

9 October 2020

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Vijaya Vaidyanath
Chief Executive Officer
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Re: Proposed demolition of the River Pavilion, Fairfield Park

Dear Ms Vaidyanath,

I write regarding the proposed redevelopment of the River Pavilion at Fairfield Park. The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (National Trust) is the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy, representing 30,000 members across Victoria. As Victoria's premier heritage and conservation organisation, the National Trust has an interest in ensuring that a wide range of natural, cultural, social and Indigenous heritage values of the municipality are protected and respected.

We understand that Council has secured a permit for the redevelopment of the River Pavilion in Fairfield Park, to make way for important facility upgrades for the Ivanhoe and Northcote Canoe Club (INCC). Regretfully, the National Trust was unaware of this development proposal and related heritage issues at the time the permit was advertised and subsequently challenged at VCAT.

We are advised that the River Pavillion was designed in 1987-88 by Dennis Carter and Paul Couch of Carter Couch, and remains an important piece of public work by this practice. Paul Couch worked closely with Robin Boyd for many years and was involved in some of Australia's most significant modern buildings.

We understand that during the course of the VCAT hearing, Council confirmed that it had obtained advice from one of its heritage advisors that the pavilion has potential heritage significance. Heritage advice provided to Council stated that:

New evidence has been produced which demonstrates that the pavilion structure and workshop/change rooms (subject site) may have state architectural significance in and of themselves.

We also note that a submission was provided as part of the VCAT hearing by leading architectural historian and noted expert in post-war architecture, Professor Philip Goad, that the River Pavillion is significant at the state level for its architectural design and as a rare example of a non-residential work by highly regarded architect Paul Couch.

We understand that VCAT resolved to uphold Council's decision to grant a permit for the demolition of the River Pavilion, as the building is not currently identified as significant in the statement of significance for the Heritage Overlay for Fairfield Park (HO147).

Despite the historic importance of the post-war period, post-war buildings generally represent a significant gap in heritage protection, as they are frequently overlooked or not included for assessment in municipal heritage studies. This is a challenge acknowledged in Council's [2019-2030 Heritage Strategy](#):

Previous heritage studies have not focussed on post-war heritage. This period needs to be further investigated, with places protected, so that this important part of the City's heritage is not lost (p13).

We respectfully request that Council meaningfully considers the new information which indicates that River Pavilion is of heritage significance, prior to making changes to the building. This is considered best practice in heritage management, as outlined in the *Burra Charter (The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance)*, which holds that an understanding of cultural significance for a place should be established prior to decisions being made regarding its management.

We strongly urge Council to undertake further community consultation to inform a new design, which delivers on the much-needed facility upgrades for the INCC, without the permanent loss of the River Pavilion. We note that there has been significant community opposition to the proposal to demolish the River Pavilion, with a current online petition recording over 3,000 signatures calling for its retention.

We feel strongly that future management of Fairfield Park can balance a diversity of community uses, while also respecting the buildings and attributes which contribute to its heritage significance.

We also call on Council to undertake further work to identify and protect places of post-war significance in the municipality, including assets owned and managed by Council. We would welcome the opportunity to provide support to Council on this issue, or any other strategic planning initiatives which address gaps in heritage protection across the municipality.

I welcome you to contact our Heritage Advocacy Advisor, Freya Keam, on 9656 9818 or at freya.keam@nattrust.com.au to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F Watson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Felicity Watson
Executive Manager—Advocacy
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)