

5.3 Other Heritage Items

MLC Centre

The MLC Centre is on the corner of Miller Street and Mount Street. It is separated from the development site by Spring Street and Denison Street. The MLC Centre was designed by Bates Smart McCutcheon in the Post War International Style. It was opened in 1957/58 as the headquarters of the Mutual Life and Citizens Assurance Company (MLC Limited). It is a fourteen storey office block, the first office block in North Sydney and the largest for a number of years after its construction. It utilised construction and structural techniques not previously used in Australia including curtain walling and modular units. For Statement of Heritage Significance (see Appendix 3.)

A Conservation Plan was prepared for the building in May 1998 by Jackson Teece Chesterman Willis giving a more comprehensive study of the building and detailed conservation policies. Relevant extracts from the policy recommendations Conservation Plan are included (see Appendix 4):

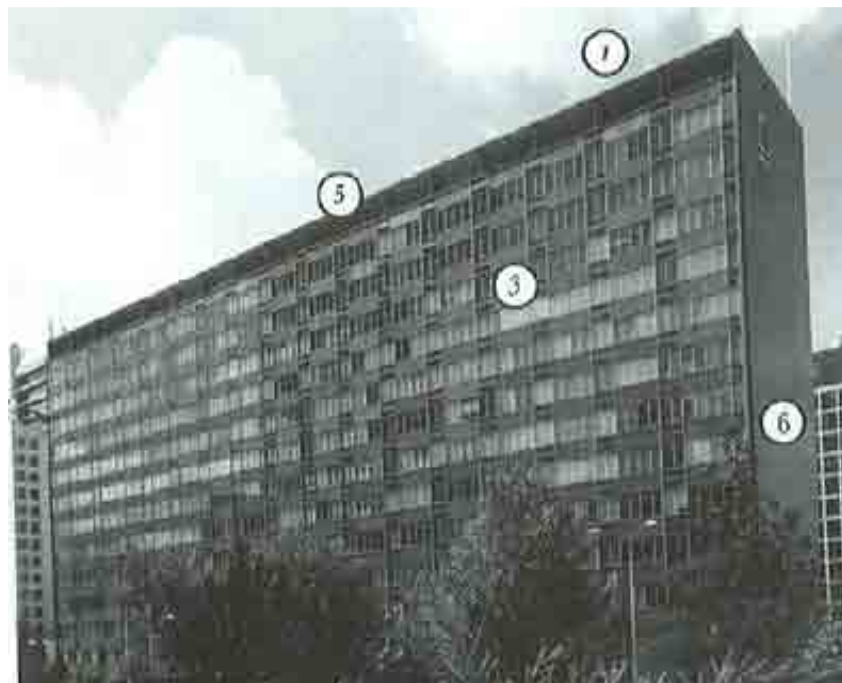


Figure 13: MLC Building, Miller Street, North Sydney

Typical Style indicators of a Building from the Post War International Style

- 1. – Cubiform and overall shape
- 3 –Curtain wall
- 5 – Overhang for shade
- 6 – Plain smooth wall surface

Source: *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture, Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present* – Richard Apperley, Robert Irving, Peter Reynolds et al.



Figure 14: Views of MLC Building

Source: Architecture in Australia. Journal of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects April – June 1956



Figure 15: North Sydney before 1958. A view looking south down the Pacific Highway from the vicinity of McLaren Street

Source: *The Opposite Shore North Sydney and Its People*, Russell, E.



Figure 16: A south view of the Municipality of North Sydney 1974 showing the path of the expressway

Source: *The Opposite Shore North Sydney and Its People*, Russell, E.



Figure 17: The MLC Centre, View from south west.

