

Berrima Hotel SSD-66876472

I object to the Berrima Hotel SSD-66876472 as it currently stands.

I support an adaptive re-use project which respects

- the State Heritage Listing of the gaol,
- the Berrima conservation and landscape areas and zones,
- the Wingecarribee River including the fauna of the river particularly the platypus and rakali populations which live in the river near the gaol

I support an adaptive re-use project which has no new construction outside the gaol walls as per the majority (80%) of attendees at a community meeting at the Surveyor General Inn on 18 April 2024.

If the project was located inside the gaol walls, its costs would be less, impact on curtilage and environment (including sandstone base of site). A project of this size, ie inside the gaol walls, would better suit the scale of Berrima.

In its current form, the proposal overwhelms Berrima, a modest colonial Georgian village.

1. STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES: preparing an EIS, p4

All EISs:

- are as succinct as possible and easy to understand
- clearly describe the project
- reflect community views
- contain a technically robust assessment of the impacts of the project
- justify and evaluate the project as a whole, having regard to the economic, environmental and social impacts of the project and the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

Pages 6-7 of the above document include the following requirements:

- use objective analysis and provide reasons and evidence to support any conclusions
- use plain English to explain complex information simply
- avoid using jargon
- ensure the EIS does not contain any false or **misleading information**.

1.1 Examples of failing to adhere to guidelines

“succinct as possible”

46 reports and 2700 pages is not succinct. The repetition in every report could be reduced by referring all heritage background to that in the EIS or the HIS. The burden of reading this quantity of material to the average community member is onerous and unrealistic. Readers have to make

decisions about what topics to concentrate on so as not to be overwhelmed and paralysed.

“ensure the EIS does not contain any false or misleading information”

Numerous of the reports appear to be desktop template reports written by consultants who haven't left Sydney and therefore do not understand Berrima and the importance of the gaol to its curtilage or the village.

They're based on templates into which data is inserted.

For example: see EIS p59 where reference is made to Penrith Development Control Plan.

“easy to understand”, “avoid using jargon” “use plain English”

A number of the technical reports are written in the language of the specialisation which make them incomprehensible to the average person. This puts the community at a significant disadvantage as we are unable to understand the information in the reports.

“misleading” “use plain English”

At a public forum before the Wingecarribee Shire Council monthly meeting on 19 November 2025, One Berrima stated that the hole in the eastern wall was a “state legislative requirement” for emergency access. When asked by a councillor who told him this, he replied “Blue Sox”. I've tried to find reference to this in App37 Bushfire Assessment but because of the technical language used by EcoLogical it is impossible and unreasonable for a lay person to understand the content.

While I accept that this claim is not made in the EIS it is information being disseminated by Blue Sox.

“reflect community views”

See my section 3 on community engagement

“Technically robust assessment”

Appendix 35 Social Impact Assessment and Economic Impact Assessment for a Proposed Adaptive Reuse of the former Berrima Gaol says:

The CMP conveys a high level of on-site heritage significance and the consequent risk of damage to cultural heritage, noting however that the baseline scenario includes risks of the site becoming dilapidated with no use.

I would like to make the point that Blue Sox is already neglecting the site which is leading to community concern.

There were 12 other Expressions of Interest during the Colliers sale process. To our knowledge none of the other 12 received a follow-up request for further information. The point here is that there were and are other options other than dilapidation.

It is not a robust assessment to say stay that if the proposal is not approved the property will become dilapidated.

It's about whether this proposal is the best possible adaptive re-use of an important local, state and national heritage property.

The property owner's current maintenance program appears to be mostly mowing the front lawn. Mid-2024 some of the heritage rose bushes died and were replaced. A vine (ivy?) is currently growing vigorously on the southern wall. The previously cared for orchard on the southern side is now neglected and overgrown.

Neglect is occurring by the current owner.

2. HERITAGE

Heritage NSW says in its SEARs response of 16 February 2024:

The proposal could adversely impact the heritage significance of the SHR item, depending on the final design.

And:

- e. the attempts to avoid and/or mitigate the impact on the heritage significance or cultural heritage values of the site and the surrounding heritage items; and
- f. justification for any changes to the heritage fabric or landscape elements including any options analysis.

