NORTHBOURNE PLAZA PROJECT
STATEMENT OF HERITAGE EFFECTS

Photo 1: View past Sydney Building across Northbourne Ave to Melbourne Building, 1948
Source: NAA A1200 L7228

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FOR TRANSPORT CANBERRA LIGHT RAIL

Submission for NCA Works Approval
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Heritage Effects (SHE) has been written by David Hobbes of Philip Leeson Architects as part of a development application for Northbourne Plaza – a public space adjacent to the Stage 1 terminus of the Canberra Light Rail. It should be read in conjunction with the design drawings prepared by Canberra Metro titled Light Rail Works Approval 13 Application.

2.0 STATUTORY JURISDICTION

We note that Northbourne Ave is designated land and is therefore within the jurisdiction of the National Capital Authority (NCA). The Northbourne Plaza development will be subject to NCA Works Approval assessment and any other approvals that may be required. The NCA is obliged to comply with the provisions of the EPBC Act 1999 for development on or adjacent to heritage listed places within its jurisdiction, i.e. items on the Commonwealth Heritage List (CHL).

In our opinion because the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are listed on the ACT Heritage Register and not on the CHL assessment of heritage impact should be in accordance with the provisions of the ACT Heritage Act 2004 and take the form of a Statement of Heritage Effects (SHE). It is customary for the NCA to refer the application to the ACT Heritage Council for its comment.

3.0 HERITAGE STATUS

Northbourne Plaza is that section of Northbourne Avenue between the Sydney and Melbourne buildings – respectively Blocks 1-7, 9-31 Section 48 and Blocks 4-20 & 31, Section 1 City. The buildings are listed on the ACT Heritage Register – Item 20032. The listing has statutory implications for conservation, management and development of the place. Non - statutory listings include the Australian Institute of Architects Register of Significant Twentieth Century Buildings, and the National Trust (ACT Chapter) list of classified places.

Development of and adjacent to the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings is guided by a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) prepared by Duncan Marshall, Geoff Butler, Joy McCann and Brendan O'Keefe and endorsed by the ACT Heritage Council in 2011. This is the guiding document for heritage management of the place.

Relevant excerpts from the CMP are included below:

Heritage Significance
The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings have a range of heritage values related to their architectural style, large scale as commercial buildings from the period, unique form of development, and historical associations.

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are significant as good examples in Canberra of the Inter-War Mediterranean style, and are of added interest as large-scale examples in this style. This style was one the distinctive designs used in the early decades of the development of Canberra as the national capital, and use of the style declined after the 1930s.

The buildings are rare as:

- *large-scale commercial buildings dating from the early decades in the development of the national capital; and*
- *as large-scale examples of Inter-War Mediterranean style buildings.*

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are also unique in Canberra in the form of development – as the block by block development of the buildings was undertaken by individual leaseholders working to an overall design. The different approach in this case partly reflects the special circumstances of Canberra as a city built for and under the close control of government.

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are of historic value as commercial buildings associated with the early development of Canberra as the national capital. While there were other substantial developments in Canberra from the same period, the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings were the major development in Canberra City, which was intended at the time as the commercial centre for the new city.

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings have played and continue to play an important role in defining Canberra City. They established the early character and scale of the city's retail and business area. From the 1920s until at least the late 1950s the buildings were the major development in Canberra City and provided its focus. While they continue as a landmark in Canberra City, other development since 1960 has diffused the focus of commercial activity and changed the character and scale of Canberra City. Accordingly, the role of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings has been diminished.

The buildings have a strong and special association with the architect Sir John Sulman. Sulman is an important historical figure in Australia, and part of this relates to his role with the Federal Capital Advisory Committee in the early development of Canberra in the 1920s. Sulman prepared the concept design for the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings, and they are one of only two places in Canberra that perhaps best present substantial and tangible evidence of his influence in Canberra.

In addition, it seems possible the buildings have social value and aesthetic qualities valued by the community. However, further research is needed to substantiate such values.

Significant Attributes

- *Sydney and Melbourne Buildings overall*
- *The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings including features which display the Inter-War Mediterranean style*
- *The large-scale and commercial nature of the buildings*
- *Evidence of the commercial character of the buildings (eg. shopfronts)*
- *The character and scale of the buildings*
- *Evidence of the individual blocks*
- *The landmark qualities of the buildings*

Issues Relating To The Broader Urban Context

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings cannot be considered as isolated buildings, unrelated to each other or the surrounding urban context. There is a strong and important relationship between the buildings, with Northbourne Avenue extending up towards City Hill, and with the surrounding streets.

