

# LAUNCESTON CITY COUNCIL

## MEMORANDUM

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FILE NO: DA0175/2021

DATE: 22 June 2021

TO: Duncan Payton Town Planner

FROM: Fiona Ranson Place and Heritage Officer

SUBJECT: **Heritage and Urban Design Report - 31 Elizabeth Street,  
Launceston - Visitor Accommodation - Construction of 38 hotel  
units**

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Dear Duncan

I have reviewed the documents submitted for the proposed building at 31 Elizabeth Street and can offer the following advice in regard to the application.

### Significance

The proposed development is to occupy a high profile corner site in Launceston's inner city area. The site is also occupied by buildings including the former 'Overton House' which are now operated as part of a hotel known as the Colonial Motor Inn.

The property is heritage listed at both state and local level, being included on the Tasmanian Heritage Register (THR) and in Table E13.2 of the Launceston Interim Planning Scheme 2015 (the Scheme). Therefore the proposal must be assessed by the Tasmanian Heritage Council (THC) under section 39(6)(b) of the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995, and also against the provisions of the Local Historic Cultural Heritage Code (Heritage Code).

The site is also included within the South Launceston Precinct of defined heritage character identified in the Launceston Heritage Study 2007 prepared by Paul Davies Heritage Architects (the Study). The Study includes a description and statement of significance for the Precinct, as does the THR datasheet. The elements most relevant to this Application are outlined below.

**Tasmanian Heritage Register** - Place no. 4124 - Title Ref.: Fol. 251573 Vol. 1

#### Description:

*'The two storey brick building includes some gable roof forms, multi-paned windows with moulded architraves, and an arched doorway. The 1908 extension has a gabled roof form with timber infill, finial and mouldings around the windows'.*

#### History:

*'Originally built as the Launceston Church Grammar School for a cost of one thousand pounds. Many notable students (including seven Rhodes scholars) studied there between 1847 and 1923. The architect was Robert de Little'.*

#### Statement of Significance:

31 Elizabeth Street is of historic cultural heritage significance due to the following:

- *its ability to demonstrate the principal characteristics of a Victorian Tudor school building.*

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- *its associations with notable architect, Robert de Little, and the Launceston Grammar School.*
- *its strong and special association with the general community as an important educational institution.*

*This site is also of historic heritage significance because its townscape associations are regarded as important to the community's sense of place.*

### **Launceston Heritage Study 2007** - South Launceston Precinct

#### Description:

*South Launceston is a mixed area that now incorporates the southern end of the city with commercial and retail activity extending through former residential areas, and the slopes on the eastern edge of the Launceston basin. It is clearly defined by the hospital grounds to the south, the steep edge to the east under the High Street precinct, and the commercial and light industrial areas to the west.*

*A focus of the area is Princes Square and the churches and civic areas surrounding it with the very fine streetscape of townhouses extending north-south. Several areas of modest early housing are incorporated in a sub-network of narrow streets and lanes that add to the fine grained nature of the precinct.*

*The major developments, in contrast to much of Launceston's residential areas, are constructed of stone and brick in the form of terraces, conjoined buildings as well as substantial free-standing buildings within gardens. Generally residential lot sizes are tighter than the areas to the east.*

*The whole precinct has a high predominance of heritage items and very few intrusive developments; the latter are in the form of more recent housing developments and several uncharacteristic institutional buildings.*

*The precinct has extremely high integrity and intactness.*

#### Statement of Significance:

The precinct is significant for a range of reasons:

- *It demonstrates the range of housing from the late Victorian and Federation periods in a very intact and coherent group.*
- *It demonstrates the clear difference between the quality of housing and location seen here and the workers' housing areas located immediately below in the valley.*
- *It provides streetscapes of high visual and aesthetic value demonstrating the core values of housing development in Launceston.*
- *The precinct contains a number of brick and stone buildings demonstrating the relative wealth of owners and contrasting to the predominance of timber construction elsewhere in the city.*
- *The buildings through their form, detail and style, together demonstrate the high quality craftsmanship found throughout the major housing developments of Launceston.*
- *The precinct contains a number of exceptionally fine and significant civic areas and structures that provide the city's core character.*

#### Policy Recommendations:

The Study acknowledges that the city's buildings and streetscapes are of high heritage value and must be protected, conserved and enhanced wherever possible.

Further, it recognises that the historic character of the city must be retained, recovered and enhanced in development works. This statement is reflected in both

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the Zone Purposes and the Objectives of the Scheme. The Study also offers policy recommendations to *'conserve the significance and heritage values of the precinct, to provide for new development that is commensurate with that significance and to encourage the recovery of significance, particularly in streetscape elements and presentation of the whole area'*. The following policy recommendations are useful when considering the current proposal.

