consideration.

The HIS further states that none of these trees have been identified to have any recognised heritage values (State or Local recognition). It is not clear from the HIS whether a significant tree assessment has been conducted within the Parliament House gardens within the last 20 years. The only tree classified by the National Trust Register of Significant Trees is the Federal Oak, which was added to the Register back in 1993. City of Melbourne did not include public (Crown) land in their 2012 Exceptional Tree Register study. Further, the Parliament House grounds have restricted access, which may have prevented the ad-hoc registration of significant trees, as is usually the case for trees added to the National Trust Register of Significant Trees.

Furthermore, it is expected that for each tree that will be removed, a replacement tree should be added to the Parliament House landscape. Often, an advanced tree of the same species will be planted, but similar species may be considered to gain the desired design outcome. The species provided in the proposed planting schedule (Drawing Number LHA-03) are all drought-tolerant, tough varieties, but all low-growing species. This redevelopment should be contributing several advanced trees to the landscape of Parliament House, to ensure a legacy of mature (even potentially significant) trees to future Victorians. A finely-detailed landscape management plan with planting lists and schemes should be submitted to the satisfaction of Heritage Victoria prior to the commencement of works, with assurances made by the contractor that the planting survives beyond the first year of construction.

Existing footpaths – p.23

We agree that the realignment of the eastern footpaths will impact on the original layout of the curvilinear paths, which is part of the key character of the garden's 'natural' form, and identified by the VHR statement of significance. Retention is preferable, but we agree that reusing the existing brick margins and re-laying the pathways in keeping with the original treatment will partly mitigate the loss of the original path. The existing pathway creates a continuous loop around the Parliament House grounds, and the interruption of this loop is regrettable – it appears to terminate on the roof of the southern wing of the addition in the advertised proposal. An alternate design that allows a continual loop through the grounds would be preferable.

Monuments and plaques – p.23

We agree with the HIS' assertion that retention of the British Parliamentary Stone is important to '*maintain its tangible connection with the site*'. This is also true of other elements being displaced by the works, including the Olympic flagpole plaque and the stone features around the tennis court. The flagpole plaque must be documented and incorporated into the new scheme so it can continue its tangible connection with the site. Incorporating these elements is one way that the new addition can respect the heritage significance of the landscape it demolishes.

Public consultation

Finally, the design of the new addition appears to be a sensitive and high-quality project. However, the National Trust notes that neither the State Government, nor the project manager or heritage consultant made any effort to engage the community in their vision, shirking any attempt at best practice in urban design. The National Trust submits that it is reasonable to expect that, for the largest works program in 90 years on one of Victoria's most significant public buildings, public consultation would be undertaken prior to the permit application being advertised. The Trust notes that this

application was first advertised for public comment between 9-16 December 2015, with submissions due by 30 December 2015 – putting the sole opportunity for consultation firmly within the Christmas shutdown period.

Interpretation

While the Trust agrees with the HIS' assessment that the proposed redevelopment is required to allow the ongoing operation of Parliament House, the impact on the significant features of the landscape could be mitigated by the development of an interpretation plan—reflected in the permit conditions for any approved development—to record and interpret the history of the site in a form or location which is accessible to visitors to the site, and to the public.

As well as enhancing the historical significance of the place, undertaking interpretation at the site has the potential to positively engage the community in the redevelopment process. Interpretation planning for the site should be done in accordance with the *Australia ICOMOS Interpretation Practice Note* (2013).

The Trust looks forward to the outcome of this application process, which we hope will retain and enhance the significance of this important place for all Victorians.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Roser'.

Paul Roser
Senior Manager, Advocacy and Conservation