

29 May 2012

GL Investment Co Pty Ltd ATF GL No.1Trust
C/- Cadence Australia
Level1, 10 Mallett Street
CAMPERDOWN NSW 2050

Dear Sir/Madam,

Heritage Peer Review: Four point Hotel, Darling Harbour: Proposed Expansion of Hotel Background

I have been engaged by the owners of the subject property, M&L Development Pty Ltd, to peer review the Heritage Impact Statement for the application by Cox Architects for alterations and additions at the subject address.

In doing so I have inspected the site, viewed the photomontages, discussed the proposal with the architects and reviewed the associated Heritage Impact Statement by City Plan Heritage. It is noted that Kerime Danis, author of the City Plan report, was involved in the design process, as is desirable.

I am a qualified heritage consultant with extensive experience in built environment heritage at the local, state and community level. I was a member of the Heritage Council of NSW for 8 years.

Assessment

Heritage interest in a property most often comes from both the interest in the history of the place, the aesthetics of the place and the impact on the locality. The history can include the associational and social connections to the place and the aesthetics can include the research potential for the site.

The *history* of the site has been researched by City Plan Heritage using original research and previous reports, including CMP's and archaeological reports, on the site and adjoining sites.

Whilst areas where large developments already exist are often not expected to change generally all places change over time, and the amount of change often depends on their significance.

In assessing impact I always consider that there are three basic questions:

- How significant is the place?
- What is its context?, and
- What are the opportunities and constraints?

1. How Significant is the place?

The Heritage Council of NSW has developed a set of seven criteria for assessing heritage significance, which can be used to make decisions about the heritage value of a place or item.

1.1 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

City Plan Heritage has reviewed the entire site and all the elements that contribute to it, including the area's built form context. The site has been correctly assessed as having historic, aesthetic, potential social and associative significance. It is rare historically however has little potential for archaeological content.

The site's significance is assessed having regard to the changes made over time to the area and the subject buildings. The context of the site has changed considerably since the 1980's.

2. What is the context?

The Four Points Hotel "spans that part of the city that is connected to the central business district and is connected to the rest of Darling Harbour precinct to its west, via the Pyrmont Bridge and the through-site pedestrian access. There is a high level of pedestrian activity on Pyrmont Bridge and around Darling Harbour". To the east of the site lies the central city area, which includes the commercial precincts along Sussex and Kent streets leading up Market Street to the Pitt Street Mall. This area has changed significantly since the hotel was constructed in 1994.

The earlier photos of the City from the Pyrmont Bridge, although romantic, belie the change in the area, particularly since the 1980's. The context of the Sussex Street heritage buildings on the site has changed considerably and the recovery of these early views is not possible. The historic view from the control box of the Pyrmont Bridge no longer exists and this has been recognised in the HIS by City Plan. The opportunity exists in this location to continue to develop the site sensitively, including setbacks from the Corn Exchange, and maintain a key vista for the Corn Exchange corner.

The context of the hotel, for the purposes of this assessment, has left Sussex Street as a busy through way with access to the hotel itself and entrances to car parks on the eastern side of Sussex Street. The pedestrian link along the expressway from King Street takes pedestrian and cyclists to Darling Harbour without needing to access this section of the street. The hotel, in a pedestrian sense, has therefore become isolated and the associated heritage buildings have uses that do not encourage the sort of destination that is commensurate with their heritage significance.

3. What are the opportunities and constraints?

Opportunities

- **Development of the vacant section of the subject site**

The hotel desires to expand the existing outdated facilities and erect:

- a low rise conference and banqueting facility on the western face of the lower floors of the hotel.
- a new 23 storey tower in the south west of the site adjacent to the corner of the Corn Exchange.

The proposed site is an excellent location for the subject facilities in terms of the location between the City and Darling Harbour. The hotel is looking to inject funds into the site and this is an opportunity to resolve some of the current issues with use and underutilisation of heritage assets.

- **Improvement in presentation of the Sussex Street frontage and Slip Street**

In response to previous discussion with authorities it was agreed that the Sussex and Slip Street frontages could be considerably improved and provide a more sensitive setting for the heritage items than currently exists with the post-modern in-fills on Sussex Street and the poor amenity behind the Corn Exchange on Slip Street. The plans now include a glazed frontage and interpretation for the

vacant site on the northern end of the frontage and a new porte-cochere at the hotel's main entrance. This provides the opportunity to creatively interpret the site in a public location and to remove otherwise intrusive 1980's additions that were then fashionable but not of significance. These 1980's post-modernist entrances do not relate to the contemporary form of the hotel which is aesthetically well resolved.