Heritage Impact Assessment

The 1988 Jackson Teece Chesterman and Willis conservation plan for the MLC Centre provides a specific policy for the townscape setting of the building and identifies the building as having a 'lot boundary curtilage' – that is a curtilage which is confined to lot on which the building sits. The relevant policy is set out below:

Policy 3.2

The original configuration of the setback with its landscaped garden and paved concourse/ colonnade, along Miller Street should be preserved by the adoption of a Lot Boundary Curtilage. The design of any new landscaping should be expressive of the philosophy which informed the original design of these spaces.

Explanation

The adoption of a lot Boundary Curtilage is a formal mechanism by which:

- *The historical setting of the building may be protected*
- *Existing visual and physical links into and out of the site may be protected*
- *The site may be protected from inappropriate development.*

The principal view to the MLC Centre is from its immediate forecourt on Miller Street and from the southwest across Victoria Cross where the cubiform massing of the building with its gridded western wall and solid planar tiled south wall can be appreciated. Figure 18, Figure 19 and Figure 20 below show the impact on this view. The proposed building will be visible rising above the roof of the MLC Centre. The Beaumonde development already visually interrupts the roof edge of the MLC Centre in certain views but it is an interruption which is not dominant to the casual observer. Also shown on the view analyses is the massing of potential development of an adjacent site in accordance with the provisions of the draft LEP amendment. This shows that any development on that site of the scale proposed would be visible above roof of the heritage item. Nevertheless, all the development shown in the view analyses outside conforms to the specific provisions of the 'lot boundary curtilage' policy of the conservation plan for the MLC Centre.

In essence, the experience of the MLC Centre is principally from Miller Street and Victoria Cross and is one of a massive gridded slab at the street edge – though obscured by subsequent tree planting. That there are and will be taller nearby buildings rising further above around is consistent with the significance of the MLC Centre as it was the first high rise office block in North Sydney and was seminal in the current and future nature of the central business district of North Sydney. The height and visibility of the proposed development in relation to the MLC Centre will not adversely impact upon the significance of this heritage item.

