

The Mayor and Councillors
City of Whitehorse
379–397 Whitehorse Road
Nunawading VIC 3131

6 Parliament Place
East Melbourne
VIC 3002

9 July 2026

info@nattrust.com.au
nationaltrust.org.au/vic
(03) 9656 9800

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Re: Whitehorse Heritage Review 2024 — Reinstatement of Excluded Heritage Places

We write to you in relation to concerns with Whitehorse Council's Ordinary Meeting held on Monday 1 June 2026, whereby Council resolved to remove more than 40 places recommended for local heritage protection in the Whitehorse Heritage Review 2024 from a proposed planning scheme amendment.

The meeting recording indicates that these places were excluded for no reason beyond the fact that property owners had objected to their inclusion in the proposed Heritage Overlay Planning Scheme Amendment.

The National Trust is Victoria's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation, representing more than 60,000 members and supporters across the state. We have a direct interest in ensuring the natural, cultural, social and First Peoples heritage of the municipality is properly identified and protected, and we write to set out why we believe Council's decision must be reversed.

Under the Planning and Environment Act 1987, Council is required to "ensure the conservation of places of heritage significance" within its municipality (Clause 15.03). Objections by a property owner is not acceptable evidence against an identified and recommended place's heritage significance and denies the expectations under the Act for rigorous planning process to assess places determined to be potentially worthy of local heritage protections. By excluding these places before the amendment process has commenced, which includes exhibition and independent panel review, Council has left identified heritage places without statutory protection, in direct conflict with its obligations under the Act. We recognise that Council also agreed to the removal of a small number of places from the amendment on the advice of its own planning officers, such as where the properties had already been demolished and could no longer be protected, and we do not take issue with them.

Furthermore, by removing places from the amendment prior to exhibition solely because some owners objected at a Council meeting, Council has denied all affected parties an equitable opportunity to participate in the statutory planning process. We understand that property owners were originally advised that they would have the opportunity to make formal submissions during the exhibition of the amendment, as intended under the Planning and Environment Act process. However, following a Councillor's direct contact with affected property owners outside the formal notification process, Council acted on those objections before the amendment was exhibited. This has circumvented the established planning process and denied other interested parties, including heritage stakeholders and the broader community, the opportunity to have their views considered through a rigorous analysis of places of potential significance, and for all affected parties to make submissions before an independent panel of experts.

The Whitehorse Heritage Review 2024 followed the same rigorous assessment process every Victorian council relies on to identify heritage places. Much of the opposition to its recommendations rests on common misconceptions that application of the Heritage Overlay would result in disadvantages for property owners. Contrary to popular belief, the Heritage Overlay does not prohibit development, subdivision or demolition; regular maintenance does not even require a permit approval. A Heritage Overlay does not impose new compliance or restoration obligations beyond those already required of any property owner under the municipality's local laws; and there is no evidence to support claims that a Heritage Overlay would reduce property values, in fact research trends show there are frequently increases in buyer demand for areas with heritage protection. These misconceptions are addressed in detail in the National Trust's published resources on [myth busting local heritage controls](#), and we would encourage Council to read this and direct its community toward this evidence rather than responding to unsubstantiated claims that only spread fear where there is no cause for alarm.

The [Whitehorse Heritage Framework Plan 2020](#) notes, "Historic buildings, places and objects are a critical part of the identity of the City of Whitehorse and contribute to the character and liveability of the municipality. Identifying and protecting historic buildings, landscapes and objects is therefore a vital function of Council for current and future generations." We would therefore expect Council to support the recommendations of a comprehensive study undertaken by a qualified heritage professional.

The cost of inaction is not abstract. Five identified heritage places have already been lost in Whitehorse under the same climate of uncertainty this decision now entrenches: 20 Naughton Grove, Blackburn; 2 Peter Avenue, Blackburn North; 18 Goodwin Street, Blackburn; 7 Ross Street, Mitcham; and 2 Lexton Road, Box Hill North. Every month the remaining places sit outside the amendment is a month in which the same outcome becomes possible for them.

Council's obligations extend beyond the individual owners of these properties to the whole municipality. Heritage places tell the story of a community's history for everyone who lives in it, not only for those who currently hold title to them. Excluding these places from the amendment before exhibition also removes the opportunity for the wider Whitehorse community to have its say on their protection through the proper public process.

The National Trust recognises that progressing a heritage amendment in the face of organised owner opposition requires political courage. We encourage Council to support the expertise of the qualified heritage consultant it contracted to prepare the Whitehorse Heritage Review 2024, and the experience of your own planning officers, and work with them to reinstate all recommended places that have not been demolished into the proposed amendment.

The National Trust stands ready to work with Whitehorse City Council to progress appropriate local heritage protections for the recommended properties identified in the Heritage Review 2024.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maddi Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maddi Moore
Advocacy Strategic Manager
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)