



Heritage Impact Statement

Revitalisation Project at
St. Michael's Uniting Church VHR H0004
122-136 Collins Street, Melbourne

Author Trethowan Architecture

Date 19 December 2024



Trethowan Architecture acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our studio and projects are located. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Place Details

This Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) is for St. Michael's Uniting Church VHR H0004 (the heritage place).

1.1.1 Address & location description:

The heritage place is located 122-136 Collins Street, Melbourne.

This proposal affects part of the heritage place (referred to as the project area) comprising the St. Michael's Walk entrance (including east lobby), toilet amenities and choir vestry, auditorium, south entry areas, east and west cloisters, indicated in red at Figure 2.



Figure 1 Aerial image with subject site indicated in red. Source: Nearmap, 2024.

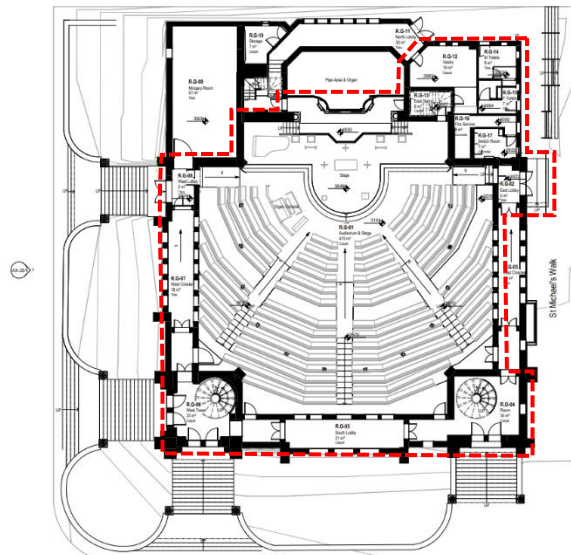


Figure 2 Existing Ground Floor Plan of the heritage place with project area indicated in red. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

1.1.2 Traditional Owners Information

The heritage place is located on the traditional land of the Wurundjeri People. Under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, the Registered Aboriginal Party for this land is the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

The heritage place is not located within an area of cultural heritage sensitivity.



1.2 Project Details

This HIS forms part of an application for partial demolition, and external and internal alterations to the heritage place.

This proposal, known as the Revitalisation Project, has been developed out of a need to improve access and amenity at the heritage place, rectifying accessibility issues and upgrading facilities to support the place's ongoing use as the St. Michael's Uniting Church.

Whilst the heritage place maintains its original use as a place of worship, the needs of the congregation have changed over time. Contemporary services involve an increased level of participation in ways not envisioned in the original planning. Additionally, non-compliance and health and safety issues limit congregational and other uses of the place and ultimately pose an impediment to the future use of the heritage place. Specifically, several existing conditions limit access both into and within the heritage place and prevent the church from delivering on its mission to provide an accessible and inclusive venue for community use.

This project proposes several external and internal alterations to upgrade accessibility and amenity at the heritage place whilst respecting the place's identified cultural heritage significance. Specifically, this proposal comprises of upgrade works to the St. Michael's Walk entrance, toilet amenities, auditorium and south entry. In April 2024, subfloor investigations were undertaken under the General Permit Exemptions¹ to inform the structural and design approach to the proposed works.

1.2.1 Pre-application meeting

An initial site visit was held with Heritage Victoria on 23 April 2024. The purpose of this meeting was to run through the existing issues and potential solutions to understand Heritage Victoria's level of comfort with the works and next steps. The following provides a summary of the key points raised:

- **St. Michael's Walk Entrance**

Consider how the new floor will intersect with the bluestone base of the wall. A freestanding canopy (not attached to the existing) that is architecturally subservient to the building would be preferred.

It is recommended to investigate under the carpet at the steps/ramp from the inner door down to the auditorium to understand how the church was originally entered and how this has changed. Preference should be given to retaining the steps/ramp in situ and building over the top to leave a record of change.

Inner door to the west side should not be altered if possible.

- **Auditorium**

Any change should be reversible, whilst obscuring original fabric is not encouraged it is a better outcome than modifying the original fabric. The new floor should butt against the panelling at the altar with something to infill the gap so as not to modify the original fabric.

The way that the service operates means that congregants need to access the stage. This should be discussed in the HIS as a justification for the changes.

Major concerns raised about raising the auditorium floor level. Noting that this is largely intact and is a key element of the original design and the significance of the place.

Review options as to how inclusion can be achieved without losing the understanding of the auditorium. A sense of the stage and pulpit being up from the main floor should be retained.

No concerns raised with the options of underfloor heating or infrared chandelier style heating.

¹ *General Permit Exemptions*, prepared by Heritage Victoria in August 2024.

- **Next Steps**

Generally, preference should be given to retaining original fabric in situ.

Develop design options for the auditorium floor and conduct an options analysis to understand the level of impact each option presents. Prepare a pre-application meeting to discuss potential design options with Heritage Victoria.

Following the initial site visit, an online pre-application meeting (P39417) was held with Heritage Victoria on 27 May 2024. The meeting was attended by representatives of the St. Michael's Uniting Church (SMUC), Trethowan Architecture and Heritage Victoria. A summary of the project background, current issues, use of the space, the proposed scheme, and option considered were discussed. The following summarises key points from the discussion:

- Detail of the junction between the proposed new floor and existing ramp should be considered.
- Details of the timber joinery at the stage should be considered and the joinery should not be modified further.
- There is a level of comfort with option 1A. It is symmetrical, reversible, and retains the auditorium space. The details will be critical - the craftsmanship of how it is achieved.
- The application will need to test and demonstrate each of the options and explain why they are not feasible and why the proposed is the only / best option. This can be set out in the reasonable use argument - these are the types of changes that are required for us to continue at the church.
- The storage of removable seats should be expanded upon - where to put them and if any other spaces need to be adapted.
- Loss of auditorium raking to the lower part could be mitigated by distinguishing the change through different colour or material finish, including at the stage. Consider how the change is treated and make it legible.
- Furniture and materials for seats etc, could be explored in relation to the acoustics of the space.

The proposed design responds to the advice received from Heritage Victoria throughout the pre-application process and adopts a general approach to prioritise the retention of original fabric in situ. Several options for the arrangement of the auditorium space and treatment of the floor level were considered and the chosen approach has been developed in consideration of the assessed significance of the heritage place. Works to the St. Michael's Walk entrance have also been developed to remove the previously proposed canopy structure and introduce monolithic signage to improve wayfinding.

1.2.2 Client

This HIS has been prepared for The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Victoria).

1.3 Reference Documents

This HIS refers to the following supporting documents:

- *Conservation Management Plan Volumes 1 & 2*, prepared by Purcell in December 2022.
- *Condition Assessment and Recommended Works*, prepared by Purcell in July 2022.
- *Opportunities and Constraints Report*, prepared by Trethowan Architecture in June 2024.
- *Guidelines for Change and Development of Heritage Places of Worship*, prepared by the Heritage Council of Victoria in 2008, revised in 2010.

- *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013.*

This HIS should be read in conjunction with the following submission documents:

- *Accessibility Assessment*, prepared by Access Central, dated 09 December 2024. Please note, this Assessment is based on an earlier draft scheme. However, contains discussion of existing non-compliance issues at the heritage place as relevant to this HIS.
- *Technical Report*, prepared by Sheerforce Engineering in April 2024.
- *Appendix A: Letter of Support*, prepared by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman, dated 6 December 2024.
- Architectural Drawings, prepared by Trethowan Architecture in December 2024, as follows:

Drawing No.	Drawing Name
AA-000	Drawing Register
AX-000	Site Context Plan
AX-001	Existing Site Plan - Sheet 1
AX-002	Existing Site Plan - Sheet 2
AX-005	Existing Site Photos Exterior
AX-100	Existing Ground Floor Plan
AX-101	Existing First Floor Plan
AD-100	Demolition Ground Floor Plan
AD-101	Demolition First Floor Plan
SK-001	Proposed Key Plan
SK-100	Proposed Ground Floor Plan
SK-101	Proposed First Floor Plan
SK-400	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Scope
SK-401	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Works Demolition
SK-402	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Elevation - Sheet 1
SK-403	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Elevation - Sheet 2
SK-407	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Perspective - Sheet 1
SK-408	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Perspective - Sheet 2
SK-409	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Perspective - Sheet 3
SK-410	DB1 - Entry Upgrade Proposed Sign
SK-415	DB1 - Proposed Exterior Finishes
SK-420	DB1 - Demolition East Lobby Plan & Int Elevations
SK-421	DB1 - Proposed East Lobby Plan & Int Elevations
SK-425	DB1 - Proposed East Lobby Plan & Int Perspectives - Sheet 1
SK-426	DB1 - Proposed East Lobby Plan & Int Perspectives - Sheet 2
SK-430	DB2 - Demolition Amenities Upgrade Plan
SK-431	DB2 - Proposed Amenities Upgrade Plan
SK-432	DB2 - Proposed Amenities Upgrade Plan RCP
SK-435	DB3 - Existing/Proposed Amenities Section



SK-445	DB2 - Proposed Amenities Perspective - Sheet 1
SK-452	DB2 - Demolition Vestry Int Elevations
SK-453	DB2 - Proposed Vestry Int Elevations
SK-465	DB3 - Existing/ Proposed Section A-A
SK-466	DB3 - Existing/ Proposed Auditorium Section B-B
SK-470	DB3 - Auditorium Perspective - Sheet 1
SK-471	DB3 - Auditorium Perspective - Sheet 2
SK-472	DB3 - Auditorium Perspective - Sheet 3
SK-476	DB3 - Existing/Proposed Auditorium East Screen Plan
SK-477	DB3 - Existing/Proposed Auditorium East Screen Elevation
SK-478	DB3 - Auditorium Screen Perspective
SK-490	Proposed Interior Finishes
SK-750	Proposed Door Schedule
SK-755	Proposed Window Schedule

1.4 Limitations

The heritage place is included on the Victorian Heritage Inventory (VHI) as St Michael's Uniting Church H7822-1764. This report does not address archaeological matters. Should advice regarding these matters be required, qualified archaeologist may be engaged.

This report does not address matters in relation to Aboriginal cultural heritage, such as anthropology, archaeology, or history. Should advice regarding these matters be required, a Heritage Advisor and the relevant Registered Aboriginal Party may be engaged and consulted.

Several site visits to the project area were undertaken by Trethowan Architecture between August 2023 and November 2024.



2 History

The Traditional Owners of the land for the heritage place are the Wurundjeri People.

The following historical summary is extracted and adapted from the CMP.

In January 1840, construction of a modest brick chapel began on land allocated to the Independents at the corner of Russel and Collins Streets. By early 1841, the chapel was opened with space for 300 worshippers. A small school building and Manse were also constructed at the site. By the early 1860s, the chapel was in poor condition, and the fellowship was split into two due to ongoing tensions over the support of Rev. Morison and financial hardship caused by the economic slump in Melbourne. The Collins Street fellowship had been excluded from the newly formed Congregational Union of Victoria. However, the denomination was also realising that to prosper, they needed a strong central church to act as a focus.

In an attempt to reverse their fortunes, in 1862, the Collins Street fellowship commissioned architect Thomas Watt to design a new church building, and again attempted to join the Congregational Union. Their application to join was refused and building plans had to be abandoned when the provident society which administered their funds collapsed, taking the Church's savings with it. Faced with growing opposition, financial hardship, the offer of £1000 in acknowledgement of the Rev Morison's services and a substantial donation for construction of a new church, the Collins Street fellowship had no choice but to accept the money and initiate Morison's resignation. Morison saw that his presence was hindering the progress of the church and resigned in 1864. This paved the way for the construction of the new Church on the Collins Street site.

The next steps in the construction of the Collins Street Church were taken at a church meeting held on 28 February 1866, where it was resolved to form a building committee. The Building Committee decided that an architectural competition was the best way to achieve their goals. After considering the designs received, the Building Committee short-listed three designs, two by Crouch and Wilson, named Metropolitan A and B, and one by Reed and Barnes named Hope.

The design initially chosen was Metropolitan B (a bluestone Gothic design), as it could hold more worshippers and was cheaper than either of the other two, although the great architectural beauty of Reed and Barnes design was noted. However, on notifying the architects of the conditions of acceptance of the design – that it would hold 1200 people on the ground floor, include freestone dressings and a tower, and cost £7000, the architects responded that the extra 200 people would be accommodated in an end gallery rather than on a floor, and that the addition of the tower and freestone dressings would increase the cost to £7,700.

At the last minute, Reed and Barnes submitted an amended version of 'Hope' that included a signed letter from several contractors willing to construct it for £7,300. Crouch and Wilson also submitted a modified version of Metropolitan A that included a corner tower. Rev. Henderson approved of the balance this gave the Russell and Collins Street sides of the Church. However, neither of the designs were accepted as the acoustics were not considered appropriate. Reed and Barnes were offered the opportunity to work with the committee to develop their design to better meet the Building Committees requirements. The choice was made because the prominent corner tower and polychrome brickwork were novel and distinctive. Rev. Henderson appears to have played a large part in the development of the design, in particular the requirement that all congregation members should be able to see and hear the pastor. The design, which now accommodated 1200 people, was accepted and Reed and Barnes appointed to supervise the construction at a commission of five percent on 15 Jun 1866. The Building Committee promptly called for tenders and commenced fund raising activities. Six more church members and a Bank of Victoria representative, Mr Battersby, joined the Building Committee to strengthen their fund-raising capabilities. Thirteen tenders were received in early September, ranging in price from £11,575 to £15,077 significantly above the £7000 budget. Reed submitted two alternative designs on 14 September 1866. The first was estimated to cost £9,560 and was a simple change where the tower base was constructed to the roof line only, allowing it to be completed at a later date. The second design, estimated to cost £6,974 had no tower, tower base or the corridors below them, meaning it would not be possible to add the tower at a later date. The contract for the revised scheme with the tower base was signed with John Young for £9,523 on 9 October 1866. The contract conditions stipulated construction completion in nine months, and that late completion would attract a penalty of three guineas per



day beyond the nine months. A finance subcommittee was formed on the same day to collect promised donations to enable payment of the sub-contractor.

