

# Monte Scientia Project

## Heritage Response to Submissions – SSD10393

This report has been prepared to address heritage related concerns raised by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) and North Sydney Council in response to a State Significant Development application for the Monte Scientia Project, at Monte Sant Angelo Mercy College, North Sydney.

In summary the key heritage issues involve:

- Removal of a portion of the existing brick wall along Miller Street; and
- The visual relationship and alignment of the proposed building to existing heritage buildings on the site.

### Submission - North Sydney Council's Heritage Planner.

*The front brick wall is considered to be an important element in the setting, curtilage and character of the site. The North Sydney Council's heritage inventory for Monte Sant Angelo outlines the Statement of Significance as follows:*

Important regional school since the 1880s. Contains a significant early mansion, Masalou, as its central building. The Chapel and Mercy Hall are both fine buildings from the turn of the century. O'Regan House is a complementary building to the rest. The group, all in site of each other, form an impressive precinct within a landscaped setting. **The facebrick wall and gates along Miller Street define the site.**

#### 1.0 MILLER STREET WALL:

##### North Sydney Council Comment:

- *Demolition of Existing Miller Street Historic Wall – The existing wall contributes to the Catholic cultural history of the enclosed school site and also contributes to the Miller streetscape. It is noted on the site's Statement of Significance as being an item of heritage significance. Demolition of the wall is therefore not supported.*

*It is recommended that the proposal be redesigned to retain the existing wall.*

##### Applicants Response:

As recommended, the design of the proposed changes to the Miller Street wall has been revisited, resulting in the retention of a greater extent of existing wall fabric along with the refinement of the detailed design to those portions of the wall to be altered. The alterations to the wall are in response to the existing driveway entry being relocated further to the south; the resulting wall design is proposed to infill the current entry opening.

The new wall has been designed to provide the existing visual definition of the site, required light to the setback behind the wall as well supporting the opportunity for integrated interpretation. The contemporary design also meet the criteria for distinguishing new from old fabric in reconstruction works.

The intent of the changes will ensure that the Miller Street wall continues to **define the site** as identified in the Statement of Significance.

