

# HEATHCOTE CIVIC PRECINCT

TAUNGURUNG COUNTRY  
123-125 HIGH STREET, HEATHCOTE



HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT  
REGARDING ALTERATIONS & ADDITIONS  
TO A CIVIC COMPLEX

PETER ANDREW BARRETT  
NOVEMBER 2024

*Cover photographs from top to bottom:*

*High Street frontage.*

*North West elevation.*

*Part of South West (rear) elevation.*

**Heritage Impact Statement for: -**  
Proposed alterations and additions  
to the Heathcote Civic Precinct  
Taungurung Country  
123-125 High Street, Heathcote

**Victorian Heritage Register Number: -**  
VHR H1368

**This statement forms part of a permit application for: -**  
Partial demolition, alterations and  
additions to the Heathcote Civic Precinct.

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**For:**  
Eplus Architecture

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

*Figure 1: Aerial view of the Heathcote Civic Precinct. The subject site is delineated with a blue line (Source of image: Vicplan).*



The Heathcote Civic Precinct is a community-use building that is owned by the City of Greater Bendigo. Built in 1863-64 as a court house and council chambers, it serves today as a customer service centre for the Council, a Council-run public library, and a retail outlet.

Since the completion of this building it has undergone a series of alterations and additions, the most significant change being the addition in the mid-twentieth century of a supper room at the rear of the wing of the former council chamber/shire offices.

The Council proposes to remove this supper room and its auxiliary spaces, and replace this with a new addition that will contain multi-use spaces for the library, as part of a broader scope of works to upgrade this complex so it can better serve the community.

Works are also proposed to be undertaken to the former court house which incorporate some conservation actions and other works to improve the amenity of the court house, which is to be adapted to use as a co-working space.

This heritage impact statement is to accompany a permit application to Heritage Victoria for these proposed works to the Heathcote Civic Precinct.

This heritage impact statement is prepared by Peter Andrew Barrett, architectural historian and heritage consultant.

## 1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

This heritage impact statement addresses a number of questions in relation to the proposed works to the Heathcote Civic Precinct:

- Has this proposal addressed local planning scheme heritage provisions?
- What were key considerations when designing the proposed works?
- What physical and/or visual impacts will result from the proposed works?
- What additional measures are recommended to enhance this heritage place and/or mitigate detrimental impacts?
- Are the proposed works, on balance, a satisfactory outcome, given the heritage constraints of the site?

## 1.3 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This heritage impact statement should be read in conjunction with drawings of the proposed works that are prepared by Eplus Architecture. These are a set of architectural drawings titled 'Heathcote Civic Precinct' and 'Heritage Victoria Permit – Updated addition scope', dated 1 November 2024.

All sources reviewed in the preparation of this heritage impact statement are listed in the Bibliography at the end of this report.

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

This heritage impact statement is prepared with regard to *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013*; hereon referred to as the *Burra Charter 2013*. The *Burra Charter 2013* is a policy guideline in the *City of Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* that must be considered in assessing any proposed works to a heritage place.

This report is based, in part, upon site inspections of the Heathcote Civic Precinct undertaken on 23 February 2024, 28 August 2024 and 23 October 2024.

Much of the history of the complex and its physical description are well documented, and do not need to be re-written or re-assessed in any minute detail in this report.

This heritage impact statement has reviewed various citations at State and Local levels, and other sources that discuss the site's cultural heritage value; and makes comment where appropriate on matters contained within them that are relevant to this permit application.

## 1.5 TERMINOLOGY

The term 'Heathcote Civic Precinct' refers to the entire complex including all parts of the subject site, its building, the Boer War memorial at the front of the site, and all landscape elements.

The orientation of elevations discussed in this heritage impact statement is consistent with this permit application's architectural drawings ie:

- North East Elevation – High Street elevation or façade;
- North West Elevation – side elevation of the wing of the former council chamber;
- South West Elevation – rear of the building;
- South East Elevation – side elevation of the wing of the former court house.

When referring to single elements in the complex generic terminology will be used to identify these including:

- 'former court house' and/or 'south east wing';
- 'former council chambers', 'shire offices' and/or 'north-west wing'. This wing also contained for a time a town hall, which is mentioned *passim*.
- 'supper room', this encompasses the entire red brick rear addition built in the mid-twentieth century;
- 'war memorial' (Boer War Memorial) in the High Street setback
- 'forecourt' to describe the landscape area in the front setback from High Street.



Figure 2: An 1867 drawing of the Heathcote Civic Precinct by Frederick Grosse. (Source of image: State Library of Victoria).



The complex and its elements are referred to by different names in historic documents and earlier reports. In this report, contemporary names are used to identify buildings and elements at the complex except when quoting an historic narrative or referring to an earlier document.

# 2

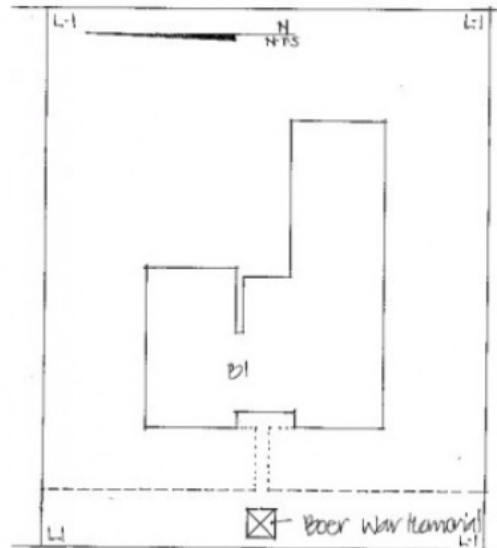
## WHAT IS THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PLACE?