The first church service was held in the newly completed church on Sunday 18 August 1867.

Throughout its history, the church has undergone several phases of internal and external alterations and additions. In 1967 a chapel was added to the north end of the Russell Street elevation, later adapted to create the Mingary. In 1926, Choir Stalls were installed at right angles to the preacher's platform. These were later moved to their current positions in 1977-78 when the central aisle was created, diagonal aisles regraded, and communion table raised. The original Oregon pews to the ground floor auditorium were also replaced with the extant upholstered pews at this time. In 1981, much of the land surrounding the church was sold.



Figure 3 'Congregational Church, Collins Street, Melbourne', 1872. Photographer unknown. Source: State Library of Victoria.

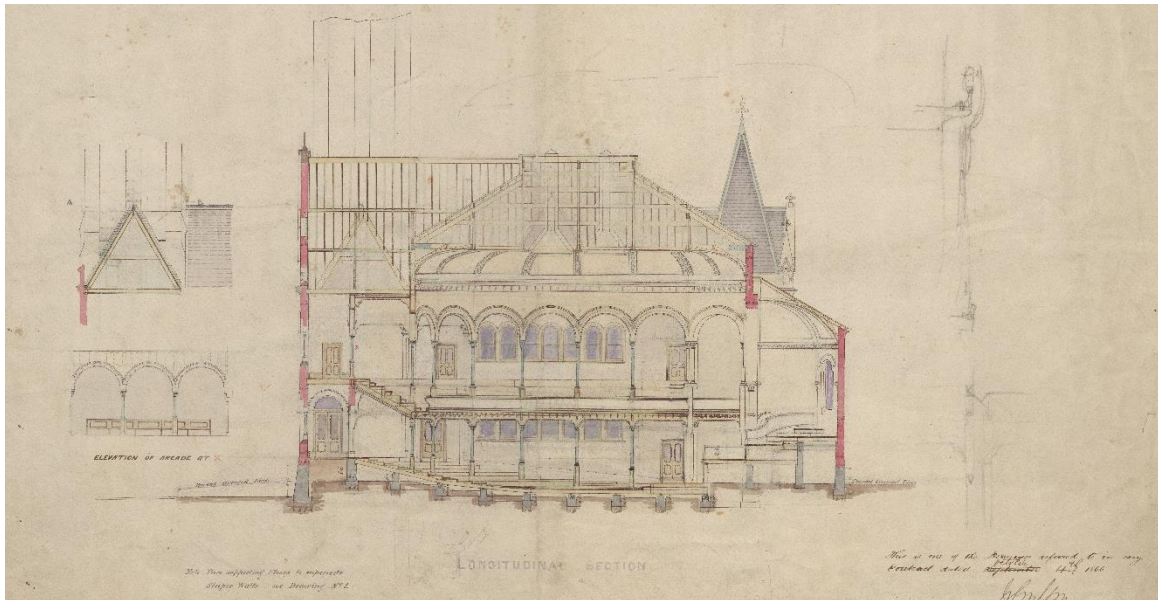


Figure 4 Original longitudinal section through the Auditorium, contract drawings by Reed and Barnes, 1866. Source: Bates, Smart and McCutcheon Pty Ltd Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

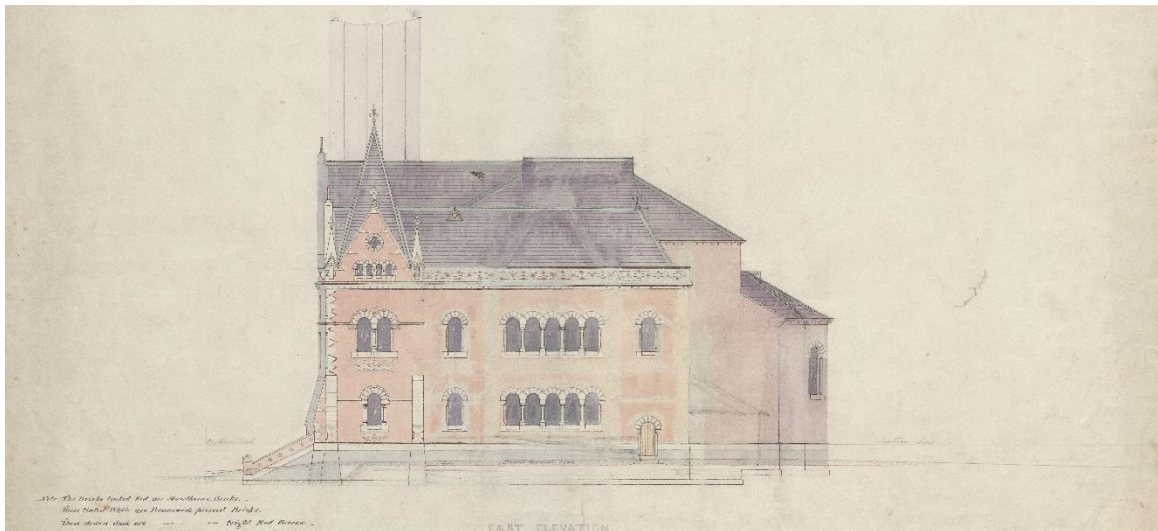


Figure 5 Original east elevation, contract drawings by Reed and Barnes, 1866. Source: Bates, Smart and McCutcheon Pty Ltd Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.



Figure 6 Interior of the Auditorium as viewed from the gallery level, c.1870. Note, original configuration. Photograph by Charles Nettleton. Source: State Library of Victoria.



Figure 7 Image of the auditorium looking towards the organ, c.1958 prior to alterations to the levels and creation of central aisle. Source: St. Michael's Uniting Church.

3 Significance & Description

3.1 The Cultural Heritage Significance

The heritage place is identified as significant at the local and state levels. It is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR H0004) and the Melbourne Planning Scheme (HO576). Heritage Victoria is the Responsible Authority.

The site is also included on the Victorian Heritage Inventory (VHI) as H7822-1764.

3.1.1 Victorian Heritage Register (VHR)

The VHR listing includes all land and buildings located within the registration extents.

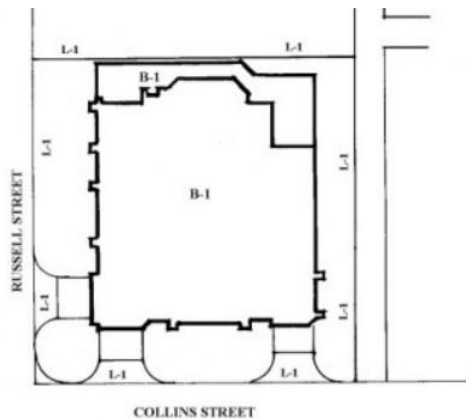


Figure 8 VHR registration map for St. Michael's Uniting Church (VHR H0004). Source: VHD, 2024.

The Statement of Significance prepared for the site is included in the Victorian Heritage Database, and reads as follows:

What is significant?

A small chapel stood on this site from 1841 following the arrival of the Rev William Wakefield in 1838. Tasmanian merchant and pastoralist Henry Hopkins had asked the Colonial Missionary Society in England for a pastor for the infant settlement of Port Phillip in the 1830s. The present building was designed by the prominent architects Reed and Barnes between 1863 and 1866. The foundation stone was laid by Henry Hopkins on 22 November 1866 and the building was constructed by John Young. The chapel was built in 1966 to mark the centenary of the building. The interior was altered in 1978 when some of the original seats were removed.


How is it significant?

The former Independent Church is of architectural, historical and scientific importance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

It is architecturally important as an exuberant and outstanding example of Lombardic Romanesque style and one of prominent Victorian architect Joseph Reed's finest buildings. The building is very finely detailed both externally and internally. It is of importance as a particularly early example of the use of polychromatic brickwork in Victoria, and unusual use of the style. Other polychromatic churches in Victoria are Gothic in style. The Independents or Congregationalists were one of the most experimental of the denominations and the use of such an unusual style reflects this independent spirit. The building is also of architectural importance as having a highly formative influence on subsequent polychrome church work, and on polychrome architecture generally in Victoria.

It is the finest example in Victoria of a galleried auditorium type church and is complete with tiered seating arranged in a semicircle around the pulpit. The interior is outstanding, with its semicircular arches on slender iron columns over the half circle gallery, with a domed ceiling above. The spiral gallery stairs are also a notable feature. The auditorium is



of importance as having one of the most scientifically acoustic design of any nineteenth century churches in Victoria.

It is an important example of an Independent or Congregational church and is of historical importance for its associations with the Congregational denomination, and as the site of the earliest church of this denomination in Victoria. Established in England during the Puritan movement of dissent from the Church of England, the Congregational denomination was introduced to the colony by early settlers such as John Pascoe Fawkner and John Gardiner. It remained an Independent or Congregational church from the time it was built in 1866-67 until the formation of the Uniting Church in 1977 following an agreement between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in 1971.

3.1.2 Melbourne Planning Scheme

The site is listed on the Schedule to Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as the individually significant place HO576: *St Michaels Uniting Church, 122-136 Collins Street, Melbourne*. The heritage place is also included as a contributory place under HO504: *Collins East Precinct*. The VHR listing takes precedence.

The Statement of Significance for HO576: *St. Michael's Uniting Church, 122-136 Collins Street, Melbourne* is reproduced as follows:

A graded building in a Level 1 streetscape, Included within a Heritage Overlay, Included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

City of Melbourne Central City Notable Buildings Citations 1987: The site of Melbourne's first permanent church, the current structure was built in 1867 to a design by Reed and Barnes. One of their best works, it is the finest and one of the earliest examples of polychrome brick design in Victoria. Its campanile tower dominates the eastern Collins Street area.

The Statement of Significance for HO504: *Collins East Precinct* is reproduced as follows:

Collins Street has often been identified as Melbourne's leading street. This is due, in part, to the pleasant amenity and distinctive character of its eastern end. Its relative elevation and proximity to the Government Reserve and points of access to the City provided for its development as an elite locale. Initially a prestige residential area, the Melbourne Club re-established itself here in 1857 and by the 1860s the medical profession had begun to congregate. By the turn of the century it was firmly established as a professional and artistic centre of Melbourne, with part of its fame due to its tree plantations in the French boulevard manner (hence the 'Paris end'), which date from 1875.

A number of significant buildings come together in this precinct to form a series of prominent streetscapes. These include, at the western end, the Town Hall, Athenaeum, and Assembly Hall through to the Scots and Independent Churches, with the Regent Theatre through to the redeveloped T&G building opposite. The eastern end includes the early 19th century residential and artists' studio buildings at the foot of No. One Collins, with the predominantly 20th century intact run to the north featuring Alcaston, Anzac Portland and Chanonry Houses, and Victor Horsley Chambers plus the nearby Melbourne Club.

At all times until the post 1939-45 war period, redevelopment took place in a quiet and restrained manner with an emphasis on dignity, harmony and compatibility with the intimate scale and pedestrian qualities of the street. These qualities are still embodied in significant remnant buildings and other artifacts, despite the intrusion of large developments. The qualities of the street are also embodied in the social functions of the buildings which include elite smaller scale residential, religious, social, quality retailing and professional activities.

3.1.3 Non-statutory listings

Non-statutory listings have no formal or legal weight in the planning scheme but are customarily considered when making planning decisions and are representative of heritage values in the community.

The heritage place is subject to non-statutory heritage controls as it is listed on the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Heritage Register as Property No. B2351 Former Independent Church (St. Michael's Uniting Church). A Statement of Significance is provided as part of the listing, as follows:

The earliest church in Victoria to be built in a Lombardic Romanesque style, designed by Reed and Barnes, and erected in 1866-67. The polychrome brick exterior, with tall campanile to the south-west, is especially notable. The galleried interior is of amphitheatrical form focussing upon pulpit and organ and designed for acoustic effect. The building exerted a highly formative influence on subsequent polychrome church work and, together with Reed's Lombardic style houses, on polychrome architecture generally in Victoria.

Classified: 19/03/1970

3.2 Policies

The heritage place is subject to both general and place-specific permit exemptions as a result of the VHR listing. Where there is conflict between general and place specific exemptions, specific exemptions prevail. The CMP also outlines a series of conservation policies for the place.

3.2.1 General Permit Exemptions

General permit exemptions (subject to general and category conditions) relevant to this proposal and project area include:

4.0 Internal fitouts

- *Alterations to interior areas that have been previously refurbished, including:*
 - *the upgrade of previously modernised spaces including bathrooms, kitchens, laundries, and toilets.*
 - *the replacement of existing appliances, fixtures and associated wiring and plumbing.*
- *Installation of new internal partitions and walls*

6.0 Services

- *Maintenance, repair, replacement, upgrade and removal of existing surface-mounted and subfloor services and utilities, limited to: fire detection and prevention systems, video surveillance and alarm systems, heating units and systems, air-conditioning units and systems, hot water systems, public address systems and speakers, ventilation systems, plumbing (water and gas), drainage and pipework, electrical wiring and cabling, telecommunications wiring and cabling, antennae, satellite dishes and aerials, usage meters.*
- *Maintenance, repair, replacement and upgrade of existing surface-mounted electrical fittings, limited to: fans and lights, power boards, circuit breakers and safety switches, points, controls and switches, digital screens.*
- *Maintenance, repair, replacement, upgrade and removal of existing subsurface services and utilities, limited to plumbing (water and gas), drainage and pipework, electrical wiring and cabling, telecommunications wiring and cabling, subsurface watering systems, combined service routes.*

3.2.2 Place Specific Permit Exemptions

A place specific permit exemption policy is included as part of the VHR listing. The policy includes several general conditions. Place specific permit exemptions (subject to conditions) relevant to this proposal and project area include:

- *Minor repairs and maintenance which replace like with like.*
- *Removal of metal framed seating (pews) and replacement with timber seating to match the extant original seating (pews).*



3.2.3 Conservation Management Plan (CMP)

The CMP outlines a series of conservation policies *to guide the care and conservation of the place into the future*. Relevant policies are outlined as follows:

- **Policy 01**
Consistent with the St. Michael's Mission the place will continue to be used for contemporary and progressive Christian theology. A balance is to be maintained between the primary purpose of worship and the wider role and functions of the church.
- **Policy 02**
The informed management of change at St. Michael's will be underpinned by the conservation planning process.
- **Policy 03**
Change will be grounded in a clear understanding of significance and the impact of change, both negative and positive.
- **Policy 04**
Any harm to significance will be balanced against the clear and convincing justification of its environmental, social, cultural, missional and economic benefits.
- **Policy 05**
Requirements and proposals for change must respect, conserve or enhance the elements of primary and contributory significance of St Michael's.
- **Policy 08**
Ensure every proposed fixture, addition and change – however small – is of the highest quality and will either preserve or enhance significance.
- **Policy 09**
Use high-quality and bespoke solutions to problems to avoid harm. Technologically innovative solutions to solve complex problems should be considered wherever appropriate.
- **Policy 10**
The accessibility of St. Michael's is to be enhanced including the reasonable and practical removal of physical, sensory, intellectual, social, cultural and organisational barriers to access.
- **Policy 12**
Consider more energy efficient replacements for failed original systems. Ensure that replacements will have no, or minimal, adverse impact on significance.

