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12 February 2018
Submitted via the website

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Re: Sirius building, 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks
Proposed new Planning Controls**

I write in regard to the call for public submissions on the proposed SEPP for the Sirius site at 36-50 Cumberland Street. I have a very detailed knowledge of this area having previously worked for SCRA/SHFA. My Master's thesis undertaken at the School of Architecture at Sydney University involved a study of the development and conservation of Gloucester Street, The Rocks and more recently I have been involved in the preparation of Conservation Management Plans for 23 George Street North and some of the surviving 1840s townhouse in the area: 20-22 Lower Fort Street and on Millers Point proper.

As a general comment the information contained within the suite of documents exhibited does not demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the actual place. Bunker's Hill, upon which the Sirius building now sits, was once a separate residential area from The Rocks where substantial cottages, villas and townhouses were erected by wealthy merchants including the Campbell family. Lower Fort Street still contains vestiges of this housing stock. The scale of the buildings on Bunker's Hill can be seen in Conrad Marten's 1857 painting Campbell's Wharf held in the National Gallery of Australia. Martens also painted views from Bunker's Hill looking towards Government House and Circular Quay, as did other artists.

Contrary to what the material on exhibition suggests, these substantial buildings designed by the leading architects of the colony are located on the site now occupied by the Sirius Building. Buildings on Bunker's Hill dominated the skyline when viewed from the eastern side of Sydney Cove (later East Circular Quay) for decades before the Sydney Harbour Bridge was constructed (figure below).



Campbell's Wharf, Conrad Martens, 1857, National Gallery of Australia

Bunker's Hill was redeveloped between 1900 and 1918 following the resumption of the area and in anticipation of the construction of major public works to regularize the street layout, creating a main thoroughfare that extended York Street prior to the construction of Sydney Harbour Bridge. The Sydney Cove Authority recognized that Bunker's Hill was a precinct in its own right in its 1984 planning scheme, having undertaken historical research on the surviving building stock of The Rocks and compiling building data sheets.

I have gone through the exhibited documents and made comments as to the degree to which the documents differ from my detailed knowledge of the place.

Explanation of Intended Effect

p2

There has been a history of alterations to the SCRA scheme to make additions to building envelopes with ministerial approval so that rooftop alterations can be made, fire doors can open out &c. That being said, the envelopes for sites such as the Hotel in Campbell's Cove were designed with views in mind. SCRA took care with the design of Sirius to ensure that views when one moves across the bridge were not blocked. The form of the current building still allows for the World Heritage Listed Sydney Opera House to be viewed by motorists and pedestrians on the bridge and the walkway is popular during Vivid. The proposed SEPP shows a proposed building form that only provides views of the sails from the Harbour Bridge not the podium, which is an important part of Utzon's concept.

It is not clear if further excavation for car parking is proposed. The cliff face to Gloucester Walk a significant townscape element.

p3

Cumberland Street is difficult to access during major events and during the Weekend Rocks markets. An active frontage in this part of Cumberland Street may not get the intended visitor traffic, as many pedestrians use Gloucester Walk because of the views that can be obtained and the steps down through Foundation Park and to Argyle Place.

Planning Report (December 2017) (including figures from the Urban Design Report)

2.4 New Directions

The sale of the site to enable the provision of more social housing should be contrasted with the number of housing blocks in The Rocks, Millers Point and Redfern/Waterloo that have been sold off or scheduled for demolition so are no longer available as social housing. Upgrading of these buildings that were initially designed as social housing would have provided more units. Funds from the sale of State Heritage Register items should have been directed towards conservation of the items remaining in Housing's portfolio.

2.5 State Significant Precinct

Whilst mentioned as being a Conservation Area of National Significance and discussed in detail in an essay by the late Max Kelly in the *Illustrated Register of the National Estate*, the Conservation Area is not currently heritage listed at a National Level. As noted above the views of the buildings in what is now Gloucester Walk on Bunkers Hill have been prominent in views of Sydney Cove since the 1840s, long before either the Sydney Harbour Bridge or the Opera House were conceived of.

2.6 SCRA Scheme

It is not clear how the maximum built form envelope under the SCRA scheme was derived, as the scheme consists of a building control diagram for each area within the area then managed by SCRA, extending from Grosvenor Street to Dawes Point. The Cahill Expressway was to form a cut off point between the smaller scale development or infill within the Conservation Area and larger scale development sites. Development sites were released over the successive decades after the plan was approved, earlier schemes to only retain Cadmans' Cottage having been abandoned due to public outcry and the resulting Green Bans. The Sirius building is a physical reminder of this process and is of cultural significance as a reminder of resident action and the need to rehouse those displaced by the developments that did proceed.

2.8 SEPP 65

Had the building been designated a State Heritage Register item then the apartments could have been retrofitted without the need to fully comply with SEPP 65. The building met the necessary State Heritage Register criteria however the application was rejected at a ministerial level based on the submissions provided by the pro development lobby and the Land and Housing Corporation rather than the more numerous submissions in favor of retention by expert bodies such as the Australian

Institute of Architects and DOCOMOMO. Independent advice commissioned by the Heritage Council from a leading historian and a leading Professor of Architecture confirmed that the building met the necessary criteria. Professor Goad's advice has been appended.

According to the PlanningNSW's website the *Apartment Design Guide* applies to the design of new apartments. SEPP 65 only applies to a substantial refurbishment however the planning policy does not define what this would constitute. SEPP 65 may not apply if the extent of works only includes upgrading of kitchens and bathrooms and external façade repairs.

It should be noted that the design of the Sirius building included many of intended features of *Apartment Design Guide* such as visual privacy, solar and daylight access, common circulation spaces and some private open space. The promotional brochure prepared by the Department of Housing described the design attributes in detail

Sirius has five four bedroom flats for larger families. All of these are on the ground floor and have outdoor terraces at the front and rear. The living rooms and bedrooms are at different levels which gives extra privacy. Very little space is wasted in corridors or stairs and the internal laundry and toilet are located in a central core...Publicity brochure produced by Housing NSW c. 1980



The brochure also described the community facilities in detail including the 'Heritage Room.' The terraces are shown in bird's eye view, the caption to which read

Nearly every tenant can enjoy growing things. All top floor units have roof gardens and all units on the ground floor enjoy their own terrace garden. The community room for the aged residents opens onto a large outdoor garden and a generous garden area at ground level is provided for all residents and their visitors. Publicity brochure produced by Housing NSW c. 1980

The HIS authors have been highly selective in the material they have included, giving the impression that the building was widely disliked. The dislike of Brutalist architecture is a common phenomenon amongst those without architectural training, and so should not be used as a criticism of a particular design. The 'Toaster' on East Circular Quay has also been described as Sydney's ugliest building, a building which ruins the quay (Daily Telegraph, 16 December 2011).

Many actually liked the completed building. The promotional brochure prepared by the Department of Housing included the views of

One elderly tenant when excitedly previewing her future home humorously quipped "Even Heaven will be a let down after this".

Promotional Brochure, Housing Corporation of NSW c. 1980

2.9 Local Controls

The Rocks Conservation Area is listed as an item on SHFA's Section 170 register (under the NSW Heritage Act). The Planning document states no local controls, yet the building is located in a State Heritage Listed conservation area. SHFA has various policies relating to the entire conservation area.

3.1 Site Location & Context

The Land uses map included in the Urban design study and repeated in the planning document is inaccurate. There are two hotels adjacent, the Mercantile and the Glenmore Hotel. The adjacent warehouse beneath Cumberland Street is also partially utilized for storage. (figure 8). Rocks Market not mentioned however the Mining Museum is shown as being retail however the former power station and mining museum has been adapted for new uses, as has the Metcalfe Bond and the former Bushells complex on the corner of Hickson Road. There is some retail in these buildings but that is not their main use. Create NSW's website notes that the former Mining Museum was

Built from 1902 -1908 as a power station, the Arts Exchange is a six storey stone and brick office building. It was operated as a Mining Museum until 1996. The site was acquired by Arts NSW (now known as Create NSW) in 1999 and converted into office space for arts organisations.

