

4 September 2013

Justin Clark
National Design Reviewer
Grocon Group
Level 18, 420 George Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Our Ref: 12-0555jcl3

Re: IMAX Redevelopment—Heritage Significance and Impact Assessment

Dear Mr Clark

We refer to our commission to prepare a Heritage Significance and Impact Assessment to determine the heritage significance of the subject site and its immediate context, and to establish the likelihood and extent of any potential impacts on this significance as a result of the proposed redevelopment of the IMAX Theatre, located at 31 Wheat Road, Darling Harbour, also known as 'The Ribbon'.

This assessment has been prepared generally in accordance with the principles outlined in the document titled *Statements of Heritage Impact* (NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and the Heritage Council of NSW, First Edition, 1996). It is also consistent with the relevant principles and guidelines of *The Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 1999* (Burra Charter).

The relevant heritage planning controls set forth in the following documents have been considered in preparing this report:

- Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005 (Harbour REP);
- Darling Harbour Development Plan No. 1

The main purpose of this assessment is to determine if the site has any heritage values (built and/or archaeological), and the potential impact of the proposed redevelopment on those heritage values. This assessment includes recommendations to avoid or mitigate against those impacts.

Background

The IMAX Theatre is located within the Darling Harbour precinct, being situated west of Harbour Street, between the Western Distributor fly-over ramps, just south of Cockle Bay and north of the recently completed Darling Walk/Quarter precinct.

The existing site comprises of the purpose built IMAX Theatre complex, with a range of restaurants and food outlets on the ground floor on the northern side.

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The site is part owned and currently controlled by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA).

Heritage Context

Built Heritage

The heritage items in the broader context of the subject site are:

Name	Register	Listing No.	Location
The (Darling Harbour) Carousel	State Heritage Register and SHFA's S170 Heritage and Conservation Register	Listing No 1620	Under the Western Distributor, south west of the subject site
Sewage Pumping Station No 12 (SP0012)	Sydney Water's S170 Heritage and Conservation Register	Listing No 4571746	Harbour Street, east of the subject site
Pymont Bridge	State Heritage Register	Listing No 01618	North of the subject site
The Vintage Building	City of Sydney Local Environment Plan 2005	CSHI No. 4166	Located east of the subject site at 281-287 Sussex Street

The IMAX Theatre is not listed on any heritage register, nor are any of the built or landscape items in the immediate vicinity of the subject site. There are other heritage items listed on the SHR to the north east of Pymont Bridge (along Sussex Street), however these do not have visual connection with the subject site.

Historical Archaeology

Preliminary review of historical information indicates that most of the study area comprises land that was reclaimed from the 1830s. This area was developed after this time for commercial and industrial purposes. During the nineteenth century, this area was primarily used for wharf and shipping-related activities and industries, with a general shift to other industrial pursuits in the early-to-mid twentieth century. The study area has been extensively redeveloped during the late twentieth century, including the development of the IMAX Theatre. While some areas may have been subject to subsurface disturbance, the study area would be considered to have at least some potential to contain archaeological evidence related to the historical use and development of the area.

The site of the IMAX Theatre building is also considered to have historical archaeological potential at this stage, despite the presence of a major built element on this part of the site. The building does not have any basement levels or major underground elements that would have required major disturbance to the site during the construction of that building.

Further historical research and assessment would be required to more accurately define the historical archaeological potential of the site.

Aboriginal Archaeology

Based on overlays of early historical plans of the shoreline of Darling Harbour, the footprint of the proposed Ribbon building and associated elements appears to be wholly located in an area of land that was reclaimed after 1830. This area would therefore be unlikely to have any potential to contain Aboriginal archaeological evidence.

Introduced fill deposits associated with land reclamation across the site may contain isolated Aboriginal artefacts that were brought to the site from other contexts. These objects would be considered 'Aboriginal objects' under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NSW) (NPW Act), however, the location and extent of any such evidence would be impossible to predict.