The CMP also includes a series of management actions. Relevant sections are extracted and adapted as follows:

2.3.7. National Construction Code

NCC legislation is performance based, providing a framework of '...Deemed-to-Satisfy Provisions, which cover established and acceptable practices, or flexibility to develop Alternative Solutions...' When proposing change which will impact fabric of exceptional and high significance consultants are to be encouraged to consider solutions which responds to the intent of the legislation through the development of performance based alternative solutions which seek to preserve extant, significant fabric in preference for strict application of deemed to satisfy solutions.

2.3.8. Access

Universal access solutions should seek to improve accessibility at St. Michael's while maintained the identified significance of the place. Solutions will be subject to the accessibility provisions of the NCC and the Access to Premises standards. Where possible access solutions should seek to supplement existing amenity rather than replace existing fabric.

- MA 35

An access masterplan should be developed to ensure whole of building solutions and coordination with considerations arising from compliance with the NCC (See Volume 2 Section 2.3.7), the Premises Standards and the Disability Discrimination Act 2006.

2.4.1 Audio Visual

- MA 47

Investigations should consider a retractable floor mount projection screen, situated in front of the Apse and Organ. Projection could be facilitated from the read of the Auditorium or balcony and technical specifications required.

2.4.2 Organ

- MA 50

Subject to upgrade requirements the location of the Piano and Organ console could change when it can be demonstrated to improve amenity.

2.4.3 Seating and Access

The significance of the galleried auditorium of the church and its tiered seating arranged in a semicircle around the pulpit is acknowledged in the Summary Statement of Significance. Some original seating is noted to have been adapted or removed in 1978. Replacement pews are generally identified by metal frames and carpeted upholstery.

There are recognised constraints presented with respect to accessibility, comfort and ergonomics. The need for accessible and enhanced amenity seating, including companion seating has been identified by Morris Golding. In addition, the current universal application of carpet to stairs, ramps, pathways removes definition of edges. The need for luminance contrast throughout the building, especially between adjacent surfaces to access or egress routes, has been identified as requiring improvement.

- MA 52

Changes to seating configuration in support of accessibility are to be supported by careful design and planning. Non-original pews could be removed as needed although the general presentation of semi-circular seating should be retained. Such change could be considered against Permit Exemptions for liturgical use, but would be best informed by a Design Master Plan.

- MA 53

Changes to seating configuration and interface of the gradient of aisles with tiered seating, in support of accessibility are to be informed by careful design and planning. Together with Chancel access from St Michael's Walk a new at grade viewing and seating area could be facilitated to the NE side of the Auditorium. Removal and/or modification of pews in support of an integrated solution could be considered.

3.2.4 Heritage Victoria Technical Guide

The Heritage Council of Victoria *Technical Guide, Guidelines for Change and Development of Heritage Places of Worship* provides guidance and opportunity for change in the development of religious places for liturgical, accessibility and other needs. The guide suggests that in considering any change to a place, a Needs Analysis and Accessibility Audit are essential documents in justifying acceptable changes. Owing to this, an Accessibility Report was undertaken by Access Central in March 2024 and is included as part of the submission documents.

3.3 Analysis of the significance

3.3.1 Levels of significance

The CMP prescribes levels of significance to areas and fabric within the heritage place, definitions for the levels of significance are as follows:

- **Primary Significance**

Fabric of primary significance makes the greatest direct contribution to the historic and aesthetic values of the place. It accounts for rare or outstanding original fabric and unaltered original elements and features. Fabric of primary significance should be retained and conserved in situ. A permit is required for most works or alterations. Any work, which affects the fabric or external appearance of these elements, should be confined to preservation, restoration and reconstruction as defined by The Burra Charter.

- **Contributory Significance**

Includes elements and features that make an important contribution to the recognition of the item's significance albeit the fabric may not be in good condition. This may include elements that have been altered, or elements created as part of a generally sympathetic alteration to the building. This category is likely to include much of the extant fabric from the early phases of construction and many reconstructed early or original elements wherever these make an important contribution to the significance of the item. A permit is required for some works or alterations. Elements identified as being of contributory significance should also generally be retained, restored and conserved in situ subject however to other relevant factors including technological feasibility of proposed works. Minor intervention into fabric including adaptation and alteration as defined by The Burra Charter is permissible, provided that level of significance of each element is retained, with an aim not to remove or obscure significant fabric, giving preference to changes which are reversible.

- **Little or No Significance**

Can include elements and features which were originally of higher significance but have been compromised by modifications. Can include additions made to accommodate changing functional requirements where these components are generally of little or no impact on the complex's significance. Elements assessed as being of little or no significance are generally not regarded as essential to the major aspects of significance of a building or place, often fulfilling a functional role. Both retention and removal are acceptable options, depending on the element. Any major interventions to the item should be confined to areas where the fabric is of little significance.

The following areas are identified to be of *primary significance*:

- Auditorium
- Apse with Pipe Organ
- Preacher's Platform
- East, West and South Cloisters
- East and West Towers
- East and West Lobbies
- Gallery
- Vestry

The following areas are identified to be of *contributory significance*:

- Mingary
- Mingary Garden

- North Cloister

The following site (Figure 9) and ground floor (Figure 10) significance plans are provided for the heritage place:

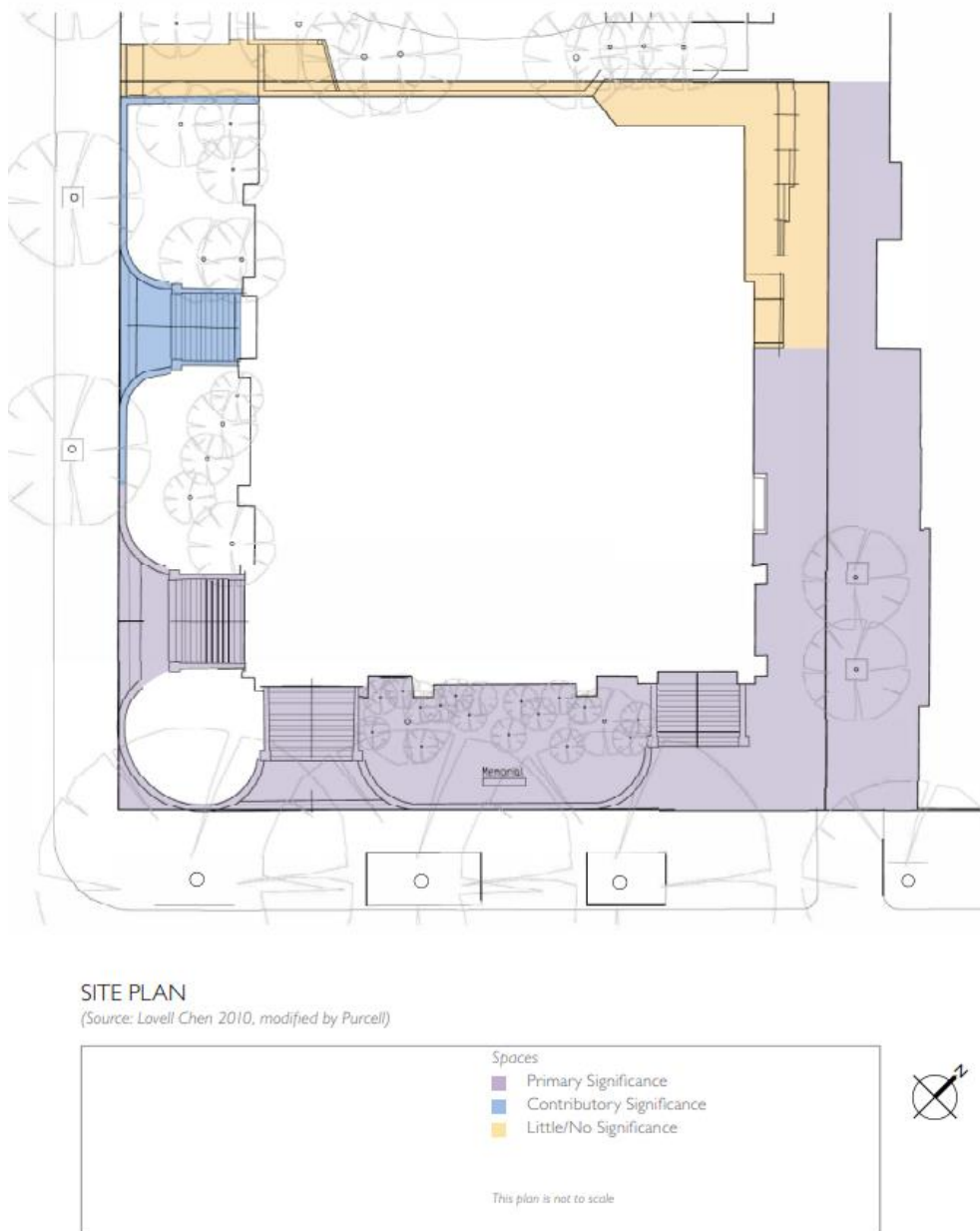


Figure 9 Site Floor Plan indicating the significance of spaces and fabric. Spaces of *primary significance* indicated in purple, *contributory significance* indicated in blue and *little to no significance* indicated in yellow. Source: Purcell, 2022.

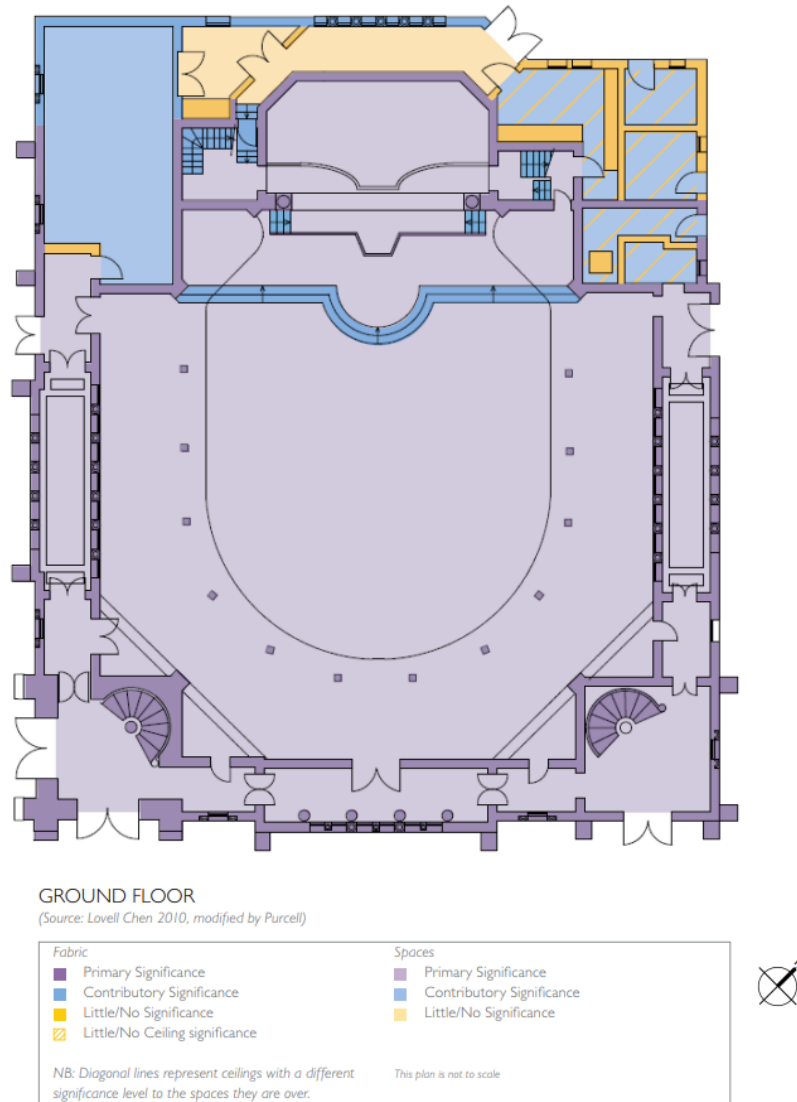


Figure 10 Ground Floor Plan indicating the significance of spaces and fabric. Spaces of *primary significance* indicated in purple, *contributory significance* indicated in blue and *little to no significance* indicated in yellow. Source: Purcell, 2022.

3.3.2 Summary of Significance

The heritage place is of architectural, historical and scientific significance and this is embodied in the built form and fabric of the church building and its setting. Historically, the heritage place is significant as the earliest church of the Independent or Congregational denomination in Victoria. Its continued use as a place of worship contributes to this significance. The heritage place is also of contributory significance to the *Collins East Precinct* for its contribution to the prominent streetscapes at the eastern end of the CBD, and for its ongoing social function.

Architecturally, the place is significant as an outstanding example of the work of architects, Reed and Barnes, undertaken in the Lombardic Romanesque style and as an early and influential example of the use of polychromatic brickwork in Victoria. This architectural significance is illustrated in the materiality and external and internal detailing, including the prominent tower and use of architectural elements such as parapeted gables, wheel windows and arcades that are typical of the Romanesque style.

St. Michael's Walk

The CMP indicates that the original extent of the east elevation to St Michael's Walk is of *primary significance*. However, the significance of the later single-storey addition to the northeast corner

varies. The exterior space from the line of the existing DDA access ramp, is noted to be of *little or no significance*. However, the exterior area south of the ramp is of *primary significance*.