In 2015 a major refurbishment of the Arts Exchange was completed. It is now an operations hub for Sydney's major festivals and key arts organisations. In addition to their office space each organisation has use of shared work areas, meeting rooms and facilities. The bringing together of organisations with a similar focus in this way promotes efficiencies and innovation through the sharing of ideas and resources

<https://www.create.nsw.gov.au/about-us/arts-properties/the-arts-exchange/>

There is a small residential building between the Metcalfe Bond and the former Mining Museum. Foundation Park which connects Gloucester Walk with Playfair Street below is not shown as being a public park. Many of the buildings are in fact mixed use and there are apartments on top of 88 Cumberland Street.

3.3 Historic Context

Figure 9 should have included items listed on Housing's S170 register, as the registers related to items owned or managed by an Agency. The entire conservation area is also listed on SHFA's S 170 Register, as mentioned above. Sirius is listed on Housing's S170 Register and has been since 1995. The listing is for social significance however as this listing is now 20 years old, the influence of the Green bans should be considered historically for its influence on the character of the built environment of Sydney and the survival of the nineteenth century scale and character of the conservation areas such as The Rocks, Hunters Hill and Glebe.

Rocks Heritage Management Plan should have been updated with work commissioned by SHFA since the document was prepared such as the CMP for the adjacent building, 23 George Street North. The areas of archaeological sensitivity likewise does not take into account archaeological investigations in the vicinity of the Ajax building noted in the CMP for 23 George Street North. Vestiges of earlier buildings survive at the junction of the Sirius and the warehouse and can be seen in the car park.

The list of the adjacent heritage items does not include a number of State Heritage Register listed items and the column is headed up SHI. The State Heritage Inventory includes items listed on Local Environmental Plans and State Government Agency Section 170 Registers. The numbers of the items quoted are their State Heritage Register Items. Missing from the list of State Listed items are:

Name & Address	SHR number
Argyle Terrace (Caminetto's) 13-15 Playfair Street	SHR 01525
Avery Terrace 2-4 Atherden Street	SHR 01529
Playfair's Terrace, 1-7 Atherden Street	SHR 01570
Metcalfe Bond Stores, 68-84 George Street	SHR 01562
Sergeant Majors Row 33-41 George Street North	SHR 01579
Union Bond Store (former) Westpac Bank, 47 George Street	SHR 01612
Terraces 29-31 George Street North	SHR 01608
Playfair Street Terraces 17-31 Playfair Street	SHR 01569

It is unclear as to why the ASN Company Hotel, later the Rocks Police Station on the corner of Argyle Street and George Street North has been included as there are many closer SHR listed items to the site.

The houses in Lower Fort Street were once in visual proximity, until the erection of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Likewise the Dawes Point Battery remains are listed on the State Heritage Register and are related to the development of the precinct.

Transport

The traffic flow only shows the conditions Monday to Friday. During the Rocks Market access is more circuitous. The rationale for the through site link is not given. The modern building erected between the Glenmore Hotel and the Sirius around 1990 was intended to have a through site link however this appears to now serve as a foyer. The vehicle entry / exit map shows an exit into an area utilized during the Rocks Market.



View from the Manly ferry showing the skyline of The Rocks. The Sirius building is not the highest point. Photograph by the Author.



View from the pedestrian walkway on the Sydney Harbour Bridge taken in 2015. Note that the view of the Opera House is partly obscured by 88 George Street (the former Bushells' Building) which is a State Heritage Register listed item that has been retrofitted to achieve a high green star rating. Photograph by the Author

View Analysis Points

The view analysis points do not correspond with the long-standing views of Bunkers Hill from the eastern side of Circular Quay, from ferries on the harbor and along Cumberland Street to the chimney of the non-commissioned power station (later the Mining Museum). Numerous historic photographs show the panoramic views of Sydney Cove that include Bunkers Hill. A historic view from Bunkers Hill by George Halstead looking down to the stores and town house at 43-47 George Street and a current view are included in the Dossier presented in support of the World Heritage nomination for the Sydney Opera House. No mention is made of the inclusion of these views in the nomination. Views to the Opera House from the bridge on either side of the tall sections are of the entire Opera House including the waterfront setting and the podium.

Figure 31 of the planning report shows the Sirius building towering over Atherden Street however the terraces in Atherden street post date the substantial town houses on Bunkers Hill so have been towered over for their entire existence. These terrace houses date from the early 1880s and whilst are typical of the area, demonstrating the provision of rental housing in the area by local business owners such as the Playfair family.



View of Campbell's Wharf house in 1870 (ML SPF). Note the store erected for Martyn and Combes in the late 1840s and the townhouse adjacent which survive today (and are shown in the recent photograph taken by the author above).

4.4 Heritage

This section confuses National Heritage listings with State Heritage Register Listings, the Sydney Harbour Bridge is the only Nationally listed item in the vicinity. Detailed comments on the Heritage Impact Statement are made below. Reducing the scale of the building will give a homogeneity in scale that is not part of the historic character of this area. Bunker's Hill was a precinct with residential buildings of different scale of and character buildings and was originally separated from The Rocks by a stone wall presumably erected by the Campbell family. The Rowan's Bond store erected in 1916 and demolished in the 1970s also towered over Atherden Street.

4.7 Utilities

The assumption that all utilities are present is naïve at best. During the preparation of the CMP for the AJAX a request was made to Dial Before You Dig who could provide no information on services in the area as no drawings or information could be located. Sections of The Rocks retain longstanding infrastructure that may not be sufficient for upmarket apartments. The constraints imposed by the roadway over the existing building are also not mentioned at all. This limits the location of any new services and also limits the size of construction vehicles that can access Cumberland Street now that the southern end has been closed off.

Design Excellence

It is not the design excellence provisions that are usually applied to retrofitting, but green star ratings for sustainability. Projects in The Rocks have already set standards in retrofitting listed heritage items. The Green Building Council website details the sustainability measures of the refurbishment of No 88 George Street.

A NSW Government project has set a new benchmark for environmental sustainability in heritage buildings, Planning Minister Frank Sartor announced today. The former Bushells warehouse at 88 George Street has been rated Australia's most sustainably designed State heritage-listed office building, following a \$7 million NSW Government refurbishment project. The Green Building Council of Australia has awarded the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority project a 5-Star Green Star Office Design rating - the first time the rating has been awarded to a State heritage-listed office building....

"When the project began, the NSW Government set out to achieve an Australian excellence rating by combining the best in green building design with an innovative approach to features such as air conditioning." "We have achieved this and delivered what will be a healthy workplace which maximises daylight and fresh air and reduces energy and water use, as well as cuts greenhouse gas emissions." "This project sets an important benchmark for the adaptive re-use of heritage buildings across the country....

"It demonstrates that it is possible to retain heritage significance, but also deliver a contemporary and highly sustainable building... Chief Executive of the Green Building Council of Australia, Romilly Madew, praised the Foreshore Authority for obtaining the 5-Star Green Star rating. "88 George Street shows that heritage buildings can include green and sustainable initiatives without losing the beauty and identity of the building," Ms Madew said. "Green buildings do not need to be new constructions, but can incorporate new technologies and design to create a building that is efficient and a healthy environment for staff.

www.gbca.org.au/gbca-media-releases/heritage-building-achieves-green-star/

Retention of the Existing Built Form

The planning controls actively discourage the retrofitting of the building. The inclusion of a clause that limits additions is contrary to how the SCRA scheme has operated to date, with some limited additions permitted if there is no heritage impact. No consideration appears to have been given to utilizing floor space in the adjoining warehouse building, floor space that is suitable for use for storage, bicycle parking and recycling collection.