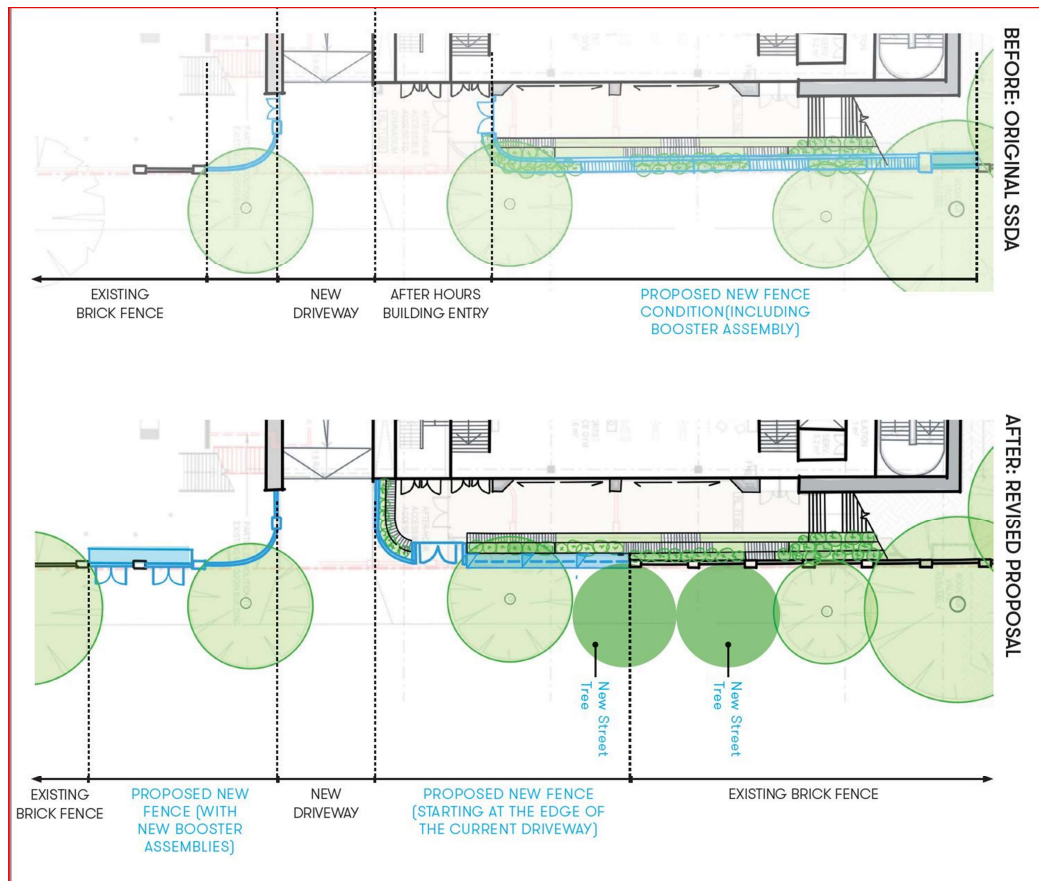


Figure 1 - Diagrams showing the reduced portion of fence to be removed. (Source: Haybal)



Figure 2 - Street elevation of the fence and proposed building. The render illustrates how the line of the fence is maintained whilst providing light, security and the required services access from the street.lets (Source: Hayball )



VIEW 1 BEFORE: ORIGINAL SSDA



VIEW 1 AFTER: REVISED PROPOSAL



VIEW 2 BEFORE: ORIGINAL SSDA



VIEW 2 AFTER: REVISED PROPOSAL

Figure 3 - These four render images demonstrate how the design changes strengthen the role of the fence in defining the school site.  
(Source: Hayball)

The new area of wall is required to infill where the existing vehicular entry is currently located, and so no wall currently exists. The primary amendment to the design of the fence involves the maintenance of the height of the wall as it steps up Miller Street. The original proposal for the new portion of wall was a low brick wall (note views 1 and 2 Before above) with open landscaping; the amended design continues a full height structure in line with the existing wall, articulated in bays to maintain the existing structural rhythm.

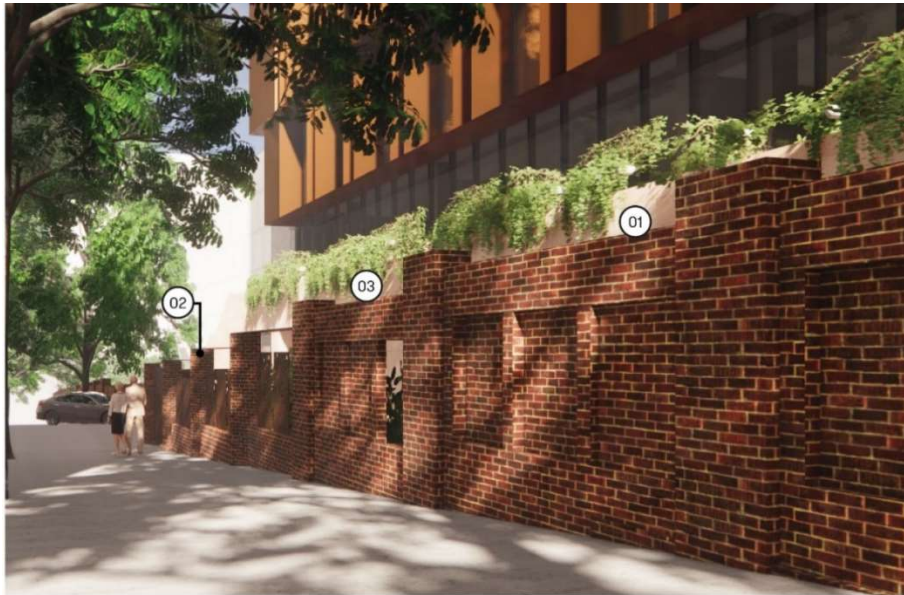
The requirement for light and street access to services, namely the hydrant booster valves, has been addressed through the insertion of metal screens, coloured to marry in with the wall and so maintain the visual definition of the site.