### 2.1 HERITAGE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

The Heathcote Civic Precinct is included on the Heritage Council of Victoria *Victorian Heritage Register* as a place of State significance – VHR H1368 Former Heathcote Court House and Council Chambers. The extent of this registration is all land marked L-1 and all of the buildings marked B1 on the plan of the extent of registration – see Figure 2.<sup>1</sup>

This extent of registration also includes the Boer War Memorial at the front of the complex in High Street. The Boer War Memorial is included on the *Victorian War Heritage Inventory* (Place ID 127001).<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3: Map of the Extent of Registration of the Heathcote Court House and Shire Council Chambers, contained in the Victorian Heritage Register. Source of image: Victorian Heritage Database.



- 1 Heritage Council of Victoria, *Victorian Heritage Register*, 'Former Heathcote Court House and Council Chambers', Place ID 5124, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/5124>, retrieved 28 August 2024.
- 2 Heritage Council of Victoria, *Victorian War Heritage Inventory*, Heathcote Boer War Memorial, Place ID 127001, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/127001>, retrieved 28 August 2024.

In the environs of the subject site is another war memorial, the Heathcote War Memorial, which is at the front of the Heathcote RSL Public Hall. That war memorial is also included on the *Victorian War Heritage Inventory* (Place ID 155579).<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO

The Heathcote Civic Precinct is subject to a site-specific heritage overlay in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* – HO465 Former Heathcote Court House and Shire Council Chambers.

In the environs of the subject site are other site-specific heritage overlays within the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*. These include HO764 Mechanics Institute at 121 High Street; and HO765 the former Commercial Bank of Australia, 129 High Street.

The Heathcote Civic Precinct forms part of another precinct-based heritage overlay HO723 Heathcote Precinct, which covers much of the commercial area of central Heathcote.

Figure 4: A map showing the extent of the heritage overlay applicable to the subject site, and the site-specific heritage overlays of adjacent sites, listed on the heritage overlay schedule of the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*. The subject site, the Heathcote Civic Precinct, is delineated in blue. Source of Map: Vicplan.



3 Heritage Council of Victoria, *Victorian War Heritage Inventory*, Heathcote War Memorial, Place ID 155579, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/155579>, retrieved 28 August 2024.

As a consequence of these site-specific heritage overlays and the precinct-based heritage overlay, any works to the Heathcote Civic Precinct, including works adjacent to its buildings and landscape elements, will need to be designed with regard to the local planning policies in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* pertaining to heritage. These include Clause 43.01 Heritage Overlay and Clause 15.03 Heritage.

Primarily, the intent of these heritage overlays is to conserve and enhance heritage places, and to ensure that new works do not adversely affect their recognised heritage values. Any proposed works to the Heathcote Civic Precinct should be consistent with the intent of these conservation policies. The extent of these site-specific heritage overlays in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* are shown in Figure 4.

The City of Greater Bendigo has prepared guidelines for sites subject to a heritage overlay - *Heritage Design Guidelines* (City of Greater Bendigo, September 2020). The design guidelines provide clarity on the conservation and alterations and additions to heritage places, however, the focus of the guidelines is residential buildings, not public or commercial buildings.

## 2.3 OTHER HERITAGE LISTINGS

### *National Trust of Australia (Victoria)*

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) database contains only a file on the Heathcote Civic Precinct (B5495), which is described as the 'Former Town Hall and Court House'. There are no statutory constraints arising from this.

### *Australian Heritage Council*

The Heathcote Civic Precinct is not included on the Australian Heritage Council *National Heritage List*.

### *(former) Australian Heritage Commission*

Heathcote Civic Precinct forms part of the Heathcote Conservation Area, High Street, Heathcote, which is included on the *Register of the National Estate*, registered 30 June 1992, Place ID 4244, Place File No 2/06/099/002. The *Register of the National Estate* was closed in 2007 and is a non-statutory archive.

There are no statutory constraints arising from the inclusion of the Heathcote Conservation Area on the archived *Register of the National Estate*.

## 2.4 EXISTING CONDITION OF THE PLACE

The Heathcote Civic Precinct including its buildings and landscape elements are in good condition. However, some portions of the complex, in particular the former court house, are in need of conservation works to its historic fabric. These conservation works are documented in the drawings prepared by Eplus Architecture that are titled 'Heathcote Civic Precinct' and 'Heritage Victoria Permit – Updated addition scope', dated 1 November 2024. A summary of the conservation works is also found in the Appendix of this heritage impact statement.

## 2.5 CURRENT USE OF THE PLACE

Much of the Heathcote Civic Precinct is currently used as a local library and customer service centre by the City of Greater Bendigo, and the former court house is occupied by a retail outlet

## 2.6 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACE

The Heathcote Civic Precinct is a place that is recognised to be significant at State and Local levels.

The heritage controls at State and Local levels apply significant constraints on how change can occur to this site, and all parts of its building and its landscape elements identified as contributing to the heritage value of the Heathcote Civic Precinct.

These controls do not, however, preclude any change; rather manage how and what change can occur to Heathcote Civic Precinct to maintain its inherent heritage values.

The proposed works provide an opportunity to enhance the experience of those both working at and/or visiting this site.