A highly successful example of benefit of retrofitting a building that is larger than would currently be permitted by planning controls is the Queen Mary building at Sydney University. This building has been converted from a Nurses Home into Student Housing in line with Sydney University's Sustainability principles. Models such as this could have been considered.

Heritage Impact Statement, November 2017

The Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) prepared by Architectural Projects and dated November 2017 that is currently on exhibition as part of the proposed new planning controls for the Sirius building on Cumberland Street in The Rocks contains a number of inaccuracies and uncredited material drawn from the Conservation Management Plan for the adjacent site commissioned by SHFA in 2012 and prepared by Jean Rice Architect. Historical material and images used throughout the HIS are centered on 23 George Street rather than on the Sirius building at 32-50 Cumberland Street. Material available at State Records such as the drawings of the Rowans Bond Store that previously occupied the site and the decade by decade photographs of the Sirius site taken by SHFA have not been included, rather the images are all for the site to the north, at the intersection of George Street North. This is unacceptable in a document that claims to be assessing the impact of the demolition of the Sirius building on all of the surrounding State Heritage listed items.

As it stands the current HIS totally misrepresents the heritage status of the building to those making a submission, implying that the Australian Institute of Architects and the National Trust do not consider the building to be significant. The opposite is the case and I have already made a submission via the website to the Minister for Planning seeking that the misleading Heritage report be corrected. This has not occurred.

The summary of historical context (p5) notes that once building regulations had been introduced in 1837 town houses 'similar to those existing in The Rocks' were built on Bunker's Hill. This is a misrepresentation of the detailed analysis contained in the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for 23 George Street North and the subsequent comparative analysis of SHFA's terrace house portfolio (by Jean Rice Architect, 2014) as well as the comparative analysis contained in the recent CMPs for some of the surviving town houses in Millers and Dawes Point. These studies of the surviving housing stock differentiate between the larger town house form imported directly from London by architects such as John Verge from the mid 1830s (that had already been adapted to meet fire regulations) and the smaller form of terrace house such as 29-31 George Street and 33-41 George Street that emerged to suit the Sydney market, a form that remains prevalent in suburbs such as Paddington and parts of The

Rocks. The HIS demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the difference between the standard London townhouses and the Paddington-type of terrace house that was outlined by JRA in the reports commissioned by SHFA.

The HIS gives the date of the decline of The Rocks housing stock as 1850s however once again this was not the conclusion of the reports by Jean Rice Architect. No evidence is provided to support the change in decade claimed by Architectural Projects and no examples are cited. The standard of housing did not decline, rather other parts of the city became fashionable for townhouses, in particular Macquarie Street and Liverpool Street and Elizabeth Street fronting Hyde Park. Shirley Fitzgerald, the former City Historian, traced the decline as occurring between 1870 and 1890 when smaller scale terrace housing intended for was built between the existing buildings. This pattern of development is traced in the CMP for 23 George St North and was dated to the late 1870s. The townhouses between Gloucester and Cumberland Street were occupied as rental accommodation until 1900 when they were demolished. It was not that the housing stock was substandard, as these were substantial sandstone built but the land was needed to begin the process of realigning Cumberland and Gloucester Streets so that one new concrete arch bridge could be constructed over the Argyle Cut.

Page 22 of the November 2017 HIS report states that *“the building is not listed as significant on the AIA Register of Significant Architecture in NSW”*. As the former Heritage Officer for the NSW Chapter of the Australia, I assure you that Sirius has been on the Chapter’s Register of Significant Architecture since 2015. In addition the HIS notes that the Sirius building is not listed by the National Trust, which is also not the case. The National Trust also listed Sirius in 2014. Copies of the listings have been uploaded to the Save our Sirius website. This is a major omission in a Heritage Impact Statement and yet the introduction states that the NSW Chapter of the AIA and National Trust were consulted.

In addition to providing misleading information regarding the heritage status of Sirius, the Statement of Heritage Impact contains a considerable number of illustrations taken from the Conservation Plan for the adjacent site prepared by Jean Rice Architect for SHFA in 2012. Of the 18 images taken directly from the CMP only for 23 George Street North image is credited in the HIS as having been prepared for a previous report. The purpose of a Statement of Heritage Impact is to address the particular site in question. It is not appropriate to utilise material prepared and annotated for another site without proper crediting of the source. As one of the authors of the AJAX report, I can confirm that no permissions were sought. The majority of this material was available on line at either the State Records or the State Library so could easily have been obtained by the authors of the current HIS and adjusted to include the full extent of the Sirius building. The HIS authors claim to have followed the Kerr methodology that involves consideration of the available documentary evidence. This means consulting primary historical source material such as the series of maps held by SHFA, the City Council, the Mitchell Library and State Records.

References to files given in the HIS are to files that were inspected by the authors of the CMP for 23 George Street. Omitting to indicate that the material was taken from another study creates the impression that the 2017 HIS authors inspected the files yet

the bibliography does not list any files or archival material, indicating that neither NSW State Records or SHFA's archival material was actually consulted. All of the material appears to be drawn from existing reports that are available on line. The architectural drawings of the Sirius building or the earlier Rowans' Bond held at State Records appear to not have been consulted. Instead, elevations of the adjacent building are presented (again taken from the 2012 CMP for 23 George Street North).

Archaeology

The two archaeological maps provided in the HIS do not include the investigations and findings noted in the subsequent report for the adjacent site. Investigations were undertaken in the vicinity by the archaeologists for SCRA/SHFA in the early 1990s.

The HIS states that the site is unlikely to contain archaeological remains yet remnants of earlier buildings on the site were noted as having survived in the carpark of the Sirius building. The CMP for 23 George Street concluded that further investigation of the archaeological potential of the site was required, including the portion beneath the Sirius Apartments. The Heritage Act will still apply.

Ministerial Refusal to list on the SHR

In choosing to not list the Sirius building the Minister was yet again thinking of the income from the proposed sale, despite the Land and Environment Court Ruling that this was not a valid approach. This second refusal has been the subject of an article in Architecture AU in which the numbers of submissions for and against were compared (copy appended). The proposed heritage listing for the Sirius Building Minister did not fully take into consideration the unanimous recommendation of the NSW Heritage council, the numerous letters of support in favor of the listing submitted by SHFA, the Australian Institute of Architect, DOCOMOMO and others. In order to not appear biased the NSW Heritage Council commissioned the internationally recognised Professor of Architecture at the University of Melbourne, Professor Phillip Goad to make an assessment of the heritage significance of the building. This advice was quoted in the Heritage Council minutes. Professor Goad found that

The Sirius Apartment Building at 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks designed in 1975 by Tao (Theodorus) Gofers within the NSW Housing Commission and completed in 1980 **is of State Heritage Significance.**

As measured against SHR Criteria a) [historic significance]

It has **historic significance** as being a direct outcome of the so-called 'Green Bans', the protest movement instituted in Sydney in late 1971 against the commercial redevelopment of The Rocks and Millers Point precincts in the 1970s. Instead of relocating local residents, the NSW Housing Commission decided in an unusual move to consult and build affordable public housing for those residents and others displaced in the area.

As measured against SHR Criteria c) [aesthetic significance]

It has **aesthetic significance** as being a rare, representative and fine example of the late Brutalist architectural style, especially in its application to public housing and in its use of off-form concrete and its picturesque massing of stacked cubic components

intended to minimize its impact on the neighboring historic precinct of The Rocks and alleviate the effects of vehicular noise from the Sydney Harbour Bridge approaches.

It has **aesthetic significance** as representing, architecturally, the important philosophical move by the NSW Housing Commission in the mid-1970s away from modernist ideals of housing in towers or slab blocks on cleared sites towards solutions that involved community participation and sympathetic contextual placement of such housing and retention of long-time low-income residents in historic inner urban precincts.

