

IPC
heritagemailbox@environment.nsw.gov.au

Dear Heritage Council of NSW

Re: MLC Building North Sydney (105-153 Miller Street, North Sydney)

I write to support of the “state heritage listing” of the MLC Building, 105 Miller, Street, North Sydney.

The MLC Building represents a unique synthesis of mid-century design excellence, heritage significance, local placemaking and corporate innovation & leadership. Since its completion in 1957, it has been North Sydney’s long-standing landmark building, defining it as a place of innovation and connection. It has played a key role as:

- architectural innovation in the Sydney and Australian context
- its demonstration as a place of adaptive re-use development proposal
- as a central placemaking element in the North Sydney centre

The future of the MLC Building is of State significance in part due to its multiple layers of contribution - to architectural design, heritage, corporate innovation, sustainability and local placemaking.

Key matters for consideration are:

- **Heritage**

The current listing of the MLC Building on the North Sydney LEP, and the current Heritage Council recommendation, demonstrate the unique value of the MLC Building in our design, heritage, cultural, placemaking and commercial enterprise history. The loss of the MLC Building will render North Sydney a much “lesser” place, devoid of the rich heritage of the building, and ongoing “place” role of the building in North Sydney. Given the limited number of significant buildings in North Sydney, (and none with the rich contribution of the MLC Building), it is essential to ensure that the MLC Building is properly recognised as a State significant building.

- **Corporate and Urban Leadership**

The MLC Building has demonstrated over more than sixty years, how a combination of design excellence, innovation, sustainability, and the capacity for adaptive reuse delivers corporate and urban leadership. These outcomes have informed the North Sydney narrative, as a place and community for many decades. Since 1957, the MLC Building has been instrumental in positioning North Sydney as a community, a place of vision, commerce and innovation.

- **Heritage – urban context, design, built form and placemaking – layers of excellence**

Located at the heart of the North Sydney town centre, the MLC Building, by virtue of its widely recognised and celebrated mid-century design excellence, is the most outstanding element of the North Sydney urban centre. It was the catalyst for North Sydney’s longstanding role as Sydney’s second CBD, and its listing in the North Sydney LEP celebrates its unique heritage value. Supported by the Post Office building, it has stood as the key “place maker” and “marker” at the Miller St and Pacific Highway intersection for decades. It is recognised by generations of Sydneysiders and visitors, as “the” North Sydney landmark, and as the “gateway connection” to the harbour bridge and the Sydney CBD.

Over time, the MLC Building has been witness to significant surrounding urban demolition, development and re-development. It has remained the “placemaking anchor”, maintaining the heart of the CBD and articulating a consistent “central place” as the surrounding built form has evolved around it.

The MLC Building with its popular lawn and mid-century rock garden anchors North Sydney as a “place”. The draft North Sydney Public Domain Strategy builds on the civic heart established by the MLC Building, to deliver a key intervention in the form of the proposed Miller Place. The closure of Miller Street, in conjunction with the MLC Building will be transformative, because it **builds on** the key “place defining” role which the MLC Building has played since its construction. The scale of the building, its unique design, and its history of connecting people and business at the centre of the community, will continue to enrich the character of North Sydney, as it evolves to support new and different commercial and community activities in the future. The MLC Building is the long term “authentic” hub of North Sydney, and key to its unique character and sense of place.

- **Adaptive re-use – a demonstration building**

The MLC Building is an internationally recognised adaptive re-use case study. It demonstrates how a well-designed building can be adapted to meet changing business and technology needs. The multi award winning Campus MLC project undertaken by Lendlease and its financial services business, MLC, in the late 1990s, repositioned the building and significantly enhanced the reputation of the corporate entities occupying it, as well as the highlighting the North Sydney CBD, as a vibrant financial services hub.

Campus MLC is a notable head office in Sydney, because of the shift in approach it made from a prevailing demolition/rebuild model, to a sustainable, adaptive re-use development approach. Designed by architects BVN for Lendlease, it was a “step change” in workplace design, building on the robust design principles of the 1957 building by Bates Smart McCutcheon. The mid-century design foresight, provided a foundation for Lendlease and MLC to invest in the next iteration of this remarkable building in the 1990s. They engaged international workplace specialists including London based DEGW and Franklin Becker from Cornell University, to work with a local team of specialists, led by Rosemary Kirkby, to deliver the renowned Campus MLC workplace. Its significance is demonstrated in broad media coverage. (Refer links and extracts, Attachment 1)

- **Building Condition**

All buildings require maintenance over time. With assets owned by office investment funds, there is a separation between maintenance of the interior assets and the structure of the building. As the Campus MLC adaptive re-use project (and subsequent refurbishments) demonstrate, the MLC Building interior has been the focus of significant innovation, investment and maintenance.