The visibility of the buildings in the streetscape is one dimension of this relationship, moderated in those places where mature street trees are present, and the

surrounding pavement widths are another factor. The moderated scale of building development facing the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings is also an important factor.

Future changes in the surroundings which need careful consideration and control include:

- *anything which impacts on the visibility of the buildings in the streetscape, including*
- *new tree plantings, and bus and truck parking;*
- *changes to Northbourne Avenue including its median strip; and*
- *the scale and character of new buildings facing the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings,*

Conservation Policy 14: Conservation of the Buildings and Courtyards

In general terms, the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings will be conserved.

Fabric related to the Inter-War Mediterranean style will be conserved. Key and other features of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings which express the style include:

• light-coloured smooth walling;
• medium pitch roof of Roman pattern tiles;
• exposed rafter ends;
• round arches;
• arcaded loggia (the colonnades);
• formal entrance treatments; and
• fanlights.

Additional qualities or features to be conserved include:
• other classical references displayed by the buildings including: the rhythmical arcade design with pavilions featuring pedimented parapets and central arches punctuating the arcades; and cast roundels, shields and consoles on the exterior walls above the colonnades;

• the evidence of original blocks;
• original shopfronts, or surviving original shopfront elements;
• original interiors, or surviving original interior elements;
• open verandahs, where these exist;
• the London Plane trees in the courtyards; and
• the prominent setting and landmark qualities of the buildings, as well as their planned relationship to each other, Northbourne Avenue and City Hill.

Implementation Strategies

14.1 *No changes will be made to original shopfronts, or surviving original shopfront elements.*

Where shopfronts are not original, owners are encouraged to reconstruct shopfronts to match the original shopfronts, or at least to achieve the general style of original shopfronts.

New or replacement modern-style shopfronts will not be installed.

14.3 The ACT Government will develop a policy document to guide future external signage. The aim will be to provide a greater degree of coordination of signage which is more sympathetic to the historical buildings. The document will address issues such as the location, mounting, size and form of signs, such as in the colonnades. The policy document will take account of the existing ACT Heritage Council policy on signage for the buildings, and be approved by the Council.

14.6 Banners or flags will not be attached to the buildings.

14.7 The Colonnade Lighting Guidelines may be implemented in any change to the colonnade or façade lighting.

However, the preferred option is to reconstruct the original colonnade and façade lighting if possible.

No new lighting or surface mounted conduits or services will be installed in the colonnades or on the street facades of the buildings, except for lighting which reconstructs or is at least sympathetic to the original lighting.

14.8 Non-original and redundant plant, services and conduits will be removed and any damage to surfaces or finishes made good. This applies to the courtyards as well as the rest of the buildings.

14.12 The long-term option for the colonnade paving should be to restore the original concrete paving or, if this is damaged beyond repair or otherwise unable to be restored, then a new sympathetic finish should be installed.

The treatment of the edge paver should be considered in this context.

Commentary: It is believed the original paving survives under the current tiling and bitumen. However, it is possible the paving has been damaged to achieve good adhesion for the tiling. Paving with a grey tile close to a concrete finish may be the best option in such circumstances. The original edge pavers were concrete to match the colonnade paving. The current pavers are not original and not a match for the originals.

14.13 The step between the colonnade and the street pavement will be maintained where this survives.

14.14 Planter boxes and other permanent obstructions in the colonnades should not be permitted.

Policy 18 Setting

An appropriate setting for the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings will be maintained which:

- *protects the heritage values of the buildings;*
- *respects the planned relationship between the buildings, especially through the treatment of the Northbourne Avenue median;*
- *protects the visibility of the buildings, recognising the existing mature trees hide the buildings somewhat, and including consideration of truck and bus parking adjacent to the buildings; and*
- *respects the buildings through the scale and character of buildings on surrounding blocks.*

Commentary:

The City Centre Development Code within the Territory Plan includes a specific provision regarding development adjacent to the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings intended to protect the heritage values of the buildings.

'Development in areas adjacent to Section 1 and Section 48 is compatible with the built form and historic character of the Sydney and Melbourne buildings.' (Territory Plan, 4.2 City Centre Development Code, p. 14)

While this general guidance is a good beginning, more detailed guidance about scale, character, materials and colours could be developed with the involvement of the ACT Heritage Council.

