

4 February 2022

Jessica Joseph
Council Officer
Council of the City of Sydney
GPO Box 1591
SYDNEY NSW 2001

By email: dasubmissions@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Joseph,

National Trust submission relating to D/2021/1504 (372-382a Pitt Street, SYDNEY)

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) expresses its strong objections to the proposed demolition of the intact row of buildings at 372-382 Pitt Street Sydney. It is the view of the Trust that these buildings can and do contribute to the streetscape in this location and their demolition is not justified on heritage grounds.

The National Trust submit that:

- these buildings should be investigated for their heritage value and potential local listing;
- the Heritage Impact Statement underplays the heritage significance of these buildings;
- recent demolitions throughout the CBD do in fact increase the rarity value of these items;
- there is long-established precedent in the city allowing for the heritage renewal required in this location.

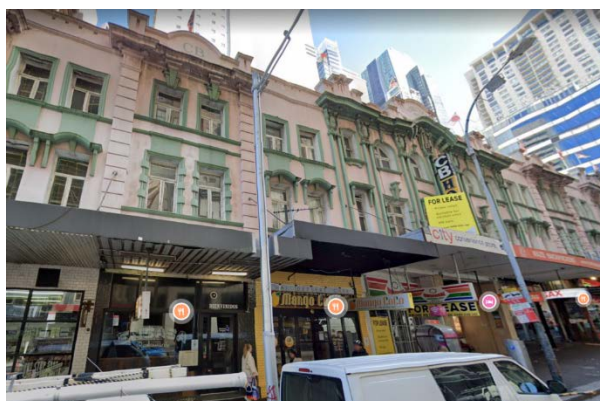
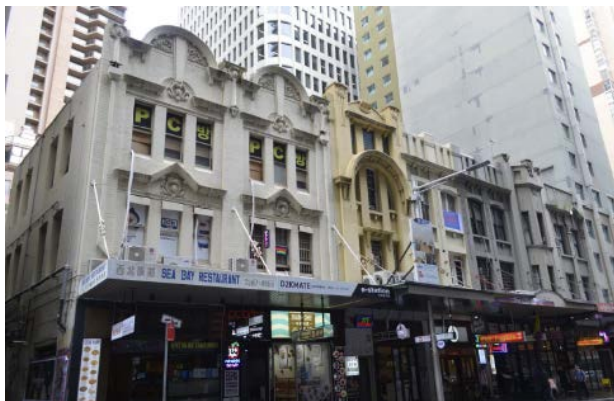
Heritage values dismissed

The Heritage Impact Statement (10 December 2021) prepared by Urbis makes the following general statement (p.5) regarding the buildings in question:

The subject site is a row of seven three-storey early twentieth-century commercial terrace buildings. The buildings have been heavily modified, are not rare or good examples of their type. Urbis is of the opinion that the site does not comprise the requisite level of significance for local listing. Accordingly, demolition of the structures on the subject site is supported from a heritage perspective.

The evidence for this assessment of the buildings as being “heavily modified” is outlined later in the report when (p.10) it states that:

*...the buildings represent Edwardian free classical commercial terrace buildings. **The buildings have been highly altered with only the first and second floor façade retaining some level of intactness. The fenestration, mouldings, parapet, etc allow this part of the building to be read in its original form.** (National Trust bold) The ground-floor of each building has been significantly modified with broad shopfronts with large glass windows, mostly restaurants, punctuated with doorways and stairs providing access to the upper floors. A steel awning extends from the top of the ground floor to the kerb.*



The intact facades of 372-382 Pitt Street (left) are readily identifiable as heritage items, and are immediately comparable with the scale, design, and level of integrity and intactness of the heritage-listed CB Hotel (right) which is located immediately to the south. (Source: Urbis and Google maps)

To describe these buildings as “highly altered” because they have modern ground floor shopfronts – and therefore not worthy of heritage listing – is to condemn the heritage values of almost every Victorian or Federation-era main street shop in almost every suburb of Sydney, including King Street Newtown, Military Road Mosman, Oxford Street Darlinghurst, and almost the entirety of Parramatta Road, just to name a few. The majority of these streets have recognised heritage values and retain heritage listing despite modernisation below the awning line.