The MLC Building has generated consistent financial returns for its owners over time, including owner occupiers and asset fund owners. Given the importance of the building, the asset owner must be required to protect this important building and take an adaptive reuse development approach, which recognises the MLC Building’s heritage significance, accommodates changing business needs and ensures that it continues to play its unique placemaking role at the heart of North Sydney.

- **Sustainability**

Heritage protection of the MLC Building is a “sustainability” action. Built form and urban renewal sustainable development principles are well established. Detailed consideration must be given the “real cost” of demolition (embodied energy, landfill associated with demolition). There are excellent international examples of adaptive re-use to inform sustainable adaptable reuse development opportunities for the MLC Building. The design of the building, with its double floorplate, lends itself

to innovative adaptive reuse strategies. It is critical that there is a transparent discussion on the condition of the building and the adaptive reuse options to ensure sustainable development outcomes are delivered. The MLC Building is well positioned to demonstrate leadership in heritage, sustainable urban renewal and adaptive re-use.

Given its State and National significance, I urge the Heritage Council to ensure the long term protection of the MLC Building by approving its listing on the State Heritage register.

We as a community must ensure that the MLC Building continues to inspire architects, engineers, placemaking practitioners, sustainability specialists and corporate innovators for generations to come.

Yours sincerely



Debra Berkhout
19 April 2021

[REDACTED]
e [REDACTED]
m [REDACTED]

Links

<https://architectureau.com/articles/office-revolution/>

“When Prime Minister Robert Menzies opened MLC’s new highrise headquarters in Miller Street, North Sydney, in August 1957, nearly all the faces in the crowd were sombre suited men. MLC was then the largest office building in Australia. Inside were gleaming interiors and marching rows of desks, all sporting the latest look in corporate efficiency. Outside, Bates Smart & McCutcheon’s glazed curtain wall was a triumph of engineering. Today, the building looks just as fresh. The facade has been restored by Bates Smart’s Sydney office following a conservation management plan prepared by Peter McKenzie for Jackson Teece Chesterman Willis. The result is an exemplary piece of sustainability. To restore a 1950s skyscraper takes some courage. Not every corporation chooses to revive a potential dinosaur. Restoration is not necessarily a cheap solution or a sensible investment. To their credit MLC chose to stay and they did so throughout the refurbishment process. Inside, the changes wrought were dramatic. The new interior that is “Campus MLC” represents one of the most profound shifts in the history of postwar Australian office design.”

<https://dynamic.architecture.com.au/gallery/cgi-bin/awardssearch?option=showaward&entryno=20022077>

“The Campus MLC project is twofold -the making of a new workplace, and the rejuvenation of a heritage listed building. MLC, now part of the National, required a new workplace as the final plank in a cultural change programme spanning ten years. The central design tenet was the engagement of the people of MLC in the process of design. In other words a design, and therefore a “place” led by human needs and a response to a culture, rather than a place as a response to a functional brief. The 1957 Bates Smart McCutcheon designed building proved an ideal basis upon which to design a workplace based on principles of flexibility, egalitarianism, transparency and engagement. Its open rectangular floor plan with attached core has proved that the simple concepts of modernist planning well executed are timeless.”

<https://www.indesignlive.com/the-peeps/indesign-luminary-rosemary-kirkby>

Campus MLC won the RAI National Interior Architecture award in 2002 and was described by leading Australian architectural academic, Dr Phillip Goad, as representing “one of the most profound shifts in the history of post-War Australian office design.” The real compliment for Kirkby is that, a dozen years later, the recent interior update by Woods Bagot has “preserved the architectural bones” of her scheme. “The desk size has changed, because technology has changed,” she says “but somehow we got the design right. What we designed for was universal human behaviour, and we know that’s enduring.”

Penelope Barker, Indesign August 2001:

“Forget the plush CEO’s office and the corporate lobby as a power statement: Campus MLC is a potent symbol of sweeping change in the workplace and of the value of design in facilitating cultural change and creating an environment conducive to the needs of people and community.”