The southeastern portion of the 'Zone of Influence' of the development extends across part of the original shoreline in this area, and subsurface archaeological deposits related to Aboriginal use of this area may survive in this part of the site.

Assessment of Heritage Significance of the IMAX Theatre and Site

Built Heritage Significance

The 540 seat IMAX Theatre is located between the Western Distributor fly-over ramps at the edge of Cockle Bay. It was designed by HBO + EMTB and opened in September 1996.

The form of the building is elliptical and was designed to symbolise the human eye. It has a metal cladding and a roof that floats above the building on the north-west.

The IMAX Theatre received a Royal Australian Institute of Architects Merit Award in 1997, Masters Builders Association Excellence in Construction – Entertainment/Hospitality in 1997, and the BHP National Metal Building Award.

The IMAX Theatre building is not listed on any statutory or non-statutory heritage register. Although it has a distinctive character, it does not demonstrate any particular design quality that would render it of aesthetic significance at the Local level. The building, though housing state-of-the-art projection technology, does not exhibit any particularly significant technical innovation or research potential. A social significance assessment has not been undertaken for this project. The building typology is not rare or representative of the local area's cultural or urban fabric.

The IMAX Theatre building has therefore been assessed as not having heritage significance at a Local or State level.

Historical Archaeological Significance

Parts of the site have potential to contain archaeological evidence related to the historical development and use of the area. If extant, the evidence may have some heritage significance and archaeological research potential, and therefore could be considered 'relics' under the *Heritage Act 1977* (NSW) (Heritage Act). Further research and assessment would be required to more accurately define the archaeological significance and research potential of the site.

Aboriginal Archaeological Significance

The major part of the site would have no Aboriginal archaeological potential, and would be unlikely therefore to have any Aboriginal cultural heritage significance. The southeastern portion of the site has potential to contain evidence related to the original shoreline and Aboriginal use of this area, and may have Aboriginal cultural significance. However, no assessment of the Aboriginal cultural significance of this area has been undertaken at this stage.

Proposal

The proposed redevelopment of the IMAX Theatre complex involves the:

- Demolition of the existing IMAX Theatre complex;
- Construction of a new 20-storey building with mixed use including a new IMAX Theatre, commercial retail tenancies, a gym, function centre and office space; and
- Construction of a new 2-storey building for two commercial tenancies, a SHFA tenancy and an amenities block;
- Relocation of The Carousel slightly south and the relocation of the 'daisy sculpture'; and
- Upgrade of the surrounding public domain, including landscaping.

Preliminary Assessment of Heritage Impact

Of the identified built heritage items in the broader context of the subject site, The (Darling Harbour) Carousel and the Sewerage Pumping Station have the potential to be impacted by the proposed IMAX Theatre redevelopment. They are located in close proximity to the development site and within the 'Zone of Influence'.

The other heritage items in the vicinity, in particular the Pyrmont Bridge and The Vintage Building, are located at a sufficient distance from the subject site that while it will be an alteration to their current visual setting, the IMAX Theatre redevelopment will not adversely impact their heritage significance.

The Carousel

The Darling Harbour Carousel is a rare, complete and intact example of an Edwardian carousel...retains its steam engine and original workings, and demonstrates the methods of construction and operation that are associated with the "golden age" of carousels (1890s and 1920s).¹

The IMAX Theatre redevelopment proposes to upgrade and improve the public domain around the Carousel. This will result in alterations to the visual and physical setting of the Carousel, however this is assessed as being a positive heritage impact. The overall public domain improvements will enhance the setting of the Carousel.

While the scale of the proposed new 20-storey building is substantially larger than the existing IMAX Theatre complex, the location of the Carousel (under the Western Distributor) makes it difficult to perceive the overall scale, height and mass of the proposed building in conjunction with The Carousel. The new 2-storey building will replace an existing 2-storey tourist information centre and SHFA office adjacent to The Carousel, so there will be no change to the scale relationship between the two structures. Moreover, The Carousel is proposed to be relocated approximately five metres to the south, increasing the separation between it and the proposed building.