With regard to the Northbourne Avenue median, a detailed study of the history of treatments, plantings and particular values has not been undertaken. None the less, it is apparent that tree planting was an early feature, that otherwise the median remained reasonably open allowing views between the buildings, and that the median was not interrupted by structures. Accordingly, any future treatment of the median should respect these qualities – tree planting, the median remaining reasonably open, retaining the possibility of views between the buildings, and no structures.

Implementation Strategies

18.1 *Sympathetic semi-permanent dividing screens for food and beverage outlet seating on the street verge may be installed. However, this should generally not be higher than standard table height. Full height dividers and roof structures will not be permitted.*

4.0 DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The design has been developed over a period of time in consultation with David Hobbes of Philip Leeson Architects. The process has sought to achieve an optimum design outcome which satisfies functional and aesthetic requirements for Northbourne Plaza whilst minimising any detrimental impact on the heritage significance of the Melbourne and Sydney Buildings.

Consultation has also taken place with representatives from ACT Heritage.

5.0 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The development proposal for Northbourne Plaza includes changes to the verges, road carriageway and median on Northbourne Ave between the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings bounded by London Circuit and Alinga Street.

Development will be undertaken in two stages. In Stage One the light rail will terminate at a stop in the block to the north of Northbourne Plaza. The Plaza median will be simply and neatly landscaped. In Stage Two the light rail will be extended to the south through the Plaza and the final landscaping plan will be fully implemented.

The major elements of the proposal are listed below:

Northbourne Ave Verges

- widen the verges between the existing outside edge of the cycle lane and the Sydney and Melbourne Building facades
- raise the level of the verge to the existing colonnade level, eliminating the stepdown at the building perimeters where it remains
- incorporate the cycleway into the raised verge
- pave the raised verges with Bluestone slabs with black granite details, transitioning to existing paving levels at Alinga Street and London Circuit
- delineate the line of the original perimeter step
- delineate between the pedestrian verge and the cycleway
- introduce new tree plantings along the verges
- provide new verge lighting, seating and low planting

Northbourne Ave Median (Stage 1)

- remove existing hard and soft landscaping to achieve a clear and level surface across the space with a 2% fall to the backs of the existing kerbs
- re-locate underground services as required
- lay decomposed granite in the zone of the future light rail tracks
- lay irrigated turf to the remainder of the area up to the kerb lines
- provide new traffic lighting poles close to the kerb line on each carriageway

6.0 ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACT

This section assesses the potential impact of the various elements of the proposal on the heritage significance of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings.

6.1 Widen the verges between the existing outside edge of the cycle lane and the building facades

Proposal
It is proposed to widen the verges by eliminating the existing parking and bus lane and reverting to close to the original Northbourne Ave kerb line.

Background
The CMP does not address this issue directly.

Historic photos from the 1920s to the 1950s show broad verges with a combination of concrete pathways, areas of grass and shrubs. The verges on London Circuit and Northbourne Ave have been narrowed over time to provide for additional traffic lanes and bus parking. The wider verges remain on East and West rows and Alinga Street. The verge shrub plantings were removed before they reached maturity.