# 3

## WHY IS THE PLACE OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE?

### 3.1 HERITAGE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

The following Statement of Significance for the Heathcote Civic Precinct is included in the record details for this heritage place on the Heritage Council of Victoria *Victorian Heritage Register* – VHR H1368 Former Heathcote Court House and Council Chambers:

*The Former Heathcote Court House and Shire Council Chambers was constructed in 1863 to the design of Melbourne architect, John Flannagan and was partially funded by both the local council and the colonial government. The building is quite unusual for incorporating the town hall with the court house, and only a small number of other Victorian local councils had such buildings and of these, very few survive particularly those dating from the 1860s. Flannagan designed a similar building for the Hotham Municipal Council in 1862 and this previous design was used as a model by the Heathcote Council when lobbying the government for funding. The building when constructed was a face brick symmetrically arranged building with courthouse and town hall in large wings on either side of a central entrance bay. The building is a good example of nineteenth century classicism employing the inventive and playful mood of mannerist buildings of the Baroque period. Since construction the building has been rendered with stucco and features an intact court house interior.*

*The Former Heathcote Court House and Shire Council Chambers is of historical and architectural importance to the State of Victoria.*

*The Heathcote Town Hall and Court House is of architectural merit as a well composed building influenced by a style known nominated [sic] Victorian Mannerism, which sought to be inventive and playful within the tradition of strict classicism. Early nineteenth century British architects rediscovered Mannerism of the late Renaissance as a style which released them from cold imitation of Classicism [sic] and allowed freedom and 'character' within their design. The well designed and prominent building is an unusual and rare surviving integration of an 1860s court house and shire chambers.*

*The building has historical importance as it demonstrates the growth of the central goldfields area as a consequence of the gold fields and in particular the period of permanent settlement in the 1860s and 1870s when temporary buildings were replaced with permanent structures of considerable architectural merit.*

The building is a notable example of a council chambers/shire office and court house complex built in the mid-nineteenth century. The rendering of its exterior (formerly of face brick), most probably during works in the 1890s, have reinforced the visual effect of the detailing of its façade.

In terms of the complex's Mannerist-style, it does demonstrate aspects of this style, but in a relatively restrained way in comparative terms with other Mannerist-style buildings.

In terms of the combined functions of this building, as a court house and council chambers, local government buildings of the nineteenth century often did incorporate various functions such as court houses or post offices. Another example in Central Victoria is the Clunes Court House and Town Hall/Borough Offices, built in 1872-73,<sup>4</sup> - refer to Figure 6. The second North Melbourne Town Hall, built 1875-6, incorporated a trio of functions of municipal (town hall and municipal offices), post office and court house.<sup>5</sup> Fitzroy Town Hall, built in stages between 1873 and 1890, is another municipal complex that had a court house, as well as a police station.<sup>6</sup>

*Figure 5: In this c1870 photograph of Heathcote, part of the court house portion of the Heathcote Civic Precinct is visible at right (indicated with an arrow). The building's original face brick exterior is visible. The large complex behind, is the Government Camp. Source of image: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.*



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- 4 Heritage Council of Victoria, *Victorian Heritage Database*, 'Clunes Town Hall and Court House', VHR H2180, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/2040/download-report>, retrieved 29 August 2024.
  - 5 Heritage Council of Victoria, *Victorian Heritage Database*, 'North Melbourne Town Hall and Court House', VHR H2224, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/3016>, retrieved 29 August 2024.
  - 6 Heritage Council of Victoria, *Victorian Heritage Database*, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/471>, retrieved 29 August 2024.

Figure 6: Clunes Town Hall and Court House. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.



### 3.2 GREATER BENDIGO PLANNING SCHEME

As well as being subject to a site-specific heritage overlay in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*, the Heathcote Civic Precinct is within a precinct-based heritage overlay of the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*, the HO723 Heathcote Precinct. The statement of significance for this heritage precinct identifies it to be of historic, aesthetic, scientific and social significance at a Local level. These heritage values are derived from:

*The Heathcote precinct includes places associated with the major historic themes including the government camp that initially demonstrates the role of government regulations associated with gold mining, and then later with the establishment of local government. High Street includes places associated with agricultural industries and later commercial activity derived from agriculture. High Street also contains the key buildings for recreation, education and religious worship, as well as a number of private residences. It also contains a number of contributory residential and commercial buildings that provide a context for the key buildings. The Barracks Reserve trees are historically significant as a reminder of early recreation activities in Heathcote.*

*Criterion A*



*Heathcote contains a number of buildings associated with the establishment and continuation of government activities. The Government Surveyor's office of 1853 by James Crowle is the earliest example of government buildings in Heathcote, and this was continued with the establishment of the Government Camp containing the hospital, police station and the second lock up. The powder magazine provides evidence of government regulation associated with mining as it served the purpose of safely storing explosives necessary for deep lead mining. The further development of government activities is demonstrated by the council offices and courthouse of 1863 for the newly constituted Shire of Mclvor. Criterion A*

*Heathcote contains evidence of gold mining sites and mining technologies that provided the impetus for the growth of the town, initially from the alluvial gold mining along the Mclvor Creek and the later gold sluicing operations at Pink Cliffs immediately to the west of the town in the 1860s. Although not in the Heathcote precinct, Pink Cliffs gold sluicing site and Sawpit Gully gold puddling sites are of scientific significance in understanding different mining technologies as they evolved in trying to extract gold from clay. Criterion F*

*Heathcote contains examples of buildings that demonstrate the town's links with agriculture of the region. This is best demonstrated by the former Christie's flour mill built by James Crowle, and several large stone stores in High Street. High St contains a number of examples of commercial buildings with distinctive in their design with splayed corners, such as 72 and 105 High Street. High Street presents an intact commercial streetscape of the late nineteenth century. The streetscape consists of a line of shops and a group of basically intact nineteenth century public buildings (Heathcote Hall, Mclvor Shire Offices, Court House, Commercial Bank, Wesley Uniting Church and Post Office). Very few streetscapes in Victoria possess such continuity of scale and setback with a number of nineteenth century shopfronts and posted verandahs. The Heathcote precinct also contains examples of a variety of housing styles including small timber and masonry cottages and larger houses from the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. There are representative examples of Victorian, Edwardian and Inter War housing. Criterion D*

*The Heathcote Precinct is associated with Government Surveyor Philip Chauncey and with stonemasons and builders James and John Crowle and with Dr. Alfred Esler, a renowned surgeon who resided at Helenslee. Criterion H*

The statement of significance notes that the Heathcote Civic Precinct is an important part of this heritage overlay in terms of its architectural and aesthetic values, and in demonstrating the early establishment of local government in this district which served as a continuum of the earlier Government Camp established on the rise of land to its rear.