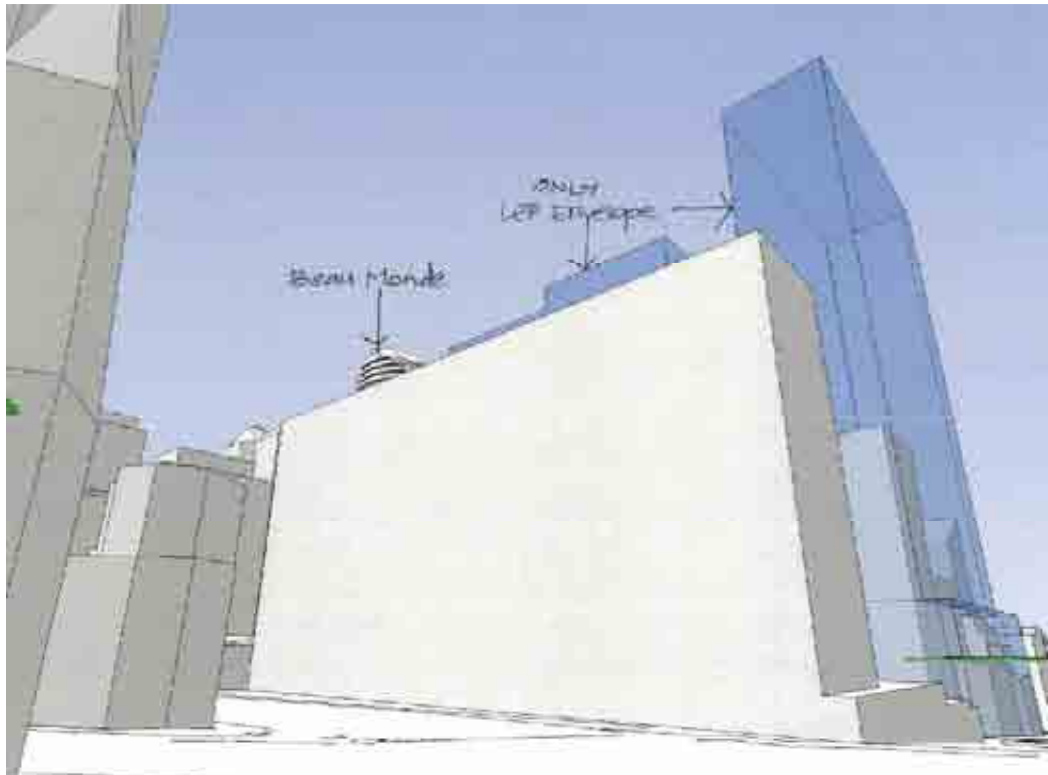


Figure 18: View Analysis of development within the provisions of the draft LEP at 88 Walker Street and 100 Mount Street from south west of MLC Centre

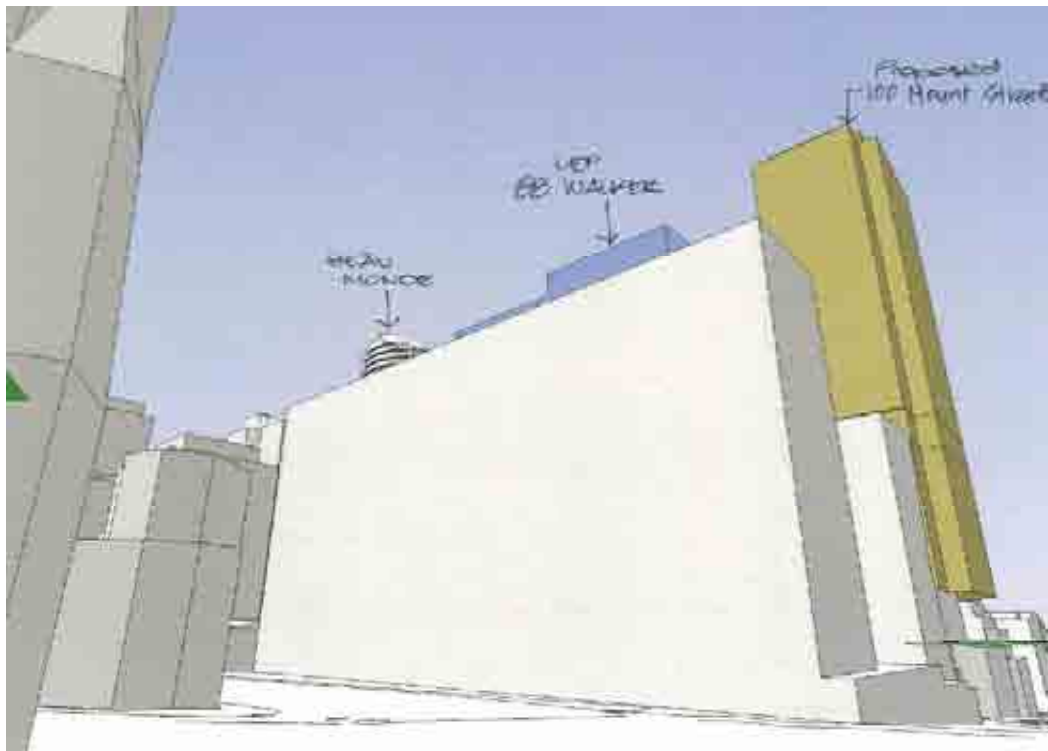


Figure 19: View Analysis of proposed development at 100 Mount Street from south west of MLC Centre with development at 88 Walker Street within the provisions of the draft LEP shown also.

