



Tasma Terrace
4 Parliament Place
East Melbourne
Victoria 3002

Email: info@nattrust.com.au
Web: www.nattrust.com.au

T 03 9656 9800
F 03 9650 5397

20 September 2012

Sue Gauci
Hobsons Bay City Council
115 Civic Parade
PO Box 21
Altona
VIC 3018

Dear Ms Gauci

Re: Planning Application PA1225056 57 Nelson Place, Williamstown

The Trust objects to the proposed demolition of the former Oriental Hotel.

The Hobsons Bay Heritage Study (revised 2010) identifies heritage places and precincts within Hobsons Bay.

As Council is aware the site is individually listed in the heritage overlay to the planning scheme as HO211.

What is Significant?

The former Oriental or Builders Arms Hotel, constructed c.1871, at 55 Nelson Place, Williamstown.

How is it Significant?

The former Oriental or Builders Arms Hotel at Nelson Place, Williamstown is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the hotel is significant as one of a number along Nelson Place in proximity to the waterfront, which demonstrates their important role in the early development of the town and the importance of Nelson Place as the commercial heart of Williamstown during the mid to late nineteenth century. It also illustrates how hotels were upgraded following changes to licensing laws during the late nineteenth century, which required hotels to have a certain number of rooms of minimum dimensions to be licensed. (AHC criteria A4 and D2)

Aesthetically, although altered, it is significant as a rare example of a three-storey corner hotel that relates to other similarly sited nineteenth century hotels in the Nelson Place and Government Survey Heritage Precincts. (AHC criteria B2 and E1)

Thematic history

Barnard (1999) notes that:

Hotels in the nineteenth century were essential for providing accommodation and sustenance for travelers, as well as meeting places for locals.

In a thriving port, visited by any number of sailors and travelers, it is little wonder that hotels proliferated in the 1850s and 1860s and there were also plenty of working men attached to the railways, port and dockyards who needed to slake their thirst at the end of the day. ..it is little wonder that a guide to Williamstown published in 1904 boasted that "probably in few towns in the States [of Australia] is there better or cheaper accommodation for visitors than in Williamstown".

Specific history

There has been a hotel on this site since 1856 when the original „Barkly Arms“ was erected – Evans (1969) notes that it was “accused of being a disorderly house in 1860”¹. This hotel was destroyed by fire c.1870 and the present much larger building was erected shortly afterwards. The rate book description by 1870-71 was a 16 room brick hotel with a Net Annual Value of £110. The description remained the same until 1888-89 when the number of rooms increased by 6 and the NAV had increased to £198.2

The upgrading of the hotel in the 1880s followed the introduction of new licensing laws in 1877 that required hotels to have a certain number of rooms of minimum dimensions to be licenced.³ It was renamed the „Oriental“ in 1881.

Unusually, the hotel remained in family ownership well into the twentieth century at a time when many larger hotels were being acquired by major breweries such as the Carlton and West End company. The Murphy family were long term owners during this period.

Description

The former Oriental Hotel is a three storey stuccoed brick building on a corner site, which is constructed to both street frontages. The present verandah is not original: A c.1870 photo shows the building without a verandah.

External Integrity and condition

Integrity – Low. Condition – Poor.

Context

The former Oriental Hotel occupies a prominent corner site in Nelson Place – although now relatively isolated, it is one of a number of early hotels on key sites along

Comparative Analysis

The former Oriental is one a number of substantial brick hotels that were constructed in Williamstown during the late nineteenth century, and is one of only three, three-storey examples along with the Royal and the Newport. It directly compares with the more intact examples cited in this Study including the Newport at 1 Mason Street (1888), Morning Star at 3 Electra Street (1890), Bristol at 190 Ferguson Street (1890), Royal at 85 Nelson Place (1890), and the Yacht Club at 207 Nelson Place (1892). Other corner hotels within the Government Survey area include the Telegraph (1862) at 17 Ann Street, and the Stags Head (1887) at 39 Cecil Street.

Management objectives

Conserve elements that contribute to the significance of the place and ensure that new development is sympathetic to the historic character of the place in accordance with the relevant articles and conservation principles, processes and practice set out in the Burra Charter. Refer to the relevant Heritage local policy at Clause 22.01 of the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme.