North-East Addition

The area to the north-east corner of the building, currently comprising of the choir vestry, storage and sanitary facilities is part of a later single-storey addition, dating to 1967. However, early plans indicate the presence of a smaller addition to this corner of the main building. The original appearance and provenance of this earlier addition is unknown. The internal wall to the fire services cupboard and part of the external east wall may be remnants of this smaller early addition and are indicated to be of *primary significance* in the CMP. The ground floor choir vestry, storage and sanitary facilities are noted as areas of *contributory significance*; however certain walls, ceilings and joinery are of *little or no significance* as per Figure 10.



Figure 11 Single-storey addition to north east corner of building as viewed from St. Michael's Walk (east elevation). Part of wall that is primary significant and possibly part of an earlier addition indicated in red. Source: Trethowan Architecture.

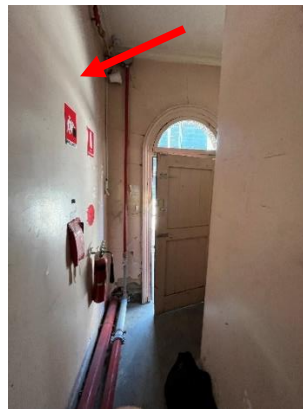


Figure 12 Interior of the Fire Services Room looking east towards entrance door. Primary significant internal wall indicated by red arrow. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

Auditorium

Internally, the auditorium is identified as an area of *primary significance*. This significance is illustrated in the fabric and galleried form of the auditorium with tiered seating arranged in a semicircle. Specifically, the design of the auditorium to slope towards the elevated preaching platform allows all members of the congregation to see and hear the preacher. Thus, the form and fabric of the auditorium contributes to the historical significance of the place and its association with the Congregational denomination, as well as the scientific significance of the place as a nineteenth century acoustic design. Internal detailing, including semicircular arches and domed ceiling, is also of significance. Further, the CMP indicates the apse, pipe organ, preacher's platform and stage are areas of *primary significance*. However, the stairs to the stage and preacher's platform are identified to be of *contributory significance*.

Choir Stalls

The choir stalls located to the west of the lower auditorium surrounding the organ console date from c.1923. Originally the stalls were installed in rows at right angles to the preacher's platform with the organ console in the centre (Figure 13-Figure 14). However, the stalls were moved to their current location as part of the arc of pews in c.1977-78. At this time, it appears they were either joined together and added to or rebuilt to form the current arced composition (Figure 15-Figure 16). The ends appear to be original. As such, the choir stalls, whilst early, have been substantially altered and are therefore of low integrity.



Figure 13 Image of the auditorium post-1958 showing the 1920's choir stalls in rows at right angles to the preacher's platform. Source: Woods, St. Michael's Church, p.62.

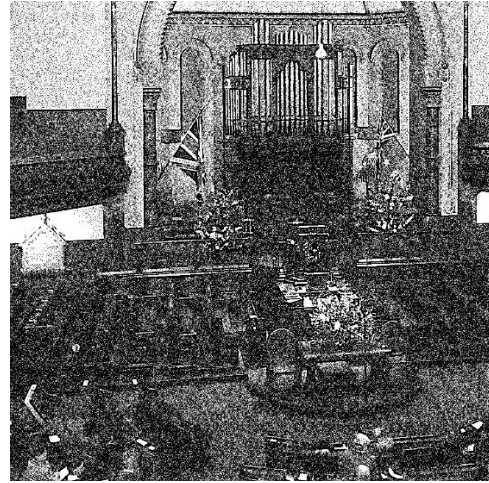


Figure 14 Image of the auditorium, c.1925 with choir stalls in rows at right angles to the preacher's platform. Source: St. Michael's Uniting Church.



Figure 15 Choir stalls in their current curved arrangement. Note: physical evidence of altered/joined panels. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 16 Choir stalls in their current curved arrangement. Note: physical evidence of altered/joined back panels. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

3.4 Description

The following description is extracted and adapted from the CMP, prepared by Purcell in 2022.

3.4.1 Exterior

St Michael's Church is intact as a Lombardic Romanesque style church designed by Reed and Barnes. The polychromatic brickwork is both decorative and emphasises the geometry of the building. The central section of the west (Russell Street) façade includes the central gable with its roundel and arcades on all levels. The northern end is topped by a narrower version of the central gable with arched windows below. A new door with bluestone stairs was created in this section in 1927, and the single story extension to the north was constructed in 1967 from matching recycled bricks. St Michael's has a Welsh slate roof, much of which was replaced as part of conservation works in 2005.

The Collins Street (south) Elevation is almost a mirror image of the Russell Street (west) Elevation. The main difference being the number of arches in each central bay arcade. The St Michael's Walk (east) elevation is less decorated than the street facing elevations. However, it has polychromatic brickwork to all arches, and carved stone sills and arcade columns. A later accessible entrance ramp with bluestone paving and contemporary metal balustrade has been installed to the double doors to the north end of the east wall (Figure 18-Figure 20).

The north elevation is also less decorated than the street facing elevations. However, it also has polychromatic brickwork to all arches, and carved stone sills and arcade columns. The Apse has blind windows, which were possibly infilled when the Apostle windows were relocated in the 1950s.



Figure 17 View looking north down St. Michael's Walk. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 18 Accessible entrance to St. Michael's Walk. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

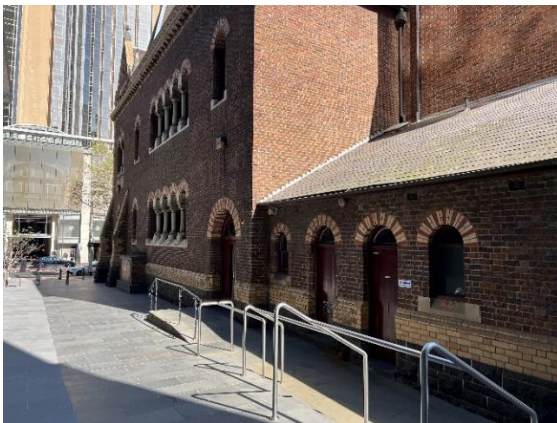


Figure 19 View looking south down St. Michael's Walk. Note single storey amenities addition to RHS of image. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

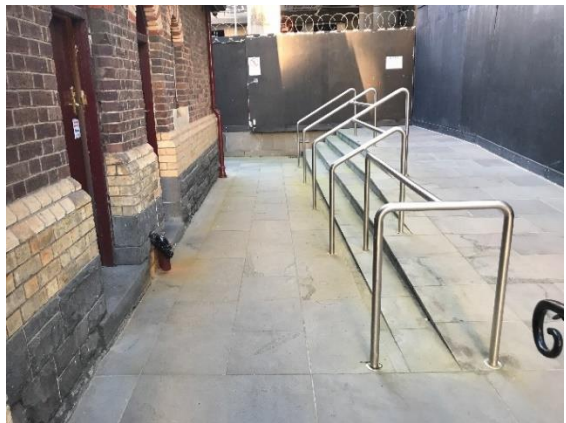


Figure 20 Steps and handrails to St. Michael's Walk and in front of entrance doors to toilet amenities. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 21 Single-storey amenities addition to the north-east corner as viewed from St. Michael's Walk. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 22 St. Michael's Walk entrance doors. Note, later glazed panels. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

3.4.2 Interior

The layout of the church is based around the large, square auditorium with its horseshoe-shaped gallery over. The theatre-like auditorium is surrounded on three sides by cloisters and lobbies, with

the fourth side (the north) containing the pipe organ in a semicircular Apse with a cloister behind on the ground floor. The north west corner contains the side chapel (Mingary) on the ground floor and the Vestry on level one. The south east and south west corners contain semi circular stairs to the first floor, with the south west corner supporting the main tower and spire. The north east corner (area of the later single-storey addition) is occupied by the choir vestry, services and toilet amenities areas. The toilet and services areas are accessed externally via St Michael's Walk (Figure 20).

Auditorium

The main interior space, the Auditorium, is a galleried room (Figure 23). The focus of the room is the raised timber preaching platform with the church organ behind in a semi-circular apse. From the preaching platform, the floor slopes up gently to the south, east and west. The upholstered timber pews are arranged on a series of concentric steps around the preaching platform, with one central, and two diagonal, sloping aisles. This allows everyone to see the preacher, and the rest of the congregation, giving a feeling of community. There are seven stained glass windows on the east and west sides of the auditorium at each level. Fourteen of the nineteen stained glass Bicentennial Windows by Klaus Zimmer are on the ground floor to the east and west, with the remaining four large ones on the ground floor south wall. Timber double doors to the east and west lobbies contain later stained glass panels.

The interior of the Auditorium has been altered through several periods. The current arrangement largely reflects the 1977-78 alterations in which the choir stalls, organ console and organ were moved to form part of the arc of pews, the central aisle was created, diagonal aisles regraded, communion table raised, and original timber pews were replaced with the existing padded pews.



Figure 23 View of the Auditorium from the gallery level. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 24 View of the Auditorium looking south down central aisle. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 25 View of the Auditorium looking west. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 26 View towards stage and preacher's platform. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 27 Looking towards the east entry from the Auditorium. Note: Timber double doors to east lobby with later stained glass panel visible. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 28 Tiered seating looking towards the rear of the Auditorium. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 29 View of Apse with organ from the stage. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

Amenities, Services and Choir Vestry

The toilet amenities to the north-east addition are characterised by later finishes and fixtures, with wall/floor tiling and modern partition walls (Figure 30-Figure 32). The services rooms are generally in fair condition with damaged walls and later wiring/piping and other accreditations throughout. The power supply unit for the church is located in the north-east corner of the Services Room (Figure 38). A rendered plinth remains visible to the original north and east external walls of the main church building, these walls are covered in hard plaster (Figure 37). The external doors to the addition are timber with arched fanlights above, the windows are arched timber sash windows. There is a skylight to the southwest corner of the Fire Services Room with a timber panelled chute, the skylight glazing appears to be later (Figure 37). There is an existing opening to the wall between the east lobby and switch room, with fire services panel to the lobby side (Figure 35-Figure 36). The choir vestry room is accessed from the north lobby and features two arched sash windows to the north wall (Figure 33-Figure 34). The floors are carpeted (later) and walls painted, with rendered plinth overpainted to the south wall (original external wall).

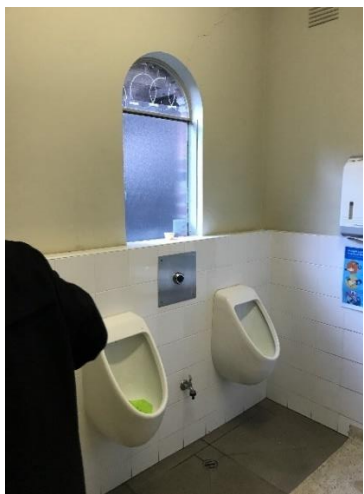


Figure 30 Toilet facilities looking towards north wall. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024



Figure 31 Toilet facilities looking east to external door. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024



Figure 32 Toilet facilities. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 33 Choir Vestry room looking east. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 34 Choir Vestry. Note painted rendered plinth to LHS of image. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 35 East Lobby looking towards north wall. Note fire indicator system indicated by red arrow. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 36 Switch Room looking towards east wall. Note existing opening to East Lobby indicated by red arrow. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 37 Fire Services Room looking south. Note skylight (indicated by red circle) and plinth to original west wall of church (indicated by red arrow). Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 38 Power supply unit located in north-east corner of the switch room. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

3.4.3 Existing Condition

A condition assessment of the heritage place was undertaken by Purcell in July 2022. Overall, the assessment concluded that the building appeared to be in a *generally sound state* with several areas of localised fabric deterioration, failing or end of service life materials and inappropriate repairs identified.

3.4.4 Current Use

The registered place maintains its historical use as a place of worship. Originally functioning as an Independent or Congregational Church, it remained as such until the Uniting Church was formed in 1977 following an agreement between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. Today the heritage place continues to operate as the St. Michael's Uniting Church.

3.5 Constraints and Opportunities

An *Opportunities and Constraints Report* was prepared by Trethowan Architecture in June 2024. This identified opportunities and constraints arising from the assessed significance of the place and its statutory heritage protections, with consideration given to the need to address accessibility issues and upgrade amenities. The relevant findings are summarised as follows:

- **Disability access through St. Michael's Walk door**

Opportunities - The existing walkway provides access that is located away from the primary facades on Collins and Russell streets, providing opportunity for ramping and additions in a more visually discreet area.

Constraints - This is still a significant façade with fabric and architectural detailing that needs to be conserved and protected.

- **Upgrade of sanitary facilities**

Opportunities - The internal walls of the existing sanitary facilities area and choir vestry and Cleaners/Services room is largely not significant, allowing greatest opportunity for upgrading the area.

There is an existing opening in the fabric between the lobby and that could be reused.

Constraints - There is an existing primary significant graded wall through the area where change will need to be justified (between the Cleaner's Room & Fire Services. Historical research will be needed to clarify the significance of this wall. The wall between the Auditorium and Store however is original and new openings in this fabric will need strong justification.

- **Changes inside the church**

Opportunities - There is some opportunity to make alterations to the floor, steps and seating given that there have already been alterations to these elements. The steps to the stage are contributory graded. Many of the pews are non-original. As demonstrated by early photographs and images, there have been considerable changes to the interface between the stage and pews. The location of the organist has also changed over time.

The Guidelines for Change and Development of Heritage Places of Worship (2010) provides scope and rationale for adapting significant spaces in order to retain the social and historical significance of church spaces and for meeting the ongoing needs of the congregation. This includes accessibility and upgrading of facilities as well as changes to liturgy.

Constraints - There is considerable original fabric and detailing that needs to be retained and unobscured.

The amphitheatre arrangement of the auditorium and the relationship between the pulpit and the congregation is an important part of the significance and this character has been substantially retained over time.



- **Improvements to heating and cooling**

Opportunities - There appear to be very limited opportunities for significant improvements to the overall space, however localised heating can be renewed.