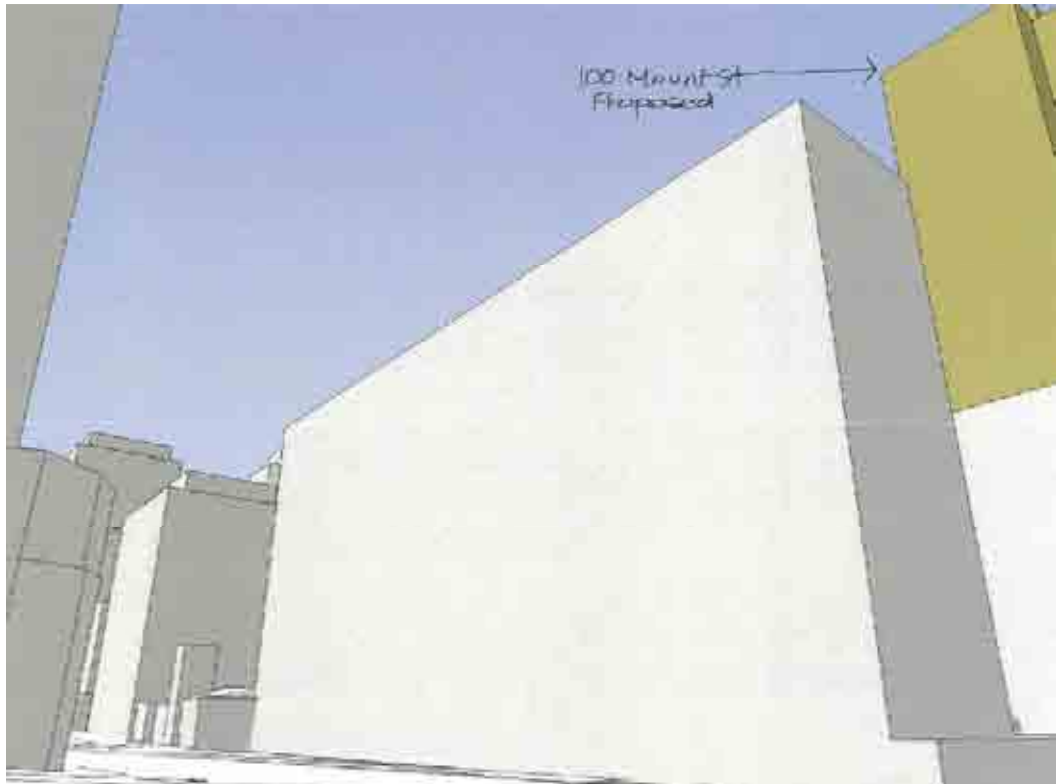


Figure 20: View Analysis of part of the proposed development at 100 Mount Street from south west of MLC Centre.

Former Bank of NSW

This two storey building is located on a triangular site on the corner of Mount Street and the Pacific Highway. The building was erected in 1931 replacing an earlier bank premises on the site. It is designed in the Inter-War Free Classical style and the new building coincided with the construction of the Pacific Highway approaches to the Harbour Bridge.

For Statement of Heritage Significance (see Appendix 5)



Figure 21: The Bank of NSW (Former) Miller Street View from the West



Figure 22: Bank of NSW (Former) View from North

Heritage Impact Assessment

The heritage item retains its original external form and can be appreciated as a significant corner building at the corner of Mount Street and the Pacific Highway. When viewed from the west, the heritage item already has a backdrop of taller planar buildings. The lower scale of the item, its rounded corner and its apparent protrusion into the space of the Victoria Cross retain its landmark value. The addition of another tall building into the north-eastern setting of the heritage item will not have a significant adverse impact upon its heritage value.

Victorian Shopfront Terrace, 187 Miller Street, North Sydney

This two storey Victorian Italianate style building was erected c.1888. It is one of the few remaining Victorian shopfronts on Miller Street and retains original detailing to the Miller Street facade including the ground floor glass and metal shopfront and the triple semicircular arched windows on the upper floor.

For Statement of Heritage Significance (see Appendix 6).



Figure 23: 187 Miller Street North Sydney

Heritage Impact Assessment

This heritage item is a remnant of the type of development characteristic of North Sydney before the second half of the twentieth century. The development of the second half of the last century has now engulfed all but

the intact streetfront of the building. The proposed development is not visible from this location on Miller Street and there will be no effect on the heritage significance of the item.