The opportunity for integrating heritage interpretation into the metal screens set into the fence supports communication of the significance of the site to the wider community.

The detailed design proposed for the infill wall is a sensitive *adaptation*<sup>1</sup> of the existing fence which will support the historic and ongoing use of the site as a school, as set out in the published Statement of Significance. As a clearly contemporary design the new infill portion of wall will be read as such whilst retaining the definition of the site and providing opportunities for sympathetically integrated interpretation.

<sup>1</sup> As defined in the Burra Charter, Australia ICOMOS 2013, Clause 1.9





MILLER ST - PROPOSED FENCE PERSPECTIVE



MILLER ST - PROPOSED FENCE PERSPECTIVE

Figure 4 - The perspectives above demonstrate the manner in which the wall design satisfies the need for light entry as well as enclosure. Key: 01: Brick wall to be retained 02: New fence – brick podium and pillars with metal screens and top rail 03: Existing brick wall with heritage insertion. (Source: Hayball)

The detailed form and materiality of the portion of infill fence is appropriate to the retained wall that runs the length of the site along Miller Street, and the later brick wall (which also interprets the original) along Berry Street fronting the McQuoin Centre. The proposed matching brickwork, the colour and finish of the metal panels within the wall and the dark horizontal components that visually maintain the height of the and link the new work to the existing wall all support a sympathetic approach to the new work.

The proposed alterations to the fence design conserve an appropriate *visual and sensory setting*<sup>2</sup> for the wider school site, and as such are acceptable.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid Article 8

## 2.0 CURTILAGE AND SETTING:

### North Sydney Council Comment:

- *Curtilage and Setting – The visual curtilage and setting of the heritage significant buildings should be retained. The facades of Mercy hall, the Library, Masalou and Treanor are all aligned either perpendicular or parallel to each other and assist in creating a spatial relationship with each other in a square formation as well as creating a sense of enclosure to the Holy Grass. The chapel ... has a traditional east/west alignment, opening up to the driveway and gate. The McQuoin Centre on the corner of Berry/Miller Streets is set far enough downslope and away from the Holy Grass and the significant buildings that it reads as a separate built element on the site and has little relationship with them.*

### Applicants Response:

The cultural significance of the site lies in its continuous use as **an important regional school since the 1880's**. As a typical school campus the site contains a range of buildings which represent various phases of development that have responded to the changing needs of the school community, resulting in a campus generally divided into two parts.

The northern portion of the site is visually and physically focussed around The Holy Grass, which has a built edge of historic buildings to the north and west, which together form the setting of these significant buildings. The Chapel building, running east west in line with Christian tradition, lies on the eastern edge of the historic precinct and is the most prominent historic building visible from the public domain. The existing entry off Miller Street leads directly to the heritage precinct and forms the divide between the historic precinct from the later development to the south.

*The proposed development, however, relates to none of the historic existing alignments and established curtilage but instead relates to the alignment of the McQuoin Centre and the Miller Street frontage. The new development should acknowledge the alignment of the heritage buildings as it will be seen in the context of the historic buildings due to its proximity.*

### Applicants Response:

The layout of the historic buildings and driveway is based on the location of Masalou, which predated the school's occupation; Mercy Hall, the Library and Treanor were subsequently placed in relation to each other, as were subsequent buildings in response to the needs and operations of the school. This pattern of development does not in any way take away from the significance of the historic precinct, its individual buildings or its contribution to the significance of the place; it does however recognise that in the siting of the new building a whole of site approach is required to support the primary cultural significance of the place, namely its historic and ongoing role as an *Important regional school since the 1880s*.

