



20 September 2021

The Hon. James Merlino MP
Minister for Education
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CC: The Hon. Richard Wynne MP, Minister for Planning

Re: Proposed demolition of heritage buildings at Sunshine Technical School

Dear Minister,

I write on behalf of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) with concerns regarding the proposed demolition of heritage buildings at Sunshine Technical School. The 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 more than 30,000 members across Victoria.

We understand that the Department of Education, through the Victorian School Building Authority, is intending to release a Request for Tender in September 2021 for the demolition of two vacant schools located at Sunshine and Ardeer. Proposed works include the demolition of existing buildings included in the Heritage Overlay of the City of Brimbank Planning Scheme: Sunshine Girls' Technical School HO57 at 111 Derby Road, and Sunshine Technical School (Boys' Wing) HO56 129 Derby Road.

These buildings are located within McKay housing subdivision, which is of **national** historical and social significance as a part of a suburb created by Australia's leading industrialist, HV McKay, and as a milestone in the development of the industrial suburb under the influence of the Garden City movement. Designed in the Moderne architectural style by Percy Everett, Chief Architect of the Public Works Department, the Sunshine Girls' Technical School (1938) and Sunshine Technical School (Boys' Wing) (1941) are among the municipality's most significant twentieth century buildings.

As you are aware, the Minister for Education is exempt from the provisions of the *Planning & Environment Act 1987*, and therefore the Department of Education does not require a planning permit for works to places in the Heritage Overlay. However the State Government's own guide to the Victoria Planning System states that:

Where they have been exempted from any legal need to comply with planning scheme requirements, as a matter of practice the ministers concerned should consult from an early stage with relevant planning authorities on proposed works. This consultation fosters cooperative involvement of local government in state planning and development matters. Consultation needs to be effective and therefore should be more than the mere circulation of proposals.¹

¹ [Using Victoria's Planning System, 2015.](#)

In this case, we are advised that there has been no consultation with Brimbank City Council or the community regarding the proposed demolition. Further, we are advised that there are no immediate plans to redevelop the site, with the rationale for demolition being vandalism and anti-social behaviour at the site.

This approach to the management of heritage assets is unacceptable. It is completely at odds with recent amendments to the *Planning & Environment Act 1987* introduced through the *Planning & Environment Amendment Bill 2021* by the State Government to strengthen local and state government powers to penalise property owners for unlawful demolition, **and allowing properties to fall into disrepair.**

The demolition of these buildings would signal an unacceptable double standard to the Victorian community: that the State Government seeks to punish private property owners for allowing their properties to fall into disrepair, while allowing the demolition of its own heritage assets—which have apparently fallen into disrepair—without community consultation.

The demolition of these buildings would also be a poor sustainability outcome, which is at odds with the State Government's strong commitment to Climate Action.

The National Trust seeks an urgent commitment from the Department of Education to secure and retain these historically significant buildings, and engage with Brimbank Council.

We also seek a meeting with you or one of your advisors to discuss this matter, as well as the broader issue of the Department of Education's management of heritage assets.

I welcome you to contact Felicity Watson, our Executive Manager, Advocacy at felicity.watson@nattrust.com.au to discuss this matter further.

Yours faithfully,



Simon Ambrose
Chief Executive Officer
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)