The local policy in 22.01 has many objectives, including:

To conserve characteristics that contribute to the individual identity of heritage places and precincts within Hobsons Bay and ensure that their cultural significance is not diminished by:

- *The loss of any fabric which contributes to the significance of the heritage place or precinct;*

The Policy includes:

Exercising discretion

It is policy to conserve heritage places and precincts by:

- *Ensuring the maintenance and preservation of heritage places;*
- *Ensuring the restoration or reconstruction of fabric where opportunities arise.*
- *Discouraging the demolition of heritage places unless the demolition is only part of the heritage place and it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority that, as appropriate:*
- *Ensuring the fabric to be removed is not significant;*
- *Ensure the fabric to be removed will not adversely affect the significance of the heritage place;*
Ensuring development will assist in the long term conservation of the heritage place;
- *In the case of an industrial heritage place, ensuring development will facilitate the historic use of the heritage place and will not result in the loss of fabric of primary significance;*
- ***Discouraging the demolition of heritage places unless it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority that the structural integrity of the heritage place has been lost;***
- ***Generally not accepting the poor condition or low integrity of a heritage place as justification for its demolition, particularly if in the opinion of the Responsible Authority the condition of the heritage place has deliberately been allowed to deteriorate***

The subject building is also included in the Government Survey heritage precinct HO8.

Policy basis

The Government Survey Heritage Precinct comprises the parts of "Williams Town" originally surveyed by Robert Hoddle and later extended by the Victorian Colonial Government between 1837 and 1855. Historically, the precinct demonstrates the most important and prosperous phases in the development of Williamstown, from the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries associated with the development of the port and later influenced by the development of railways and related industries. The early settlement of Williamstown and its importance as a port and defence facility, also contributes to a broader understanding of the history of Victoria. This policy implements the recommendations of the Hobsons Bay Heritage Study Amended 2010 relating to this precinct.

Objectives

To retain the distinctive cultural heritage significance of this precinct which is derived from:

- *The strong associations with the maritime and railway industries that were key influences in the early historic development of Williamstown;*
- *The strong associations with the formative civic, public and commercial development that occurred in Williamstown during the nineteenth century;*
- *The setting and visual prominence of the civic, public and commercial buildings on key sites throughout the precinct, and in particular the grouping of related basalt public buildings in Cecil Street and public buildings in Electra Street;*
- *The strong and distinctive urban form created by the regular grid subdivisions, separated by areas of open space, which exemplifies nineteenth century town planning;*
- *The pre-1860 buildings, which demonstrate the very early origins of this precinct and comprise one of the most significant collections of buildings from this period within Victoria;*

Comment

It is clear that the application to demolish is not consistent with local heritage policy articulated in the planning scheme. The clearly identified significance – notably that the subject building is an early example of a three-storey hotel in Williamstown - will be completely lost if the application is approved. The Oriental Hotel is one of four corner hotel sites marking out a precinct – together with the Telegraph (fully restored), Briannia (abandoned) and the Prince of Wales.

It is apparent that the applicant is to some extent relying on the physical condition of the building to justify the application. The supporting evidence of Aurecon seeks to address the local policy clause

- *Discouraging the demolition of heritage places unless it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority that the structural integrity of the heritage place has been lost;*

The most recent report by Aurecon dated 22 June 2012 states:

Our limited visual inspections reveal that the Willy Tavern structure is in our opinion in an unsafe condition and we recommend that either restoration of the structure or demolition be carried out immediately...considering the condition and extent of necessary demolition, it is understood that it is neither practical nor feasible to consider this option.


Given the circumstances of the hotels lack of maintenance, Council must consider that its policy at 22.01 applies:

- *Generally not accepting the poor condition or low integrity of a heritage place as justification for its demolition, particularly if in the opinion of the Responsible Authority the condition of the heritage place has deliberately been allowed to deteriorate*

Aurecon's conclusion (22 June 2012) about the building being "unsafe" does not in our opinion sufficiently demonstrate to the Council whether the structural integrity

Aurecon's conclusion (22 June 2012) about the building being "unsafe" does not in our opinion sufficiently demonstrate to the Council whether the structural integrity "has been lost". It may be unsafe to enter but Aurecon only states that the structure "might not be able to withstand any earthquake forces and a minor or major earthquake may cause sudden collapse."

The objectives of the scheme will not be met by this application.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Roser', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Paul Roser
Senior Manager Advocacy & Conservation

c.c. National Trust Inner West Branch