### 3.3 NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria), which has only a file on the Heathcote Civic Precinct, does not have a statement of significance for the building.

### 3.4 OTHER

The statement of significance for the Heathcote Central Conservation Area in the now archived Australian Heritage Commission *Register of the National Estate* states:

*This section of High Street presents an intact commercial streetscape of the late nineteenth century. The streetscape consists of a line of shops and a group of basically intact nineteenth century public buildings (Heathcote Hall, [former] Mclvor Shire Offices, Court House, Commercial Bank, Wesley Uniting Church and Post office). Very few streetscapes in Victoria possess such continuity of scale and setback and of intact nineteenth century shopfronts and posted verandahs.*

Although a non-statutory archive, the statement of significance of the *Register of the National Estate* does accurately identify High Street, Heathcote to be a rare streetscape in Victoria in terms of its intactness of nineteenth century built form and in its consistent scale. Setbacks from street boundaries do vary, however, the former Heathcote court house and council offices a case in point with their setback from the street boundary in contrast to shops and other buildings in High Street extending along street frontages,

# 4

## SITE DESCRIPTION

### *Environs*

The subject site is situated within the HO723 Heathcote Precinct heritage overlay of the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*. High Street forms the spine of this precinct in central Heathcote that contains many of this town's public and commercial buildings, monuments and memorials, and landscaped areas.

In the environs of the subject site, immediately to its southeast in High Street, is the former Mechanics Institute (built 1900); and to the northwest in High Street the mid-twentieth century RSL Hall and War Memorial. Beyond these are the former Heathcote branch of the Commercial Bank of Australia (built 1886). The former Mechanics Institute and the former Commercial Bank are subject to site-specific heritage overlays in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* – refer to Figure 4.

Opposite, in High Street, is the Barrack Recreation Reserve, and to the rear of the Heathcote Civic Precinct, on the opposite side of Camp Street, is the Heathcote Primary School, built upon the site of the former Government Camp.

*Figure 7: The Heathcote Civic Precinct forms a streetscape of heritage buildings in this portion of High Street including the former Mechanics Institute (foreground) and the former Commercial Bank of Australia, partially visible at right. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



### *Subject site*

Built upon the subject site is a mid-nineteenth century former court house and council chambers, set back from the site's High Street boundary behind a shallow forecourt. This forecourt contains the Heathcote Boer War Memorial, a bluestone monument with marble plaques commemorating those that '*served and fell*'. The memorial is surmounted with an ornate luminaire on an iron lamp standard. The monument is sited on axis with the central front door of the former court house/council chambers building.

The former court house/council chambers complex is brick, finished in ruled render. The render most probably was applied during works to the complex in the 1890s, designed by architect, T A Payne of Brunswick.<sup>7</sup> A stone base extends around the perimeter of the front portions of the building, with part of this now concealed by later landscaping works that raised the ground level, particularly at the front. In this stone base are recesses for sub floor ventilation.

The roofs of the building are obscured by a plain rendered parapet. Now clad entirely in metal roofing, an 1870s drawing shows the roof above the central portion was probably clad in slate tile - refer to Figure 2.<sup>8</sup>

The façade is symmetrically composed with two projecting bays that flank a shallow recessed and lower bay. The façade and the side and part of the rear elevations are expressed in a Classical Revival-style, restrained in its expression as typically found in buildings of the mid-nineteenth century. The 1890s addition to the rear of the council chambers wing is expressed as a stripped version of the Classical detailing of the front.

