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Hobsons Bay Heritage Referral

Date	7 July 2025
Property	Williamstown Surf Life Saving Club (WSLSC)
Application No.	PA250139
Proposal	Partial demolition, buildings and works associated with the re-development of the WSLSC
Heritage Status	Contributory to Esplanade Foreshore Heritage Precinct (HO5)
Planner	s 33

Background

A site inspection was held on 20th October 2022 with the architect and council officers following a previous online discussion. Redevelopment of the WSLSC is a complex project on a constrained site with issues like sea level rise and access.

Key preliminary heritage comments were:

- the need for a heritage consultant to be involved including to establish a hierarchy of significance for fabric, setting and viewlines,
- the retention of the whole of the original extent of the clubhouse is necessary,
- there are no internal controls however the hall with its memorabilia is important and it is good to retain it whereas the toilets and kitchen could be gutted and used for other purposes,
- the pool was of lower heritage significance as it was constructed after the significant period for the HO5 precinct,
- a high replacement of external fabric will be required because of the condition of the clubhouse but other changes should be limited and reversible, and
- new buildings should be of contemporary design and plans should address the impact of the development on key view lines and the historic Clubhouse and its setting.

A meeting was held with the architect and council officers on 25th July 2024 to discuss a revised scheme. Heritage advice provided on 5th August 2024 reiterated earlier advice and expressed concern that the proposal was being developed without the heritage consultants having undertaken analysis about significant fabric, views and setting. While the complexity of the site and brief are acknowledged, the revised scheme represents a substantial impact on the heritage values of HO5.

The revised scheme was not supported for the following reasons:

- The whole extent of the original main building, including the hall and hipped roof forms to the rear should be retained;



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- The stairs, lifts and vertical elements should be incorporated into the new development against the carpark rather than inserted into the section of the heritage building proposed for demolition;
- The impact of the height and placement of new fabric against the heritage building needs further review in terms of impacts on the silhouette and key view lines;
- Changes being made to the pool are acceptable, however the height and location of the new development needs further review in terms of impacts on the key view lines and setting of the heritage building.

Heritage significance

The Esplanade Foreshore Heritage Precinct (HO5) has the following statement of significance.

What is Significant?

The Esplanade Foreshore Heritage Precinct, which comprises the foreshore land adjacent to the Esplanade extending from Thompson Street to Bayview Street in Williamstown.

How is it Significant?

The Esplanade Foreshore Heritage Precinct is of local historic, social and aesthetic significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

Why is it Significant?

Historically and socially, the Esplanade foreshore is significant as an illustration of the importance of Williamstown as a place of recreation for over 140 years. It was the earliest public bathing beach developed in the western suburbs of Melbourne and the surviving pre-World War 2 buildings and landscaping illustrate the importance and of the 'Back Beach' whose popularity between the late 1890s and the 1930s rivalled St Kilda on the opposite side of the Bay.

Aesthetically, the Esplanade foreshore is significant for surviving buildings and landscape elements that still evoke the Edwardian and Interwar origins of this area and contribute to its historic character.

On this basis, the following buildings and elements contribute to the significance of the precinct:

The former Williamstown Dressing Pavilion, former Band Rotunda, shelter shed, Williamstown Life Saving and Swimming club and pool and the remnant Edwardian and Interwar landscaping including Cypresses, lava rock beds planted with Mirror Bush and bluestone rubble wall.

The 1935 clubhouse is one of four buildings identified as contributory to HO5 along with landscaping elements. These four buildings occur within the curved alignment of Williamstown Beach with three at the eastern end and the clubhouse at the western end. Contributory landscaping elements such as the bluestone wall, mirror bush plantings and open vistas from the Esplanade and the water unite the contributory elements.



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Fig 1: The WSLSC is at the western end of the sweep of sand of Williamstown Beach while the other contributory buildings, comprising the former Williamstown Dressing Pavilion, former Band Rotunda and shelter shed, are at the eastern end.

The chronology of the buildings on the WSLSC site is shown in the Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) with the clubhouse dating from 1934-35 (refer to fig 2). It is an example of an architect designed Interwar building which is substantially intact. The whole of the 1935 clubhouse remains clearly legible on the site. It was built to the design of architect J W Parry and the drawings are held by HBCC and reproduced in the HIS pp3-4.

