



Tasma Terrace
4 Parliament Place
East Melbourne
Victoria 3002

Email: info@nattrust.com.au
Web: www.nationaltrust.org.au

T 03 9656 9800
F 03 9656 5397

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Mr Tim Smith
Executive Director
Heritage Victoria
PO BOX 500
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Our ref.: B1093

Dear Mr Smith,

RE: Permit Application P25346 – VHR0211 Former Lalor House

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) submits the following response to the above permit application which seeks to 'undertake demolition works, alteration and restoration works to the existing residence, subdivision of the rear portion of the property, demolition of outbuildings and the construction of six residential townhouses' on the site of the former Lalor House in Richmond.

While the National Trust is generally supportive of the owners' proposal to undertake minimal alteration to the main portion of the house, we have various concerns relating specifically to the level of demolition and intervention proposed for the rear of the property (the former servants wing), and the proposal to subdivide the adjoining block of land (previously a tennis court) to develop six new townhouses. As one of the first properties registered under the provisions of the Historic Buildings Act 1974, the proposed re-development of this largely intact Victorian-era mansion needs to be undertaken sympathetically and in direct response to the cultural heritage significance and value of the site.

National Trust Statement of Significance

As noted in the Heritage Impact Study (HIS) prepared by Nigel Lewis, the former Lalor House was classified by the National Trust on the 10th of March 1966, making it 'one of the earliest classifications for such a Boom Style building', representing a 'broadening of the criteria adopted by the Trust at the time, 10 years after the Trust was founded'. The former Lalor House has historic, social, aesthetic and architectural significance at a State level. Mirroring the Statement of Significance that was adopted by the Victorian Heritage Register, the National Trust's Statement of Significance denotes the following:

The Lalor residence at 293 Church Street Richmond was erected in 1888 for local medico, Dr. Joseph P Lalor, son of the celebrated Eureka Stockade leader and politician Peter Lalor. The arcaded, two storey brick, and stucco residence and surgery was designed in an original and exaggerated boom classicism style by American born, classically trained architect William George Wolf. The Lalor residence is an early career masterpiece of unknown but important boom period architect W G Wolf. The exemplary boom style classicism design, characterised by an innovative exaggerated use of massive classical motifs, harsh tonality and exuberant ornament, is rivalled only by Benvenuta at Carlton and Labassa at Caulfield for period architectural importance in Victoria. Peter Lalor died at this house in February 1889 after a short stay in confinement. The Lalor residence and surgery has been used by the medical profession continuously from 1888-1973. The building remains intact and of high integrity externally. The iron palisade fence is preserved. The interior has not been closely inspected.

Proposed Internal Works for Rear Servants Wings

While the National Trust commends the owners for proposing that 'minimal changes are to be made to the most significant rooms of the house' (HIS, pg. 14), we have concerns regarding the level of detrimental impact that is proposed for the rear section of the house. While the National Trust accepts that changes to rear wings are a normal occurrence when significance is attributed largely to prominent façades, we consider the intention to undertake extensive demolition of original fabric relating to internal domestic occupation in this section of the house to have an unacceptable impact on the cultural heritage significance of the property. The National Trust submits that the accumulative impact of the removal of various original elements needs to be more extensively and sympathetically mediated at a design level.

We do not agree that 'given that minimal changes are to be made to the most significant facades of the house, the changes previously made to the rear of the house, and the need to provide an upgrade standard of accommodation in this area with natural light, the heritage impact is considered acceptable' (HIS pg. 12). The works proposed for the rear servants wing sees only three walls and the roof retained. While the proposal to install a kitchen replacing the rear balcony may be generally acceptable, the complete opening up of the north wall of the rear wing and obliteration of the interior is not.

As noted in the Heritage Impact Statement, the servants wing on the ground floor still retains a 'fireplace with its marble overmantel, and archway into the vestibule that may have been a butler's pantry', and the servants wing on the first floor, while 'very modest', has 'remained basically unchanged'. The proposal to remove the internal walls on both levels will significantly change these original elements and the reading of the spaces. We have specific concerns regarding the rear servant stairs, which are ascribed in the Heritage Impact Statement as the 'most intact internal space in the whole house with respect to finishes, retaining the original marbled wall finish and painted dado, as well as very intact stairs' (HIS, pg. 9). The west wall of these servant stairs is proposed for removal, 'while retaining the stairs and finishes on remaining walls'. We submit that the removal of the west wall will have a significant impact on this 'intact internal space' and should be avoided. Conservation works as necessary to this section of the house is also recommended.