6.0 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 Introduction

The following assessment is based on the guidelines set out by the NSW Heritage Office publication 'Statements of Heritage Impact', 2002.

The following aspects of the proposal respect or enhance the heritage significance of the item or conservation area for the following reasons:

- The significance of the heritage items in the vicinity of the proposed development is not significantly adversely affected. The proposed development is in the context of North Sydney which has multiple high rise buildings in the vicinity. The heritage items in the vicinity are generally appreciated from a relatively close proximity as the height of the buildings in the area does not allow for long range views. The specific impacts upon the former North Sydney Fire Station has been managed by provision of a podium with void above consistent with the height of the heritage item. The significance of the former fire station would be enhanced by the replacement of the intrusive tree as shown in DA02.

There are no aspects which could detrimentally impact on heritage significance.

Early consultation has allowed the heritage issues to be integrated and mitigated in the concept design which preceded the project application. The resulting application is a sympathetic solution.

6.2 New development adjacent to a heritage item (including additional buildings and dual occupancies)

- *How is the impact of the new development on the heritage significance of the item or area to be minimised?*

The proposed new development has a street level podium which matches the height of the adjoining heritage item (the former North Sydney Fire Station). The construction of the proposed podium is aligned to the height of the top cornice of the balustrade parapet of the heritage listed Firehouse Hotel. The potential dominance of any higher development such as that proposed has been mitigated by mediating the scale shift using a podium with void above. The proposed development conforms to heritage objectives and existing policies within conservation plans for the heritage items nearby.

- *Why is the new development required to be adjacent to a heritage item?*

The new development is on land near heritage items in the dense North Sydney central business district for which the existing character, the future desired character and the highest and best use of the land is for a development such as that proposed.

- *How does the curtilage allowed around the heritage item contribute to the retention of its heritage significance?*

The curtilage around the former North Sydney Fire Station is its Lot boundary. This is not altered by the proposed adjacent development. The curtilage around the MLC Building is its Lot boundary and this is not altered by the proposed development.

- *How does the new development affect views to, and from, the heritage item? What has been done to minimise negative effects?*

Views to the former North Sydney Fire Station from Walker Street are not affected by the proposed development. The proposed podium of the new building would match the two storey scale of the heritage item at the Walker Street frontage.

Views to the MLC building not be impeded by the proposed development but the tower will be visible from behind the MLC Centre when it is viewed from west of its immediate context on Miller Street. The changes in setting conform to the townscape policies of the MLC Centre's conservation management plan.

- *Is the development sited on any known, or potentially significant archaeological deposits? If so, have alternative sites been considered? Why were they rejected?*

The development site is on land which has previously been developed. The existing building to be demolished is a contemporary multistorey building. It is unlikely that there are any significant archaeological deposits.

- *Is the new development sympathetic to the heritage item? In what way (eg form, siting, proportions, design)?*

The podium within the new development is consistent with the scale of the adjoining heritage item (the former North Sydney Fire Station) and mediates the Walker Street frontage.

The tower of the new development is higher than the adjacent heritage item (the MLC Building) but it does not dominate the heritage item as there are other multistorey buildings in the vicinity.

- *Will the additions visually dominate the heritage item? How has this been minimised?*

The additions will not visually dominate the heritage items. The heritage item is currently surrounded by multistorey buildings so there will be limited adverse impacts.

- *Will the public and users of the item, still be able to view and appreciate its significance?*

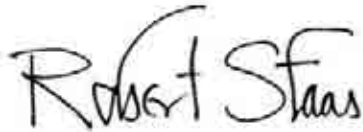
Appreciation of the significance of the adjoining heritage item from Walker Street, for the public and users of the former North Sydney Fire Station will not be adversely affected by the development. Appreciation of the adjacent heritage item from Mount Street, Miller Street and the eastern side of the MLC Building for the public and users of the MLC Building will not be adversely affected by the development. Indeed the increase in accommodation means a greater number of members of the public will be able to experience the heritage items within the setting of the new development.

