



08 December 2023

Mr Steven Avery  
Executive Director  
Heritage Victoria  
heritage.permits@delwp.vic.gov.au

6 Parliament Place  
East Melbourne  
VIC 3002

Email: [conservation@nattrust.com.au](mailto:conservation@nattrust.com.au)

Web: [www.nationaltrust.org.au](http://www.nationaltrust.org.au)

T 03 9656 9818

## **Re: Objection to P38226, Bendigo Art Gallery Redevelopment**

Dear Mr Avery,

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (National Trust) and our Bendigo and Region Branch (the Branch), have reviewed the redevelopment proposal for the Bendigo Art Gallery and while we understand and support the need to make changes at the site to address operational and capacity issues, we have major concerns with the design as currently proposed.

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (National Trust) is the state's largest community based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy, representing 40,000 members and supporters across Victoria. The Bendigo and Region Branch of the National Trust is our community-led voice and representation in the region.

We have major concerns with the current application to redevelop the Bendigo Art Gallery for the following reasons:

- The overwhelming nature of the new development, in size, scale and style, which is inappropriate in the context of the heritage-listed buildings and parklands;
- The necessary conservation works to existing significant buildings are not prioritised as part of this redevelopment;
- The reasonable economic use argument is not justified if this level of spending does not include investment into the existing state-listed heritage places and spaces that give the gallery its prominent site and context.

### **Overwhelming Development**

We submit that the proposed new gallery in size, style and scale, would detract from the landmark qualities of the Bendigo Art Gallery, (former Bendigo Volunteer Rifles' Orderly Rooms), including important views from View Street and Rosalind Park. Renders of the proposed design indicate that the new development, a monumental concrete style building with minimal articulation, will overwhelm the site, dominating views in the surrounds of State listed heritage buildings, open space and parkland.

View Street provides the Victorian public with one of the finest precincts of 19th century buildings in Victoria. New buildings in this precinct need to be respectful in scale and style, to the existing significant buildings, not compete for attention. This is echoed by the comments made by Heritage Victoria in permit pre-application meeting. We note that some of these

issues have been partially addressed, however, we draw attention to the following concerns, which we feel have not been adequately considered.

The new gallery construction significantly impacts on the line of sight for the whole 19th century precinct and buildings, which is due to the increased width and bulk of the new building. In particular, the new building detracts from views of the Former Rifle Brigade Orderly Room/Bolton Court Building from the west heading down View St and from the south standing opposite the Capital Theatre. We note that sight lines from the west and south west are not shown in the Heritage Impact Statement (HIS). We submit that the close proximity of the east side of the new build overwhelms Bolton Court and reduces its prominence within the site.

Furthermore, the proposed landscaping will further reduce the prominence of Bolton Court. The open space in View Street has been significantly reduced by the new build and the sculptures it contains, including the green temple, have been removed. We believe this would be detrimental to the site as the current lawn areas provide seating for visitors and are often used. This area has historically always been open space. While the new plans include a 'street' through to Rosalind Park, which will increase connectedness to the park, we find the added width and bulk to the new build unnecessary, in conjunction with the style and scale of the new construction.

We submit that the imposing concrete, block style of the new construction not only impacts the individual heritage sites, but it detracts from the integrity of the 19th century View Street precinct by bisecting through sight lines and diminishing the precinct's complete nature.

### **Conservation works and policies**

The National Trust and our Bendigo Branch are concerned that this major redevelopment project has not prioritised or incorporated the necessary conservation works needed at the properties included on the VHR and the design does not show sufficient consideration of the State values of the places.

These significant buildings and features require as much attention and respect as any proposed new building and landscape design, so they too remain a prominent part, and the hero, of this redeveloped gallery complex. The historic buildings and landscapes should be better integrated into the design of this complex so they can continue to contribute to the success of this gallery, rather than becoming something to work around.

We are also concerned that the HIS does not include any reference to policy contained in the existing Conservation Management Plan (CMP) prepared by Allom Lovell. While there is reference to updating the CMP, we submit this should have been completed at the beginning of the design process, to inform the current design, rather than to justify the current proposal.

The HIS suggests (Item 13, page 54) that "the design of the new building ... introduces a programme of conservation management and mitigation measures which include among others, update to a Conservation Management Plan, conservation works schedule and complete 3D scanning of the entire complex among other things." It does not state when these works are to be undertaken.

Additionally, we are not satisfied that the conservation works listed in the HIS appropriately prioritise and address the issues on all three registered sites. There are a number of heritage issues that have not been addressed in the design or the HIS that we believe still need to be considered; the openings to connect the Gallery to Rosalind Park are inadequate and there is minimal activation of the area that is located in Rosalind Park. We also note that there is reference to relocating the Plant Room, which would be beneficial to the heritage building, but these works are not integrated into the current plans for the re-development and are instead considered a different 'stage.' This suggests that addressing issues related to the better use of the heritage buildings on the site are considered secondary to the new build project. Instead, we would encourage the applicant to undertake a more holistic and integrated planning approach for the whole site.

### **Economic Use**

While we appreciate and support the applicant's need to make changes at the site to address operational and capacity issues, we submit that the proposed significant growth and change to the gallery is not necessary to fulfil the goals of the applicant, including the increase for capacity and the claims of diminishing visitor satisfaction.

The 2014 additions to the gallery have served the business and community well, with recognition of the Bendigo Art Gallery as one of the most important galleries in Victoria and Australia. The change towards a large exhibition space, a public lobby and stairwell, increased administration areas, shops and cafes contradicts the current strategies that have been so successful in making the gallery a destination place for tourists and a boon for local hospitality providers and retailers.

The applicant can take heart that the Gallery's recent 'Elvis Exhibition' was the largest attended, with over 219,000 visitors, 86% of whom came from outside Bendigo. This increase in tourism provided a huge boost to local businesses. The Gallery was able to achieve this success with the spaces currently available, rather than requiring a significantly larger, and more obtrusive construction that impedes the heritage sites surrounding it.

With the guidance of Heritage Victoria, the Greater Bendigo Council could instead embark on a more appropriate plan to review the current façade entrance and landscape, reorganise the reception and shop and action the urgent heritage maintenance works required on all three sites named in this application.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the National Trust and Bendigo Branch oppose this redevelopment of the Bendigo Art Gallery as currently proposed on the basis that it would have an adverse and potentially irreversible impact on the heritage significance of heritage places within the precinct and that this impact is not justified by the case for reasonable or economic use.

We believe the proposal has not given the due respect and attention to the VHR listed places in its midst, and the design could better consider the values of these places to provide a development that improves and upgrades the gallery use with an eventuating arts complex where both the heritage and contemporary shines.

If you have any enquiries regarding this submission, please get in touch with this office on 03 9656 9844 or with me directly at [samantha.westbrooke@nattrust.com.au](mailto:samantha.westbrooke@nattrust.com.au).

Yours sincerely,



Samantha Westbrooke  
Executive Manager - Conservation and Advocacy  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)



Peter Cox  
President, Bendigo & Region Branch  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)