1. *The properties identified as heritage items should be retained and where possible future work should recover significance where it has been lost.*
3. *Alterations and additions should be undertaken with regard to the heritage value of the place and should not adversely affect the significant attributes or streetscape value of the group. (Where) there is adequate scope for additions; these should be considered for their ability to fit within the existing streetscape and for their design excellence.*
6. *Controls should be developed for front fence forms that are appropriate to the setting. High or solid fences are generally not appropriate to street frontages.*
7. *Where infill buildings are proposed, material selections and forms should relate to the predominant streetscape pattern. Replication of historic forms is not encouraged in new work, however new designs must demonstrate a scale, form and materials relationship to the precinct.*
9. *Buildings converted to commercial use should have detailed controls regarding painting, presentation and signage.*

## Assessment

### Tasmanian Heritage Council Decision

The THC made their decision in regard to the application at their meeting on 16 June 2021. Consent was provided subject to the following conditions:

1. *The exterior wall surfaces that are proposed to be of pre-cast concrete and pressed metal/Alucobond cladding must be modified or substituted with a different material to achieve an articulated, textured finish that is in harmony with the material character of the façades of the adjacent heritage building.*
2. *Concrete floors, for the new lift lobby and new entry paving, must be detailed such that the junctions with existing masonry walls are constructed in a manner that:*
  - (i) *Does not result in the transfer of moisture or the introduction of soluble salts to the existing walls; and*
  - (ii) *Incorporates a porous strip of minimum 300mm width alongside the base of the existing masonry wall, enabling the evaporation of moisture from the ground at the base of that wall; or other detail having similar effect; and*
  - (iii) *Does not restrict the provision of subfloor ventilation to the heritage building.*
3. *The locations of new air-conditioning plant, and services generally, must be designed to be concealed to have minimal impact on the presentation of the heritage place.*
4. *Works involving excavation and installation for the new grease trap (Ref. Concept Servicing Plan A14\_Rev C) must be designed to minimise impacts on heritage fabric.*
5. *Amended documentation demonstrating compliance with the requirements of Conditions 1-4 must be submitted to Heritage Tasmania and be to the satisfaction of the Works Manager, prior to the commencement of works.*

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The following advice was also provided to assist the applicant in meeting Condition 1 and to provide for a development which fits more cohesively with the place and its setting:

*The Tasmanian Heritage Council recommends that:*

*(a) To comply with Condition 1, the pre-cast concrete and metal wall panels be substituted with an alternative cladding material, such as face-brick, painted or bagged brick or masonry rendered to create a modular pattern, that responds positively to the material character of the heritage place.*

*To respond more positively to the heritage place and its townscape setting the Tasmanian Heritage Council recommends that:*

*(b) The palette of external finishes and colours generally be of earthy neutral colours and tones, and matt textures, that have the effect of softening and articulating the forms of the new development. A lighter neutral wall tone may be used to reduce the prominence of the northern stairwell, and an alternative cladding to the Level 4 walls, similar to the roof material, may be used to reduce the visual prominence of those elements.*

*(c) To maintain consistency with the heritage streetscape, the bluestone foundation walls should be coursed horizontally with traditional stepped construction or a rendered cap applied to the raking wall profile.*

*(d) The fenestration of the George Street elevation, and west-facing Level 04 decks should be refined to discrete vertical proportion openings more reflective of the predominant pattern of fenestration evident in the neighbouring heritage buildings.*

*(e) The dormer/roof cut-outs to the east (George Street) and west elevations should be articulated by omitting or reducing the connecting rooflines.*

*(f) Adjustments may be made to the gable end roof profiles, to truncate the eave overhangs to reduce their visual prominence.*

The applicant was also encouraged to 'contact Heritage Tasmania for further advice about the selection of external cladding materials and finishes'.

### **Local Historic Cultural Heritage Code:**

The standards from the Heritage Code which must be considered are as follows:

*E13.6.1 Demolition*

*E13.6.4 Site coverage*

*E13.6.5 Height and bulk of buildings*

*E13.6.6 Site of buildings and structure(s)*

*E13.6.7 Fences*

*E13.6.8 Roof form and materials*

*E13.6.9 Wall materials*

*E13.6.11 Driveways and parking*

*E13.6.12 Tree and vegetation removal*

*E13.6.13 Signage*

### **E13.6.1 Demolition**

There is only very minor demolition proposed as part of the application. It is mostly related to landscaping elements including retaining walls which are not of any known heritage significance. The only heritage fabric proposed to be removed is a small section of wall to the eastern side of the central building on the site (the former

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Overton House) where an opening is to provide a connection to the proposed building. This connection is in a discreet location to the rear of the building and has been assessed by the THC. Conditions have been applied to the Notice of Heritage Decision to deal with any issues with this part of the development and therefore the performance criteria are considered to be met and no further assessment is required.