In regards to internal works proposed for the main portion for the house, we have some concern regarding the removal of the built in cabinet from Room 8, the former surgery (HIS, pg. 14). As noted in the National Trust Statement of Significance, 'the Lalor residence and surgery has been used by

the medical professional continuously from 1888-1973.’ The removal of this connection between the tangible remnant of the cabinet and the intangible historical significance of the houses former uses should be mediated if possible.

Proposed External Works

We have some concern regarding the proposed external works to the property, in particular the proposal to construct a ‘glazed two storey enclosure with first floor screen in place of the existing east-west verandah, and a glazed two storey volume enclosed with first floor screen in place of the existing north-south verandah’ (HIS, pg. 12). The Heritage Impact Study makes the comment that these additions will make a ‘strong and well resolved architectural expression that will provide a dramatic response to the grandeur of the main part of the house. They will bring important function back to the degraded and neglected section’ (HIS, pg. 12). Considering how intact Lalor House is as a whole, the National Trust submits this ‘dramatic response’ is not entirely appropriate, and certainly makes no reference to the previous use or function of the servants wing.

In addition, the proposal to retain the external doors to the lane, yet lock them in a closed position, raises some level of concern (HIS, pg. 13). We question whether the intent to apply ‘fixed glazing to weatherproof and protect’ the doors will pose a significant change, and whether this process is reversible.

Finally, in regards to the conservation works proposed for the façade, we support the proposed ‘low intervention conservation of all external render’, yet would encourage the reconstruction of missing elements at the very least as a concession for the proposed demolition at the rear (as proposed tentatively in the Heritage Impact Statement). This would represent a positive outcome for the proposed ‘re-adaption’ of the house, alongside the paint analysis to determine the early colours of the external joinery and iron fence at the front of the property.

Subdivision and development of the rear of the site

The National Trust does not accept that the ‘proposed subdivision will have little if any heritage impacts on the values of the whole place’ (HIS, pg. 17). In response to this permit application, we would like to acknowledge and support the recommendations put forth by the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria on the 22nd of July 2016 (under sec 32 of the Heritage Act 1995), to include the addition of land associated with Lalor House under the extent of registration. The Executive Director provides the following reasoning for this decision:

The registration of Lalor House, which was gazetted in 1974, requires updating. No land was able to be registered under the Historic Buildings Act until 1982. For places added before that time, only the buildings are included in the registration, not the land on which they sit or an appropriate curtilage. Places registered since 1982 include both buildings and land. Early registrations are currently being updated to reflect this change.

This rationale is supported by sec. 27 of the Heritage Act 1995:

- 1) If the Executive Director considers that –
 - a. The cultural heritage significance of a registered place or a place nominated under this Division for inclusion in the Heritage Register would be substantially less if the

land or any part of the land which is or has been used in conjunction with the place were developed; or

- b. Land surrounding a registered place or nominated place is important to the protection or conservation of that place or contributes to the understanding of that place –

This recommendation is further supported by the Executive Director as follows (our emphasis):

The Former Lalor House, Richmond and the land on which it is sited has been used for residential purposes since its construction in 1888. Any development of the land on which the building is located or which immediately surround the building **would have the potential to negatively impact the cultural heritage significance of the registered place.** It is therefore recommended that the cadastral block – defined as all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 888367, be included as part of the registration of the place.

As stipulated in sec 27 (1) of the Heritage Act 1995, in making decisions on the registration of additional land, the Executive Director must consider whether the cultural heritage significance of a registered place would be substantially impacted if the associated land was developed. The National Trust submits that the subdivision and re-development to the rear of the former Lalor House has the potential to have a detrimental impact on the significance of the site as a whole. The Heritage Act allows owners to make applications to subdivide part or all of the registered place. Subdivision is not precluded by registration; nonetheless it establishes a proper process for assessment of the heritage impacts of the proposed subdivision.

In summary, the National Trust is broadly supportive of the intention to update Lalor House for twenty-first century family living, including some degree of subdivision, but retains some concerns regarding the cumulative impact of the changes proposed.

If you require any further information in relation to this submission, please contact the Conservation and Advocacy Department on 9656 9837.

Yours sincerely,



Anna Foley
Senior Manager, Advocacy & Conservation (Acting)