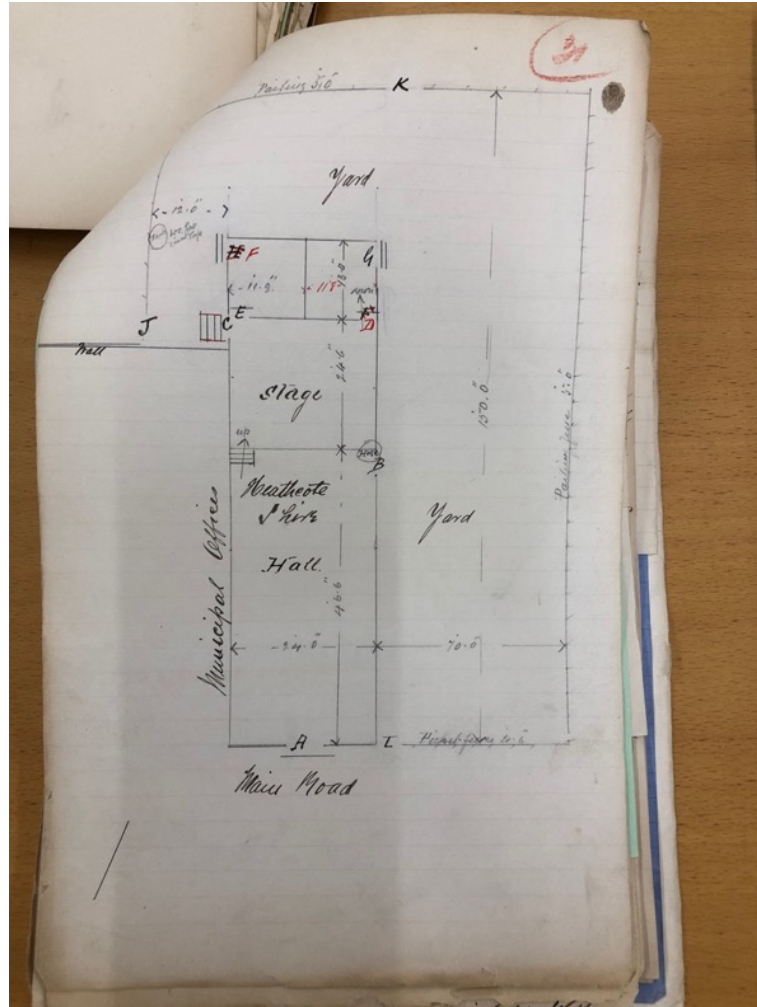
The recessed central bay of the façade is divided into three smaller bays with pairs of engaged columns supporting a central segmental pediment above the entrance. A circular recess is within the pediment for provision of a clock. The central bay has a pair of timber panelled doors flanked by bays with arched timber frame double-hung sash windows. There is a fanlight window above the door opening. The two projecting bays of the façade have a similar tripartite compositional arrangement, except the central door of the former council chambers wing has been replaced with a window.

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7 Public Record Office Victoria. VPRS 7882/P0001/489, Health Department of Victoria, Building File: Shire Hall, High Street, Heathcote.

8 Correspondence in the 1890s also describes the roof being slate and iron. Public Record Office Victoria. VPRS 7882/P0001/489, Health Department of Victoria, Building File: Shire Hall, High Street, Heathcote.

Figure 8: Sketch plan of the council chambers wing in 1904, after it had been remodelled and extended as a town hall, by architect T A Payne. Source of image: Health Department of Victoria, Building File, held by the Public Records Office Victoria.



At the rear of the former court house, is a lower single-storey section, which was built around the same time as the courtroom. Its south east and south west elevations each have two bays formed by pairs of pilasters that flank timber frame, double-hung, sash windows. The north west elevation that forms one side of a recess at the rear of the building is less resolved, but does have some Classical detailing. An outbuilding that was built at the side of the former court house, shown in the c1870 photograph, has since been removed.

At the rear of the former council chambers is a Modernist red brick former supper room that was built in stages in the 1950s and 1960s. It incorporates part of the hall that was built in works to the complex in the 1890s.

*Figure 9: Heathcote Civic Precinct viewed from High Street.  
Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



*Figure 10: South East elevation of the Heathcote Civic Precinct, viewed from High Street. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



*Figure 11: South east elevation of the 1950s/60s supper room addition at the rear of the Heathcote Civic Precinct. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



*Figure 12: Rear of the Heathcote Civic Precinct viewed from Camp Street. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



*Figure 13: Supper room addition from the 1950s/60s at the rear of the Heathcote Civic Precinct, viewed from within the site. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



*Figure 14: The north west (side) elevation of the Heathcote Civic Precinct viewed from within the site. The end of the original 1860s portion of the hall is indicated with an arrow, the remainder towards the rear was built in stages from the 1890s. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*





# 5

## WHAT WORKS ARE PROPOSED?

It is proposed to remove at the rear of the complex a small skillion roof addition and a larger flat roof addition. These portions of the building have face red brick and have mid-twentieth century origins. They were built in the mid-twentieth century as a supper room, replacing an earlier town hall.

These existing elements at the rear, which are not sympathetic to the materials and architectural character of the nineteenth century portions of the building, will be replaced with a single-storey addition containing multi-use spaces for community activities with associated circulation spaces and amenities.

In plan this addition is an L-shape, and it will have a central courtyard or 'outdoor hub'. The addition is expressed in a contemporary manner, cuboid in its massing, and its cladding a palette of materials that includes white coloured bricks, perforated rotatable screens, and large and smaller expanses of glazing.

*Figure 15: Floor plan c1960 of the former council chambers wing after it was remodelled and extended from being a town hall into a supper room. Source of image: Health Department of Victoria, Building File, held by the Public Records Office Victoria..*

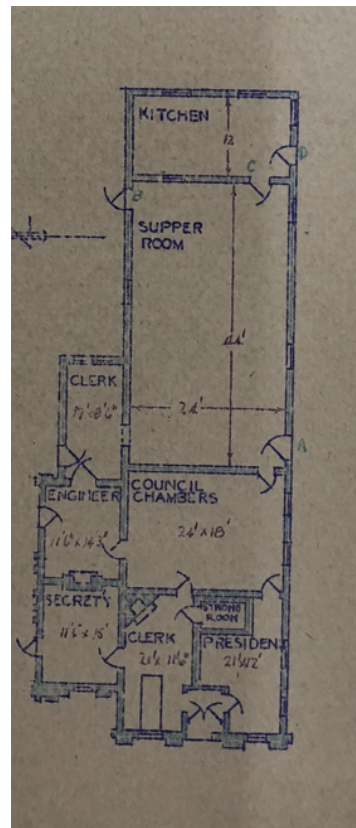
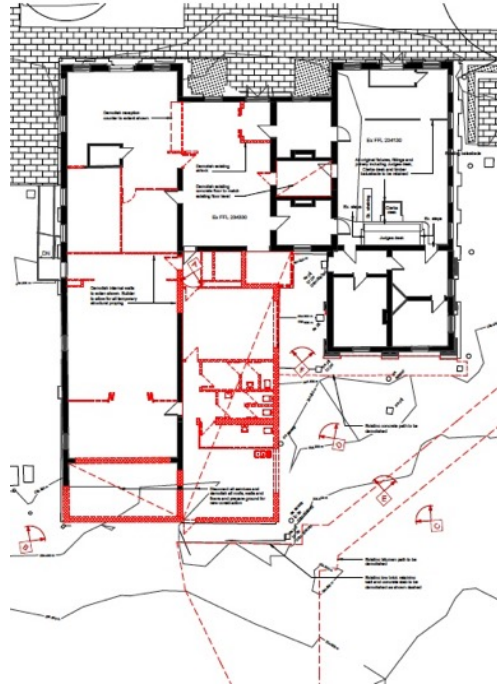