Berrima's heritage values are repetitively documented in the 46 documents and 2700 pages of Blue Sox's EIS but protecting heritage requires more than the documents repeating the heritage values of the site.

Blue Sox's EIS does not justify the two major adverse impacts on the heritage significance of the gaol:

1. completely obscuring of the western wall
2. the hole (allegedly 4 metres wide) cut into the eastern front wall.

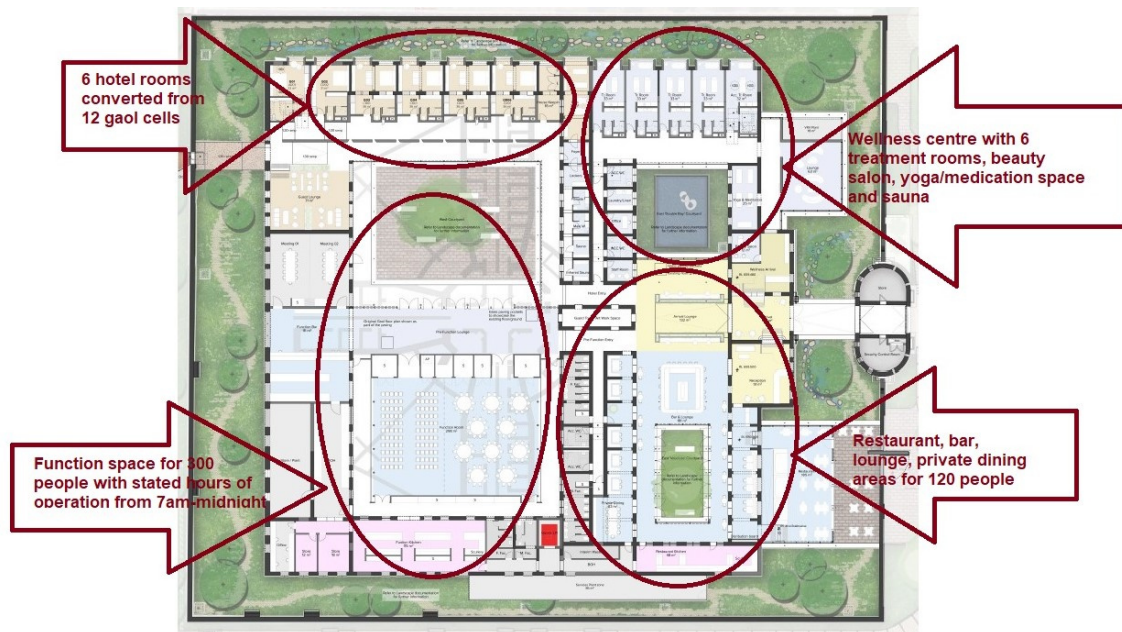
2.1 Western wall

App 32 Heritage Impact Statement, Executive Summary, page 6

The location of the new accommodation building outside the historic gaol walls preserves the internal spaces of the gaol for public access and adaptive

reuse, ensuring that the heritage fabric would be visible and accessible for community and cultural engagement.

This obfuscating statement seems to imply that by locating the new accommodation building outside the walls has the effect of preserving the internal buildings, but fails to address the impact of the new hotel accommodation on the western wall – the biggest problem – and it is the gaol walls which have state heritage listing. Plus the internal spaces are primarily for high-end commercial activities. (Image below shows the extent of commercial activities inside the gaol walls. Diagram adapted from Blue Sox EIS. Red lines added by me.)



Heritage Impact Statement p7

The proposal does not adversely affect the Berrima Conservation Area. The design and location of access points in conjunction with the landscape strategy enhances public access and promotes physical and visual connections to Berrima Village and the Wingecarribee River [sic], providing a positive interface between the site and surrounding township.

Heritage Impact Statement p69

“The proposal includes a sensitively designed contemporary development to the rear of the enclosing Gaol wall. The design adopts a range of strategies to reduce its visual bulk and avoid competing with the gaol walls. Strategies include upper-level setbacks, articulation between suites, and stepping the massing northwards, creating clear separation and revealing a currently obstructed view of the northern gaol wall through removal of intrusive additions.”