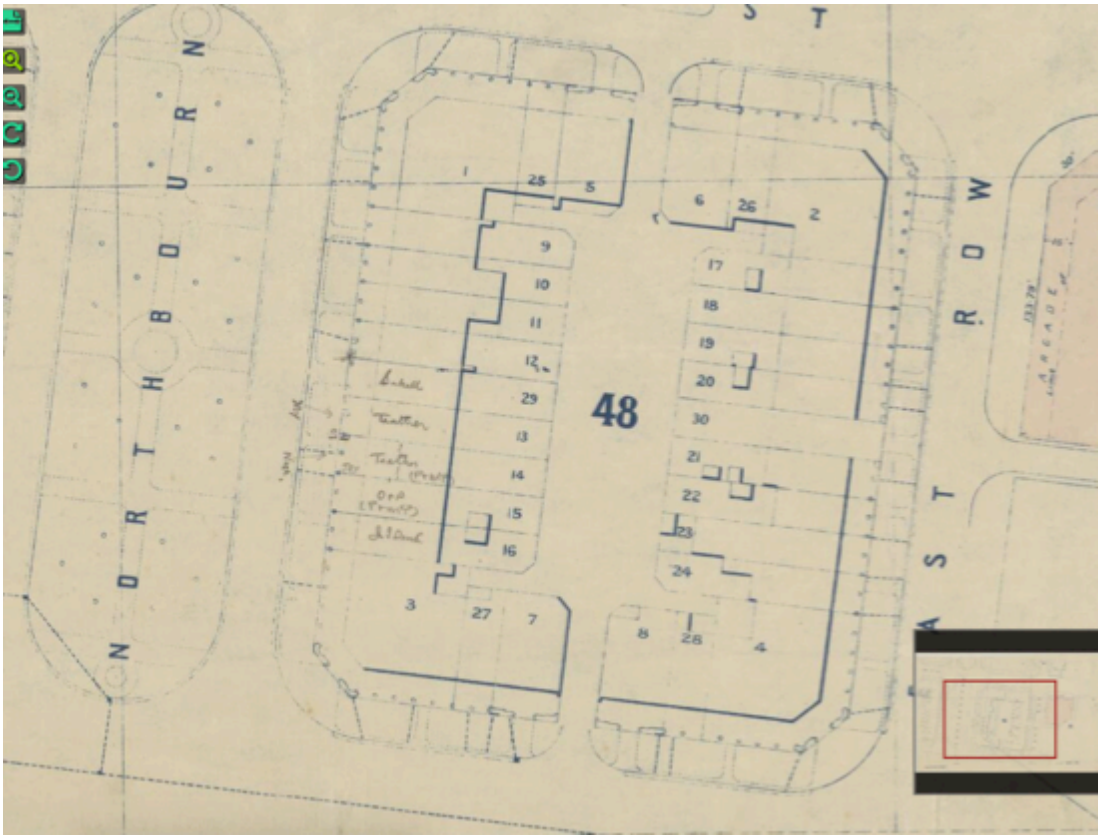

Figure 1: Plan of Sydney Building, land subdivision and adjacent spaces.
Commonwealth Dept. of the Interior 1928
Source: NLA Map G8984 C3G46: **Note the arrangement of verges and pathways**

Photo 2: Sydney and Melbourne Buildings 1938
Source: State Library of Victoria H2002 199/755: **Note verge and median treatments**

Photo 3: Sydney Building viewed from Melbourne Building c. 1938.
Source: NLA Pic FH/502: **Note verge treatments**

Photo 4: Sydney Building from Northbourne Ave median 1951
Source: ACT Heritage Library, Dept of Capital Territory Collection, 009165
Note verge treatments

Photo 5: Aerial View 1955
Source NLA VN4465 44: **Note verge and median treatments**

Impact
The proposal to widen the verges on Northbourne Ave will return the verges close to the original alignments. The elimination of bus and truck parking will improve views of the building facades. In our opinion this will have a positive impact on heritage significance.

6.2 Raise verge level

Proposal
It is proposed to raise the level of the verge so that it is flush with the colonnade level. This will eliminate the existing perimeter step at the edge of the buildings.

Background
Conservation Policy 14 deals with conservation of the building façade. It does not mention the step down explicitly.

Conservation Strategy 14.13 states that the step be maintained where it survives, although no rationale for this requirement is given.

The perimeter step remains in front of the Melbourne Building on West Row, London Circuit and Northbourne Ave and in front of the Sydney Building on Northbourne Avenue and London Circuit. The verges have been raised on Alinga Street and East Row resulting in the loss of the step along these facades.