This dilemma is easily resolved in any heritage listing. The National Trust note that the immediately adjacent “CB Hotel” (403-427 Pitt Street) is listed as a heritage item under the City of Sydney LEP and that its Statement of Significance clarifies what components of the building contribute to this heritage value:

The CB Hotel is notable as one of the few intact examples of "street block" urban renewal of the early 1900s and is considered of regional significance. It records the process of commercial development in the "down town" end of the city during the Federation period. It is a rare and excellent example of Federation Free Classical architecture incorporating Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts features in its embellishments. The building creates an historic streetscape in its own right with a consistent form, scale and bulk considered to be rare in the Sydney region. The 1930s eastern addition is representative of an austere interpretation of the Inter-War Functionalist style. It is significant as the site of the Chequers Restaurant from 1958 to 1980.

Medium Significance: The exterior facade of the building above the awning.

Low Significance: All interiors to the building. The facade below the awning.¹

The National Trust would consider that the above statement of significance could be applied almost without modification to the buildings at 372-382 Pitt Street. These buildings are of similar design and scale, retain a similar level of original fabric and design integrity, provide evidence of the “down town” commercial development in the city (particularly in relation to the Anthony Hordern’s retail complex) and were terminated by a modern corner hotel building of a similar height. These similarities explain why the buildings at 372-382 Pitt Street were listed on the Central Sydney Heritage Inventory in September 1989. They may have low significance below the awning and internally, but the façade above the awning is of heritage significance. The demolition of the two southern bays for the Ibis Hotel, while unfortunate, does not render this group of buildings as without heritage value.

The buildings retain a key role in the interpretation of the historical commercial development of Pitt Street and this part of the City of Sydney. Buildings of a similar age and nature do still exist in this part of the city, and it is only because of their frequency that they do not begin to stand as sad, isolated examples. These buildings play a key role in maintaining this continuity as people walk between Goulburn and Liverpool Streets, the eastern

¹ <https://www.hms.heritage.nsw.gov.au/App/Item/ViewItem?id=2424229>



side of which still retains an almost continuous row of heritage items with intact facades – albeit predominantly above the awning line.