It is incomprehensible that the underlined statement in the previous paragraph can be considered accurate. Indeed it is misleading. Blue Sox's own image (below App5 Architectural Designs pt2) shows that there is no competition between the hotel mass and the western wall. The visual bulk of the hotel mass wins the competition as the gaol wall as the gaol wall is not visible.

Describing the hotel mass as 'subservient' in App 32 Heritage Impact Statement p68 is misleading and by any reasonable observation incorrect. (again, see image below)

In the western setting, the subservient scale and massing of the accommodation building allows the dominant Gaol wall to remain the site's most notable feature.



On the western side of Wingecarribee River, an area known as the Sutton St Precinct (Berrima DCP), will suffer acutely from the massive bulk of the 2-4 storey hotel block.

Property owners in this precinct are extremely concerned about the impact on their views of the 1839 gaol wall. One property owner, who has lived on his property for 40 years, has expressed significant distress about the impact on his life and 'pattern of viewing' (as it's called in App 14 Visual Impact Assessment). His 'pattern of viewing' of the western wall of the gaol (see photo immediately below) which he's enjoyed for 40 years will disappear and be replaced by a new modern hotel block.



The impact of the hotel mass to the Sutton St Precinct is considered insignificant in the Visual Impact Assessment as this area is not considered part of the primary visual catchment by the authors of this report. This decision, ie that residents of the Sutton St Precinct are not part of the primary visual catchment is extremely self-serving. This area suffers most from the hotel mass and should be given the same consideration as the more populous visual catchments.

The visual impact of the hotel mass from the corner of Old Hume Highway, Argyle St and Wingecarribee St, from the beer garden of the Surveyor General Inn for example, is significant as the hotel mass at the southern end is 4 storeys (3 hotel levels and a service level)

Berrima Village DCP, page 16

“Berrima contains two Heritage Conservation Areas:

- a General Conservation Area that encompasses the Village itself, and
- a Landscape Conservation Area that captures the Village’s wider rural surroundings.”

Council expects that all new development in the Berrima Village will respond to the essential visual elements that make up the Village’s character. In particular, all new development will:

Retain the identity and containment of the village core area to the north of the Wingecarribee River within the Berrima Conservation Area and to limit the settlement as a whole within the Berrima Landscape Conservation Area.

The above paragraphs indicate that Berrima’s heritage appeal comprises a number of elements and these elements are to be taken as a whole and from

various viewpoints. Any changes to some of the elements will change Berrima's heritage credentials and appeal as a whole.

2.2 Eastern wall

Heritage Impact Statement p105

Intervention into stonework to create a new eastern opening to the front wall would reuse the existing stone in a new offset, pivoted alignment such that the original fabric would be retained and the intervention would be both readily interpretable and largely reversible.

The main consideration in relation to the hole in the eastern wall must be the impact of the hole on the most important wall of the gaol, noting that the four walls must be considered in totality. Trying to minimise its impact by making it reversible does not take away from its impact.

The State Design Review Panel is quoted in App 32 HIS p84:

Due to the significant heritage impact the opening requires further justification, noting that connection between the restaurant and formal garden appears to be achievable through the gatehouse.

Attempts to justify the hole against the above statement include:

The intervention to the eastern wall facing Argyle street is a symbolic gesture to the public that the Gaol is now open to all.

Through curated interpretation and embedded cultural artwork in the new threshold, the proposal stands as a gesture of reconciliation, a gateway to common ground where the past is acknowledged with integrity and the future is envisioned with inclusion.

Appendix 6: Architectural Design Report p97

The claim that the hole in the wall is a gesture of reconciliation is bizarre. Blue Sox should be asked to provide some basis for it and whether it has been tested on Indigenous stakeholders.

New opening in eastern Gaol wall for public access
App 32 Heritage Impact Statement, p68

The opening in the eastern wall was proposed as a symbolic intervention, signalling the evolution of the site from its previously impenetrable barrier. The opening invites permeability and inclusion for the public into a space transformed for new experiences following cessation of its former use for incarceration.