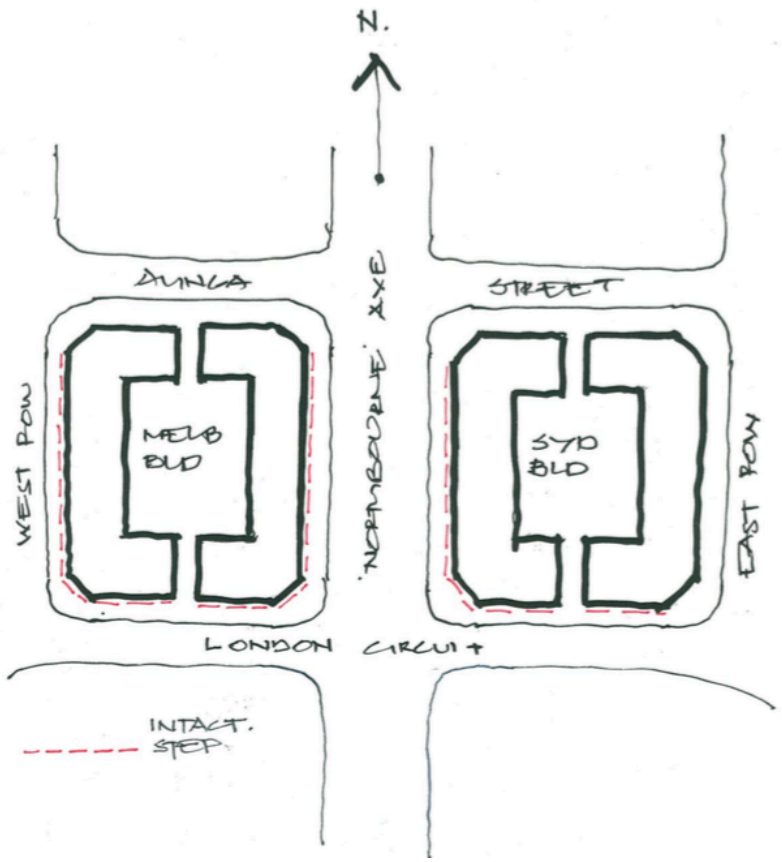

Figure 2: Diagram showing extent of remaining perimeter step
Source: PLA 2017

Historic photos show that the original step edge was part of the colonnade paving. This consisted of smooth trowelled concrete with tooled joints which reflected the alignment of architectural features. The step terminated the outer band of this paving pattern and the edge was simply slightly rounded poured concrete.

We believe a small section of the original step edge remains on the Sydney Building at the corner of East Row and London Circuit (Photo 7)

The original concrete paving has been topped over the years with either bitumen or various terra cotta or quarry tiling, in each case raising the paving level and requiring a consequent raising of the step edge. This has been done largely with precast concrete treads of various colours, textures and edge profiles.

Where the step has been removed the edge has been delineated either by precast concrete pavers or broomed concrete set flush with the adjacent paving in the colonnade and the verge.

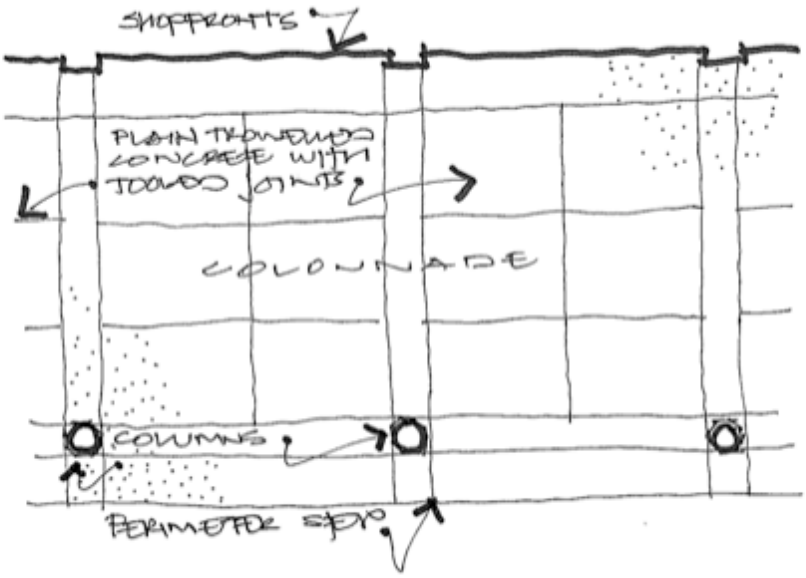

Figure 3: Interpretation of original paving pattern
Source: PLA 2017

Photo 6: Staff of Canberra City Post Office, 1935
Source: NAA C4076:HN850: **Note step behind the subjects' legs**

Photo 7: Surviving original step edge at the same location as in Photo 6 above.
Source: PLA 2017

Photo 8: Jolimont Building viewed from Melbourne Building arcade over Alinga St, June 1929.
Source: NAA A3560 15387: **Note paving pattern**

Photo 9: Roughly the same location as Photo 8 above.
Source: PLA 2017: **Note introduction of tiling and precast concrete paver step tread**

Photo 10: View to Sydney Building from Melbourne Building, January 1929
Source: NAA a3560 4944: **Note colonnade paving, median treatment and wall lights on opposite portal**