The Minister for Finances tweet war with Shaun Carter, the then President of the Institute of Architects NSW Chapter over the aesthetics of the building is evidence of the lack of understanding of growing importance placed on 20th Century heritage and the work of modern architects nationally and internationally. The work of Le Corbusier that Minister Perrottet so disliked has been listed on the World Heritage Register.

The submissions in favor of heritage listing for Sirius far outweighed those against listing. Architecture AU examines the results

Documents obtained by the Save Our Sirius Foundation under New South Wales's freedom of information laws (GIPA Act), reveal the Heritage Council received 24 submissions, of which four were objections to the heritage listing. Two of these objections originated from other government departments, including from the owners of the site, Government Property NSW and the Land and Housing Corporation, and the Department of Family and Community Services. (refer to the Appendices)

Instead to taking the advice of one of the country's leading authorities on Twentieth Century architecture, the Minister chose to take advice from a series of generalist heritage consultants, none of which actually bothered to read the files on the development of the site or the green ban negotiations held by SHFA. In Victoria the Heritage Act contains provisions to take the agency view into consideration. The NSW Heritage Act does not. The marriage equality postal vote strictly adhered to the numbers for and against. The NSW Government took the pro development minority view rather than the majority view.

Growing International Recognition

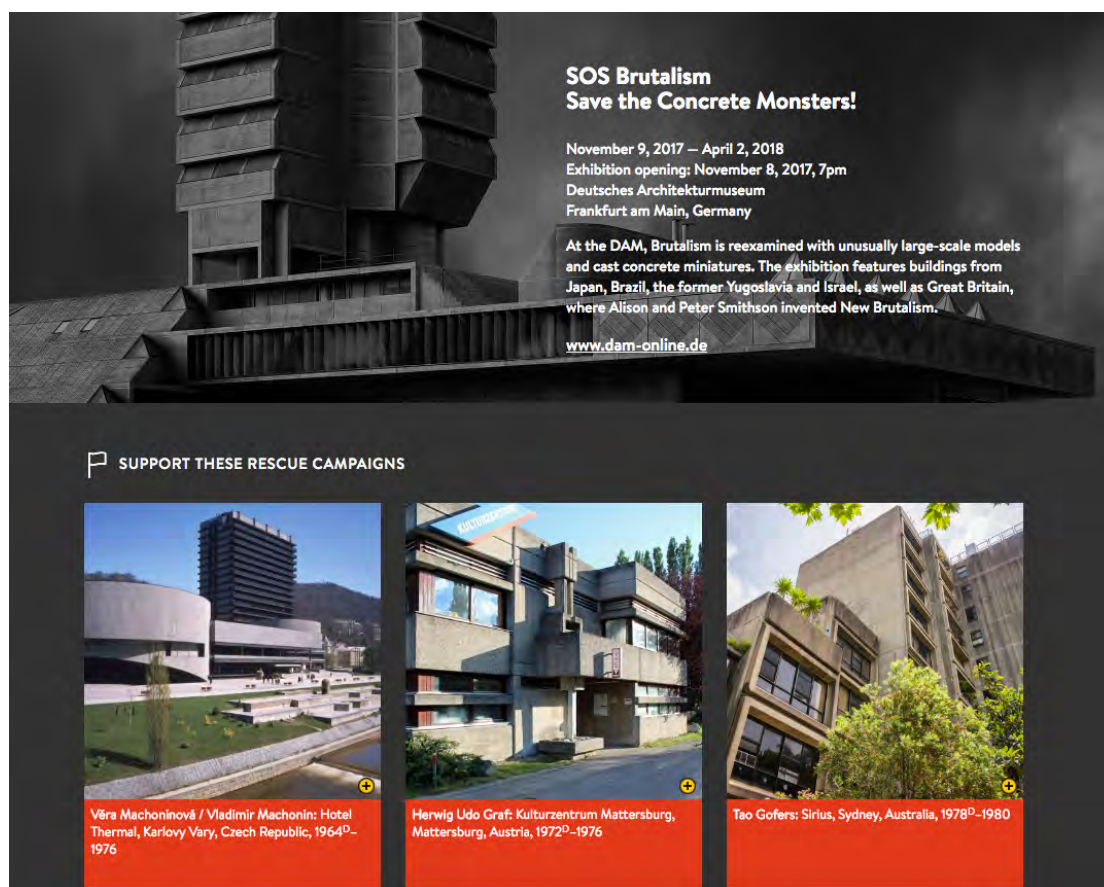
In addition to being included on the NSW Chapter's Register of Significant Architecture the Sirius building has been discussed two articles in the Chapter's publication Architecture Bulletin.

Concrete Poetry, Iconic and Award-Winning Buildings, March - April 2012 (Noni Boyd and Glenn Harper)

Saving Sirius is Hard to Do, Noni Boyd, Heritage Officer, Architecture Bulletin, Winter - Spring 2016

The Architecture Bulletin and the AIA register summary were available on line at the time that the Heritage Impact Statement was prepared. These publications are available on line. The Sirius building has also been gaining international recognition, with international housing experts seeking information on the building and visiting

the complex whilst in Sydney. The German SOS Brutalism website has included the Sirius building since around 2015 and the building is currently included in the display of threatened buildings as part of the SOS Brutalism exhibition on at the Deutsches ArchitekturMuseum in Frankfurt. The exhibition will then travel. The building may not have been included in international publications at the time that Jennifer Taylor prepared her advice however it certainly is now.



The HIS also doesn't acknowledge any of the articles and academic research papers written over the past five years that consider the Sirius building. In preparing an HIS it is usual to include reference to published articles. In addition it is stated that the architect Tao Gophers (Gofers) does not appear on the list of architects whose housing designs were significant. Public architects were committed to the production of good works of architecture and did not seek to have their names in lights. Seeking publicity was frowned upon, in contrast to the 'starchitect' phenomena of today. The short list of key designers in the survey of NSW's Public Housing by John Gregory and Jennifer Campbell does not include the names of designers of individual blocks, so also omits the internationally renown architects the Housing Commission utilised including John Andrews and Harry Seidler and the well-respected local architects F W Turner and the firm of Morrow & Gordon. The names listed were those who acted at a higher level such as the Government Architect or advisors to the Housing Commission.

Sustainability

There is a growing trend to retrofit buildings to retain their embodied energy. This applies in particular to more recent buildings that have not reached the end of their

useful life or would be costly and difficult to demolish. Housing in London and even the notorious housing slab blocks such as those in Sheffield have been retrofitted to modernise the apartments and successful partnerships between the housing agencies and councils and developers have been established.. Had this approach been taken initially with the Sirius building it could have been leased, upgraded and re-occupied by now, saving a considerable amount of time and taxpayers money. Likewise well known modern public housing at Lignon in Switzerland and Keil in Antwerp has been successfully retrofitted by housing corporations. I visited the refurbishment of the social housing in Kiel in 2005, as part of a DOCOMOMO International Specialist Committee visit that showcased the work of the local architect Renaate Braem who designed this social housing. In this work one unit was retained as a museum to show what the interiors of the units had been like when completed, including their built ins. All of the remaining units were upgraded to meet modern standards.



Social housing being refurbished in Kiel, Antwerp. Further refurbishment to blocks in this area are being undertaken at present. Photographs by the Author.

Additions

Should the building be retained then the controls make no provision for additions however the implementation strategy in the CMP for 23 George Street included two options to re-instate a building above the warehouse to the north of Sirius. Such a building could have included pedestrian access between Gloucester Walk and Cumberland Street. Due to the condition and heritage significance of the warehouse building that holds up part of Cumberland Street the range of uses to which the area can be put is limited however upper level of the warehouse building could be utilised as storage in conjunction with apartments.

