

28 February 2014

The Manager
Major Project Assessments
NSW Planning & Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Sir/Madam,

SSD 13_6123 Campus Improvement Program 2014-2020 for Camperdown-Darlington Campus

I write in response to the publicly advertised State Significant Development proposal for the Sydney University Campus Improvement Program 2014-2020 (SSD 13_6123) and provide the following National Trust comments on this proposal.

The Trust strongly opposes the intended demolition of International House (96 City Road, Chippendale) which was listed on the National Trust Register in March, 2012 for its landmark, historic, aesthetic and social significance and its rarity as a modernist design by leading architects Bunning & Madden for university student accommodation in Australia (copy of the Listing Report attached). It is a representative Sydney example of an international genre of buildings, along with the UNSW International House built in the same year to a design by Edwards Madigan Torzillo Briggs.

The Environmental Impact Statement refers to the Heritage Impact Assessment (page 79 – European Heritage), which acknowledges that this building is of High Significance yet then attempts to argue that its demolition would be acceptable with an argument that: -

*“the loss of any building of **some** heritage significance has an impact, but in the case of the University of Sydney the loss of a building should not be considered in isolation, but rather within the context of the overall campus and, in particular, the overall significance of the University as an evolving educational institution” (National Trust bolding).*

As the pre-eminent and prestigious institution training Australian architects for 134 years, it would be reasonable to expect that the concepts of Heritage Conservation and adaptive re-use of buildings of high heritage significance would be thoroughly understood, promulgated and incorporated into the University's own programs as *‘an evolving educational institution’*.

The Trust also queries the validity of any conclusions of a Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by an employee of the Proponent and urges that an independent assessment be undertaken to properly inform the Department's considerations. We do not accept that the “trade-off” approach is a satisfactory heritage philosophy for such an important institution and significant group of buildings, particularly when the proposed replacements are conceptual only and the suggested offsets are ambitions, rather than concrete outcomes.

Also, in the Assessment of Heritage Impact (page 4), the Blackburn Building is listed as only of “moderate” significance. Given the extraordinary research and medical breakthroughs which have been undertaken and achieved in this building, this seems to be an under-rating of the building's significance. It does not



take into account historical and social significance, including the strong involvement of the Blackburn Family in the history of the University.

The Trust is also concerned that the proposals for Precinct D – Health are a conglomeration of massive new rectangular block constructions which will dwarf Wesley College and the adjacent St Andrews College buildings. The Conservation Management Plan identifies B3 – The “Wesley College / Blackburn Circuit Axis” as a feature of the University. This Axis will cease to exist. Wesley College will have no relationship to the Blackburn Building (A6), as the area between, including almost all of the current open space) will be consumed by huge new buildings covering this area.

The height of buildings proposed will dominate older significant buildings. Even the old Institute Building on City Road appears small when compared with what is proposed. This is in contrast to the present Merewether Building, which is low key and human in scale. Although building envelopes are proposed to be stepped, in some precincts the overall scale of what is proposed is overwhelming. Proposed setbacks are minimal and leave little opportunity to appreciate boundary walls which are evidence of past uses. This also presents a challenge to maintaining significant boundary fabric during the construction phase.

What appears to be envisaged is a high-rise university that is more akin to the Sydney Central Business District than a gracious campus of exceptional significance in the history of tertiary education in Australia. Oxford University is a major tourist attraction because it does respect and enhance the heritage significance of its place and this contributes in no small way to the international standing of that university.

The retention of International House, ranked as of High Significance, should be non-negotiable and its size/scale should be respected in the new development.

The Blackburn Building should be retained. The Trust understands that it was built with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and that its heritage significance has been greatly underestimated.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Quint', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Graham Quint
Director - Advocacy