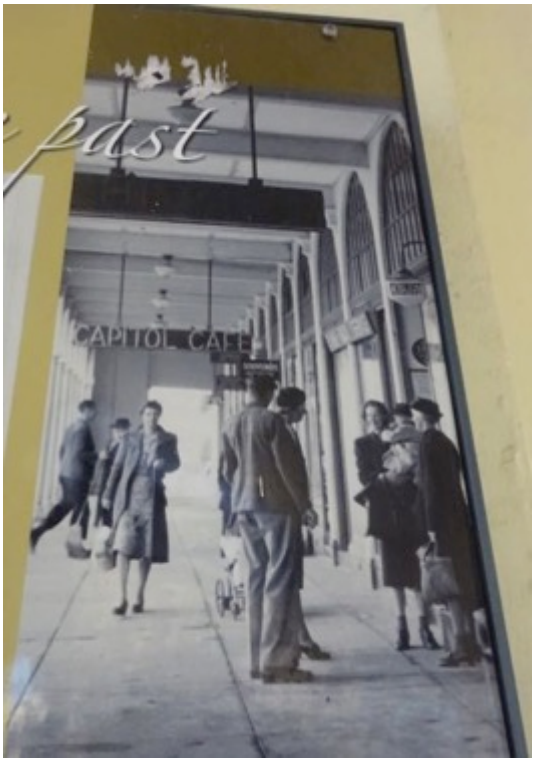

Photo 11: Sydney Building Arcade on East Row, c.1942
Source: NLA VN 438 7467
Note paving pattern and light fittings

Photo12: Original paving visible under bitumen, East Row
Source: PLA 2017: **Note edge strip has been irretrievably damaged**

Photo 13: Original paving and tooled joint visible under tiling, Alinga St
Source: PLA 201 : **Note tiles are glued directly onto concrete in this instance**

Photo 14: Original paving visible under quarry tiles, Alinga St
Source: PLA 2017: **Note thicker cementitious tile bed in this instance**

Photo: Raised verge Alinga St
Source: PLA 2017-07-05: **Note flush broomed concrete strip at former perimeter step location**

Photo 15: Perimeter step Northbourne Ave
Source: PLA 2017: **Note precast concrete step tread**

Impact
In our opinion the step serves the purpose of defining the edge of the buildings and forms a shallow podium on which the buildings sit. This element contributes to the prominent setting and landmark qualities of the buildings. Therefore the loss of the step can be considered to have a detrimental impact on an intrinsic feature.

This issue has been carefully considered during the design development process. The consequences of retaining the step include:

- keeping the step divides the space and limits opportunities for activation across a broad, single level colonnade/verge

- retaining the step is likely to require the relocation of the existing drainage closer to the building so as to achieve DDA and ACT Design Standards for Urban Infrastructure compliance. The drainage location would result in a trench drain through the middle of the verge that would impact on both the walking surface and outdoor dining opportunities as well as conflict with preferred tree planting locations. Drainage infrastructure relocation impacts on the ability to provide tree planting given clearance requirements from both building facade and road traffic.

- raising the verge to the level of the colonnade contributes to future proofing: chiefly locating both drainage and trees in the long term preferred positions, thereby facilitating the future verge expansion

- to comply with accessibility requirements, at the very least a number of step ramps would be required and this has the potential to have more of a negative visual impact than removing the step entirely

To mitigate the heritage impact resulting from the loss of the step an option is proposed to introduce a high quality stone paving strip which delineates its original location. This is discussed under Heading 6.5 below.

6.3 Incorporate the cycleway into the raised verge

Proposal
It is proposed to incorporate the cycleway into the raised portion of the verge adjacent to the roadway kerb. The cycleway will 1700mm wide, paved in a lighter Bluestone than the main verge and delineated by a bond of granite setts.

Impact
We believe that this subtle delineation at the outer edge of the verge will not have a detrimental impact on the heritage significance of the buildings.

6.4 Provide Bluestone paving slabs to new verge,

Proposal
It is proposed to replace the existing concrete pavement on the Northbourne Ave verges with new Bluestone slabs to match the existing finish in West Row and Alinga St. The new paving will transition to existing paving levels at Alinga Street and London Circuit. The body of Bluestone paving will be broken up by lines of black granite extending perpendicularly from every second column location. This is intended to reflect the column alignments and also reference the concrete verge crossings which were arranged at regular intervals in the original 1920s verge design (refer to Fig.1 and Photos 3 & 5).

Background
The 2011 CMP anticipated the following project:

- *replacement of the existing paving on Alinga Street adjacent to the Sydney Building, and on West Row adjacent to the Melbourne Building, with Bluestone – similar to other sections of paving adjacent to the buildings which has previously been replaced;*

- *other minor changes associated with the pavement works (eg. pram crossings, tree pavement surrounds, new kerbing and rainwater sumps, and installation of tactile indicators);*

This work was subsequently undertaken.

Impact
In our opinion this provides a high quality surface which is consistent across the immediate area. It will not have a detrimental impact on the heritage significance of the Buildings and is consistent with the expectations set out in the CMP. The lines of black granite paving extending from the building serves to break up the main field of Bluestone, reflects the column alignments and references the original verge paths.