Constraints - The auditorium is large and architecturally significant, leaving limited opportunities for large scale intervention. The building is not connected to gas, and the subfloor space is limited.

- **Audio visual system upgrade**

Opportunities - There may be opportunities to conceal retractable screens behind and above the arches or arcade. Technology provides opportunity for hearing solutions tailored to individual needs that avoid intervention to the fabric, such as hearing augmentation.

Constraints - The auditorium is highly detailed with limited opportunities for new permanent fixtures or screens.

4 Proposal

4.1 The Proposed Works

The proposed works comprise of partial demolition, and external and internal alterations to the St. Michael's Walk entrance, toilet amenities, auditorium and south entry areas. The proposal will upgrade the project area to improve accessibility, compliance and amenity.

4.1.1 St. Michael's Walk Entrance

Accessible Entrance

It is proposed to remove the existing non-compliant accessible entrance to the St. Michael's Walk entry and replace with a new compliant entrance ramp. As part of the works an area of the existing bluestone ground paving along the east wall will be removed. The new ramp will run parallel to the east wall, separated by a 150mm gap (with linear drain) and falling towards the south with new landing centred to the existing double entrance doors. Steps will provide access to the landing at the north. The ramp/stairs will feature bluestone paving to match the surrounding paving and contemporary freestanding metal handrails. A new low masonry wall will run along the east of the ramp. A monolith 'St Michael's Uniting Church' entrance sign will be installed adjacent to the southeast corner of the ramp to assist in wayfinding. The original timber entrance doors will be retained and restored, with later glazing removed and timber panelling installed to match the original design. Door hardware will be updated as required.

The later metal handrails and part of the existing stairs in front of the amenities block will be removed and replaced with new bluestone paving, a low masonry wall and handrail. The handrails and stair to the north end of St. Michael's Walk will be retained.

Additionally, it is proposed to enclose the arched openings to the east and west cloisters, with metal framed clear glazing panels installed to the internal face.

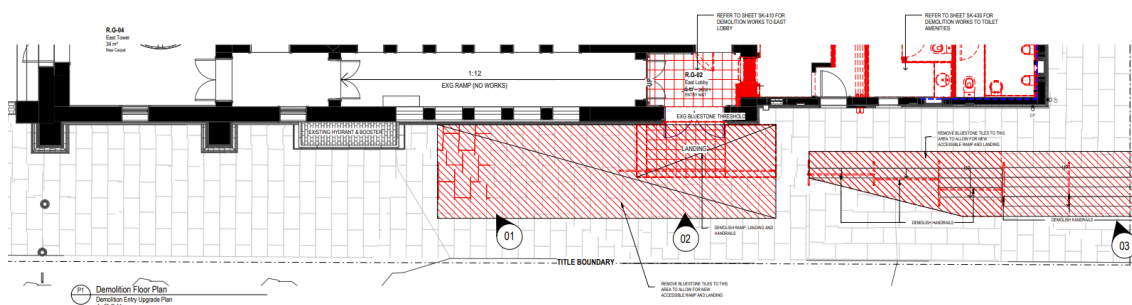


Figure 39 Extract from Demolition Plan of St. Michael's Walk Entrance. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

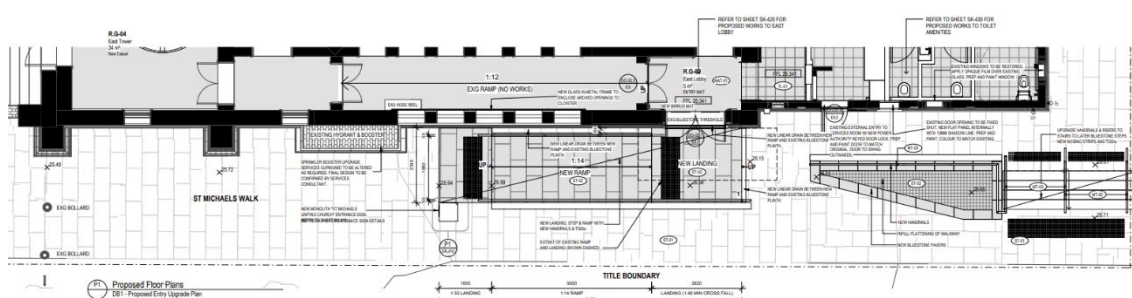


Figure 40 Extract from Proposed Plan of St. Michael's Walk Entrance. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 41 Proposed St. Michael's Walk approach. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

East Lobby

To the east lobby, it is proposed to widen the existing opening to the north wall, forming a large arched entrance to the toilet amenities with metal surround. The internal double doors leading to the auditorium will be removed and replaced with a glazed sliding door installed to the auditorium side. The timber door frame and architrave are to remain. The later stained-glass panels will be reused in the proposed auditorium screens, and the doors themselves will be stored on site.

The existing later tiled flooring will be removed and replaced with new entrance mat (birrus mat or similar).

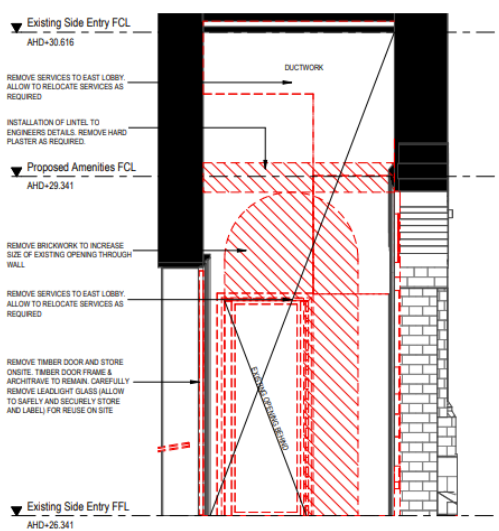


Figure 42 Demolition North Internal Elevation East Lobby. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

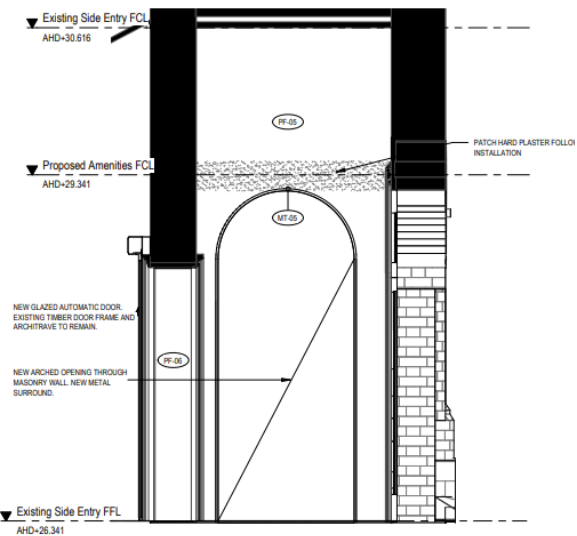


Figure 43 Proposed North Internal Elevation East Lobby. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

4.1.2 Toilet Amenities

Demolition

It is proposed to demolish all finishes and fixtures to the existing toilet amenities, switch room and fire services room. Internal partition walls between the toilets, fire services and switch room are also proposed to be removed, as well as the east and south walls to the choir vestry and *primary*

significant internal wall to the Fire Services room. It is also proposed to remove the choir vestry flooring and fabric from the *primary significant* wall between the east stair and choir vestry to create a new opening. A small L-shaped section of wall to the Switch Room, including existing power supply unit, will be retained.

It is proposed to remove the later skylight to reduce the risk of future water ingress issues and maintenance requirements. The timber lined shaft will be retained and enclosed in the roof/bulkhead.

New Works

It is proposed to internally rearrange the amenities/services area to create a new accessible toilet amenities space with internal access via the new opening in the east lobby. From the lobby, a hallway will lead west to a contemporary joinery tea point station. The hallway will continue north, providing access to four individual toilet cubicles (1x ambulant) and one DDA compliant toilet located to the north-east corner. A services room will be constructed along the east wall with external access via the existing door to St. Michael's Walk. All external doors and windows to the area will remain in place. However, the northmost door to the east wall and door to the north wall will be fixed shut and built over internally. Opaque film will be installed to the DDA and WC windows.

The existing rendered plinth to the original external walls of the church will be retained, visible along the south wall of the proposed hallway. Generally, the design and materiality of the amenities area will be contemporary in nature. Additionally, it is proposed to replace the choir vestry flooring and repaint the walls and ceiling.

It is requested that details of the proposed finishes and fixtures are approved under a condition to any permit.

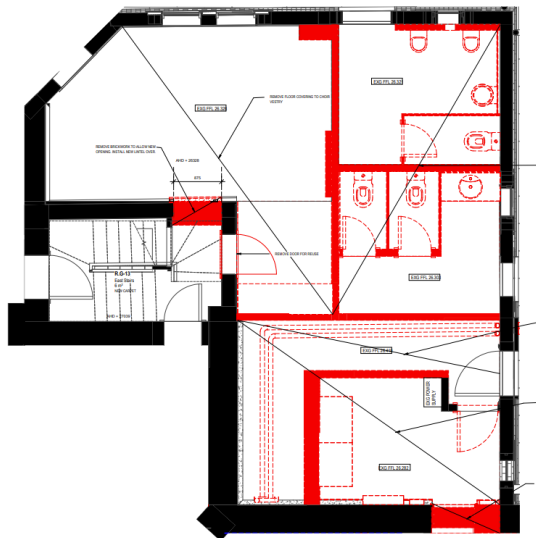


Figure 44 Proposed Demolition Amenities Upgrade Plan. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

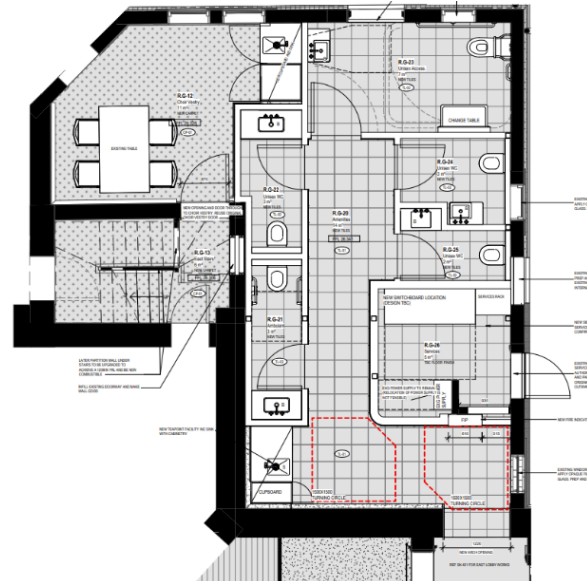


Figure 45 Proposed Amenities Upgrade Plan. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

4.1.3 Auditorium

Demolition

It is proposed to remove the later upholstered pews to the lower auditorium area as well as all timber choir stalls. The choir stalls will be removed and adapted/reused in the new ramp wall and handrails. Some later upholstered pews to the upper auditorium area will be removed and stored for later reinstatement.

The top step of the stage and existing half circle extrusion will be demolished, as well as the existing ramps to the east and west entrances. The existing stage structure will remain. All floor coverings and nosing strips to upper auditorium stairs will be removed. A small section of the existing flooring



will be removed at the junction with the new floor, to allow for the connection of new floor joists to the existing timber bearers.

To the west lobby, it is proposed to remove the internal double doors leading to the auditorium. The timber door frame and architrave are to remain. The later stained-glass panels will be reused in the proposed auditorium screens, and the doors themselves will be stored on site.

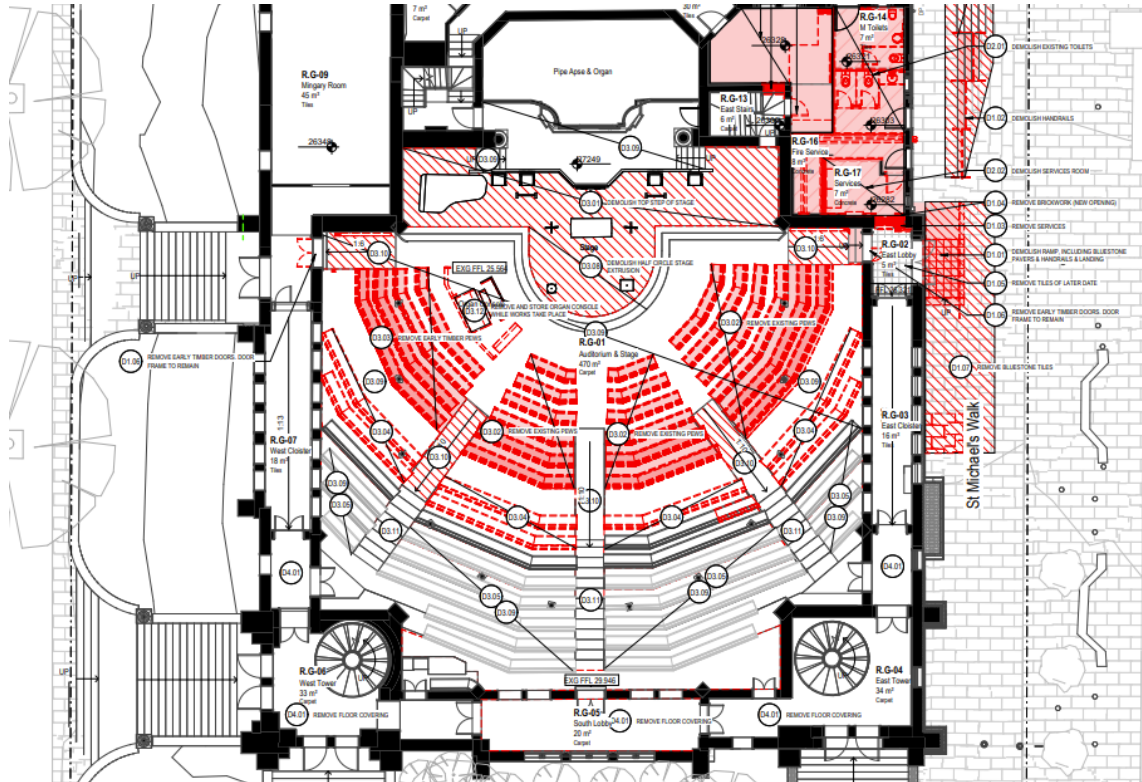


Figure 46 Demolition Ground Floor Plan. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

New Works

It is proposed to rearrange the Auditorium space by regrading the floor levels and altering the existing tiered seating arrangement to improve accessibility, safety and compliance. It is proposed to create a level floor over the lower auditorium area and an enlarged stage, retaining the tiered upper seating and altering the existing stairs to achieve compliance. The stage will extend further south with ramps installed to the east and west entrances providing step free access into the auditorium and down to the regraded lower auditorium area. The seat backs of the former choir stalls will be integrated into a low wall separating the ramp from the lower auditorium, with pew rails reused to form new handrails. Details of the junction between the raised floor and timber preacher's platform joinery are yet to be confirmed.