App 32 Heritage Impact Statement, p76

Another slightly bizarre claim about symbolic intervention, impenetrable barriers and inclusion. No, it's a hole in a heritage wall.

From a heritage perspective, it is considered appropriate that new public entrance to the Gaol complex be situated on the traditional main, public facing elevation. The new entrance is proposed to provide an entrance to a new restaurant that is inviting and available to the general public, regardless of whether they are hotel guests. This would facilitate wider activation and public engagement with the heritage precinct, which is balanced against the sites contribution to the town character by prioritising the Gaol's solid wall as the defining street. The original entrance to the Gaol would be retained as a fundamental and functional entrance to the hotel reception area and associated facilities, with its imposing scale and oviform design remaining the pre-eminent feature of the entire enclosing wall.

App 32 Heritage Impact Statement, p80

This justification reads like the 1866 main gaol gate will become the hotel reception entrance, and non-hotel guests will be directed to the new hole in the wall to access the café/restaurant – effectively taking away access to one of the most important features of the gaol from non-hotel guests.

The 1866 main gate is the most important and dominant feature of the gaol and should be available to all, hotel guests and café customers.

Blue Sox have said repeatedly that their development would be welcoming and available to all. The above is the opposite of that.

At a public forum before the Wingecarribee Shire Council monthly meeting on 19 November 2025, One Berrima stated that the hole in the eastern wall was a “state legislative requirement” for emergency access. When asked by a councillor who told him this, he replied “Blue Sox”. I've tried to find reference to this in App37 Bushfire Assessment but because of the technical language used by EcoLogical it is impossible and unreasonable for a lay person to understand the content.

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3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Berrima community voted at a community meeting in 18 April 2024 that there should be no new construction outside the gaol walls. (This was the view of 80% of people who attended the meeting. There have been attempts to re-write the decision from the meeting but I attended, took notes and distributed a meeting summary.) This view would have been conveyed by residents at various drop-in sessions and at a meeting the Berrima Residents Association (BRA) as this too is the view of the BRA.

Blue Sox lists 6 meetings with a group called One Berrima in its community engagement material. One Berrima has no community mandate or nor has it been involved in effective community communication. For example, it has failed

to communicate with the community after its meetings except the first one when some members were part of the now defunct Berrima Gaol Community Group.

Of the three community groups currently operating in Berrima, the BRA is the only community group with a mandate, ie it is incorporated, has existed for 40 years, and has 80 (approx.) financial members. App36 Community and Stakeholder Engagement lists 2 meetings (10.6.23 and 4.8.25) with the BRA.

Blue Sox has preferred meeting with One Berrima (5 or 6 meetings depending on criteria) rather than BRA (2 meetings) for reasons which can only be speculated but perhaps the effusive social media posts in support of the project indicate the success of Blue Sox's courtship of One Berrima.

Blue Sox has also had a couple of meetings with Berrima individuals. At one of these meetings, facilitated by a One Berrima person, and the meeting ended with "if you don't like it you can sell" from the Blue Sox representative. An exercise in corporate arrogance rather than community engagement.

Blue Sox has not approached the third community group, Berrima Heritage Matters*, for any meetings. (*Disclaimer: I am a volunteer at Berrima Heritage Matters pop-up at 2/13 Old Hume Highway Berrima.)

BHM have operated this pop since 21 Feb 2025. BHM have talked to 1700 people over the past 10 months including Berrima and Southern Highlands residents. The research conducted by BHM provides valuable contemporary research about who visits Berrima and why. This contradicts the proposal's pitch to the high-end market.

If Blue Sox is genuine about community engagement and reflecting community views, it should have talked to this group about the research about Berrima's visitor demographics.

Other more formal Southern Highlands community groups have found Blue Sox's approach as non-negotiable intransigence, eg the hotel block outside the gaol walls has been declared by Blue Sox as "non-negotiable".

My understanding is that the only variation to Blue Sox plans based on Berrima community input has been a change to the angle of the driveway going into the underground car park from Wingecarribee St.

Other changes have come about as a result of State Design Review Panel concerns.

On its project website, theberrimagaoil.com.au, there is an option to subscribe to a newsletter. I did so very early after the release of the website.