6.5 Delineate the original perimeter stepdown

Proposal
An option is proposed to define the location of the original stepdown with a continuous 400mm wide strip of black granite slabs.

Background
The Northbourne Plaza Project boundary is the face of the perimeter step. Works to the Colonnade and building facades are not part of the project. It is anticipated that future works to the Colonnade will include replacement of the paving.

The CMP recommends restoration of the original concrete paving, however it notes, and we agree, that its damaged condition is not likely to allow this. Furthermore recent adjacent paving has related to the levels of the various colonnade surface toppings. Restoration of the original surface would require lowering of these adjacent levels. The CMP suggests that a light grey tile be used which approximates the colour of the original plain concrete.

During the design development process reconstruction of the outer strip of original plain concrete paving was considered. (Refer to Fig. 3 above). This was discounted for the following reasons:

- it extends considerably beyond the project boundary
- it pre-supposes the future Colonnade replacement material
- setting a level for new trowelled concrete is not practical without replacing the entire colonnade surface in a single operation
- it introduces a further material which has the potential to be visually jarring and detract from the surviving original building fabric and features
- plain concrete is considered too lacking in character and quality for such a high profile urban landscaped space

Impact
The proposal is considered to have a minor impact on heritage significance. While not reconstructing the original fabric it provides a distinctive and high quality material which identifies the original step edge.

6.6 New tree plantings along the verges

Proposal
It is proposed to plant six trees at intervals along the Northbourne Ave facades of both buildings – three on each side of the centre portals. The trees will be London Plane, with a smooth straight trunk, pleached to ensure a regular and contained canopy which will be kept above the line of the colonnade arches. The trees will be planted in line with the façade columns. The trees will be planted in a vaulting system, i.e. growth medium within a dedicated void which minimises the risk of root damage to adjacent structures.

Considerations
Historic photos show broad verges of equal width on all sides of the buildings with a combination of plain concrete pathways, sections of grass and small shrubs.

The Sydney and Melbourne Building verges to London Circuit and Northbourne Ave have been narrowed to accommodate additional vehicle lanes and parking. These verges have continuous concrete paving and no plantings.

Verges to West Rows and Alinga St have Bluestone paving and four mature London Plane trees. The verge to East Row has cobblestone paving and four less mature London Plane trees – likely planted when the current bus interchange was constructed.

We note that the tree plantings in Alinga St and London Circuit follow a pattern whereby there is a tree on either side of the central laneway and a tree towards each end of the façade. This leaves sufficient space in between for the building façade to be viewed.

During the design development process the number of trees was reduced from eight to six with the aim of striking a balance between maintaining good views of the building facades and providing a high quality landscaped space with good summer shading.

Impact
In our opinion this planting proposal will not have a detrimental impact on heritage significance. The proposal continues the species and pattern of tree plantings which have been established in adjacent street verges over the last 30 or 40 years. The tree form and spacing will allow good views of the building facades.

6.6 New planting beds and seating along the verges

Proposal
It is proposed to construct a series of planting beds at regular intervals along the verges in association with the tree locations. The beds will be flush with the verge surface and will contain a groupings of three indigenous ground covers.

At each end, close to the corners of Alinga St. and London Circuit low timber slatted benches will be installed.

Background
During the design development process the extent of planting beds was reduced, the planters were changed from slightly raised to flush and the variety of plant species was reduced with the aim of mitigating the potential for the design to compete visually with the building facades.

Impact
These landscape elements are consistent with the overall landscape theme for the light rail corridor. In our opinion they will not have a detrimental impact on heritage significance. Their low height will preserve views of the building facades. The seating areas will provide opportunities for rest and contemplation of the buildings.

6.7 New verge lighting

Proposal
It is proposed to erect new lamp posts on the verge between the cycleway and the planting zone to provide illumination for cyclists and pedestrians. The fitting will be Sylvania Lighting *Amarante* which is a slim column, c. 3m high in bronze finish with an illuminated section at the top.

Background
The CMP includes a Lighting Strategy which recommends restoration / reconstruction of the original lighting regime. This includes "Schoolhouse" type fittings suspended via

collars from every second colonnade beam and external wall fittings fixed via a collar either on the smooth walls flanking the entry portals or on the roundels on the façade. The current arrangement of the wall fittings is somewhat ad hoc. They do not appear on every portal and the number of roundel fittings varies from one façade to another.