Screening will be installed to the east and west entrances to provide a visual buffer between the stage and those entering the auditorium. The screens will project from the north wall to obscure the east and west lobby entrances, with concealed door providing access to the stage. The design of the screens will be contemporary, made of perforated metal, and incorporating the later stained-glass panels from the removed east and west lobby double doors.

It is proposed to provide 150 new stackable seats to the lower auditorium area, allowing for flexible seating arrangements. The tiered seating to the upper auditorium will be retained, with stairs to each aisle built out to achieve compliance and provide safe access to the upper seating. The remaining later pews to the upper auditorium will be reupholstered to match the new stackable seats. The existing sound desk will be retained with joinery reclad. Two new retractable projection screens are proposed to be installed to the gallery level flanking either side of the apse.



A new glazed sliding door will be installed to the west lobby on the auditorium side, to match the east lobby entry. The organ console will be removed, stored during the works, refurbished and reinstated to the west side of the new stage within a new timber enclosure.

It is requested that details of the proposed finishes and fixtures (including floor coverings) are approved under a condition to any permit.

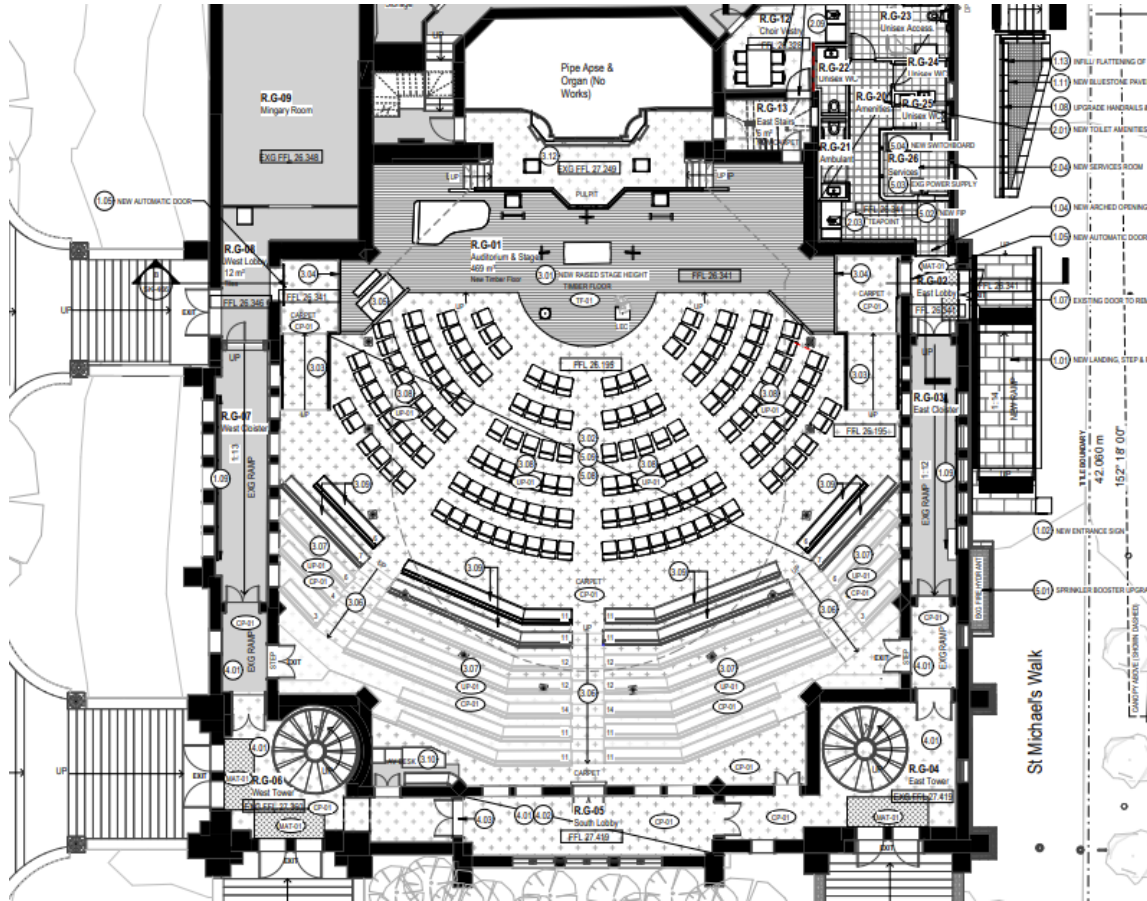


Figure 47 Proposed Ground Floor Plan. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

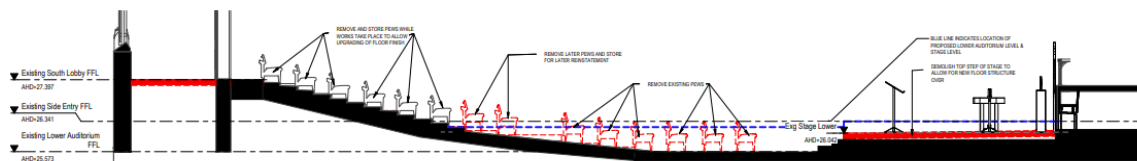


Figure 48 Demolition Section of the Auditorium. Blue line indicates line of proposed raised flooring and stage. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

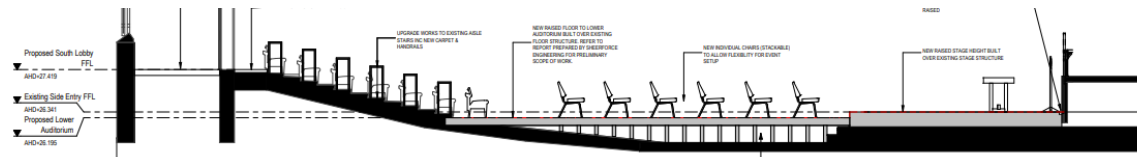


Figure 49 Proposed Section of the Auditorium indicating new raised flooring and stage with existing retained under. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

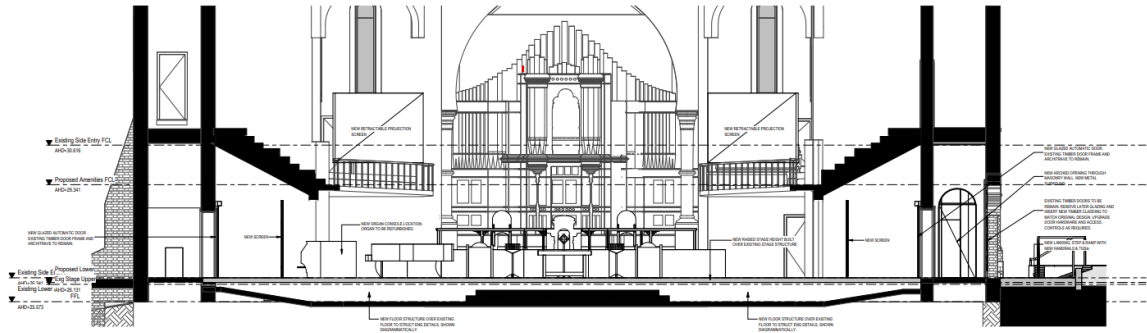


Figure 50 Proposed Internal Elevation of the Auditorium stage. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

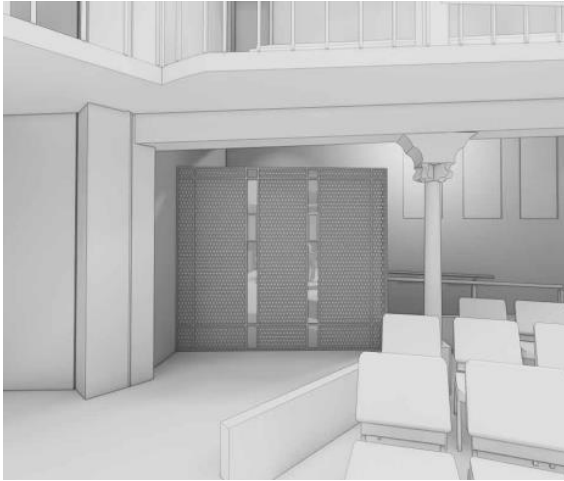


Figure 51 Perspective from the lower auditorium illustrating proposed contemporary screen and new low wall to stage. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

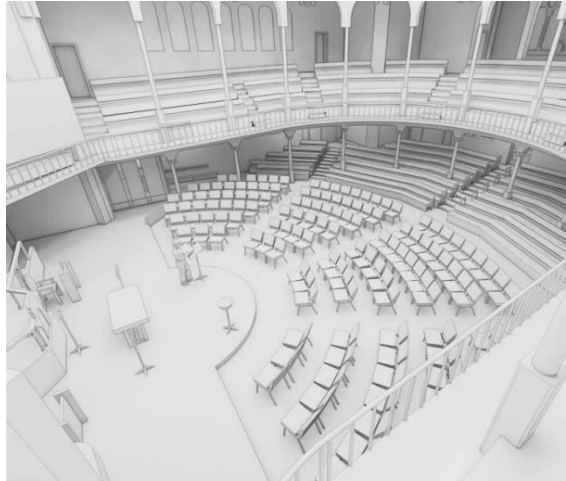


Figure 52 Proposed auditorium as viewed from the gallery. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.



Figure 53 Proposed auditorium as viewed from the aisle. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

4.1.4 South Entry

It is proposed to replace the carpet to the south lobby and east and west tower rooms. It is also proposed to replace the entrance mats to the south entrance. It is requested that details of the proposed finishes are approved under a condition to any permit.

4.2 Options Considered

Several design options related to the auditorium upgrade works were considered, tested and assessed to formulate the proposed design response.

- *One Platform Lift*

This option involved raising/enlarging the stage to provide step-free access from east/west lobbies; increasing the number of steps to the stage to five; removing some seating to the east aisle and installing a platform lift to provide access to lower auditorium levels. This option also included modifying the existing stairs to the upper auditorium seating to meet compliance.

Whilst this option allowed for the retention of the tiered seating arrangement to the lower auditorium, the installation of a platform lift would require partial demolition of the original flooring. Some original flooring would also be lost following the removal of the existing pews and works to level the floor. It was likely that services upgrades would also require further impact on the existing floors with this option. In addition, this option would provide limited step free circulation and introduce new safety issues by increasing the height of the stage to 778mm above the auditorium floor level.

An option to introduce two platform lifts (one at each entrance), therefore increasing step-free circulation, was also explored. However, it was deemed inappropriate due to similar concerns.

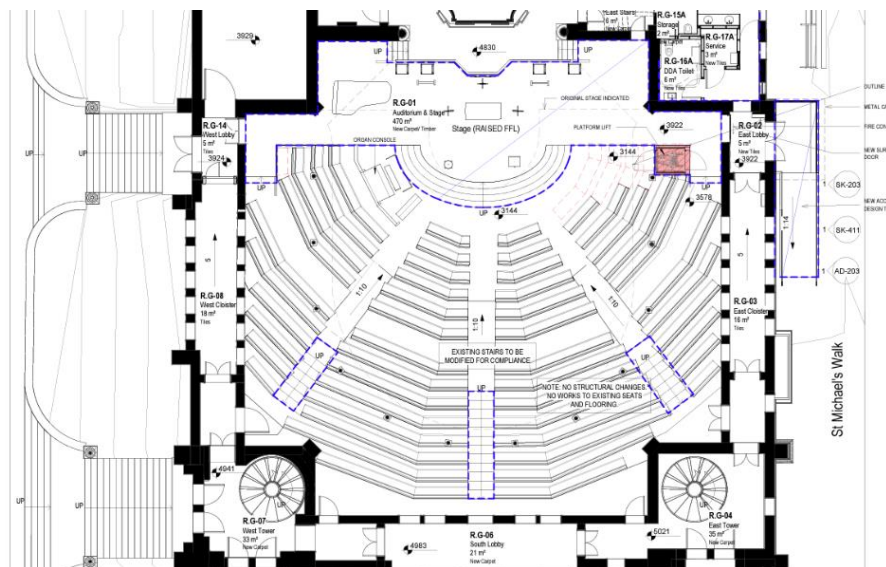


Figure 54 Platform Lift Option, note platform lift indicated in red. Areas of change indicated by blue outline. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

- *Long Ramp*

This option involved raising/enlarging the stage to provide step-free access from east/west lobbies; increasing the number of steps to the stage to five; removing majority of seating to east aisle and installing a long north-south ramp to provide access to lower auditorium levels. This option also included modifying the existing stairs to upper auditorium seating to meet compliance.

Whilst this option allowed for the retention of part of the tiered seating arrangement to the lower auditorium, the installation of a ramp would require the partial demolition of original floors to an isolated area. Further, the ramp, whilst contained to the east wall,



would have a high visual impact on the auditorium space. In addition, this option would provide limited step free circulation and introduce new safety issues by increasing the height of the stage to 778mm above the auditorium floor level.

An option to introduce two long ramps (one at each entrance), therefore increasing step free circulation, was also explored. However, it was deemed inappropriate due to similar concerns.