In extending the central landscaped area through the centre of the school campus, by aligning the new building with Miller Street and the McQuoin Centre, a stronger visual and physical relationship will be created between the heritage precinct and the southern portion of the school campus, for this reason we don't believe Council's suggested strict alignment with the existing buildings is appropriate. The setting of the heritage precinct will be strengthened by the expansion of the purposefully landscaped connection to the southern area of the site; with landscaping tying together the stepped levels across the site, and the new building sitting down into the site allowing the heritage precinct to maintain its prominence. The approach of 'sinking' buildings to the lowest topographic level to reduce

their bulk and dominance on the site has been applied in development across the southern portion of the site generally; in this instance this approach reduces visual and physical impacts on the heritage curtilage of the heritage precinct.

The addition of the new building in the vicinity of the heritage buildings will add a new component to the wider setting, it will not however diminish the ability for users of the site or those viewing the site from the driveway from appreciating the heritage significance or character of the historic buildings. The proposed amendments to the design, particularly the 'corner lantern' and the increased verticality of the fenestration, ensure the new building is visually sympathetic to the existing buildings.

The siting of the proposed building intentionally addresses Miller Street, creating the opportunity to extend the existing open area around the Holy Grass into the heart of the lower campus as shown below in Figure 4.

The new building will be read in close proximity to the heritage buildings; it will also be read as being in close proximity to other later school development on site, and all defined by the existing boundary fence. The proposed amendments to the design of the proposal have resulted in a more refined contemporary building as it is appreciated from the public domain and from inside the school grounds.

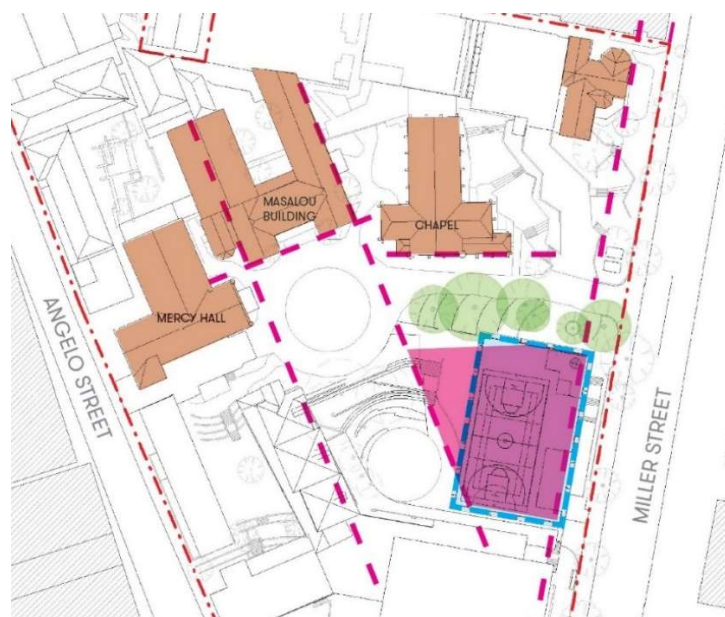


Figure 5 - Diagram identifying the primary alignment lines between the heritage buildings and the proposed building. This diagram also clearly identifies the relationship between the existing Holy Grass and the new landscaped courtyard. (Source: Hayball)

It is appropriate in heritage terms to maintain the alignment with the McQuoin building as it continues the existing pattern of development on the site and it materially improves views of the heritage precinct from within the school campus.