Historic photos do not show any lampposts on the verges.

During the deign development phase the need for verge lighting was discussed and it was agreed that any fitting should not detract visually from the building facades or interfere with the patterns of light created by the original colonnade and façade lighting plan (assuming this will be reconstructed in the future). It was also agreed that the historic pattern of more powerful traffic lighting would remain in the median only.

Impact
The proposed lighting poles are not considered to have an impact on heritage significance. They are a simple, elegant design which does not detract from the character of buildings and are at sufficient distance from the buildings that their lighting pattern will not interfere with the original lighting concepts. At the same time they will provide adequate illumination for pedestrian and cyclist safety as well as contribute to a high quality landscaped space which will enhance, not detract from the buildings.

6.8 Work to the Median

Proposal
For Stage 1 it is proposed to remove existing hard and soft landscaping and lower the ground to the original level to achieve a clear, even surface across the space with a 2% fall to the backs of the existing concrete kerbs. Underground services will be relocated as required in anticipation of Stage 2.

The central zone which will accommodate the Stage 2 light rail tracks will be covered in decomposed granite, The remainder of the area will be covered in irrigated grass up to the kerb lines.

New Smartpole LED traffic lighting will be installed close to kerb line and will replace the existing poles.

The final landscape proposal for Stage 2 which incorporates the continuation of the light rail tracks will be the subject of a subsequent SHE.

Background
As built in the 1920s the median landscaping had a simple symmetrical character. Paving comprised plain concrete pathways around the perimeter, a centre path running north/south and four equally spaced pathways running east west. The pathways met at circular nodes at the north and south ends and in the centre (refer to Figure 1). The remaining ground surface was grassed with fairly formal tree plantings in each section comprising a mix of Conifers (evergreen) and European trees (deciduous). When mature and in leaf the tree canopies formed a reasonably dense screen which obscured views of the buildings although the east/west pathways formed view corridors. No elements of this scheme survive.

Photo 16: Melbourne & Sydney Buildings, 1949
Source: NLA Pic P838/66: **Note median plantings reaching maturity**

Photo 17: Looking past Sydney Building to the Melbourne Building, 1952
Source: NAA A1200 L15015: **Note median plantings of Conifers and deciduous trees**

Nothing of the original median landscaping remains. The space has been raised c.500mm above the road level with concrete retaining walls along the roadways and a sunken paved central section with poured concrete planters. A broad paved pathway runs down the north / south axis. There are no east/west pathways. There are grass strips to the east and west sides each with a row of deciduous trees which appear to be c. 30 years old.

Photo 18: View north down median showing raised and sunken parts
Source: PLA 2017

Impact

This proposal is considered to have no detrimental impact on the heritage significance of the Sydney and Melbourne buildings. Indeed it signals the start of a staged process which is likely to have a positive impact on heritage significance by reverting to the original median level which will restore the original relationship of the median as a transition and linking space between the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings. Stage 1 will have simple, unobtrusive finishes. Stage 2 will provide the opportunity to introduce tree and shrub plantings which reference earlier planting schemes and interpret the series of east / west linking pathways which provide a visual connection between the buildings. The proposed traffic lighting continues the established pattern of this type of lighting in the median and introduces a well designed, elegant fitting which is consistent with the desired high quality landscaped character of the light rail corridor.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The design development process has carefully considered the potential impacts on the significant features and fabric of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings and seeks to achieve an outcome which balances respect for heritage and the achievement of a high quality and functional urban landscape design which is consistent with the design parameters established for the Canberra Light Rail Project as a whole.

In our opinion the design proposal for Northbourne Plaza is largely consistent with the Conservation Policies for the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings.

The raising of the verges and consequent loss of the perimeter step will have a moderately detrimental impact on a significant design feature. However we believe this is mitigated to some extent by the quality of the design and finishes, the fact that the step will be referenced in the design and in the opportunities it provides for activation of the colonnade / verge and in providing accessible spaces.

A positive impact on heritage significance will result from;

- the lowering of the median to its original level, giving the opportunity to reference an earlier landscaped character of grass, trees and shrubs and to interpret original pathways and view lines which reinforce the relationship of the buildings across Northbourne Ave.

- the restoration of the original verge widths allowing a more generous landscaped perimeter to the buildings and amelioration of the visual and acoustic impact of road traffic

- the integration and activation of the verge, colonnade and cycleway

- the provision of a high quality urban landscape design which will vastly improve people's experience of the buildings whether they be passing by or stopping to socialise