Sustainability

NSW is lagging behind both national and international trends in the retrofitting more recent building stock and needs to make more of an effort to take a more sustainable approach to the treatment of the built environment in order that Australia can meet its agreed sustainability targets. For decades there have been calls to take heed of the mounting environmental cost of the frequent cycles of renewal of the built environment. This 'cost' is currently not being properly taken into consideration in NSW. As Robert Bevan pointed out in the Financial Review in 2008:

Demolishing buildings should be a last, not a first resort. The mounting environmental cost of wasting embodied energy should make us take heritage seriously

Bevan, R, 2008, Demolish and build anew at the nation's peril. Australian Financial Review, August 15-17 2008.

Australia is lagging behind the developed world when it comes to taking a longer term view to the built environment. In her paper prepared for Scottish Heritage on embodied energy considerations for existing buildings Dr Gillian Menzies argues that

The sustainable use of existing buildings must be a national and global priority. Replacing a building has significant energy, carbon and financial cost implications. A new building would have to use many times less energy than the existing one to justify this energy and carbon investment. Retaining the existing building stock is preferred where its energy performance is good or can be improved to appropriate levels. Retaining existing buildings and seeking to enhance their energy performance in sensitive ways is in keeping with building conservation, sustainability and progress towards a low carbon society

Menzies, G F, 2011, Technical Paper 13, Embodied Energy Considerations for Existing Buildings, Historic Scotland p 35

Australian research into improving the implementation of adaptive re-use strategies for historic buildings likewise stresses that this issue is

important to the national interest as destruction and reconstruction brings with it higher energy impacts (evidenced principally as embodied energy) that collectively impact on Australia's ability to meet its emission obligations

Conejos, S, Langston, C & Smith, J, 2011, Improving the Implementation of Adaptive Reuse Strategies for Historic Buildings, Le Vei dei Mercanti, SAVE Heritage Safeguard of Architectural, Visual, Environmental Heritage Naples 2011 p.8

These points are set out in more detail in my recent article on Heritage and Sustainability in *Historic Environment*.

Conclusion

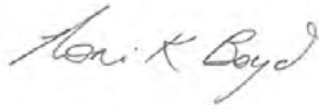
The suite of documents exhibited contain information that has been selectively 'cherry picked' to suit the desired outcome, which is the destruction of the Sirius building, an outcome that is being pushed at a ministerial level. This push is against the heritage advice from within the agency, advice that is consistent with the NSW Heritage Act (as the item is on the Agencies' Section 170 Register) and is also contrary the unanimous decision provided by the NSW Heritage Council and the independent opinions obtained by the Heritage Council to assist in their decision making. Ministerial aesthetic preferences, preferences that are out of step with international and national professional opinions on modern architecture, are determining the fate of the Sirius building. This disregard for the extent of submissions in support of heritage listing, expert submissions which far outweigh the submissions against, will have a negative impact on the individual character of The Rocks and the buffer zone of the World Heritage Listed Sydney Opera House.

The planning and heritage documents on exhibition rely heavily on a limited number of existing broad studies and do not take into account the findings of detailed reports commissioned by SHFA since the Rocks Heritage Management Plan of 2010 or the full extent of items included on SHFA's Section 170 Register. These documents provide more information on archaeology and heritage listed buildings in the vicinity and was available on line. Even basic information such as land uses is incorrect, but could have easily been checked by walking around the area.

The HIS currently on exhibition is totally inadequate, containing numerous errors and conclusions that alter the conclusions of detailed reports, research into the Green Bans prepared by SHFA and published histories without providing justification. The copyright disclaimer notes that the HIS report was prepared specifically for the owners of the site, yet the HIS relies in the most part on an earlier report for an adjacent building prepared by Jean Rice Architect. The HIS is misleading in the information it contains in a deliberate attempt to downplay the social, historical and architectural significance of the Sirius building in particular and the Bunker's Hill precinct in general. The consultants have used an earlier HIS as a basis and did not taking enough care when changing the text so that it reflected the heritage status of the Sirius. Such a poorly researched and compiled report should not have been placed on public exhibition and should have at least been peer reviewed.

Given that the building is listed on an Agency Section 170 Register (as required under the NSW Heritage Act) a more thorough and independent heritage assessment should have been undertaken as a basis for the planning scheme. Such an assessment should not be commissioned by those vested interest in demolition but be prepared by independent consultants. A more thorough understanding of the area is needed to determine proper planning controls, controls which are not weighted towards the demolition of the Sirius Building, controls that take the Rocks Conservation Area and the Buffer Zone of the Opera House into proper consideration.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Noni K Boyd'.

Dr Noni Boyd
BArch, MSc (Arch. Cons), PhD
Architectural Historian & Heritage Consultant

Appendices	Phillip Goad letter
	Sirius Denied Listing

Expert Report:

**Sirius Apartment Building
36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks
Sydney, New South Wales**

Assessment on Aesthetic Significance

Professor Philip Goad
2 November 2015

Expert witness details:

Name: Professor Philip GOAD

Residential Address:

88 Pleasant Road, East Hawthorn, Victoria, 3123

Postal Address: Faculty of Architecture Building & Planning
University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, 3010

Qualifications: BArch(Hons), PhD, LFRAIA, FAHA
RAIA (registered architect[academic])
former President, RAIA Victoria

Experience: over twenty-five years of experience as an architectural historian, research and consulting in the area of 20th century Australian architecture. Major conservation management plans during this period include:

(in association with Allom Lovell Associates)

- National Gallery of Victoria
- Victorian Arts Centre (State Theatre, Hamer Hall)
- BHP House
- Sidney Myer Music Bowl

Expertise: 20th century Australian architecture with special focus on the period after 1945 and contemporary architectural design. Goad has been contributing editor and critic for *Architecture Australia*, and co-editor of *Fabrications*, the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia & New Zealand. He is, amongst other publications, author and editor of:

- *A Guide to Melbourne Architecture* (Watermark Press, Sydney 1999, 2009)
- *New Directions in Australian Architecture* (Pesaro Publishing, Melbourne 2001)
- *Judging Architecture: Issues Divisions Triumphs - Victorian Architecture Awards 1929-2003* (RAIA Victoria, Melbourne, 2003)
- *Bates Smart: 150 years of Australian architecture* (Thames and Hudson, Melbourne, 2004)
- (with Julie Willis) *The Encyclopedia of Australian architecture* (Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2012)

Instructions: This report on the Sirius Apartment Building, 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks, NSW has been prepared at the request of the Heritage Division, Office of Environment and Heritage, State Government of NSW.

Given time constraints and distance, this report proceeds as a desktop study of the Sirius Apartment Building at 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks. The author has inspected the site on previous visits to Sydney. References consulted appear at the end of this report.

Brief:

The brief is to assess the aesthetic significance (*SHR Criteria c*) of the Sirius Apartment Building at 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks, NSW.

Description of place:

The Sirius Apartment Building is located at 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks in Sydney, New South Wales. It was designed in 1975, documented by 1977, constructed between 1978 and 1979, and was complete by 1980. The complex comprises public housing and associated landscaping, and was erected by the NSW Housing Commission. It contains 79 apartments, accommodating approximately 200 residents. There are five four-bedroom units, eight three-bedroom units, thirty-eight two-bedroom units, eleven one-bedroom units, and seventeen one-bedroom apartments specifically designed for elderly tenants (located on the eighth floor of the project's tower section).

The building is currently owned by Government Property NSW (GPNSW) and the Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC).

Stylistically, the Sirius Apartment Building can be considered as an example of late Brutalism.

Formally, the Sirius Apartment Building is a series of repetitive cubic elements stacked on top of each other and aligned north-south in a stepping form (in plan and elevation) across a sloping site. At either end, the building is low – tapering to fewer than five storeys – rising to an eleven-storey tower form towards the southern end of the building's middle. The stepped form of the complex means that there are numerous rooftop terraces, many of which include soft landscaping. At ground level, brick paving and brick planter beds and low brick walls soften the building's overall appearance.