Figure 16:  
Extent of  
demolition  
works to the  
former Council  
Chamber wing  
(marked in  
red). Source of  
image: Eplus  
Architecture



The proposed internal works to the council chamber wing are modest in scope. They involve removal of partitions to reconfigure spaces including the removal of an air lock and reception desk. It involves change to an interior that has undergone a significant amount of alteration and adaptive re-use over the last 160 years. As noted in the 2013 conservation management plan:

*This Shire Offices portion of the building has been altered and extended and mostly has lost its heritage fabric particularly throughout the interior. As a result of the fire, ceilings, floors and walls and all joinery elements were renewed and over a period then (1951-2000s) the interior arrangement has been progressively altered to the point where there now are few original walling elements.<sup>9</sup>*

This description of the intactness and integrity of the former council chambers wing still remains an accurate observation of its existing condition.

<sup>9</sup> Heritage Alliance, 'Conservation Management Plan. Heathcote Courthouse and Shire Council Offices', p vi.

The former court house wing, currently used as a retail outlet, is to be adapted to use as a co-working space. In addition to a number of works to adapt this space to its new use, it is proposed to undertake some conservation actions to address maintenance or damage to fabric, some of these identified in the conservation management plan prepared for the complex by Heritage Alliance for the City of Greater Bendigo in 2013.<sup>10</sup>

The Appendix of this report contains a table of a summary of both conservation works from the 2013 conservation management plan and the works proposed as part of this permit application, and the status of these works. More detail of these proposed works can be found in the Eplus Architecture permit application drawings.

The focus of conservation works to this portion of the complex is encouraged, as the court house is the most intact portion of the building both externally and internally. The works address ongoing issues with water penetration to this space, which was noted in 2013 in the conservation management plan:

*...sections of walling and ceiling which has been damaged by water penetration through the wall tops and through leaking roofs. This will need repairs (mostly replastering) and some areas of sheet ceiling [in rear portion] replaced.<sup>11</sup>*

The conservation management plan also identified the floor to be stable, however inspection of the floor found this to be of twentieth century origin and not original. The existing vinyl flooring is proposed for removal and the timber floor is to be revealed. A small hatch in this floor is to provide access to a sub-floor mechanical extract air unit.

The joinery in the courtroom was also noted in the conservation management plan to require repair and this is also to be undertaken as part of the proposed works.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Heritage Alliance, 'Conservation Management Plan. Former Heathcote Courthouse and Shire Offices', pp 41-48.

11 Heritage Alliance, 'Conservation Management Plan. Heathcote Courthouse and Shire Council Offices', p vii.

12 Ibid.

# 6

## LOCAL PLANNING SCHEME HERITAGE POLICY?

The Heathcote Civic Precinct is subject to a site-specific heritage overlay in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* – HO465 Former Heathcote Court House and Shire Council Chambers. The Heathcote Civic Precinct is also within the HO723 Heathcote Precinct of the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*, which covers much of the commercial area of central Heathcote.

As a consequence of the site-specific heritage overlay and the precinct-based heritage overlay, any works to the Heathcote Civic Precinct will need to be prepared with regard to the local planning policies and guidelines in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* pertaining to heritage. These include Clause 43.01 Heritage Overlay and Clause 15.03 Heritage.

Primarily, the intent of the heritage overlays is to conserve and enhance this heritage place and the precinct it is located within; and to ensure that new works do not adversely affect the recognised heritage values of the HO465 Heathcote Civic Precinct or the broader HO723 Heathcote Precinct

The proposed works are modest in scale and scope in as far as the impacts on heritage fabric of this place. In terms of the former council offices, they are to the rear of the heritage building, and consequently recessive, and involve the removal of twentieth century additions of little or no appreciable heritage value. The works will retain the valued front portion of the building which, externally, is relatively intact, well-composed and detailed; and by removing the rear Modernist portions will enhance the character of the complex when viewed from Camp Street.

The proposed conservation works to the court house will remedy a number of problems associated with drainage, water penetration and ventilation within this portion of the building. Other works to the court house which alter fabric to allow for the new co-working space are to be undertaken in a sympathetic manner, many are reversible, and can be done without altering to any appreciable level the nineteenth century character of this portion of the building.

The works are prepared with regard to the *Burra Charter 2013*, which is a guideline in the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*.

The proposed works are consistent with conservation policy within the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* in terms of their scale, bulk, form, setback, materiality and architectural character.

In this regard, the proposal is consistent with the intent of the respective heritage overlays that apply to this site, which is to conserve and enhance heritage places and to ensure that new works do not adversely affect them, as defined by Clause 43.01 Heritage Overlay of the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme*.

# 7

## WHAT WERE KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DESIGNING THE PROPOSED WORKS?

When designing the proposed works the paramount consideration was retaining the recognised cultural heritage values of the Heathcote Civic Precinct. These include tangible and non-tangible heritage values that are historical, aesthetic, scientific and social.