7.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the proposed project does not significantly, adversely impact upon the identified heritage significance of the adjacent or adjoining heritage items nor heritage items or conservation areas further afield. The former North Sydney Fire Station is currently surrounded by tall buildings and the impact of a new high-rise development in the immediate vicinity will not alter the ability of the public to appreciate the heritage significance of the heritage item. The podium of the new development generally maintains the parapet height of the heritage item on the Walker Street frontage. Although the tower is higher than the existing building adjacent to the heritage item, the height of the development is not out of context with the existing buildings in the vicinity and conforms to relevant heritage objectives and conservation policies. The bulk of the tower is separated from the podium by a significant void.

The replacement of the intrusive plane tree in front of the entry to the former Fire Station with one further south as shown in DA20 has a beneficial heritage impact.

I recommend that the heritage aspects of this project application be approved.



Robert Staas
Director / Heritage Consultant
NBRS+PARTNERS ARCHITECTS

14 May 2009

8.0 APPENDICES

8.1 APPENDIX 1: Extract from the MLC Centre Conservation Plan prepared in May 1988 by Jackson Teece Chesterman and Willis for the MLC Centre:

2. 2 The Development of North Sydney

2.2.2 1932- 1957 Period

The opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932 enabled easy road and rail connections which encouraged further growth on the North Shore in general and North Sydney in particular.

In North Sydney, the interval between the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the commencement of large-scale commercial development was characterised by residential development associated with new road links created by the Bridge.

Between 1923 and 1942 over 1000 new flats were constructed in North Sydney, ranking it behind only Sydney, Waverley, Randwick and Woollahra.

Together with this urbanisation, the nature of the commercial and retail activities changed.

North Sydney began to develop away from the waterfronts and peninsulas that had traditionally been the focus of activity. The transfer of the Council Chambers from Alfred Street, Milsons Point to its present site in 1926 was significant in this process and the town centre envisaged by the Surveyor General's 1838 town plan finally came into its own. The transport nexus of the suburb now centred on the North Sydney Railway Station and Victoria Cross precinct and the main roads through the council area took on a greater significance as individual travellers drove their horses, carriages and motor cars through North Sydney to the Bridge approaches.

[Following the Great Depression and World War II, there was endemic widespread housing shortage across the country.]

The nation-wide commitment to improve housing standards brought about by memory both of the low standards before the war and of the horrors and austerity of the World War II, had the effect of severely limiting the resources that could be made available for commercial development. It was not until the easing of financial restrictions by Commonwealth Government in 1955 that commercial and industrial building was able to re-commence in earnest with the consequence that "Australian building embarked on the greatest period of expansion in the country's history".

High-rise in North Sydney began with an isolated development, the MLC office building, opened in 1957. It was the largest office block in Australia for some years afterwards and incorporated the latest building technology being practised in America.

...

Many other large buildings are under construction or in the planning stage and, within a few years, the entire commercial area of the North Sydney municipality will be transformed.

By the end of the 1950s the northern approach roads to the Bridge were unable to handle the traffic demand and in 1962 a radical reconfiguration was proposed, which was to operate in conjunction with the newly opened Cahill Expressway. The new northern approach system known as the Warringah Expressway was constructed between 1963 and 1968 and necessitated the demolition of approximately 600 dwellings.

Upon completion, the Warringah Expressway formed a major role in allowing the rapid expansion of high-rise office and commercial development in North Sydney during the 1970s and 1980s.

8.2 APPENDIX 2: Heritage significance of the Former North Sydney Fire Station

The heritage significance and other relevant attributes of the Former North Sydney Fire Station, 86 Walker Street, North Sydney as noted on the Heritage Inventory Database is:

Original Fire Station for North Sydney and relic of operations from horse-drawn technology. Indicative of period Fire Brigade organisations and activity. Fine example of small regional government building and an example of Victorian Italianate architecture.