Technically, the Sirius Apartment Building is an off-form reinforced concrete structure with in-situ poured floors and walls, and with large-scale precast concrete panel window elements slotted into the in-situ frame. It is these precast panels that give the complex its stacked, modular visual character. Within each panel are bronze-anodized aluminium frames housing glazing, bronze tinted for sun protection.

Internally, in public areas, walls are off-form concrete (bush-hammered) softened by Tasmanian Oak timber panelling in spaces such as the foyer and community room, and at service cores. The interior conditions of the individual apartments are not known to this author.

History

In the early 1970s, when the NSW government was looking to develop The Rocks, it was envisaged that all public housing residents would be relocated to other suburbs. Much of the precinct had long been in public ownership with a history of public housing on the site since the early 20th century. However with

community opposition to redevelopment and building unions placing a ‘Green Ban’ - a ban on work until all public housing tenants were satisfactorily rehoused – on the precinct (Burgmann & Burgmann, 2011; Roddewig, 1978; Rodrigo, 2015), the NSW government was forced to rethink its options. In 1973, local residents developed ‘The People’s Plan’ and argued that any future planning of The Rocks should involve local residents. One of the Plan’s key recommendations was that existing residents be allowed to stay in the area and that historic buildings be retained. In response, the Sirius Apartment Building was proposed by the government “as an alternative to the relocation of tenants, subsequently resulting in the temporary lifting of construction bans in April 1975” (Rodrigo, 2015). As a result, the design architect for the NSW Housing Commission consulted with local residents, adjusted the building form to alleviate noise from the Sydney Harbor Bridge approaches, and explored a range of unit designs to accommodate diverse family and demographic types. Private garden spaces, balconies, community rooms, and a communal roof garden were all included in this community-based response to designing a large public housing project.

Architects

The designer of the Sirius Apartment Building was Dutch-born and Canadian trained architect Tao (Theodorus) Gofers (1941-), working as a ‘Specialist Design Architect’ within the NSW Housing Commission (Rodrigo, 2015). Gofers grew up in the Alcan-developed planned mining community Kitimat in northwest British Columbia, studied Science at the University of British Columbia (UBC) (1963-6) and then architecture at UBC, graduating in 1972. He commenced practice designing single-family houses, then migrated to Australia in 1973. He worked for the Sydney office of Jackson Teece Chesterman Willis before gaining a position at the NSW Housing Commission in 1974. One of his early designs for the Commission was The Laurels at Ritchie Street, Sans Souci (1974). This was a modular stacked development of interlocking unit types of maximum three levels, which has been argued was a prototype for the Sirius Apartment Building (Rodrigo, 2015). Its plan was staggered across the site and in elevation (reducing to single-storey at its eastern end) so that the resulting form was picturesque in profile. At the time, this was a new design approach for the NSW Housing Commission.

In 1975, Gofers was promoted to Specialist Design Architect and began designing the Sirius Apartment Building between Cumberland Street and Gloucester Walk in The Rocks. Gofers was involved in speaking to prospective tenants and determining the demographic mix of the complex, the building’s design internally and externally, including the project’s roof gardens, community room and timber sculptures in the main foyer.

By 1977, design development and documentation of the Sirius Apartment Building was being carried out by the Sydney-based architectural firm Alexander and Lloyd, a practice established in 1957 and which by the 1970s had begun to specialize in providing architectural services for the NSW Public Works Department and for development assistance projects in developing countries (Alexander and Lloyd, 2015). Alexander and Lloyd had earlier been responsible for the design development and documentation of Gofers’ The Laurels at San

Souci, especially the technical documentation of the project's precast concrete façade elements (Alexander and Lloyd, 2015).

Comparative Analysis:

Stylistically, the Sirius Apartment Building can be considered as an example of late Brutalism. This description is justified on the basis of a number of aspects: first, the use of exposed off-form concrete and acid-etched precast concrete window panels – its direct and truthful exposure of structure and materials; second, the response to topography and existing context, which was a key part of Brutalism's urban mission – to re-engage with the built fabric and pedestrian movement patterns of the city; and third, the building's unitized appearance and individual roof gardens which impart a sense of human scale, a consistent and key aim of Brutalism despite its various aesthetic incarnations over more than twenty years.

Brutalism in world architecture has a long and complex history, and as a result takes many aesthetically diverse forms and appearances. In very general terms, the style can be identified internationally from 1952 with the completion of Le Corbusier's off-form concrete multi-storey residential slab block, the Unite d'Habitation, Marseilles, France. But the style and the term Brutalism was explored across the world in a variety of ways (often conflicting with the connotation of the word 'Brutalism') until c.1974-80 (Goad, 2015). At that time, changing architectural ideas and fashion saw the adoption of Postmodernism in architecture: a return to overt historic reference, symbolism, colour and direct contextual reference, and importantly, a strong reaction against modernist ideas that celebrated urban slum clearance and heroic abstract forms devoid of meaning.

In comparative terms, in New South Wales, the Sirius Apartment Building (1975-80) should therefore be considered as an example of late Brutalism.

Early examples of Brutalism in New South Wales were to be found in buildings such as architect Tony Moore's own house at North Sydney (1959), which directly reflected appreciation of British exponents of so-called 'New Brutalism', in particular the work of Alison and Peter Smithson. This house and others like Ken Woolley's own house, Mosman (1962) and Peter Johnson's own house, Chatswood (1963) employed clinker bricks, terra cotta roof tiles and dark-stained timbers – 'as found' construction materials. The wide adoption of this locally developed idiom was also applied to educational and institutional buildings, which gained added inspiration from the humanized modernism of Scandinavian architects like Alvar Aalto and Heikki Siren, and from the early 1960s the idiom came to be known as the 'Sydney School'. Important non-residential examples include Allen Jack & Cottier's Clubbe Hall, Frensham School, Mittagong (1964-5) and Ancher Mortlock Murray & Woolley's series of buildings at the University of Newcastle (eg, Student Union, 1964; Great Hall, 1968).

One of the most important proponents of Brutalism as a stylistic idiom in New South Wales (and in Australia) was the Office of the NSW Government Architect,

especially in terms of buildings that employed off-form concrete and exposed brick and, unlike the so-called 'Sydney School', explicitly non-residential monumental forms. Important examples emanating from the Office of the NSW Government Architect extended over more than ten years and some of the most significant included Goldstein Hall, University of New South Wales (1963), William Balmain Teachers College (later Ku-ring-gai College), Lindfield (1970-1; 1973-9) and the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, Oatley (1976-80), the latter two projects also involving extensive indigenous landscape sites – in complete contrast to the urban setting of the Sirius Apartment Building.

In terms of Brutalism and social housing in New South Wales, a key example is Harry Seidler's NSW Housing Commission apartments at Rosebery (1964-7), a large scale project accommodating 226 apartments (Blake, 1973). However, Seidler's dramatic design, which comprises twin high-rise off-form concrete slabs connected by reinforced concrete bridges offset within an open landscape (in contradistinction to the surrounding suburban context), indicates his ongoing and sophisticated allegiance to the aspirations of CIAM-influenced urbanism (modernist abstract forms in a *tabula rasa* [cleared/clean slate] landscape).

By contrast, the much smaller, stepped and staggered forms of the mixed high and low-rise Sirius Apartment Building (1975-80) relates to the low rise character of the historic precinct of The Rocks. As such it is completely different and unusual within the context of Sydney public housing, which at the time was focussed on villa estates, terrace houses and high-rise projects – not a mixture. As such, it indicates an important move by the NSW Housing Commission to better relate its large-scale projects to existing urban contexts.