In this regard the proposal has had regard to the 'infill guidelines' developed by the Heritage Council of NSW and the NSW AIA for a streetscape which includes significant buildings.

The proposed changes on the Sussex Street frontage and along Slip Street are integrated into the proposal for the through site link and the reactivation of the linkages behind the items. This will be a major contribution to the future presentation of the heritage items as the Corn Exchange will be able to address both Street frontages.

This will be associated with the removal of the unsympathetic colonnade behind the Dundee Arms.

- **Activation of heritage buildings**

Possibly the most important aspect of the proposal by the development of the new tower and the conference facilities is the opportunity to reinvigorate the heritage items. The increased clientele and the new links within the building, both north-south and east west, will encourage new uses to the heritage sections of the site and/or reinvigoration of patronage. This section of Sussex Street will be enlivened by the proposed tower and conference centre and the area will be a focus for activities associated with the hotel. At the present time there is no incentive to increase this type of activity.

The redesign of the section of Slip Street behind the Corn Exchange and the opportunity of providing a new area for activity on the lower level for potential new leases will bring a level of activity to the rear of the building. This will be complemented by the viewing of the rear of the Corn exchange from the public areas of the tower and the better linkage through the hotel which will increase the visibility of the heritage buildings.

Constraints

- **Sensitive location in relation to Pyrmont Bridge for views and vistas**

The loss of views to the Corn Exchange has been raised as a heritage constraint in this matter. The Heritage Impact Statement by City Plan Heritage has addressed the issue in terms of its impact on heritage significance. There will be an impact on views from the Pyrmont Bridge to the Corn Exchange. At present these views are significantly obscured by vegetation in the Slip Street area. The analysis of the views in the photomontages provides evidence that the views come and go as one progresses along the bridge towards Market Street. The corner element of the Corn Exchange remains throughout this progression towards the east in the proposal. The only way the impact can be completely eliminated is not to build the proposed addition.

The proposal has provided a number of opportunities for the site, as outlined above. These are considered to be real benefits and the current best view of the Corn Exchange from the overpass to Sussex Street and the view to the north on Sussex Street from the intersection with Market Street will be retained and enhanced.

As stated in the HIS the financial and functional impact of cutting back the base of the tower would be very high for the marginal benefit in views to be gained by such an exercise.

The proposed tower addition the hotel has been designed to provide an individual element on the southern end of the hotel. The combination of the existing Four Points Hotel and Darling Park on the east side of Darling Harbour has combined to provide two large masses that, whilst individually well

designed, are more monolithic in their massing. The proposed addition to the hotel is designed to provide a more individual building with a smaller footprint to add to the visual variety of this section of Darling Harbour and provide a focus for the entrance along the bridge towards the city. It does this also by being lower than the buildings on the ridge to the east and by stepping down from Darling Park to the existing Four Points profile.

Summary

The proposal to add to the subject hotel and create a conference centre, further accommodation and office accommodation is considered to be positive in relation to the conservation, presentation and reactivation of heritage fabric on the site. Overall the proposal is one which will provide many heritage benefits.

The only dis-benefit that can be ascertained from the documentation and analysis is the partial loss of views from the Pyrmont Bridge. This view is a changing one and is currently obscured to a great extent by the trees around Slip Street. It is considered that the conclusion of the HIS that this is an acceptable heritage outcome is one that can be supported on the basis of the overall investment in facilities to enhance the operation and presentation of the items themselves.

The nature of view sharing in Central Sydney is a complex one. The proposal still maintains the important focal view of the Corn Exchange from the Pyrmont Bridge and the approach ramp and provides a point of reference for travellers walking towards Sussex Street. This view will become clearer as one approaches the walkway over the expressway and will be enhanced by the potential removal of the monorail and the selective thinning of vegetation on Slip Street. The Corn Exchange as a destination in the pedestrian progress across the Pyrmont Bridge to Sussex Street will not be lost.

Discussion relating to the cutting back of the proposed new building is not considered to enhance significantly the appreciation of the Corn Exchange from the Pyrmont Bridge. The effect of the Slip Street works and the selective thinning of trees will add as much or more to the opening up of the vistas to Sussex Street on the journey east across the Bridge ramp and footpath. An analysis of the views has clearly indicated that there is only a marginal and insignificant gain for a view of the Corn Exchange by cutting back the tower and this would impact on the economic and functional viability of the proposal.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Davies
Director