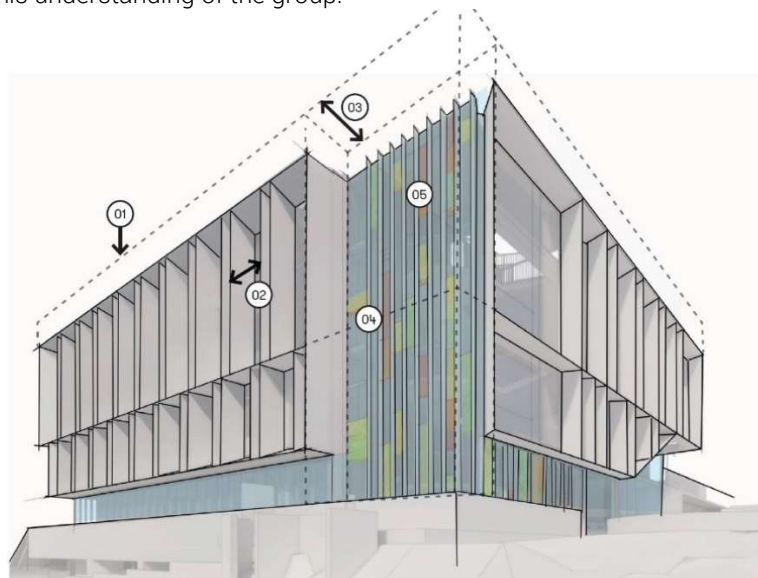
*Because of the proposal's bold design and monolithic massing, it is likely that it will visually overwhelm the traditional setting of the group of heritage significant buildings and their visual curtilage over the Holy Grass. Although the northwest corner has been 'eroded' at ground level on the northern elevation of the design, the curved frame on the northern elevation takes the eye to the right angled corner of the building on the upper levels giving it visual dominance. The new development will therefore confuse the setting of the heritage items by its corner conflicting with the established building alignments.*

*It is therefore recommended that to comply with part B Section 13.4 Objective 01, Provisions P1 and P3 that the façade on the north elevation be parallel to the Chapel or that it run approximately half way along its North Elevation to be parallel with the Church. This will acknowledge the alignment of the Chapel and the established building alignments at the cultural core of the site rather than creating an incursion. It will also allow the formality of the driveway to the highly significant Holy Grass to be retained and potentially enhanced.*

#### **Applicants Response:**

The amendments to the design identified in response to the received submissions have resulted in a reduced height with a more refined façade, particularly through the setting back of the north western corner which softens the visual impact of the building in views of the Chapel. The setting down of the building into the site, the muted and natural colour palette, alongside the understanding of the building as a backdrop to the new landscaped courtyard minimises the likelihood of the new building visually overwhelming the heritage precinct. The current setting for the Chapel includes significant established landscaping which will be retained and enhanced by the proposed landscaping extending to the southern side of the driveway.

Further, the distinctive character of the historic group, reinforced by the generally white colour scheme across all of the buildings, supports the appreciation of these heritage items as a distinctive phase of development on the site. The proposed building does not change this understanding of the group.



#### **SUMMARY OF KEY BUILDING AMENDMENTS**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>01 HEIGHT REDUCTION</b><br/>Overall building height has been reduced.</p> <p><b>02 ARTICULATION OF FACADE SHADING</b><br/>The spacing and detailing for the facade fins has been further articulated to allow for larger glazed zones and more differentiation in the facade.</p> <p><b>03 SETBACK OF CIRCULATION CORE</b><br/>The north-east corner of the building has been set back by two metres.</p> | <p><b>04 VERTICAL ARTICULATION</b><br/>The facade bulk has been broken down by removing horizontal articulation to create a strong vertical element at the north-east corner.</p> <p><b>05 SECONDARY DETAILING</b><br/>Secondary detailing is proposed to the articulated north-east corner with graphics representing the heritage and values of the college.</p> |
|---|--|

*Figure 6 - Excerpt from the Architecture response to Submissions identifying the key building amendments. Further elaboration on these elements is included in the design report. (Source: Hayball)*



The proposal is to replace the existing structures with a new building in the vicinity of the heritage precinct; this has been the pattern of development on the site since the school's occupation. The key amendments to the proposal described in the Architectural Response to Submissions that specifically improve the visual and physical relationship with the heritage precinct include a reduction in height, increased corner setbacks, refinement of the façade articulation and materiality and the inclusion of the corner 'lantern detail.'