More comparable in terms of design experiment in public housing and in construction at the same time as the Sirius Apartment Building is noted architect John Andrews' low-rise housing (2 and 3 stories) for the NSW Housing Commission at Little Bay (1975-81). This project provided subsidized housing for 46 families, 32 aged persons and 18 childless couples terraced and clustered around eight private streets (Andrews & Taylor, 1982). This project's small scale, use of exposed bricks, concrete slabs and lintels, and outdoor terraces per apartment, and diverse demographic mix was similar to that of the Sirius Apartment Building in The Rocks. But the building's siting at Little Bay – on an area of denuded landscape with nearby rambling institutions like the Long Bay Gaol and 4-6 walk-up flats – was completely different to that of the Sirius Apartment Building.

Both projects are significant in that they indicate the NSW Housing Commission shifting in the mid-1970s to low-rise, more urban-scaled and more socially mixed developments. At Little Bay, the stepped-form of the project's massing and planning was recognized by the NSW Housing Commission as a possible medium-density housing prototype for sloping sites. Precast concrete construction was initially envisaged but the project was adapted to traditional loadbearing brickwork for economic reasons (*Architecture Australia*, 1981). At the Sirius Apartment Building, the translation to repetitive construction was also

only partially realized. However, as at Little Bay, aesthetic and social aspirations were satisfied.

The Sirius Apartment Building also needs to be considered against what sort of public housing projects **post-dated** its construction. The Little Bay Housing and the Sirius Apartment Building were two of the NSW Housing Commission's last projects before the significant Post Modern-influenced infill public housing projects of Woolloomooloo (1980), undertaken by the NSW Housing Commission under project manager John Devenish's leadership and involving a series of private architectural firms. The two blocks of low-rise Forbes Street Housing, Woolloomooloo (1980) designed by architectural firms Allen Jack & Cottier and Philip Cox (Taylor, 1990), which allude to the form and detail of historic 19th century terrace housing, are notable and significant outcomes of that redevelopment.

In this respect, both the Little Bay Housing and the Sirius Apartment Building represent key aesthetic endpoints to an entire era of post-war public housing. The Sirius Apartment Building, additionally – unlike the Little Bay housing – has added significance because of its close association with the Green Bans protest movement. It symbolizes the force of community reaction combined with the revised thinking in architectural circles about how to appropriately house large numbers of low-income residents.

Interstate

In Victoria, the move towards a more urbanistically sympathetic housing project like the Sirius Apartment Building is paralleled by Daryl Jackson and Evan Walker's award-winning Brutalist solution for medium density housing at their City Edge housing project, South Melbourne (1971-4), which combined tan bricks, off-form concrete, and stained timber. Howard Tanner in 1976 described City Edge as "may be the first urban housing scheme in Australia that offers an alternative to the high rise home unit towers which have dominated inner suburban planning for the past 20 years" (Tanner, 1976). The Jackson and Walker scheme was a three to five level complex that included pedestrian streets, community spaces, parklands, undercover parking and responded directly to the adjacent 19th century terrace house urban context. Another important Victorian example was the award-winning Co-operative Housing project in Cross Street, Carlton (1970) developed by the University of Melbourne Staff Co-operative and designed by architects Earle Shaw & Partners in deliberate contrast to the modernist high-rise slabs of the Housing Commission of Victoria across the street (McKay et al, 1971). The Cross Street design included a mixture of low and high-rise apartments, shared community spaces and formally contextual responses such as exposed brick, gable roofs and picturesque massing.

However both these Victorian examples were privately developed. By comparison, the Sirius Apartment Building was commissioned by a public agency, the NSW Housing Commission, and as such, in addition to the Sydney project's aesthetic interest, there is the added significance of a government body leading and experimenting with an alternative aesthetic for public housing.

Elsewhere interstate in Australia, there are few important Brutalist apartment buildings that compare in scale and urban context to the Sirius Apartment Building. In Queensland, James Birrell's Union College at the University of Queensland, St Lucia (1963-74) is a low-rise off-form concrete residential college that zig-zags its way through an indigenous landscape setting (Goad, 2015). In the Australian Capital Territory, the cleverly-designed low-rise apartment projects of architect Dirk Bolt for the National Capital Development Commission in Canberra suburbs, such as the Torrens townhouses (1967), Farrer townhouses (1968) and Red Hill Flats (1968), indicate a carefully scaled, human approach to multi-unit housing. Yet all exhibit a softened Scandinavian modern appearance rather than any overtly Brutalist approach to the material and structural palette of an apartment complex (Trickett, 2013). In Canberra, the two student housing projects designed by John Andrews - Toad Hall, Australian National University (1970) and the Student Residences, Canberra College of Advanced Education (CCAЕ, now University of Canberra) (1973) - are both examples of late Brutalism. Both employ stepped forms in plan and exposed structure and materials, and in overall layout indicate a desire for more human-scaled massing. The CCAЕ student housing, built on a slope and incorporating off-form concrete and pedestrian streets, comes closest to the late Brutalism aim of creating topographically sensitive, people-scaled urbanism.

However none of these examples sit within the arguably more challenging setting of an existing dense historic urban precinct as does the Sirius Apartment Building in The Rocks.

International comparison has been made between the Sirius Apartment Building and Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 (1964-7) at the World's Fair, Montreal, Canada, 1967. This comparison cannot be sustained either visually or factually. Gofers does not make any claim to influence (Rodrigo, 2015) nor do the two projects bear any aesthetic or technical similarity. Any reference to significance based on such an association should be discounted.

Conclusion

On balance, therefore, the Sirius Apartment Building is a rare and intact example of late Brutalist architecture as applied to an apartment building dedicated to social housing.

Technically, the building is of note for its consistent expression of off-form concrete and for its precast concrete window panels. But these elements, more commonly deployed on high-rise office buildings, are not of especial technical significance in their own right.

Historically, the building is of note for its association with architect Tao Gofers and his earlier experiment with The Laurels, and also with Alexander and Lloyd, architects who went on to have a long and enduring association with inventive solutions to development projects in developing countries. However current scholarship on both architects is limited and significance in its own right cannot be attributed to these associations.

Assessment of Significance (against SHR Criteria A and C):

This report therefore offers the following recommendation with respect to the Sirius Apartment Building.

It is recommended that:

The Sirius Apartment Building at 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks designed in 1975 by Tao (Theodorus) Gofers within the NSW Housing Commission and completed in 1980 **is of State Heritage Significance**.

As measured against SHR Criteria a) [historic significance]

It has **historic significance** as being a direct outcome of the so-called 'Green Bans', the protest movement instituted in Sydney in late 1971 against the commercial redevelopment of The Rocks and Millers Point precincts in the 1970s. Instead of relocating local residents, the NSW Housing Commission decided in an unusual move to consult and build affordable public housing for those residents and others displaced in the area.

As measured against SHR Criteria c) [aesthetic significance]

It has **aesthetic significance** as being a rare, representative and fine example of the late Brutalist architectural style, especially in its application to public housing and in its use of off-form concrete and its picturesque massing of stacked cubic components intended to minimize its impact on the neighboring historic precinct of The Rocks and alleviate the effects of vehicular noise from the Sydney Harbour Bridge approaches.

It has **aesthetic significance** as representing, architecturally, the important philosophical move by the NSW Housing Commission in the mid-1970s away from modernist ideals of housing in towers or slab blocks on cleared sites towards solutions that involved community participation and sympathetic contextual placement of such housing and retention of long-time low-income residents in historic inner urban precincts.