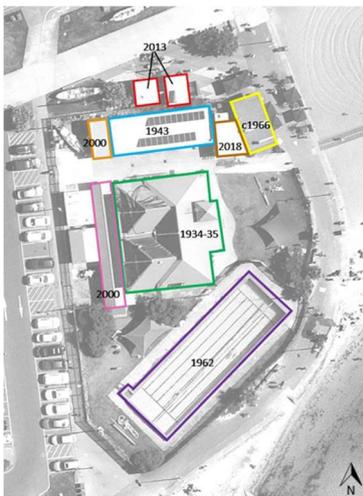
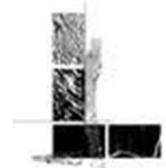


Fig 2: The clubhouse is identified in green as dating from 1934-35. Source: HIS, p9.



Fig 3: A late 1930s aerial photograph by Charles Daniel Pratt soon after construction of the WSLSC. (<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/165226>)

Assessment



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The partial demolition and change in form to the 1935 clubhouse is contrary to heritage policy and guidelines. It involves demolition of the western part of the clubhouse including removal of its two hipped roofs and interior service spaces. The whole of the 1935 building is of primary significance so this demolition involves the removal of fabric of primary significance.

It also distorts the historical record in that the clubhouse will appear as if it was always in this diminished form. The architectural design of the clubhouse will be altered and it will appear as a much smaller building instead of reflecting the historical importance of Williamstown Beach during the Interwar period in its scale and design.

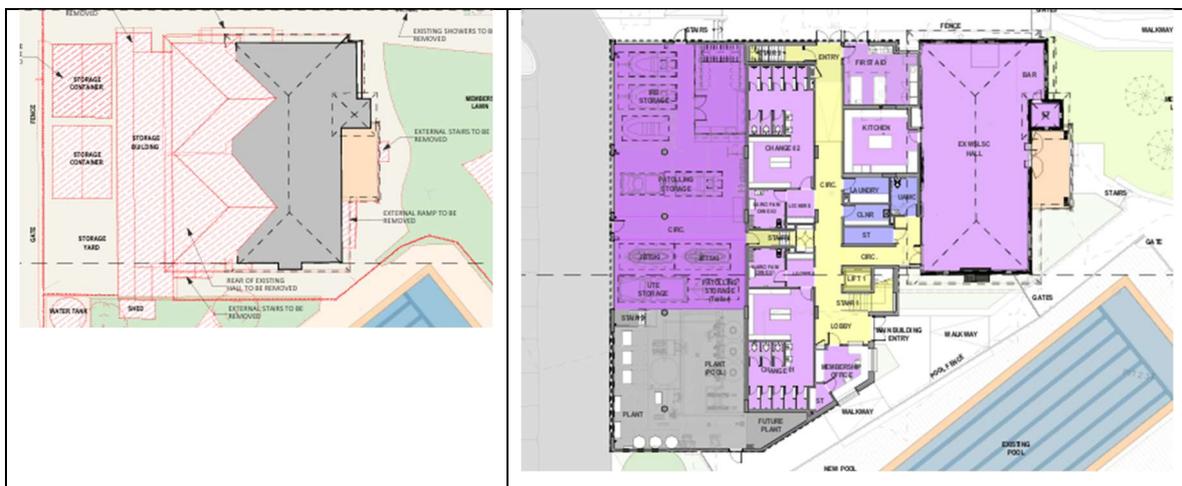


Fig 4: A comparison of the proposed existing roof form with the two western hips in red to be demolished (left) and the retained part with its smaller altered form on the right. The extent of demolished fabric of primary significance is very high.

The HIS states that Melbourne Water advised that the floor level for the clubhouse be raised by 400mm and the consultant team chose not to apply this to the hall to protect the existing space. The HIS argues that it would be applied to the service areas and this rise, in conjunction with the comparatively lower ceiling height in this area, makes these rooms unusable. The diagram below shows that a height of 2320 would be achieved and the HIS states that a height of 3000 is needed.