The revised proposal has reduced and refined the south western corner detail of the building to incorporate a 'lantern element' that addresses the school entry and the Chapel. This approach provides a more appropriate acknowledgment of the religious underpinning of the school community and does not undermine the subtle significance of the east-west orientation of the Chapel. For this reason, it would be inappropriate to consciously turn a portion of the new building to arbitrarily read as parallel to the Chapel.

The driveway entrance will be retained, its relationship to the historic precinct and Holy Grass will not be altered. The additional landscaping proposed to the southern side of the driveway will formalise and enhance the role of this element on the site. The refinement of the landscaping proposal supports the design amendments, and in turn the setting of the entry driveway and heritage buildings.

### 3.0 CHARACTER:

#### **North Sydney Council Comment:**

- *North Sydney Local Government Area is characterised by heritage buildings and conservation areas. Where infill buildings are proposed, Part B Section 13.4 of NSDCP 2013 requires the design to be respectful of the significance of the heritage items. The existing heritage buildings have a strong vertical emphasis with their spires, posts, columns and vertically proportioned windows as well as fine grain detail. The proposed new building by contrast, will have a strong horizontal massing that will conflict with the established character.*

*It is recommended that the form of the proposed building be further articulated and that a greater vertical emphasis be placed on the buildings massing, not just the façade treatment. It is also recommended that some fine-grained detail be introduced such that the character of the new building does not overwhelm the character of the historic buildings.*

#### **Applicants Response:**

The recommendation to revisit the overall design of the building has been taken into consideration, and changes have been proposed. As recommended, the façade treatment has been refined to place a greater vertical emphasis on the façade elements and the general proportions of the various components. A major change is the addition of the 'corner lantern' which removes the projecting corner delineation of the earlier scheme; and is more recessive, and so sympathetic to the approach from Miller Street where the building is viewed adjacent the Chapel building from the entry driveway.



#### 4.0 SETBACK:

##### **North Sydney Council Comment:**

- *Miller Street currently enjoys a borrowed landscape from the school with its tall trees, shrubberies and historic facades. The proposed new building will remove a large portion of these existing views from the public domain but does not provide adequate compensation in the form of a landscape buffer along the Miller Street frontage. The proposed setback of 5m of the new building from the heritage wall in addition to its scale will harden off the streetscape.*

*It is recommended that the setback along Miller Street match that of the McQuoin Centre and that a deep soil planted buffer zone of trees is provided behind the Miller Street heritage wall.*

##### **Applicants Response:**

Alteration of the proposed building setback along Miller Street to coincide with the McQuoin Centre was considered, however the existing site relationships and the requirements of the new building meant that this amendment was unfeasible for the following design reasons.

The overall driver for the size of the proposed building has been dictated by the standard dimensions of the rooftop sports courts.

Pushing back the building from Miller Street would result in excavation works having an adversely impact on the structural stability of existing buildings to the west.

Space lost from the increased setback would narrow the central courtyard and diminish its relationship with The Holy Grass. This action would also reduce views towards the heritage precinct from the courtyard, particularly to The Chapel.

The increased setback would naturally bring the new building closer to the heritage precinct, and so have a greater impact on the curtilage of the heritage items and the Holy Grass.

#### 5.0 VIEWS:

##### **North Sydney Council Comment:**

- *Views to and from the heritage buildings should be retained where possible from the public domain. The design proposal will limit views to the driveway entry.*

*As noted above, it is recommended that this impact be ameliorated by providing a landscaped buffer of trees along the Miller Street frontage and that views to the driveway entry be improved by re-alignment of the new building's North Elevation.*

##### **Applicants Response:**

The key amendments to the design that specifically improve the retention of views of the heritage precinct include the reduction in the overall building height and the reduction in bulk brought about with the introduction of the 'corner 'lantern' detail, combined with the additional buffer trees to Miller Street as recommended.