### **E13.6.4 Site coverage**

The subject site has a relatively low site coverage, especially when compared to many surrounding sites on this southern fringe of the city centre. In this sense there appears to be capacity for some intensification of the existing use on the site. However, when dealing with a place of heritage significance, the surrounding pattern of development is not always an appropriate precedent as the individual characteristics of the site, including the built form of its structures and any significant vegetation may not be consistent with that on surrounding properties.

In the specific context of this relatively large property (3910m<sup>2</sup>) the addition the proposed new building area (320m<sup>2</sup>) is not considered to constitute over development, however it is still important to note that when dealing with a building of the height proposed on a site of heritage significance located on a prominent city corner close to busy streets and surrounded by largely intact Victorian era streetscapes, it is the placement and design of the building to respond to the site and its context which is generally of greater importance. In order to address the objectives and performance criteria for clauses dealing with roofs, walls and landscaping, conditions which alter the articulation and materiality of the building form to ensure an appropriate response to the place and the surrounding streetscapes have been recommended. Therefore, if these conditions are applied, then the performance criteria relating to site coverage will be considered to be met.

### **E13.6.5 Height and bulk of buildings**

The justification for the scale of the proposed development provided by the applicant is considered to be sound and the proposed height and bulk of the new building are generally considered to be acceptable in the context of the site and its setting. However, as noted under clause E13.6.4 regarding site coverage, when dealing with a building of this scale on such a prominent and significant site, it is vital that the articulation and materiality of the building also respond appropriately to this context. Therefore, if the recommendations in regard to articulation and materiality (roofs, walls, and vegetation) aspects of the proposal are followed, then the performance criteria relating to height and bulk may be considered to be met.

### **E13.6.6 Site of buildings and structure(s)**

The setbacks provided for the main building from both George and Elizabeth streets are considered to be consistent with the street setbacks for buildings on adjoining sites and the general pattern of development on this southern fringe of the central city. Being a prominent corner site close to the city centre, the addition of substantial 'street walls' close to the site boundaries is also considered to offer a positive urban design outcome for the George and Elizabeth Street intersection.

When dealing with heritage places such as the subject site and the adjoining title occupied by 'Three Steps on George', consideration must also be given to the curtilage to existing buildings and sites and what appropriate setbacks may be.

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The distances between the proposed building and the existing Colonial Hotel and 'Three Steps on George' buildings are stated to be 1.8m and 1.5m respectively. This separation limits the visibility of these buildings from public view and thus may be considered to be detrimental to the significance of these Heritage Places. However, in this case the THC have assessed and provided consent for the development to proceed without reconsideration of the siting of the building and therefore the siting of the building proposed may be considered to meet the relevant performance criteria.

### **E13.6.7 Fences**

Although it is not known if there was previously a fence to the George Street frontage of the site, or what it may have looked like, a fence of the scale and design proposed is considered to be an appropriate addition to the streetscape for both practical and aesthetic reasons.

While the fence proposed is noted on the elevation drawing as being a 'wrought iron steel picket fence', it is shown to be of a design which is similar to other fences in the area and is considered to be compatible with the historic cultural heritage significance of the place and its setting, whether it is constructed of steel or wrought iron, however the finish has not been specified as part of the submitted documents. Therefore it is recommended that a condition be applied to any Permit issued which requires that the finish and/or colour be specified as part of amended plans.

### **E13.6.8 Roof form and materials**

The planning submission describes the proposed roof form only as being a 'gable roof of similar height, pitch, and colour as that of the existing Three Steps on George' and does not address the dormer like forms which enable the addition of rooms within what appears to be roof space. It is these elements which, in their current form are not considered to be compatible with the historic cultural heritage significance of the place or its setting such that the THC provided the following advice in regard to the proposed roof:

- *The dormer/roof cut-outs to the east (George Street) and west elevations should be articulated by omitting or reducing the connecting rooflines.*

Therefore it is recommended that a condition be applied to any Permit issued which requires that the dormer like roof elements be amended in line with the advice provided as part of the THC decision.

