

19 December 2016

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## **Re: System Garden Development**

Dear Prof. Davis,

We write in response to an article published in *The Age* on 30 November 2016 titled “Digging in to save a botanical gem”, regarding plans to “expand the footprint of the neighbouring veterinary and agricultural science building next year”. The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (NTAV) has serious concerns regarding these proposed building works, which we understand would threaten approximately 10% of the System Garden.

The System Garden was established in 1856, only three years after the founding of the University of Melbourne in 1853 and ten years after the establishment of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne in 1846. University of Melbourne publication *Voice* (Vol. 6, No. 9, 2010), has stated that the System Garden is the “oldest and only remaining garden that operates within systematic guidelines in Australian or even the Southern Hemisphere” (page 2).

The Expert Tree Committee of the NTAV advises that the System Garden is comparable to the Botanical Garden (Orto Botanico), in Padua, Italy, the world’s first botanic garden (established in 1545) and recognised on the UNESCO World Heritage List. As such the NTAV considers the garden to be highly significant to the State of Victoria, and therefore worthy of protection in relation to any future works proposed in the vicinity of the site. In particular, we consider that the open space of the garden should not be diminished as a result of any adjacent works, and that no plants should be impacted by any building works on site.

The NTAV maintains a Heritage Register of Significant Places, including buildings, landscapes, gardens and trees. The National Trust has classified within the System Garden a Chilean Wine Palm (*Jubaea chilensis*) and an Osage Orange (*Maclura pomifera*), both over 120 years old. These two trees are considered to be of State significance, due to their horticultural, social and aesthetic qualities. Given the significance of these trees, the NTAV is of the view that room should be allocated and maintained within the garden for succession in the future.

We understand that the original circular extent of the garden has been significantly impacted over the last 100 years, including as a result of the Old Botany building extension. The University of

Melbourne's *Voice* publication (Vol 6, No. 9, 2010), states "Originally it was a large circular area encompassing around 7.5 hectares. Building development has left only a little less than 2 hectares" (page 2). In the view of the NTAV, the original form of the garden can be appreciated through the existing open space. It is considered that any loss of this space—especially a 10% loss—would be detrimental to the heritage value of the garden.

The NTAV is aware that other key bodies such as the Australian Garden History Society and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria have also voiced concerns regarding reported development plans, and emphasised the need for the garden's protection into the future. We also note that in August 2016 the System Garden was nominated to Heritage Victoria for inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register and that an assessment as part of this process will be made public in the New Year. We support the further documentation and assessment of the garden, and consider that this should inform any future decision-making in relation to development which may impact on the site.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the University of Melbourne's plans for this site in further detail. Should you have any queries regarding the above, I can be contacted on 9656 9802.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F Watson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Felicity Watson  
Advocacy Manager (Acting)  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)