I received received two email newsletters from the project website. If Blue Sox was genuine with its community engagement program it would use this database to inform the community of any new and important information. For example:

- Release of Conservation Management Plan in late 2024 or early 2025 (CMP was released as a secure PDF which could not be printed, searched or emailed. I asked 3 times – by phone, email, and face-to-face – for a user-friendly PDF but these was ignored.)
- 23 FAQs with important information released on website in June 2025

These website updates were encountered by people browsing the site rather than email database subscribers being advised of updates, surely a fundamental requirement of community engagement.

Community engagement in the SSDA process should be informative and relevant to the community not self-serving to the proponent.

4. EMPLOYMENT

App35: Social Impact Assessment and Economic Impact Assessment, HillPDA

The economic assessment based on employment (both construction and operational) mentions possible jobs created.

Berrima, located in the Southern Highlands/Shoalhaven district, has an unemployment rate 1.6% (July 2025) (source Regional Australia Institute/ABS).

The unemployment rate is important because it currently affects operations of hospitality venues in the Southern Highlands. Employers are constantly struggling to find qualified and unqualified workers, sponsored workers, and accommodation for workers. Anecdotally, I know some cafes/restaurants reduce operational hours because of staffing issues.

I query Blue Sox commitment in the EIS documents to using only local construction workers, ie from the Southern Highlands region. Blue Sox is a property developer whose projects are largely based in western/southwestern Sydney. They will bring their own workers to Berrima for this proposal.

(As a relevant aside, Blue Sox has a childcare project under construction at 2 Walker St Bowral and is using a Sydney-based contractor for some of the work.)

In any employment discussion not mentioning unemployment is misleading.

5. FIRE, FLOOD, INSURANCE, EXTREME WEATHER

Fire

While the gaol is not in the official bushfire prone zone, during the catastrophic bushfires of 2019-20 when Berrima Correctional Centre was still operational, evacuation plans were underway. The danger, I understand, was from ember attack. (this information provided to me by a former gaol employee)

Flood

The Wingecarribee River floods frequently. Anecdotally, the 1978 flood is the highest in living memory and reached the rear steps of the Surveyor General

Inn on one side and the front steps of a cottage at 1/13 Old Hume Highway. A flood of a similar order would inundate the underground carpark.

Mr Ian Sharp, a water engineer with over 50 years experience has written in his SSD objection: "I believe there is a major risk of flooding of the proposed underground carpark with potential loss of life and injury".

Insurance

"... all planning decision makers need to have access to and make more effective use of robust and consistent natural peril data to ensure no more inappropriate development takes place" *Insurance Catastrophe Resilience Report 2021*, Insurance Council of Australia

Extreme weather events

The decision makers on this proposal must take into account the increases in extreme weather events as outlined in the warnings from the CSIRO and BoM – it is negligent to ignore the warnings.

State of the Climate 2024: Australia is enduring harsher fire seasons, more ocean heatwaves and sea-level rise, CSIRO, Bureau of Meteorology, 2024

Australia is notoriously fire prone. But fires differ hugely, from low-intensity grassfires through to enormous bushfires that consume forests. When extreme fire weather arrives – hot, dry and windy – small fires can turn large very quickly.

Extreme fire weather is more frequent and more intense than in previous decades. Hotter conditions dry out grass and leaf litter, producing more fuel for fire. This has led to larger and more frequent forest fires, especially in the southeast of Australia over the past 30 years. Dangerous fire weather will be more common in the future, and the fire seasons will continue to lengthen.

Climate change is driving a major divergence in where rain falls in Australia.

In northern Australia, average wet-season rainfall is now about 20% higher than 30 years ago.

But in southwestern Australia, rainfall in the cooler, growing-season months has declined 16%, and in the southeast by 9% in recent decades.

More rain in these regions now falls in heavy, short-lived rainfall events.

We urge the decision maker of this State Significant Development to read carefully objections from Berrima and Southern Highlands residents plus those from our visitors and reach a decision which reflects what is best for the gaol, the village and the importance of both to the local, state and national heritage values.

Jenny Hunter
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Berrima