### **E13.6.9 Wall materials**

As advised as part of a Request for Information for the original application, the combination of wall materials and features proposed was not considered to meet the performance criteria for clause E13.6.9 Wall materials. This included the large graphics to the Elizabeth Street frontage which may be assessed as a sign. It was left open for these design choices to be justified by the applicant, or altered addressing this advice.

Some reasoning was provided as part of the response, but the materials, finishes and colour palette were not amended and, as evidenced by the THC decision, the proposal is not considered to be appropriate in the context of existing materials on the site and in the surrounding streetscapes.

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### Building walls

In regard to the external walls of the main building, the THC have applied the following condition and reasoning as part of their decision:

- 1. The exterior wall surfaces that are proposed to be of pre-cast concrete and pressed metal/Alucobond cladding must be modified or substituted with a different material to achieve an articulated, textured finish that is in harmony with the material character of the façades of the adjacent heritage building.***

#### Reason for condition

*To ensure that the new building has a material character that is complementary to the heritage buildings consistent with the appropriate outcomes described in Section 8.1 of the Works Guidelines.*

Advice included that *'the pre-cast concrete and metal wall panels be substituted with an alternative cladding material, such as face-brick, painted or bagged brick or masonry rendered to create a modular pattern, that responds positively to the material character of the heritage place.'*

The THC also advised that in order to *'respond more positively to the heritage place and its townscape setting':*

- The palette of external finishes and colours generally be of earthy neutral colours and tones, and matt textures, that have the effect of softening and articulating the forms of the new development. A lighter neutral wall tone may be used to reduce the prominence of the northern stairwell, and an alternative cladding to the Level 4 walls, similar to the roof material, may be used to reduce the visual prominence of those elements; and*

This advice is considered to be sound and consistent with the assessment against the performance criteria in regard to wall materials. Therefore, if the proposal is modified to adequately address the THC conditions, the materials for the main building walls will be considered to be appropriate.

### Elizabeth Street boundary

It is evident that the walls annotated as 'Solid bluestone blockwork' and 'Applied bluestone splitface' on the northern elevation are intended to deal with the gradient of the site, but sheer blank walls of this height (between 1m and 2.4m) are generally not considered to make a positive contribution to the streetscape, especially when the existing situation includes planting beds to the frontage. That said, it is acknowledged that windows to an accommodation use at footpath level are less than ideal and that some effort has been made to step and articulate the wall to break down the visual impact when experienced from the street.

If the bluestone to be used is a solid natural stone, rather than a thin veneer or a form of engineered stone, and it is laid in a traditional manner with mortar joints, as shown in the photos of local bluestone foundation walls, at least this may be considered to be a robust and appropriate material for this location. This may include recesses for planting and/or seating, and where possible maximising glazing to what is effectively the ground floor frontage of the site.

The THC provided the following advice in regard to the detailing of these walls:

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- *To maintain consistency with the heritage streetscape, the bluestone foundation walls should be coursed horizontally with traditional stepped construction or a rendered cap applied to the raking wall profile.*

The guidance is considered to be consistent with the assessment against the performance criteria and therefore it is recommended that a condition be applied to ensure that the design of this wall is amended appropriately to ensure that the walls may be considered to be '*compatible with the historic cultural heritage of the local heritage place and its setting*'.

### Vegetation

As indicated on the 3D images submitted as part of the application, the overall visual impact of materials and colours may be affected by the addition of vegetation in the form of creepers and general landscape planting. However there is some concern in regard to the extent of vegetation able to be grown and maintained on the site to sustain the visual effect displayed in the documents submitted, especially with the lack of detail provided in this regard.

The appropriateness of proposed plantings have been discussed with officers of Recreation and Parks and it has been advised that the *cupressus sempervirens* (pencil pines) and *parthenocissus tricuspidata* (Boston ivy) specified along George Street are robust plants which could perform well in the location, provided with an appropriate growing medium and good watering and drainage systems, however it was also noted that Boston ivy will produce a berry or fruit which may cause issues in close proximity to busy city footpaths. Less is known about the hops proposed to the south-west façade. Therefore, to ensure the success of the plantings and thus the accurate description of the appearance of the development, it is recommended that a condition be applied to any Planning Permit issued which requires details of the following:

- Reasons for species selection, including evidence of suitability for specific locations
- Amount and type of growing medium to be provided to support growth
- Type and extent of drainage provision
- Watering requirements and methods (calculated from the above)

Therefore, if the proposal is modified to adequately address the THC conditions and recommendations in regard to the detailing of the stone walls and ensuring the sustainability of planting are followed by suitable conditions, the proposed wall materials will be considered to be '*compatible with the historic cultural heritage of the local heritage place and its setting*' and thus to meet the objective and performance criteria for this clause.