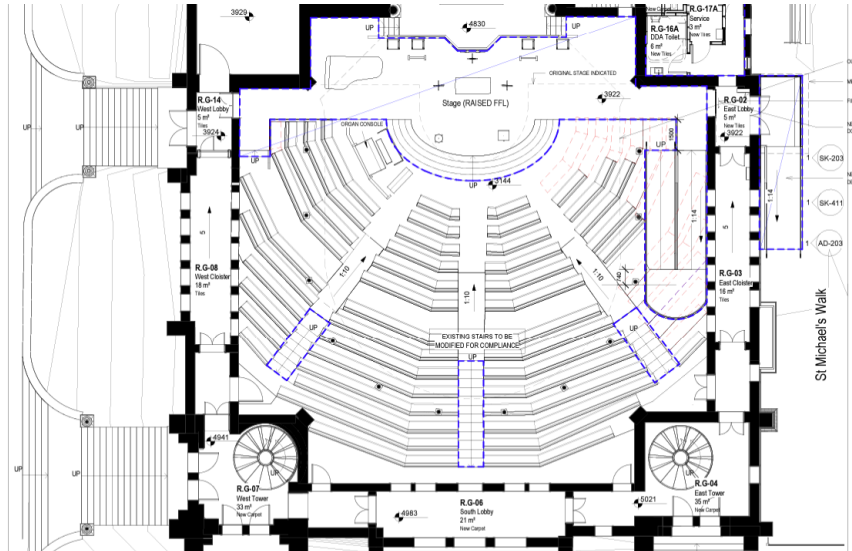


Figure 55 Long Ramp Option, areas of change indicated by blue outline with long ramp to the east of the auditorium. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

- **Short Ramp**

This option involved raising/enlarging the stage to provide step-free access from east/west lobbies; increasing the number of steps to the stage to five; removing one row of seating to the east aisle and installing a curved ramp to provide access to lower auditorium levels. This option also included modifying the existing stairs to upper auditorium seating to meet compliance.

Whilst this option allows for the retention of part of the tiered seating arrangement to the lower auditorium, the installation of a ramp would require the partial demolition of original floors to an isolated area. The ramp, whilst designed to follow the curve of the seating, would still have a high visual impact on the auditorium space. In addition, this option would provide limited step free circulation and introduce new safety issues by increasing the height of the stage to 778mm above the auditorium floor level. Finally, the ramp width and circulation space are not compliant and would require further changes to the design.

A similar option to introduce two shorts curved ramps (one at each entrance), to increase step free circulation, was also explored. However, it was deemed inappropriate due to similar concerns.

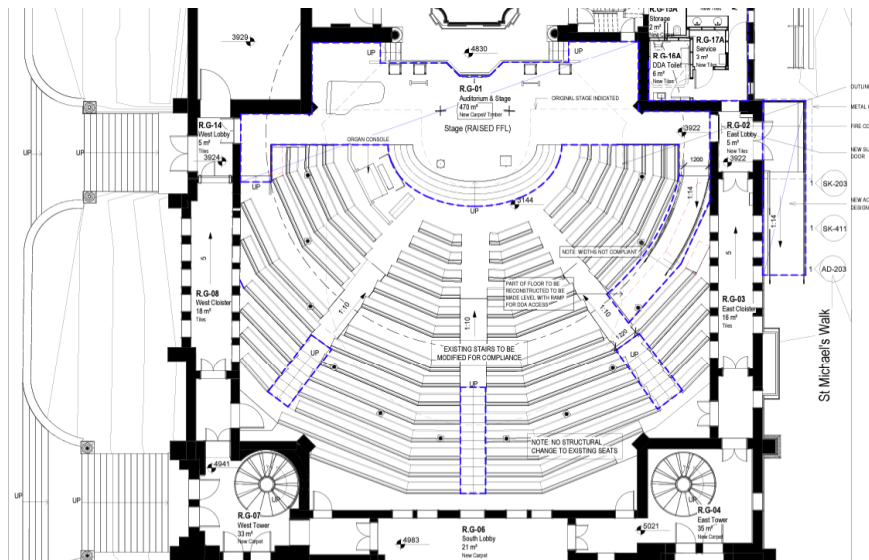


Figure 56 Short Ramp Option, areas of change indicated by blue outline with short ramp to the east of the auditorium. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2024.

In contrast, the proposed design provides a reversible solution that prioritises the retention of original fabric and improves accessibility to the auditorium seating and stage areas. Whilst it is noted that the proposal will result in some visual impacts to the original space and arrangement by constructing a level floor over the original, these impacts are reversible and will allow for the original floor to be retained in situ.

Unlike other options, the proposed design provides complete accessibility to the lower auditorium seating/stage. Further, the movable seating allows for a flexible use of the space, enabling alternative uses of the space to support the place's long-term use.

In addition, the retention of the choir stalls in situ is not possible given the proposed works to the lower auditorium. As such, it is proposed to remove them and adapt/reuse part of the stalls, integrating them into the new design for the ramp/handrails. Several alternate options were explored to inform this decision, as follows:

- Reuse as seating*

Option 1 was to adapt and reuse the choir stalls as seating, moving them to another location in the auditorium. However, as the stalls are currently in a specific arced shape this would require alterations to the already altered stalls, further reducing their integrity. It was also noted that this would result in four different types of seating in the auditorium, potentially resulting in a cluttered visual outcome and detracting from the significance of the space.
- Store for future use*

Option 2 was to store them on site for potential future reuse. However, storage space on site is limited and given the size and nature of the stalls, storage was considered unfeasible.

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5 Assessment

5.1 Impacts, Options Considered and Mitigation

Visual and physical impacts to the heritage place related to the proposal are identified. These impacts are outlined as follows, with details, options considered, and mitigation strategies also discussed as relevant.

5.1.1 St Michael's Walk Entrance

Accessible Entrance

The existing DDA ramp, handrails and rear stairs are later fabric of no significance to the heritage place and there are no concerns with their removal. The area of bluestone ground paving proposed to be removed to enable the works is located within an area of *primary significance*. However the paving is later fabric, and any impacts are mitigated by its replacement with new bluestone paving.

The proposed ramp and monolith signage will have some visual impacts related to the introduction of new built form to an area of *primary significance*. However, any visual impacts are minor and mitigated by the simple contemporary design of these elements. The provision of a 150mm gap between the proposed ramp and east wall will mitigate against any physical impacts to the original bluestone plinth. The use of bluestone paving to the ramp/stairs will ensure the materiality of the new form remains consistent with the sympathetic paving. The use of metal handrails and the contemporary design of the monolith signage will ensure these elements read as new work. Furthermore, the monolith signage will be an important wayfinding marker, ensuring the new accessible entrance is easily identified by visitors.

Restoring the early timber entrance doors by removing later glazing and reinstating the timber cladding is a positive change that will enhance the significance of the place and contribute to its ongoing conservation. New door hardware will be sympathetic in nature with minimal impact.

The removal of later external stairs and handrails adjacent to the amenities block, and replacement with low masonry wall and new handrails is considered a negligible change to an area of *little to no significance*. The proposed design will visually simplify the current arrangement.

The proposed enclosure of the arched openings to the east and west cloisters will have some impacts related to altering the original design intent. However, visual impacts are mitigated by using clear glazing to ensure full visual permeability and metal framing to allow the windows read as new fabric. The enclosure is required to provide security and weather protection to the internal areas and follows a similar approach to that taken to enclose the north cloister.

East Lobby

The enlarging of the existing opening to the north wall will have physical impacts related to the removal of significant original fabric. However, the impacts are mitigated by locating the entrance to an existing opening thus limiting the amount of removed fabric required. The arched design and contemporary metal surround will assist in identifying the opening as new work while illustrating the depth of the original external wall.

The removal of the timber double doors to the west wall and replacement with new automatic glazed sliding door to the auditorium side will have physical and visual impacts related to the removal of original fabric. However, the work is required to achieve DDA compliance and provide accessible entry into the auditorium space, as necessitated by reasonable and economic matters discussed at Section 5.2. Further, any impacts are mitigated by storing the doors on site for potential future reuse and the retention of the frame and architrave in situ, which will provide a visual marker of the original opening.

The existing tiled flooring is later fabric, there are no concerns with its removal and replacement with entrance mats.

5.1.2 Toilet Amenities

Demolition

The area to the north-east of the heritage place, currently housing the toilet amenities, choir vestry and services forms part of the later single storey addition. The CMP indicates these spaces are of *contributory significance*, however all internal walls (except for the *primary significant* wall to the fire services room) are of *little to no significance*. The removal of walls identified to be of *little to no significance* will have no detrimental impact. Likewise, where finishes and fixtures to the existing toilet amenities, switch room and fire services room are concerned, these elements are later fabric of *no significance* and their removal will have no associated impacts. The removal of the later skylight will have no impact on the significance of the place. The enclosure of the shaft will have some impacts however these are mitigated by retaining the shaft and its timber lining within the roof/bulkhead.

It is acknowledged that the proposed extent of demolition includes the *primary significant* wall to the fire services cupboard. Early plans indicate the presence of a previous, smaller addition to this area, and it is likely that this internal wall and part of the external east wall were originally part of this earlier structure. Given the significance of this wall as likely early fabric, its removal will have some associated impacts. However, in the current configuration the wall is located inside a services room with limited public visibility (only a small area is visible to the choir vestry). As such, any impacts are limited and outweighed by the positive impacts that removal of the wall provides with regard to the functional layout of the amenities area and ongoing reasonable use of the place. Likewise, removal of original fabric to the *primary significant* wall between the east stair and choir vestry will have associated impacts. However, this change is related to a rear back of house area (thus limited visibility) and will improve functionality by providing access to the choir vestry from the auditorium/preacher's platform.

New Work

The proposed amenities area will be readily identifiable as new work with a contemporary design throughout. This approach will provide a clear juxtaposition between new and old fabric, with the new arched opening with metal surround (itself an interpretation of the characteristic original arched openings) providing an appropriately contemporary entrance to the re-designed area. The rendered plinth to the original north and west external walls of the church will remain in place, visible along the south wall of the hallway. This plinth detail, in combination with the depth of the new arched opening, will act as a visual reminder of the building's original extents and this previously external wall.

There are no concerns with the installation of opaque film to windows or the fixing closed of two external doors, given these elements are identified to be of *little to no significance*. The enclosure of the skylight will have some visual impacts related to the concealment of the timber panelled shaft from view. However, the impacts are considered minor given the skylight is currently located in a services area (thus with limited visibility) and are mitigated by the retention of the skylight/timber panelled shaft within the proposed bulkhead.

The new arrangement will visually impact the *contributory* choir vestry by altering its size and shape. However, the impacts are considered minor and are outweighed by the positive impacts of updating the toilet amenities to provide improved accessibility and functionality in support of the ongoing use of the place. Further discussion of these factors is provided at Section 5.3. Additionally, the proposed arrangement of the amenities area has also been driven by the need to retain the power supply unit in its current location.

The proposed contemporary approach to the materiality, fixtures and finishes of the amenities area is generally considered appropriate. However, it is requested that details of the proposed finishes and fixtures are approved under a condition to any permit.

5.1.3 Auditorium

Demolition

The removal of a small section of the existing flooring to connect the existing and new floor joists will result in a physical impact. However, other options were extensively explored (see Section 4.2), and the proposed design is considered the least impactful, particularly with regard to the retention of original fabric. The partial demolition of the stage floor and half circle will result in impacts given this is fabric of *primary significance*. However, the stage has been previously altered and any impacts are mitigated by the retention and reuse of the existing structure.



Later upholstered pews to the auditorium are of *no significance*, there are no concerns with their removal. The removal of the choir stalls will result in some impact related to the removal of early fabric. However, the stalls in their current form do not suit the use of the place and any impacts are limited given their low integrity, which have been substantially altered from their original form. Other options for the alteration/reuse of the stalls as seating or storing them were considered (refer Section 4.2), however these were deemed inappropriate. The adaption and reuse of the stalls in the new ramp/handrail will provide some visual continuity throughout the auditorium space however will be detailed in such a way that the works read as contemporary.

The removal of the timber double doors to the west lobby entrance and replacement with new automatic glazed sliding door to the auditorium side will have physical and visual impacts related to the removal of original fabric. However, the removal of the double doors is required to achieve DDA compliance and necessitated by reasonable and economic matters discussed. Further, any impacts are mitigated by storing the doors on site for potential future reuse and the retention of the frame and architrave in situ, which will provide a visual marker of the original opening.

New Work

The proposed auditorium arrangement provides a considered design approach to improving accessibility to meet contemporary standards, whilst respecting key elements of the significance and prioritising the retention of original fabric. It is acknowledged that the proposed design will result in a visual impact related to obscuring the original sloped floor and altering the semicircular tiered seating arrangement to the lower auditorium.

Article 21.2 of the Burra Charter notes that *adaptation should involve minimal change to significant fabric, achieved only after considering alternatives*. The proposed scheme is guided by this approach, adapting the auditorium to provide a contemporary level of accessibility and amenity whilst minimising impact to significant original fabric. Where impacts are identified, these have been mitigated by the retention of as much original fabric as possible and the reversible nature of the design by retaining the original floor in situ below the new floor. Physical impacts are further reduced by creating a substantial underfloor area to conceal upgraded services. Thus, preventing the installation of services to more visible areas of the auditorium where they would likely intrude upon original fabric and visually detract from the space.

Works to modify the upper auditorium stairs will follow the same reversible approach, adding to rather than removing existing fabric to mitigate against physical impacts. This change is considered minor and will retain the arrangement of stepped aisles to the upper auditorium seating, thus mitigating against visual impacts.

The introduction of new screens and automatic glazed sliding doors to the east and west entrances is a visual change and will have some impact on the auditorium space. However, these interventions are required to achieve compliance and improve the entry flow into the auditorium. The screens will obscure the entrance areas from the stage allowing for discrete egress, avoiding disruptions to the service. Further, the contemporary design and materiality of these elements will ensure they read as new work. Where the screens are concerned, the use of a semi-permeable perforated metal screening and the inclusion of a gap between the top of the screens and ceiling, will further mitigate any visual impacts.

Conservation works to refurbish and reinstate the organ console will have a positive impact on the significance of the auditorium space.

Overall, it is acknowledged that the proposal will result in impacts related to altering the significant sloping auditorium form and tiered seating arrangement. However, these changes are necessitated by reasonable and economic use considerations, and will support the ongoing use of the place and its long-term conservation. Furthermore, the proposed design is derived from careful consideration of options and driven by *a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible*.² The chosen approach prioritises the retention of as much original fabric as possible and where visual impacts are identified these are mitigated by the highly reversible nature of the design and careful treatment of new elements.

² Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013

Finally, it is requested that details of the proposed finishes are approved under a condition to any permit.

5.1.4 South Entry

The carpet to the south cloister and east and west tower rooms and entrance mats to the south entry are later fabric. There are no concerns with their removal and replacement provided the replacement materials are respectful of the identified significance of the heritage place. It is requested that details of the proposed replacement materials are approved under a condition to any permit.

5.2 Further Information

It is requested that the following items be assessed and approved under conditions to any permit:

- Details of finishes and fixtures (including door hardware).
- Details of the junction between the raised floor and timber preacher's platform joinery.

5.3 Why the Proposal Should Be Supported

The proposal should be supported as it will contribute to the ongoing use of the heritage place as a place of worship. Since its opening in 1866, the heritage place has operated as a church, first under the Congregational denomination and, since 1977, under the Uniting Church. The place has undergone various phases of change to adapt to the developing needs of the congregational community. The proposed works continue this pattern of change, upgrading the heritage place to achieve contemporary standards of amenity and accessibility, to support the ongoing use of the place by the Uniting Church community and broader public.

It is acknowledged that the proposed works will result in some impacts. However, where identified, these impacts have been mitigated and are outweighed by the positive effects of upgraded accessibility and amenity that will support the ongoing use of the place as a church and its long-term conservation. The proposal is guided by the Burra Charter, with particular consideration given to Article 3.1, which states *conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric, use, associations and meanings. It requires a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible*. Owing to this, the retention of significant original fabric has been prioritised, with visual impacts mitigated by the reversible nature of the proposal. The result is a considered series of interventions that substantially improve the use of the place, bringing it up to contemporary standards and dramatically improving access, whilst respecting and safeguarding the assessed significance of the heritage place. Finally, SMUC is dedicated to ensuring the works are undertaken in a manner which will respect the heritage place, this extends to their commitment to engage appropriate contractors with relevant experience working with heritage places.


5.3.1 Matters which the Executive Director is to consider under s101(2)

The following section should be read in conjunction with the letter of support prepared by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman included at Appendix A.

Reasonable Use

Driven by societal, liturgical and technological changes, the way places of worship are used has changed dramatically in recent decades. The extent of these changes and their impacts is aptly summarised in the following excerpt from the *Guidelines for Change and Development of Heritage Places of Worship* (2010):

“Today, there is a greater emphasis placed on active participation of worshippers which in turn has caused a review of the way the interiors of places of worship function. This active participation has also included mission and outreach within local communities and in some cases, has brought with it a need for greater community utilisation of significant religious buildings.



Broader community use of places of worship has also occurred as a result of declining and aging congregations and escalating maintenance costs. In an effort to prolong the sustainability and viability of these places, and to also fulfil the role of mission outreach, associated buildings such as church halls have been leased or hired on casual, semi-permanent and permanent arrangements for other community uses. The minimal income gained from these hiring arrangements has often provided some opportunity for token maintenance works. Yet the unique physical characteristics of many places of worship – by virtue of their design, construction and detailing – creates a substantial burden for keeping them in good repair.”³

In the case of the Uniting Church, services now encourage more active participation, resulting in changes to the way the auditorium space is utilised. Both the minister and participants (including readers, people offering prayers, candle lights and communion servers) use the stage, with participants moving freely between the congregation and chancel. Congregation members are also invited to participate in symbolic actions during services which require movement through the space. However, the current floor level changes, sloping ramps and steps throughout the lower auditorium prevent the participation of people with limited mobility and present a safety risk for others (such as families with babies or small children).

SMUC has identified a vision to create an accessible and inclusive venue for community use, in line with its broader mission to be a vibrant, inclusive, hospitable and community focused city church. To deliver on this evolving function and the church's mission, it is reasonable to expect that the heritage place achieves a level of amenity and accessibility that is up to contemporary standards and aligns with the congregation's functional requirements. However, in its current state, access both into and within the building is largely non-compliant, amenities are outdated, and access issues within the auditorium space render it exclusionary and unsafe. Without further change, the heritage place risks falling into a state of disuse and ultimately deterioration as it is unable to fulfill the needs of the congregation or appeal to broader community use.

As such, the proposed upgrade works are required to meet the needs of the congregation and broader community, and to ensure the heritage place continues to be used as a place of worship. The works will enable SMUC to deliver its mission to create an inclusive and community focused city church. Amenities will be updated to contemporary standards and access both into and within the heritage place will be drastically improved. In particular, the proposed works to the St Michael's Walk entrance and lower auditorium will allow people to move freely without fear of trip and fall hazards. Whilst universal access to the stage will enable the inclusion of worship leaders, performers or speakers with disabilities. Ultimately, the proposed works will transform the heritage place into a welcoming and inclusive space for the congregation and broader community. This will safeguard the significant ongoing use of the place and thus contribute to its long-term conservation.

The SMUC congregation holds the heritage place in high regard and is proud to be its ongoing custodian. However, small congregation numbers and ongoing maintenance and conservation requirements mean that SMUC must continue to diversify its offering outside of regular services to generate income to support the substantial costs of building upkeep. The hiring of the space for weddings, funerals, concerts, public lectures and other compatible events is a reasonable use of the place and an ongoing function of the church, which has a history of hosting public events. However, presently the heritage place lacks the contemporary level of accessibility, amenity and safety that is necessary to attract these types of events, resulting in a downturn in the number of events hosted in recent years. The proposed works will better position the place to attract, and therefore capitalise on, public and community events, allowing SMUC to better serve the wider community and generate income for building conservation. Specifically, the proposal will create an accessible lower auditorium space with movable seating, providing greater flexibility in how the space is used for events such as weddings, concerts and public lectures. Whilst the new accessible

³ *Guidelines for Change and Development of Places of Heritage Places of Worship*, Heritage Council of Victoria and Heritage Victoria, 2010.M N

stage will provide greater space for groups of musicians and performers and increase the viability of the place for music and other small-scale arts related events.

A refusal would substantially impact the ongoing use of the place. The heritage place in its current state cannot support the needs of the congregation and broader community. There is a risk that if the building cannot support its use as a church, the congregation will leave. Should the congregation leave, the place would fall into disuse. This would put the fabric at risk of deterioration or in need of further adaption to support a new use. The loss of the congregation would also have a profound impact on the significance of the place, given the connection between its current use as a place of worship and its historic significance as an Independent or Congregational church. In summary, a refusal of the proposal would risk the heritage place's ongoing use as a church, reducing its significance and potentially jeopardising the long-term conservation of the place.

Economic Use

The proposed works are required to revitalise the heritage place, upgrade amenities and improve accessibility to ensure the place meets contemporary standards and compliance requirements. The proposal will enable SMUC to deliver on its vision to become an accessible and inclusive venue for community use, improving its ability to attract greater congregation numbers and host an increased number of compatible public events. This will allow SMUC to generate greater income and increase the funds available to undertake necessary maintenance and conservation works.

Ensuring the long-term economic sustainability of the heritage place is a crucial goal of the proposed Revitalisation Project. Presently, the heritage place is underutilised outside of regular Sunday services and weekly organ recitals. Whilst the place is available to hire for events, the outdated amenities, lack of access and safety hazards, dissuade many potential renters. The proposed works will enable a greater degree of flexibility in how the space is used, improving the breadth of events the heritage place is able to host. Upgraded accessibility and modernised amenities will better position the heritage place to attract a greater number of events, including weddings, concerts, small-scale arts related events and public lectures. This will maximise the use of the church, establishing a reliable income stream to support the ongoing maintenance and conservation requirements of the heritage place. Overall, the proposal will enable the heritage place to increase income generation and ultimately support the ongoing use and economic sustainability of the heritage place into the future.

A refusal would substantially impact the ability for SMUC to generate income to support the long-term maintenance and conservation needs of the heritage place. In its current state, the heritage place does not meet contemporary standards of amenity and accessibility and is unable to fulfill the needs of the congregation and broader community. In combination with the safety hazards and access issues caused by non-compliance, this has resulted in dwindling congregation numbers and a downturn in the number of weddings and other events hosted by the heritage place. Should the works not go ahead, the place will be unable to attract the congregation numbers and events needed to generate sufficient income to support the building's maintenance and conservation requirements. Given this, a refusal would threaten the ongoing economic sustainability of the heritage place to the extent that funds for essential maintenance would not be available and the place would risk falling into disrepair.



6 Summary of Impacts and Conclusion

In summary, the proposal comprises of internal and external alterations to improve accessibility, amenity and compliance at the heritage place. The proposed works will result in some impact, particularly in relation to alterations to the auditorium and construction of a new level floor over the original sloped floor. However, where possible these impacts have been mitigated and are necessitated by reasonable and economic use considerations. The works will contribute to the ongoing use and conservation of the heritage place. The proposal is guided by *a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible*, prioritising the retention of original fabric and ensuring that where changes will result in visual impacts they are reversible in nature. Furthermore, the proposal includes some conservation works which will contribute to the ongoing maintenance of the heritage place into the future.

Overall, the heritage place in its current state is not able to support the requirements of the SMUC congregation and broader public, and risks falling into a state of disuse. The proposed works will provide necessary upgrades to access and amenity and are thus integral to the ongoing use of the place as a church, its long-term conservation and economic sustainability.



Appendix A Letter of Support – Rev Dr Margaret Mayman



6 December 2024

To: Heritage Victoria

I write in support of St Michael's "Revitalisation Project" where I have been the minister since 2020.

Revitalising the church building and the church community

St Michael's has undertaken this significant project as part of our forward-looking vision. The revitalisation aims to prepare for the next phase of our church's life by transforming our church building to better serve both the present and future congregation and the wider community.

The congregation's identity is articulated in its mission statement, which emphasises spirituality in the broadest sense. It focuses on fostering a welcoming and inclusive community, enhancing the wellbeing of all who visit the church, and nurturing creativity and the arts, particularly through music.

The congregation of St Michael's holds in high regard the beautiful heritage church, which we are privileged to enjoy through the generosity and hard work of previous generations. We appreciate its grandeur as well as the sense of intimacy and inclusion provided by the curved interior and seating arrangement. For religious services and various other events such as concerts, public lectures, or debates, attendees value the ability to see the speakers or performers on the chancel and to connect with fellow participants in the auditorium. The church's architecture offers both aesthetic and social significance.

We are delighted with the creative and accessible design for the church renovation and facilities upgrade collaboratively developed for us by Trethowan Architecture.

Accessible and Welcoming

Making the church a fully accessible and safe gathering place is a key aspect of our mission. Presently, people with limited mobility, whether ambulant or utilising a wheelchair or walking frame, face challenges in accessing the church entrances and auditorium seating areas. The Revitalisation Project will make the entry from St Michael's Walk into the renovated lower auditorium a welcoming and inclusive space. Flexible individual seating will give everyone the opportunity to sit where they choose. Within the renewed space people will be able to move freely without fear of trips and falls

hazards. An accessible chancel will enable inclusion of worship leaders, performers, or speakers with disabilities.

We are an open and affirming congregation, welcoming LGBTIQ+ people, many of whom have experienced rejection and exclusion in other faith communities. In some religious contexts LGBTIQ+ people and people with disability have been subject to spiritually abusive rhetoric and practices. At St Michael's our theology is progressive and non-dogmatic. We practice a spacious spirituality, ensuring that visitors, whether attending services or visiting at other times, feel welcomed, respected and valued.

Community Use

The revitalisation project is a crucial component of our commitment to making the church, which is currently underused outside of Sunday services and weekly organ recitals, available to the wider community. Increasing use of the church for purposes other than worship is another goal associated with the renovation, both in terms of serving the wider community and generating income.

The project will facilitate a wider range of uses, with a particular focus on increasing the use of the church as a music venue for concerts and festivals. Increased space on the chancel for groups of singers and musicians, will make the use of the church for music and other small-scale arts-related events more viable. We believe that music nourishes the human spirit, providing an experience of transcendence that many people seek amidst the challenges of their lives and concerns about society and the world.

St Michael's also has a history of hosting public events which contribute to individual and collective wellbeing and social cohesion. The revitalisation of the auditorium, and the provision of upgraded facilities, will greatly assist presentation of lectures, debates, interactive interviews and other presentations.

Securing a sustainable future – income stream and inclusivity

A primary objective of this renovation is to maximise the use of the church to establish a reliable income stream that will support the maintenance requirements outlined in the Conservation Management Plan. Ensuring long-term economic sustainability is critical.

When the church is hired by other groups or organisations whose values align with ours, we charge fees based on the resources available. This approach allows us to accommodate renters who can afford commercial hire rates as well as community and non-profit groups with more limited financial capabilities.

The church has been a sought-after venue for weddings, which have provided additional income for the congregation over many years. However, we frequently hear from couples that the lack of accessibility for elderly relatives, and friends and family with disabilities, has ruled out the church as their preferred wedding venue.

Congregational Life: Changes in Worship Culture

For the worshipping congregation, the proposed design changes in the lower auditorium will foster inclusive community, reduce hierarchy, and enhance our egalitarian ethos while maintaining the



heritage value of the church. Over the past five years, the way the congregation uses the church for worship has changed significantly. The minister and other participants use the lectern rather than the high pulpit. Participants move freely between the congregation and the chancel, overcoming barriers between leaders and the congregation. Readers, people offering prayers, candle lighters, communion servers, and those bringing the offering forward are active participants. Sometimes members of the congregation are invited to move around the church to participate in symbolic actions during the service.

In a change from the past practice of reformed churches, communion is now served at the at the front. However, because of the steps and sloping ramp in the lower auditorium people with limited mobility must remain in their seats and have communion brought to them.

Reducing the number of steps between the chancel and the auditorium, and expanding the space on the chancel, will reduce the safety risk for families bringing babies or small children to the font for baptism.

History and Change

St Michael's has a longstanding history of both safeguarding the heritage value of the church and sensitively adapting it to accommodate changes in cultural and religious needs. The Revitalisation Project represents the next phase in this ongoing evolution. It allows the congregation, which is deeply committed to its stewardship responsibilities to honour and conserve the church, to address the present and future needs while preserving the beauty and spirit of the past. It is with pride and hope, we commend this submission to Heritage Victoria.

Sincerely,

Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Minister, St Michael's Uniting Church