

Media Release

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National Trust condemns University demolition of state heritage significant building

“The University of New England has confirmed, in a letter to the National Trust of Australia (NSW) that it intends to proceed with the demolition of the major part of Robb College in Armidale,” said National Trust Chief Executive Officer, Debbie Mills today.

Robb College was listed on the National Trust Register in 2012, as a significant example of the work of architect Michael Dysart and as the first modernist college to be built following the design of the traditionalist Oxford quadrangle form.

It is also one of the first modernist college buildings to be erected on a university campus outside of Sydney.

“In October 2014 the NSW Heritage Council resolved to recommend to the NSW Minister for Heritage that the Minister direct the listing of the College on the State Heritage Register and in August, 2017 the Heritage Council confirmed its previous finding that the building is of State Significance,” said Ms Mills.

An earlier letter in 2016 to the University by the National Trust’s Dr Clive Lucas, noting the importance of the building and offering to meet with the University to explore ways to achieve the best possible outcome, went unanswered.

Both the National Trust of Australia (NSW) and the NSW Chapter of the Institute of Architects have urgently written to the Heritage Council seeking action to protect this building.

In January 2013, the University’s Chief Operating Officer, Peter Enlund, acknowledged that the restoration of the existing buildings would cost up to \$7 million and that the buildings ‘could be used for other purposes, parts of it for teaching, or maybe for study spaces for post-graduate students and so forth’, confirming that the buildings’ retention and restoration was a viable option.

“It is an extraordinarily poor signal that a university sends to its students, alumni and the general public, to ignore the State Heritage Significance of a building and the basic principles of conservation and re-use and to proceed with demolition and a considerably more expensive (\$21M) re-build option,” said Ms Mills.

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