

Committee for North Sydney

info@committeefornorthsydney.org.au



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Chair
Independent Planning Commission
Level 3 201 Elizabeth Street
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Submitted on the IPC website

The MLC Building: A key element in the North Sydney city centre's sense of place

1 The MLC Building's cultural significance

The Committee for North Sydney* welcomed the Heritage Council's heritage assessment of the former MLC Building, since this landmark Australian building – of well-documented aesthetic, technical and representative significance – has been a civilised presence in the city centre for over sixty years.

The Committee for North Sydney has given careful thought to the origins, design and significance of the MLC Building in North Sydney. At the Committee's request one of the members, leading architect, architectural historian and urban researcher Adjunct Professor Geoff Hanmer, made a thorough and objective assessment of the building.

I submit with this letter Mr Hanmer's report.

The facts of the matter confirm that the MLC Building has the high degree of cultural significance to be listed on the State Heritage Register. The Heritage Council determined that the MLC Building had state-level historical, associative, aesthetic and social significance, rarity and representativeness. This assessment of the significance of the place is made not in relation to expediency or alternatives but in relation to the facts, irrespective of other planning and political processes concerning the future of the building.

We are confident that the Independent Planning Commission will confirm this assessment, as distinct from the question as to whether the MLC Building should be listed. This second question may depend on the Commission's assessment of options for reasonable or economic use and of the financial impact on the owner.

To assist the Commission in making this assessment, we will be submitting additional information on or before 1 April 2021.

2 The listing of the MLC Building

Listing the MLC Building would have the effect of precluding its total demolition. Through conditions, exemptions, heritage agreements and planning processes there will be options for the site, making it very difficult to argue that it would be incapable of reasonable or economic use and/or that it would cause 'undue' financial hardship.

We will be arguing that, for a range of reasons, retaining the heritage significance of the site while realising its additional economic and civic values provides the greatest environmental, economic and social return to the owners and users as well as the wider community.

* The members of the [Committee for North Sydney](http://www.committeefornorthsydney.org.au) are eminent practitioners in planning, architecture, urban design and related fields and respected members of the North Sydney community. Their primary purpose is to involve the community in planning for the strategic evolution of North Sydney from merely a CBD to an appealing *city centre* – a place for people.

We note that the Heritage Council made four significant findings.

- It is the 'iconic Miller Street wing' that has the greater significance.
- A major upgrade/refurbishment would not compromise its heritage significance.
- A reasonable or economic use of the building is possible based on economic analysis.
- Undue financial hardship to the beneficial owners has not been demonstrated.

It is clear from the Heritage Council's assessment that the options go beyond 'demolish or retain as is'. The third option is an imaginative and expert realisation of the site's increased development potential while (i) retaining and recovering the essential elements of the building's cultural significance and (ii) incorporating civic spaces and functions that would enhance the city centre at its very heart. An example would be Option 3 in the PTW report commissioned by the Heritage Council.

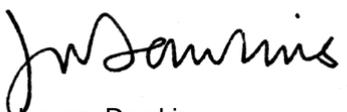
We were advised, in early briefings by Investa, that the new owners were fully aware, before purchasing the building, that their options were either refurbishment or demolition, and that they considered the building a good long-term investment in either case. It must also be the case that before buying the building the new owner considered the kind of third option mentioned above.

There is an added reason for recommending that the Heritage Council's advice be agreed to. The current building is not subject to strict (but only marginally effective) rules about overshadowing that were adopted well after the MLC Building was constructed. The replacement building, as proposed in North Sydney DA 147/20, inflicts serious damage on this core and very public area of the city because the rules now mandate a built form that offends all urban design precepts.

2 Request to present in person to the IPC's MLC Building review panel

Representatives of the Committee for North Sydney would welcome the opportunity to attend a hearing held by the panel.

Yours sincerely



Jeremy Dawkins
Convenor
Committee for North Sydney