



## POSITION PAPER

### RESTORATION AND RE-USE OF THE ROXY THEATRE, PARRAMATTA

#### BACKGROUND

The Roxy Theatre at 65 George Street, Parramatta, designed in the Spanish Baroque style and constructed in 1930, was listed on the National Trust Register in 1975 and listed on the State Heritage Register in 1999 following an earlier Permanent Conservation Order in 1989 and after the tripling of the cinemas in the main auditorium. No other centre in Australia has a theatre of this style of architecture.

The Roxy is a Parramatta icon. It makes a major contribution to the streetscape, is of aesthetic significance and has a special and strong association with the community for both social and cultural reasons.

The Roxy Theatre is important in exemplifying the early symbiosis of film theatre and social interaction. The building is important historically for its close association with the expansion of mass entertainment in Parramatta in the first half of the 20th century, and survives as rare and important evidence of the increasingly sophisticated expectations of interwar cinema audiences.

The present owner, Palace Hotels, in 2015 announced a proposal to construct a 20 storey apartment tower over the top of the Roxy, with legs to support that building standing in the forecourt area, and an extension at the rear. The upstairs cinema was proposed to be retained but the foyer would have become an arcade of shops with access for the apartments above. Another proposal then emerged to demolish the theatre except for the façade and build a glass pyramid. The reaction from the public to both these proposals was swift and negative.

In April 2016, Les Tod, of the National Trust's Parramatta Regional Branch prepared "A Vision for the Future of

#### NATIONAL TRUST POSITION

- The Trust notes that both this building and its forecourt is listed on the State Heritage Register and neither should be subjected to any destructive development proposals.
- The Trust calls on the NSW Government and Parramatta City Council to take a leadership role to ensure that the Roxy once again becomes Parramatta's showpiece theatre, giving the people of the western suburbs an outstanding cultural icon.
- The Trust, recognising the State Government's concern for the dearth of cultural facilities in Sydney's Western Suburbs urges that either the local or State Government acquire the Roxy and make it the centrepiece of a new Parramatta while also adding much needed facilities for Parramatta and its surrounding areas.
- The Trust urges the refurbishing of the Roxy for large scale productions with the former stalls and stage area being reinstated as was the Melbourne Regent some years ago and notes that Melbourne's heritage theatres add \$230 million annually to Victoria's tourism income.
- The Trust urges investigation of a land swap with part of the Council car park at the rear of the theatre to see the Roxy transferred to State/Council hands at virtually no cost, thus giving the owner/developer the bonus of a less contentious site for its tower, without heritage restrictions.
- The Trust notes that Parramatta Council could then tender for the restoration of the Roxy under an extended lease, as Sydney City Council did with the Capitol Theatre or it could choose to restore the theatre itself seeking State and Federal grants, and operate the Roxy itself, as Newcastle City Council does with its Civic Theatre.

#### ACTION TO PROMOTE THE TRUST'S POSITION

The Trust will promote its views on this issue in the media, with Parramatta City Council and the NSW government.