Designed by W. Vernon (And Charles Hellmrich). Built by Department of Public Works.

Two storey rendered brick fire station with balustrade parapet with central semi-circular pediment above heavy cornice, three pairs of semi-circular arched windows on the upper floor, all with moulded archivolts and keystones carried on simulated square columns with dentilated imposts and corbelled sills. Ground floor windows are simple segmental arches with label moulds and corbelled sills. This building is designed in the Victorian Italianate style.

Converted to a restaurant during the 1970s. Interior extensively altered.

[The building was opened in June 1895 and replaced the previous headquarters in Mount Street as well as a branch station in Alfred Street.] It operated until 1945 when services rationalised and the area was covered from Crows Nest and Neutral Bay. The building was subsequently sold and reused as a restaurant.

[Source: North Sydney Heritage Study Review, 1993]

8.3 APPENDIX 3: Heritage significance of the MLC Centre

The heritage significance and other relevant attributes of the MLC Centre, 105-153 Miller Street, North Sydney as noted on the Heritage Inventory Database is:

The first high rise office block in North Sydney and the largest for a number of years after its construction. Seminal building on subsequent high-rise design in Sydney and utilised construction and structural techniques not previously used in Australia. First use of curtain wall design; first use of modular units in Australia. Major landmark in North Sydney.

Designed by Bates, Smart and McCutcheon

A fourteen storey cubiform office block of 450,000 feet of floorspace constructed on a rigid steel frame with hollow steel floors. Curtain walls of glass and anodized aluminium spandrels. ... Double glazed using anti-actinic heat resisting glass outer and plate glass inner, ten inches apart. Facing materials include terracotta, marble, granite and mosaic tiles. This building is designed in the Post-War International style.

Opened in 1957/58, the building was constructed as the headquarters of the Mutual Life and Citizens Assurance Company (MLC Limited). It was a pioneer in architecture and construction when built.

[Source: North Sydney Heritage Study Review, 1993]

8.4 APPENDIX 4: Extracts from the Conservation Plan prepared in May 1988 by Jackson Teece Chesterman and Willis for the MLC Centre:

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

5.2 Statement of Significance

5.2.1 Aesthetic Significance

The Building is of National Aesthetic significance:

- As Australia's first large-scale commercial office development embodying the sleek, modern, recognisable, rectangular glazed prism so recently embraced by US corporations, as exemplified by the UN Secretariat and Lever House;
- As Australia's first "freestanding" office building, with setbacks from boundaries creating landscaped spaces at street level;
- As Australia's first office building incorporating two office slabs separated by a services tower, with a podium, pilotis and roof gardens;
- As Australia's first example of a deliberately decorated curtain wall;
- As Australia's first large scale commercial office development in the International Modern Style, incorporating, at all levels from conception through finishes to furniture, the contemporary architectural influences of the USA, and Europe;
- As Australia's first large scale commercial office development utilising large areas of glazed curtain walls in association with large capacity, sophisticated – control air conditioning for comfort conditions;
- In association with the state office buildings for the MLC in Adelaide and Perth, for the ground-breaking aspects of its construction including: use of light weight materials; testing leading to evolution of building regulations; prefabricated steel structural framing and flooring system; incorporation of modular design and fitout of the interiors; adoption of "fast track" construction methods;
- As Australia's first building with a large lift capacity designed to cope with a high level of inter-floor traffic resulting from the head office operations of a single tenant.

The building is of State Aesthetic Significance :

- For the incorporation of the artworks of two notable contemporary sculptors

The building is of Regional Aesthetic significance

- As a (formerly) prominent landmark of a major Australian institution, best exemplified by the now removed weather beacon on the roof of the building.