Therefore, The Carousel will not be adversely impacted by the proposed redevelopment of the IMAX Theatre, rather, the proposal includes public domain improvements that will enhance the setting of The

¹ Darling Harbour Carousel Heritage Assessment, Godden Mackay Logan Pty Ltd, April 1997

Carousel in its new location. However, the methodology for the disassembly and relocation of The Carousel will need to be carefully planned and supervised to avoid damage to the heritage item.

Sewerage Pumping Station (SPS) (SP0012)

Historically, it was one of the original group of twenty low level sewage pumping stations constructed at the end of the 19th century to serve Sydney. Aesthetically, the superstructure is an excellent example of a small-scale industrial building designed in the Federation Queen Anne style. In its surviving fabric, SP0012 reflects the importance of Federation period public utilities, which is evident in the overall design and technical excellence of the traditional construction techniques and craftsmanship such as the stone dressings and tuckpointed brickwork.²

The SPS is currently situated in a 'landscaped island', directly adjacent a concrete column supporting the overhead Western Distributor. Its setting has already been compromised. Development to the west is in the form of a single storey service building associated with the IMAX Theatre complex.

The IMAX Theatre redevelopment proposes to build closer to the SPS than the existing IMAX Theatre complex, but also involves recreating the hard paving pathway adjacent to the SPS and landscaping the area. The proposed redevelopment of the IMAX Theatre, while bringing development closer to and changing the setting of the SPS, is not assessed as having an adverse impact on the SPS.

Historical Archaeological Impacts

The proposed redevelopment of the site would require some additional bulk excavation of the site for footings and services, although the proposed new 20-storey Ribbon building would not have any basement levels. Some excavation would be required for the proposed car park to the south of the building (estimated depth of excavation would be approximately 2–3 metres below the existing ground level). Bulk excavation would also be required for installation of a diesel storage tank below Substation No. 1 and the Main Switch Room No. 1. Minor or localised excavation may also be required in other parts of the 'Zone of Influence' for landscaping or installation of services and associated infrastructure.

The proposed works, especially areas of bulk excavation, may have some impact on areas of the site that have historical archaeological potential and significance.

Aboriginal Archaeological Impacts

The proposed design does not include any bulk or deep excavation in the southeastern portion of the study area. The proposed works therefore would be very unlikely to have any impacts on any areas of Aboriginal archaeological potential.

Proposed excavation in areas of reclaimed land would have no potential to disturb intact Aboriginal archaeological evidence. Isolated redeposited artefacts may be present in introduced fill deposits, but disturbance of any such material would be considered a minor impact.

² Sydney Water Heritage Study, Graham Brooks and Associates Pty Ltd, 1996

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to avoid any potential heritage impacts that may result from the proposed IMAX Theatre redevelopment:

- The location and layout of the path adjacent to the SPS should be designed to allow substantial clearance to the western corner of the SPS.
- As this was a preliminary assessment of heritage impact, we have relied on readily available resources from previous studies for relevant sites in the locale, in particular the reports for the Darling Walk project.
- Further assessment of the historical archaeological potential and significance of the site (including historical research, site visit and analysis of the physical condition of the site) should be undertaken to better define the areas of potential archaeological impacts, and to determine any mitigation measures that may be required, including the need for any approvals under the Heritage Act to disturb potential 'relics' within the site. We recommend that this work be undertaken as soon as possible to be able to better inform the design development and to determine the requirements for the site.
- The design should not include any bulk or deep excavation in the southeastern portion of the 'Zone of Influence', to avoid any potential impacts on areas of Aboriginal archaeological potential, and the need for approval under the NPW Act. If any excavation is proposed in this area, further assessment of the Aboriginal archaeological potential of this area would be required.
- In the event that any unexpected Aboriginal objects were discovered during site works, the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) should be notified in accordance with Section 91 of the NPW Act.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Julian Siu or myself on (02) 9319 4811.

Yours sincerely

Godden Mackay Logan Pty Ltd



Peter Romey

Partner