The works that are outlined in the architectural drawings are prepared with the intent of minimal impact to heritage fabric, changing *as much as necessary but as little as possible* (Burra Charter, Article 3.1) and not distorting the historic or physical evidence that this fabric provides (Burra Charter, Article 3.2). The aesthetic values of the place will be conserved and enhanced as part of the proposed works.

In term of the former council chambers, the front portion of this wing, erected in the nineteenth century, is to be retained. The works are focussed on the rear section of this wing that has undergone significant change in the mid-twentieth century. That change, which involved adapting the former town hall into a supper room, and later a library, is of a utilitarian character and relates little to the remainder of the complex in terms of materiality and architectural expression. The addition proposed will enhance the appearance of the rear of the complex with its responsive contemporary design.

During the design development stage, feedback from Heritage Victoria was that any addition at the rear should have a level of transparency so that the rear portion of the wing of the former court house is visible. The design was refined by the architect to achieve this by using a greater amount of glazing on portions of the addition. The expanses of glazing on the southwest elevation are to have steel perforated fins to screen internal spaces from the sun during various times of the day. A planter box extending along the Camp Street boundary is added to soften the interface between the rear of the addition and the public realm.

Another key consideration in designing the proposed works was addressing issues related to drainage around the complex; subfloor ventilation and mechanical ventilation, and water penetration into the interior of the former courtroom.

Some of this work has been triggered by the proposal to adapt the court room to a co-working space. In the proposed design, the key matter for consideration has been for minimal change or intervention with fabric. Mechanical ventilation will use minimal flush wall-mounted diffusers and a grille, and sub-floor ventilation will use existing openings in the base of walls for its vents.

The non-tangible historic and social heritage values of the Heathcote Civic Precinct will not be impacted by the proposed works, as the complex will remain legible as the former court house and council chambers in Heathcote, and a centre of community life that has been known, used and valued by locals for generations.

# 8

## PHYSICAL AND/OR VISUAL IMPACTS FROM THE PROPOSED WORKS

*Figure 17: Rear of the court house in the late twentieth century, by photographer John Collins. Source of image: State Library of Victoria.*



The proposed works will result in no significant detrimental physical impacts upon culturally significant fabric at the Heathcote Civic Precinct.

The proposed works will not result in any significant detrimental visual impacts upon the front of the Heathcote Civic Precinct, and will enhance the appearance of this site when viewed from Camp Street.

Any minor impacts from the proposed works can be mitigated by added conservation measures outlined in the next section of this report.

In terms of the proposed co-working space in the former courtroom, it is an adaptive reuse of this space that will be responsive to the architectural character and former use of this space, and a more sympathetic use than the existing retail premises which is cluttered and tends to undermine an appreciation of the original character of the space and conceals in places some of its detailing.



# 9

## WHAT ADDITIONAL MEASURES ARE RECOMMENDED TO ENHANCE THIS HERITAGE PLACE AND/OR MITIGATE DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS?

There are no significant detrimental impacts from the proposed works on this heritage place.

Measures that may enhance this heritage place include:

- The site has little or no interpretative signage or other references to Heathcote's First Nation's People, the Taungurung. The Taungurung have the longest association with this site of any people, group, organisation or government. Their association with this site and their broader country should be noted, and one of its spaces in the addition could be named after the Taungurung, or an aspect of their culture. Any interpretative device or naming of a space or element should be done in consultation with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council.
- Landscaping has potential to extend beyond aesthetic qualities, and should incorporate other sensory aspects. In choosing plants for the Heathcote Civic Precinct preference should be given to Indigenous plants of this region of Victoria, and plants that have pleasant aromatic qualities, tactile qualities, and in some instances plants that can be used in cooking such as herbs.
- Internal interpretative signage within the building explaining the former uses of various spaces and elements including courtroom furniture eg judge's bench and witness box.
- As with other former court houses in Victoria eg Chelsea Court House, the courtroom has potential to be used for film and television productions locations, which has potential to raise further the landmark quality of this complex, and fees from this use can be used for further conservation works to the complex.
- Explore whether drainage works to the rear of the complex can adopt environmentally friendly aspects of design. Stormwater collected could be stored and re-used to water proposed landscaping at the complex.

*Other recommended measures*

The citation of the Heritage Council of Victoria should be reviewed and where necessary amended to be consistent with current standards of preparation of statements of significance using HERCON criteria.

There are aspects of the architectural assessment that are recommended for review including the claimed rarity of complexes containing municipal buildings and court houses, as several other examples were noted in the course of preparing this heritage impact statement.

Further scope for analysis of the perceived Mannerist-style character of the Heathcote Civic Precinct.

# 10

## ARE THE PROPOSED WORKS, ON BALANCE, A SATISFACTORY OUTCOME?

The proposed works, on balance, are a satisfactory design outcome for this building and its respective precinct.

High Street, Heathcote consists of a relatively intact streetscape of commercial and public buildings of a consistency in scale and nineteenth century character rarely seen in Victoria. High Street is rare in itself, with its length that gives the township a linear siting; and the broad width of High Street, that enables appreciation of its intact streetscapes of nineteenth century built form.

This broad width of High Street, however, has potential for new built form at the rear of the Heathcote Civic Precinct to be visible and intrusive when viewed from the public realm. The responsive design of the proposed addition at the rear of the Heathcote Civic Precinct of a single-storey scale, will mean the addition will barely be visible in views in this important historic High Street corridor. The neighbouring RSL Hall also works to shield diagonal views of the complex when viewed from High Street.