The provision of additional treed landscaping to the southern side of the driveway entry also improves views of the heritage item through the visual softening of the approach to the heritage precinct.



Figure 7 - Elevational view of the entry to the existing driveway, on the right, demonstrating the retained views back to the heritage precinct beyond. The Chapel building lies further to the right of the image; additional buffer trees are included in this render to demonstrate the visual improvements. (Source: Hayball)

Key views of the Chapel from Miller Street will be retained, as will views of the heritage precinct from Miller Street, specifically from the main entry. As discussed previously, the ability to read the specific east-west alignment of the Chapel should be retained and not confused by aligning a portion of the new building.

Internal views of the heritage precinct will be markedly enhanced with an increase in opportunities to draw people to a position where the precinct can be appreciated; primarily from the development of the landscaped courtyard as a core gathering and circulation space linked to the Holy Grass as well as new views available from the new building and sports courts.

## 6.0 MATERIALS:

### North Sydney Council Comment:

- *New buildings may be constructed using contemporary materials and with a contemporary character, subject to the infill building being visually submissive to the heritage items. The proposed reinforced glass concrete blades and frame will be a visually strong element and will visually dominate the fine-grained detail of the historic buildings.*

*It is recommended that there be a greater variety in the materials selected and the materials respond to the existing palette of materials.*

### Applicants Response:

The proposed palette of materials has been developed with the intention of providing a muted natural palette; for example, the dark rust colour of the aluminium façade fins. The landscaped elements of brick and stone, interspersed with a range of plantings, will support differentiating the new development from the historic buildings and grassed area within the historic precinct.

The coloured glass material of the 'lantern' will reflect as a contemporary reference to the stained glass windows to the Chapel, creating a visual reference on the corner of the new building that lies at the entry to the school.

The proposed refinement of the façade composition acts to 'quieten' the façade design and allow the group of white, historic buildings to retain their visual prominence.

**7.0 DEMOLITION OF EXISTING BUILDING:****North Sydney Council Comment:**

- *The existing building does not appear to have any heritage significance however, Council must have a submission from the applicant that addresses NSDCP 20-13 Part B Section 13.8 in order to adequately assess the proposal.*

***Demolition of heritage items***

***P1*** *Heritage items must not be demolished, and demolition will not be supported by Council.*

***P2*** *Despite P1 above, Council may consider the demolition of a heritage item, but only where an applicant can satisfactorily demonstrate:*

***(a)*** *Why it is not reasonable to conserve the heritage item taking into consideration:*

- (i) The heritage significance of the property; and*
- (ii) The structural condition of the building; and*
- (iii) Pest inspection reports; and*
- (iv) Whether the building constitutes a danger to the public. Note: a report from a qualified quantity surveyor is required where the costs of retention are part of the justification for the proposed demolition.*

***(b)*** *That alternative options to demolition have been considered with reasons provided as to why the alternatives are not acceptable.*

**Applicants Response:**

Based on the physical and documentary research undertaken in the course of preparation of the Heritage Impact Statement, the existing structures on the site proposed for demolition do not have any historical or aesthetic significance.

Whilst the subject sport courts and facilities are connected to the historic and ongoing use of the site as a school, they are neither rare nor uncommon nor do they demonstrate any practices or aspects of the schools use of the site that cannot be found elsewhere.

For these reasons and taking into consideration the heritage significance of the sport courts and associated facilities within the wider school site, the demolition of the structures within the footprint of the proposal is acceptable in heritage terms.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, we believe that the amendments to the scheme set out in detail in the Architectural Response to Submission, dated July 2020, suitably address the heritage comments contained in submissions received from Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) and North Sydney Council.

The key design amendments proposed support the significance of the site as an important regional school dating back to the 1880s and ensure that the significance of the individual heritage items that comprise the heritage precinct within the school is not diminished.

Yours Faithfully,

**NBRS**ARCHITECTURE.



**Samantha Polkinghorne**

Director