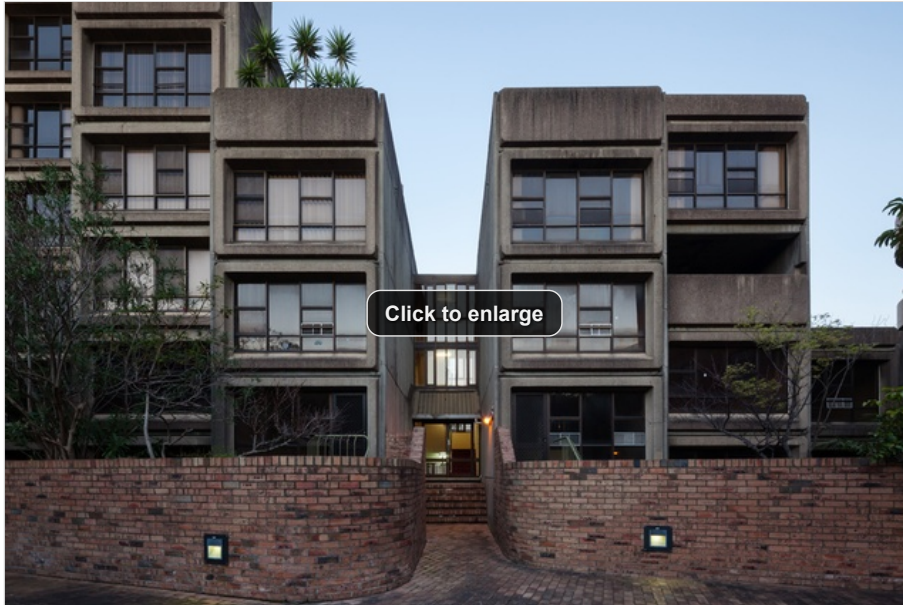
Professor Philip Goad
2 November 2015

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Sirius denied heritage protection, again

News | Words Linda Cheng



The Sirius building by Tao Gofers, 1979. Image: [Katherine Lu](#)

The NSW heritage minister Gabrielle Upton has decided not to heritage list the Sirius social housing complex designed by Tao Gofers.

Her decision comes after her predecessor Mark Speakman, in August 2016, similarly rejected the unanimous advice of the NSW Heritage Council, which recommended the building be added to the state heritage register.

Speakman's decision was later challenged in the Land and Environment Court of NSW, which found in July 2017 that the former heritage minister had "side-stepped the required assessment," making the decision invalid. The court ordered the current heritage minister to reconsider the heritage significance of Sirius according to the law.

In August, the NSW government filed a notice of intention to appeal the court's ruling and a government spokesperson told *ArchitectureAU*, "Regardless of the Court's final decision, the sale of the Sirius building will go ahead."

In her decision, Upton outlined her reasons for not listing Sirius on the State Heritage Register, in accordance with the court's judgement, and stated that she had considered the recommendations of the Heritage Council, along with submissions made in response to the public notification of the recommendations.

Documents obtained by the Save Our Sirius Foundation under New South Wales's freedom of information laws (GIPA Act), reveal the Heritage Council received 24 submissions, of which four were objections to the heritage listing. Two of these objections originated from other government departments, including from the owners of the site, Government Property NSW and the Land and Housing Corporation, and the Department of Family and Community Services.

The other two objections came from a real estate investment firm that leases the ground floor of a neighbouring building and pro-development lobby group The Urban Taskforce.

Submissions of support were received from the Australian Institute of Architects, the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, Docomomo, a member of The Rocks Chamber of Commerce as well as the NSW Tenants Union and local councils.

IIS PAGE



The Sirius building by Tao Gofers, 1979. Image: [Katherine Lu](#)

Upton notes, “While the nomination and recommendation cites the building as a ‘fine’ example of late brutalist architecture, there are contrary expert opinions that the design of the building is not considered innovative or unique, nor did it have a lasting influence on building design or social housing either domestically or internationally.”

The Heritage Council had commissioned expert reports from architectural historian Professor Philip Goad and political and social historian professor Paul Ashton.

Philip Goad’s report stated that the “stepped and staggered forms of the mixed high and low-rise Sirius Apartment Building (1975-80) relates to the low rise character of the historic precinct of The Rocks. As such it is completely different and unusual within the context of Sydney public housing, which at the time was focused on villa estates, terrace houses and high-rise projects – not a mixture.”

The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) consulted heritage and social experts including NBRS and Partners, Futurepast, Architectural Projects, Context, and the late architectural historian Jennifer Taylor. FACS states: “NBRS and Partners, Futurepast, Architectural Projects and Context collectively agree that the Sirius Apartment Building fails to meet any of the criteria for State Heritage Significance.”

However, one of these organizations, Context, says the FACS report “misrepresented” their advice.

“Context’s advice was to assess the pre-existing nomination for heritage listing, not to undertake an assessment against the State Heritage Significance criteria. Context has not and did not agree that the Sirius building failed to meet any of the criteria for State Heritage Significance,” a spokesperson told *ArchitectureAU*.

“We consider the statement to be a misrepresentation.”

While the FACS report reference the work of Jennifer Taylor in relation to the history of brutalist architecture in Australia, which did not mention Sirius, she was asked directly by the department if there were any international publications on Sirius to which she replied “I am unaware of any international publications on the building Sirius, 36–50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks, Sydney.”

Upton also noted “a number of the contrary submissions and expert reports argue that [Sirius] was not the only (or earliest) example of brutalist architecture in the social housing estate, that this approach has not had a lasting impact and there are

other (and earlier) examples of retaining low income residents in inner urban precincts.”

However, as Professor Goad points out in his report, “Brutalism in world architecture has a long and complex history, and as a result takes many aesthetically diverse forms and appearances.

“Stylistically, the Sirius Apartment Building can be considered as an example of late Brutalism.”

Russell Rodrigo, author of a peer-reviewed journal article on Sirius and brutalism that was used as evidence in FACS’s report, writes that “Sirius reflects heroic ambitions, both socially and architecturally. Through its direct and honest aesthetics, Sirius presents a powerful civic image that communicates the potential role played by the built environment in the lives of a society’s inhabitants, a role focused on the culture of the everyday, a powerful image of the egalitarian ideal expressed in architecture.”

Government Property NSW also objected to the recommendation for heritage listing on the basis that “a listing would have an immediate [...] depreciation in value.” The department commissioned a review of the Sirius building by Value Network, a business analysis consultancy that boasts among its achievements the demolition of the historic Sydney Harbour Control Tower at Barangaroo.

Value Network was engaged to “understand and represent the economic hardship which related to the potential listing.”

However, the exact amount of the “depreciation in value” had all been redacted from the report.

In the Land and Environment Court, the government claimed the heritage listing would reduce the sale value of the site by approximately \$70 million, which is equivalent to 240 social housing units.

Upton concludes, “In my view, [Sirius] is not a landmark worthy of State heritage protection.

“On balance, I do not believe that that the Sirius Building is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW, and this criterion is not met.”

In a statement, Save Our Sirius Foundation chairperson Shaun Carter said, “[We] believe this decision is an ignorant decision made by an out-of-touch government who have stopped listening to the people and are riding roughshod over the NSW landscape.

“Upton’s only argument and the only thing she cites in her decision is the opinion of a group of private companies the government hired to tell them what they want to hear.

Save Our Sirius will continue the fight. If there is a legal avenue to pursue, we will pursue it with all our might. We will not stop this fight until Sirius is saved.”

In October 2017, the World Monuments Fund placed the Sirius building on an international watchlist of sites under imminent threat, along with sites in war-torn Iraq and the hurricane-ravaged Caribbean.

[Editor’s note: The article has been amended after receiving a statement from Context regarding the nature of their advice to the Department of Family and Community Services.]



Interior of the Sirius building by Tao Gofers, 1979. Image: Barton Taylor

Words [Linda Cheng](#)

Images [Barton Taylor](#), [Katherine Lu](#)

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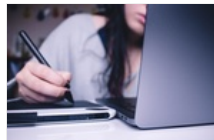
Of its place: Layer House



A real character: Avery Green



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AACA National Examination Paper goes digital



Construction of Green Square aquatic centre kicks off

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