5.2.2 Historical Significance

The Building is of National Historical significance:

- As the first large scale commercial office development built in Australia after the easing of both financial constraints and post-war materials shortages brought about by the pressing need to overcome housing shortages.;
- Because it was designed by Sir Osborne McCutcheon whose architectural practice Bates, Smart McCutcheon was in the forefront of the introduction of large scale commercial office developments in

the capital cities and major country centres throughout Australia in the 1950's and 60's, not only for MLC but also for other major corporations.

- For its association with a major company who chose to raise their national market profile by construction of a group of International Modern" office Buildings whose genre was recognisable different from those that preceded.
- Because it was a "flagship" national headquarters from which MLC's purposeful expansion into its nation-wide market was directed;
- As an essentially intact example of an office floor configuration that demonstrates a style of commercial office space that had been overtaken by the evolutionary changes in work practices, particularly those associated with the PC
- As a rare, essentially intact example of commercial office development provided with large-scale social and cultural facilities for use by staff, as a part of the developing trend towards increased leisure time in contemporary society.

The Building is of Regional Historical significance

- Because it instigated the development of North Sydney as an acceptable and viable commercial office area, as an alternative to Sydney CBD

The Building is of Local Historical significance

- Because by the provision of a shopping concourse along Miller Street and shops along Mount Street, it continues the street-level retail tradition of the area;
- As the first example of a large-scale site amalgamation for commercial purposes in North Sydney

7. CONSERVATION POLICY

7.4.3 Policies for The Townscape

Policy 3.1

The original relationship of the building envelope to original site boundaries shall be retained

Policy 3.2

The original configuration of the setback with its landscaped garden and paved concourse/colonnade, along Miller Street should be conserved by the adoption of a Lot Boundary Curtilage. The design of new landscaping should be expressive of the philosophy which informed the original design of these spaces.

Explanation

The adoption of a Lot Boundary Curtilage is a formal mechanism by which:

- *The historical setting of the building may be protected*
- *Existing visual and physical links into and out of the site may be protected*
- *The site may be protected from inappropriate development*

8.5 APPENDIX 5: Heritage significance of the former Bank of NSW

The heritage significance and other relevant attributes of the Former Bank of NSW, 51 Mount Street, North Sydney as noted on the Heritage Inventory Database is:

Interesting and attractive building on an important corner in the commercial heart of North Sydney. Excellent example of its style and indicative of period bank architecture.

Designed by John Reid and Sons

A two storey building on a triangular site, the apex being semi-circular curve. Facade formed of brick with colonnade of semi-circular arched windows continuous over two floors. The curved wall section has classically inspired columns between each window. Roof line has heavily moulded cornice. This is designed in the Inter-War Free Classical style.

Conversion to a restaurant during the 1980s involved removal of original floors and alterations of floor levels internally.

This building erected in 1931, replacing earlier bank premises on the same site from 1877, being at that time the first bank office on the North Shore. New building co-inciding with and a result of the construction of the Pacific Highway approaches to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Sold by bank in 1974 to McDonalds Restaurants.

[Source: North Sydney Heritage Study Review, 1993]

8.6 APPENDIX 6: Heritage significance of the Victorian Shopfront Terrace at 187 Miller Street North Sydney

The heritage significance and other relevant attributes of 187 Miller Street, North Sydney as noted on the Heritage Inventory Database is:

One of the few remaining Victorian shopfronts on Miller Street and the last in this vicinity. An interesting example of its type, with attractive detailing. Provides a strong contrast to the surrounding multi-storey commercial buildings. Important reminder of the continuity of retailing over time in this vicinity.

Two storey narrow-fronted building of rendered brick. Ground floor glass and metal shopfront. Corrugated-iron roofed awning and upper floor has triple semi-circular arched windows, central to facade between pilasters with horizontal course lines. Windows have label mould and facade is parapeted with corbelled cornice and flanking finials in the shape of square urns on circular pedestals. This building is designed in the Victorian Italianate style.

[Source: North Sydney Heritage Study Review, 1993]