

# Altering Heritage Assets

## Heritage Council Policy No. 2<sup>(1)</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to guide people who own or manage an item of heritage significance and who are seeking approval from their local council or the Heritage Council to alter it.

### HERITAGE ASSETS

Places<sup>(2)</sup>, buildings, structures, relics and other works are listed on heritage registers not simply because they are old or aesthetically pleasing, but for a variety of reasons —



*'Tusculum', Potts Point. A modern extension of a heritage building can be successful if carefully designed in terms of proportions and form. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects (NSW) added this modern office building to the rear of its heritage property. Photo: Patrick Bingham-Hall.*

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- (1) Policy No. 1 of the Heritage Council of NSW concerns conservation orders.
- (2) Places includes heritage conservation areas, sites, precincts, gardens, landscapes and areas of archaeological potential.



## ALTERING HERITAGE ASSETS

- they are associated with phases of our history or with persons or events of great importance
- are rare
- they have been constructed with unusual technical skill, or
- they are fine examples of a valuable group of items.

The new Parliament House in Canberra, for example, would qualify for heritage listing irrespective of its architectural merit, as would the La Perouse landing site in Botany Bay, or the Aboriginal settlement of the same area.

### HERITAGE VALUES

The Heritage Council has adopted four main heritage values — historical, aesthetic, social (contemporary community esteem) and research/technical significance. Places could be fine examples of their type, or rare within a local, regional or state context. Many places qualify for listing under more than one heritage value and in more than one context. Places are often altered over time, and these alterations themselves might be significant.

Criteria for assessing the significance of Aboriginal sites and natural heritage are being developed. Contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service for guidance when dealing with such places.

### HERITAGE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

When considering alterations to a listed heritage item it is important to understand both the reasons why it is significant and the criteria used to assess it. Each of the four heritage values have different qualifying criteria. These factors determine how an item can be changed without negatively affecting its heritage value, and what type of heritage management is appropriate.

### ASSESSING PROPOSED ALTERATIONS

As significance varies from one place to another, it is not possible to make universal statements summarising which changes are acceptable and those which are not. Each proposal to alter an item must be assessed on its merits.

A grand house, significant because it is the finest example of the work of a leading architect of its period, will have quite different constraints on alteration from that of a worker's cottage of the same period, which is significant because it was

the long-term residence of a famous writer. A building that is a rare, intact example of the 'Californian bungalow' style will lose that significance if a large, second storey is added. A row of 19th century warehouses with heritage streetscape value will lose that significance if a twenty-storey office block is built two metres behind one of the facades.

If a place is listed as a heritage item, *all its parts* are intrinsic to its significance. Though parts of a heritage site may have different levels of significance (for example, outhouses and a rural landscape on a country estate may be more, or less, significant than the main homestead) without them all, the significance of the whole place could be compromised. The significance of an historic industrial site would be diminished if all the industrial relics are removed. Nineteenth century commercial buildings lose significance if only the street elevations are retained.



*York House, Sydney is among significant city buildings that are being adapted for re-use to capitalise on their heritage value whilst providing modern accommodation and facilities. It forms part of an historic streetscape of 19th century commercial buildings terminated by a view of Sydney Town Hall. Proposals are being considered that retain its interior construction and rear address to an historic laneway while allowing some additional floors. Photo: Stuart Humphreys.*



## ALTERING HERITAGE ASSETS

### ADAPTIVE REUSE

Many heritage items can be altered or extended without unduly compromising their importance. Indeed, it is possible to enhance or reinforce their significance by an *adaptive reuse* that involves sympathetic alterations and additions. This is often necessary to ensure their survival. The Queen Victoria Building, the Capitol Theatre and Eveleigh Railway Workshops in Sydney are good examples of successful adaptation for reuse.

In general, the success or failure of alterations and additions in heritage terms is directly related to the degree to which the design acknowledges and retains the significance of the place.



*Frederick Ash Building, Newcastle, is managed at a state level because of its historical significance as a rare surviving example of 19th century retail warehouse. It is also a fine example of the work of architect Frederick Menkens. Discussions on its future centred on an application for partial demolition as part of Newcastle City Council's proposed redevelopment of the whole block as a new civic focus for the city. The Heritage Council's preferred option was for a scheme (recommended in the conservation plan) that retained the entire building. Through discussion a scheme was developed to the satisfaction of all parties.*

### A STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Before planning alterations or other changes to heritage items, it is necessary to first understand the reasons for its heritage status. Why is it significant? What is its historical context and history of its development? Is it a fine example of an important class of items? Does the community value the place? Does it inform us about our cultural identity?

A statement of heritage significance is central to developing a conservation and development strategy, known as conservation management plan (see below). Each aspect of significance leads to obligations or constraints that need to be considered when planning any changes. Often a statement of significance will have been prepared as part of the heritage listing process. If this is not the case, or if the listing is not thorough enough in its analysis, it is advisable to prepare a comprehensive statement of significance for approval by the consent authority (usually a local council but in some cases, the Heritage Council). This can save a great deal of time and frustration. You may need professional assistance from a heritage consultant or the local council heritage advisor to prepare the statement.

### A CONSERVATION POLICY

Once the statement of heritage significance has been completed and approved, it is advisable to prepare a conservation policy. This looks at the opportunities and constraints arising from *significance* and indicates how changes can be made while still conserving and enhancing that significance. A further step is to prepare implementation or management guidelines for the future development of the asset (options include maintenance plans, adaptive reuse or sympathetic additions).

### THE CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Taken together, the statement of significance, conservation policy and management guidelines form what is known as a conservation management plan. [The term conservation management plan is preferred by the Heritage Council, but is interchangeable with conservation plan.]



## ALTERING HERITAGE ASSETS

This need not be an expensive exercise. It could, in fact, save a great deal of time and money by indicating the best opportunities for capitalising on the value of a heritage asset, and in obtaining the early agreement of approval authorities and the community to policies that allow sympathetic changes.

The Heritage Council will not consider applications for extensive alterations to an item of major heritage significance unless it has already approved a conservation management plan. (This refers to items that have been identified in an environmental planning instrument or approved heritage study as being significant in a regional or state context, and those covered by an interim or permanent conservation orders.) Alterations or new works that have a major negative impact on the heritage significance of such items are usually not approved.

### **A STATEMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACT**

Owners can capitalise on their heritage asset, or the character of the heritage conservation area, through sympathetic changes or additions that conserve or enhance heritage significance. It is advisable to prepare and have endorsed a conservation policy or conservation management plan, before submitting a proposal. For any proposal to alter a heritage asset, a statement of

heritage impact is required to accompany your development application, showing how the proposal has taken these conservation policies and management guidelines into account. This will save time and money and ensure the speedy assessment of your submission.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The following publications are available from the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning's Information Centre located on the ground level, Governor Macquarie Tower, corner Phillip and Bent Streets, Sydney; phone (02) 9391 2222, fax (02) 9391 2333.

**Heritage Office & Department of Urban Affairs and Planning** 1996, *Conservation Management Documents*, NSW Heritage Manual, HO/DUAP, Sydney.

**Heritage Office & Department of Urban Affairs and Planning** 1996, *Heritage Assessments*, NSW Heritage Manual, HO/DUAP, Sydney.

**Heritage Office & Department of Urban Affairs and Planning** 1996, *Statements of Heritage Impact*, NSW Heritage Manual, HO/DUAP, Sydney.

Note: The Heritage Council's previous Facades Policy is now withdrawn.