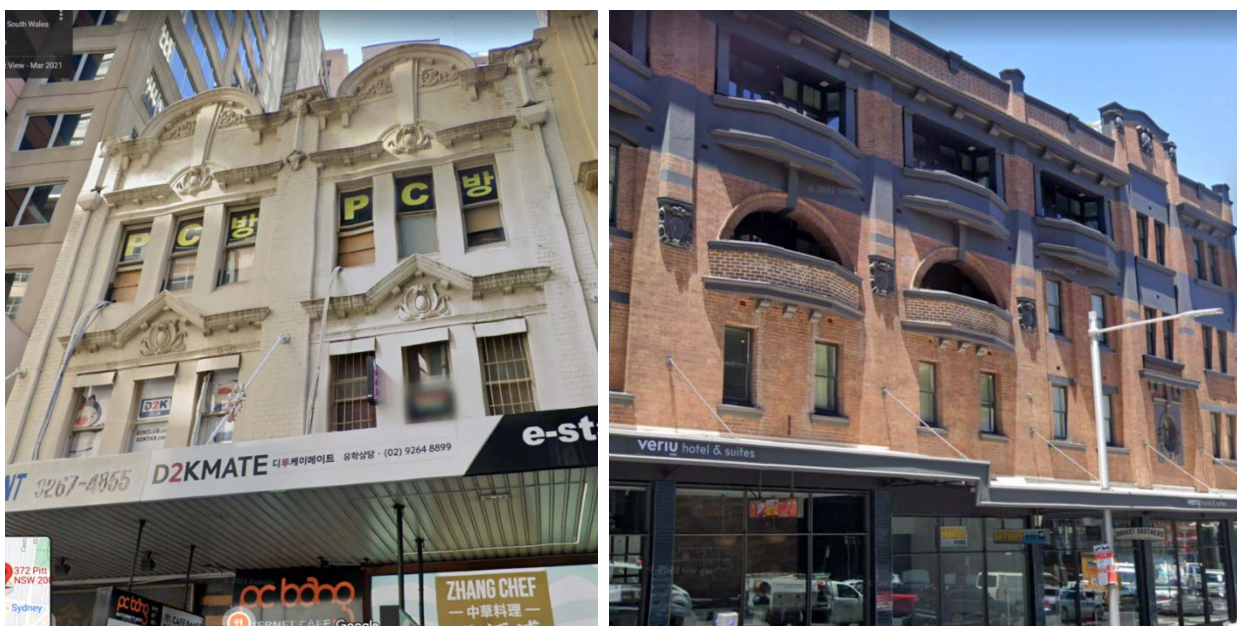


A 1989 view of the buildings (left) prior to the construction of the Ibis hotel (right) showing the relationship between these buildings and the Civic Hotel – a not dissimilar arrangement to the CB Hotel with its modern corner hotel building. (Source: City of Sydney Archives, Google maps)

Opportunity

To describe the facades of 372-382 Pitt Street as “derelict” as the Design Report (p.14) does, is to exaggerate the condition of these buildings. The National Trust need only cite a number of examples within the City to show the possibilities available with this development. The particular success of the integrated heritage buildings at Central Park (Spice Alley) demonstrate what can be achieved.

In the context of the overall development proposed, the cost to reinstate some missing details, repaint the facades, install appropriate signage and lighting, and construct historically-appropriate shopfronts, could readily be achieved. Some examples are outlined below.



The Veriu Central Hotel on Elizabeth Street (right) shows what can happen if the layers of paint are removed from the brick façade, along with inappropriate signage and window treatment, of the building at 372-374 Pitt Street (left). The renewed, sympathetic, shopfronts and awnings of the Veriu Hotel contribute greatly to the building at ground level. (Source: Google maps)



The reinstated verandah of the Newtown Hotel in King Street Newtown has used historic evidence to restore this building's prominent role in the streetscape. (Source: Google maps)



Before



After

The reinstated shopfronts of Reid House (75 King Street Sydney) offer a dramatic example of how shopfronts and awnings to an original design detail can be re-instated, along with rationalised signage, improving the heritage contribution of a building to the streetscape while retaining commercial value. (Source: Google maps)



There are also numerous examples within the immediate context of this building where historic buildings have been retained and/or incorporated within more recent developments. While the National Trust does not endorse “facadism”, there are examples of where these original structures have been retained and modern development incorporated in a meaningful way. These types of developments are able to be found throughout the city, with more recent examples being very successful urban gestures in addition to good conservation.



Museum Towers
(267-277 Castlereagh Street)



Hyde Park Towers
(142-148 Elizabeth Street)



Legion House
(161 Castlereagh Street)

Conclusion

The National Trust acknowledge that development on this site can occur, and that the streetscape as it currently stands can be improved. To simply dismiss the current buildings in this location as “derelict” and “heavily modified” however, and therefore not worthy of heritage listing or consideration, is to ignore the opportunities that heritage can bring to this part of the city and this development.

The new development specifically proposes a new podium level of the same height and street rhythm as the buildings proposed for demolition. Why not utilise the buildings already in this location for this purpose?

The recent report by the Committee for Sydney identifies the need for the CBD to have distinct precincts with unique characteristics.² The streetscape in the immediate vicinity of 372-382 Pitt Street can benefit from the renewal of these buildings far more than it can by their demolition. Our cities are enriched as we add layers to them, and we should seek a process of gradual restoration, not incremental demolition, for these and other similar buildings throughout our city if it is to retain any sense of history, variety and human scale.

The National Trust would encourage the retention and incorporation of these historic buildings, and opposes their complete demolition.

Yours sincerely,

David Burdon
Director, Conservation

² Commission into the Future of Sydney CBD – Recommendations and Actions, Committee for Sydney, January 2022