As is to be expected with any building, or complex of buildings, that is 160+ years of age, the fabric of the former court house and council chambers has undergone change over the years. In terms of the former council chamber, this change has been internal and/or to the rear of the complex, and much of the character of the front of the building when it was rendered in the late nineteenth century has been retained. The proposed addition is responsive to this valued front portion of the heritage place, as it is to be built at the rear of the complex where a significant amount of change has occurred in the mid-twentieth century.

The additions to the rear of the council chambers built in the mid-twentieth century have had the greatest detrimental impact upon this place. On the whole, they are poorly designed in as far as their response to the nineteenth century portions of the complex. The proposed works will address this negative aspect of the complex and improve the complex's presentation to Camp Street, by enhancing this with an addition that is responsive to the historic fabric in terms of its single-storey scale, materiality, cuboid form, and architectural expression.

*Figure 18: The former court room is currently used as a retail outlet. Merchandise clutters the space concealing detailing and furniture, and detracts from its historic character. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



*Figure 19: Damaged plaster on the upper wall of the court room is proposed for repair in the works. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.*



Of the most intact parts of the complex, it is both the interior and exterior of the courthouse that demonstrates the most integrity and intactness. It remains legible as a mid-nineteenth century country court house. Preventing a full appreciation of its intact interior is the cluttered appearance of merchandise of its current tenant, a retail outlet. The proposed co-working space is arguably a finer outcome, that will reveal detailing, furniture and fixtures that are currently obscured.

The new use as a co-working space is in itself a sympathetic function for the former court house space, and will be accessible to a broader range of the community than the existing retail premises.

Part of the success of the former court house and council chambers complex over the last 160+ years has been its ability to adapt to new uses and community needs. The proposed works are another chapter of change to this complex, and are change that will enhance its amenity so as to ensure it continues to be a place that is known, used and valued by current and future generations of the local community.

# 11

## CONCLUSION

The proposed works will not impact upon the recognised heritage values of the Heathcote Civic Precinct. The proposed addition to the rear of the complex is designed to be recessive so as to retain the visual prominence of this important nineteenth century building in High Street. These proposed works are responsive to this heritage place in terms of their scale, setbacks, bulk, form, materials and detailing.

Some minor mitigation measures to the proposal, discussed in this heritage impact statement, if adopted will further enhance what is already a sensitive design response. They have the potential to enhance the experience of visitors and workers at the Heathcote Civic Precinct and their understanding of its significance.

On balance the benefits from the removal of the existing Modernist supper room at the rear of the complex, and the construction of new community facilities and spaces, far outweigh any negligible impacts from the proposed works.

The suite of conservation measures and works to the former courthouse to adapt it to use as a co-working space, will ensure this portion of the building is well-maintained. This new use as a co-working space is an appropriate use, which is in tune with changing working needs and practices, and is a use that fits well with a former courtroom space.

The proposed works are consistent with good heritage practice, and provide a fine balance between the conservation of this valuable heritage asset of Victoria, and the changing needs of a community library and needs of a workforce more and more working remotely. The proposed works will ensure that the Heathcote Civic Precinct remains a focus of community life and a valued community facility.

It is on this basis the proposed works are supportable from a heritage perspective.

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Vicplan.

# APPENDIX – SUMMARY OF PROPOSED CONSERVATION WORKS

Location/Item	Description of Conservation Works	Status
All exterior rendered walls	Recommended for repainting in 2013 CMP	Completed
All exterior render	Recommended for repair in 2013 CMP	Completed
External moulded cornice to shire office	Recommended for repair in 2013 CMP	Completed
Roofing	Replace roofing on rear wing of courthouse and above central bay at front	Part of proposed conservation works.
Rainwater goods	Some remedial works needed.	Part of proposed conservation works.
External doors	No remedial works proposed.	-
Window louvre screens	Recommended for repair in 2013 CMP	Completed
Courtroom airlock	Repair damaged portions of joinery and refinish.	Part of proposed conservation works
Courtroom timber ceiling	Is in relatively good condition and requires no remedial works. NB: Not to be painted.	-
Courtroom metal ceiling vents	In relatively good condition and require no remedial works	-
Courtroom Walls	Poor condition of upper portion of walls. Require identification of the source of water penetration and damaged plaster remove/repair/replace. Replicate existing moulding(s) in the courtroom	Part of proposed conservation works.
Courtroom cornices and mouldings on lower walls including sills and architraves around windows	Recommended in the 2013 CMP to be repaired where needed.	Part of proposed conservation works.



Location/item	Description of Conservation Works	Status
Courtroom walls	Repaint with a similar paint scheme as existing.	Part of proposed conservation works.
Wall and ceiling linings damaged in rear rooms of courthouse.	Repair. Recommended in 2013 CMP	Part of proposed conservation works.
Courtroom vinyl floors	Remove and reveal floorboards (floorboards not original, but twentieth century origin), which are to be made good, and polished.	Part of proposed conservation works.
Miscellaneous courtroom joinery – door architraves and reveals, furniture (judges bench, witness box, clerk’s desk)	Repair and refinish.	Part of proposed conservation works.
Courtroom lighting	Existing lighting retained.	-
Concrete apron around perimeter of exterior of the courthouse.	Remove to allow for sub-floor vents/ventilation.	Part of proposed works.
Concrete slab below rear rooms of courthouse	Investigate for damp. Depending on the findings remove concrete slab and replace with timber floor framing.	Part of proposed works.
Courtroom	Install mechanical ventilation in courtroom	Part of proposed works.
Exterior disabled ramp to library	Make compliant to current DDA requirements	Part of proposed works.

Refer to Eplus Architecture planning application drawings for further details of proposed conservation works.