### **E13.6.11 Driveways and parking**

The proposed car parking area is to be located within the proposed building footprint, and thus behind the building line of the new building. This situation is considered meet the acceptable solution and to be an improvement on the existing as the current parking area is located in open area between the significant building on the site and a prominent intersection.

### **E13.6.12 Tree and vegetation removal**



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While any loss of vegetation in the central city is not desirable, the shrubs proposed for removal are not of any known heritage significance and a similar level of planting is proposed as part of the development.

### **E13.6.13 Signage**

The two signage elements proposed consist of vertically oriented metal lettering fixed to walls of the new building, a smaller one facing Elizabeth Street at the George Street intersection, and a larger one facing south-west down Elizabeth Street. They are both proposed to be illuminated and are shown to have heights of approximately 4m and 7.3m respectively.

Both of the signs will be visible from Elizabeth Street and they are in relatively close proximity to each other, however it is important to note that these signs are to replace two signs currently located on the corner of George and Elizabeth streets. The existing ground base sign is of a scale and design which is sympathetic to the heritage character of the site, however the other is an internally illuminated pole sign of approximately 5.5m in height. It is agreed that *'the removal of these signs and the addition of the proposed signs aids in reducing the clutter and redundancies in the streetscape'* as stated as part of the planning report submitted as part of the application.

It is also evident that the signs have been designed with the intent of complementing the character of the building with the illumination proposed is intended to be a subtle backlighting which should not dominate the significant building on the site or the broader streetscape, or result in amenity issues for neighbouring residential uses.

Most importantly the new signs are integrated into the new building rather than being attached to the significant building on the site and therefore do not interfere with *'period details, windows, doors'* or *'other architectural details'* of this building, and does not involve the *'destruction, removal or concealment of heritage fabric'*.

Taking all of the above into account, it is considered that and the number, scale and type of signs in this part of the site is considered to be acceptable due to the scale of the buildings and the site and the robust character of the area. The signage is not considered to unreasonably impact on the view of the place from public viewpoints and therefore the subject sign is considered to be compatible with the *'historic cultural heritage significance'* of the heritage place and its setting.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Fence**

It is recommended that a condition be applied to any Planning Permit issued which requires that the finish and/or colour of the fence to be specified.

This is requested as the details of the finish or colour of the fence were not provided as part of the submitted documents. It should form part of an 'Amended Plans' condition and the altered proposal would require the approval of the Manager City Development prior to issue of Building Approval.

### **2. Roofing**

It is recommended that a condition be applied to any Planning Permit issued which requires that the protruding dormer like window elements (facing George Street and

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into the site to the south-west) be further articulated by omitting or reducing the connecting rooflines such that these appear as individual dormer elements. These should be a contemporary version of those which exist in the surrounding streetscapes.

This is in line with advice provided as part of the THC decision. It should form part of an 'Amended Plans' condition and the altered proposal would require the approval of the Manager City Development prior to issue of Building Approval.

### 3. Bluestone Walls

It is recommended that a condition be applied to any Planning Permit issued which requires that the walls described as 'Solid bluestone blockwork' (SBS) and 'Applied bluestone splitface' (ABS) on the advertised plans be coursed horizontally with visible mortar joints and a traditional rendered cap applied to the raking wall profile, and that the 'Applied bluestone splitface' (ABS) cladding consist of true bluestone (or dolerite) blocks with a minimum thickness of 50mm (as opposed to a thin stone or shale veneer).

This is in line with advice provided as part of the THC decision. It should form part of an 'Amended Plans' condition and the altered proposal would require the approval of the Manager City Development prior to issue of Building Approval.

### 4. Vegetation

It is recommended that a condition be applied to any Planning Permit issued which requires details of the following:

- Species selection for all vegetation (including ground covers), including evidence of suitability for specific locations
- Amount and type of growing medium to be provided to support growth
- Type and extent of drainage provision
- Watering requirements and methods (calculated from the above)

This is required to ensure the success and sustainability of the plantings and thus the accurate description of the appearance of the development in the documents provided. It could form part of an 'Amended Plans' condition, or a separate 'Landscaping' or 'Vegetation' condition and would require the approval of the Manager City Development prior to issue of Building Approval.

### Summary

It is advised that if the proposal is altered by conditions in line with the recommendations above, the development may be considered to meet the performance criteria set out in the relevant clauses of the Local Historic Cultural Heritage Code of the Launceston Interim Planning Scheme 2015 and DA0175/2021 may be considered for approval.

Please let me know if you require anything further.

**Fiona Ranson**  
**Place and Heritage Officer**

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