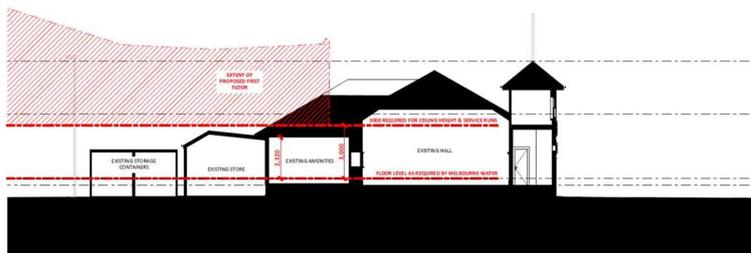
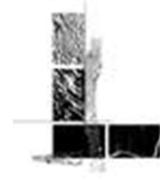


Figure 59. Existing section with the 'floor level as required by Melbourne Water' indicated by the dashed red line at bottom, and '3000 required for ceiling height & service runs' indicated by dashed red line at top of building (Source: A401, Rev 01, dated 14/02/2025, Canvas Projects, received via email 27 February 2025)

Fig 5: Diagram of floor levels and ceiling heights. Source: HIS p48

There are no heritage controls on the interiors of the clubhouse. The service spaces have been altered and are not considered special. It may be possible to gain extra clearance if the existing



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ceiling was removed and a higher ceiling installed, potentially partly raked like the hall. This would probably allow for the retention of the whole of the original external form, including the hipped roof forms to the west.

It is notable that the higher floor level suggested by Melbourne Water has not been applied to the new building. The new service areas which replace the demolished ones have the same finished floor level as the hall. It is unclear why a rise in floor level is necessary for the old service areas but not the new.

The height and mass of the proposed addition to the rear of the hall makes it visually dominant compared to the heritage building. It is a much larger floor area and extends well to the south of the clubhouse with a two storey form. The top of the roof of the clubhouse tower is just over 7 metres tall with the roof ridge and the hipped ends of the clubhouse well below this. Although the new structure is only two storeys, it has a parapet roof form at over 9.5 metres and sawtooth roofs at over 11 metres. The sawtooth roofs are clad in polycarbonate so will be lit up at night when lights are on inside.

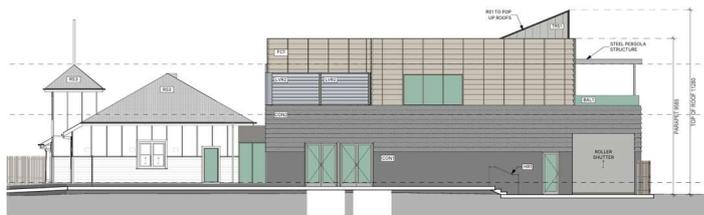


Fig 6: North elevation showing the proximity and scale of the addition to the retained heritage fabric.

The upper floor of the new addition is only separated from the heritage hall by a box gutter. The impact of the taller and wider mass will be substantial on the east elevation facing the beach. However an east elevation of the clubhouse with the addition has not been provided. Drawing TP 313 shows the addition without the heritage building and TP 311 is an elevation of the clubhouse with only part of the addition behind it. No sight line diagrams have been provided.

The sizes of rooms on the upper floor of the addition have not been provided on the plans. It is clear that there is a very large entertaining space at first floor level with operable doors between the Community Room 103, Training Room Extension 104 and Training Room 105, along with substantial balconies. There is another Training Room 109 with separate access and the plant on this level. It would appear to be possible to rework the first floor to reduce the footprint to enable the retention of the whole of the historic clubhouse.

There is a lack of analysis of impacts of the proposed redevelopment on key views within HO5 and its impact on the setting of the clubhouse. Views to the 1935 clubhouse would appear to be limited after redevelopment by the patrol building to the east of the pool which would appear to diminish views to the clubhouse from the sand, near the water and in the water. The scale of the new development impacts on the setting. Viewlines are not provided to demonstrate where the clubhouse will be impacted by the large addition, the patrol building or other development.



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More information is required about the proposed changes to the landscape, including the reduction in size of the members' lawn and introduction of new hard and soft landscaping. While the conservation works have not been assessed in detail, the general approach is supported. The materials palette is generally acceptable however there are some concerns with the metal reveal to the pop out window on the south elevation and the extent of glazing to the east elevation.

Conclusion

At this stage a full heritage assessment of the proposal has not been undertaken as it does not meet heritage policy or guidelines and is not supported in its current form. A further detailed review will be undertaken if required.

The extent of demolition and external alterations to the 1935 clubhouse, including the removal of a substantial amount of fabric of primary significance is a major heritage concern. It and will distort understanding of the historical form and scale of the clubhouse.

The proposed addition is too visually dominant in scale and massing in relation to the historic clubhouse and heritage precinct HO5.

There is a lack of analysis of the impact of the proposal on both the setting of the clubhouse and key viewlines within HO5, including the impact of the patrol building in the southeast corner of the site.

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