



**HERITAGE
COUNCIL**
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES – ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.2 Constructing capital city economies
- 4.6 Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns and cities
- 7.6.1 Developing local government authorities

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 107 Settlements
- 112 Technology and technological change
- 401 Government and politics

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

The building is significant in exhibiting aesthetic characteristics of polished, hard textured, industrial building materials for the external finishes, the reduction of structural mass and the refinement of details resulted in a transparent 'glass box', unlike any other office building in Perth, and matched by few office buildings elsewhere in Australia. (Criterion 1.1)

The building is a prime demonstration of the principal modernist architectural ideals admired in Australia in the early sixties. (Criterion 1.2)

Council House, Perth is an architectural landmark in the streetscape of St George's Terrace. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

The building is associated with the VII British Empire and Commonwealth Games, epitomising the forward-looking aspirations of the Perth community at the beginning of the 1960s. It also represents the desire for quality civic facilities in time for the start of the Commonwealth Games. (Criterion 2.2)

Council House has been the focus of the civic identity of Perth since the 1960s, and as such is identifiable as the public setting for the administrative, ceremonial and political activities of the municipality. (Criterion 2.2)

The site now occupied by *Council House, Perth* has been occupied by: public offices, associated with Government House (1870s); Post Office (1890s); Stirling Gardens and the Department of Agriculture (1920s); Soldiers' Institute (1930s); the ABC (1950s); and *Council House, Perth* from the 1960s. (Criterion 2.2)

The building is significant for introducing to Perth both a new level of purity in modernist architectural design and a consistency of minimalist detailing. The

uninterrupted floor-to-ceiling glazing introduced a degree of transparency previously unseen in commercial office buildings in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.4)

11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The building demonstrates an innovative use of contemporary building technology and structure, particularly with respect to the large expanses of uninterrupted floor to ceiling sheets of double-glazing. (Criterion 3.3)

11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

The building has a clear value not only as an acclaimed architectural landmark in its own right, but also as the focal point, over three decades, for newsworthy and often controversial decisions and social events involving many prominent people – Western Australians and visitors alike.

The civic identity of Perth has been bound up with that of *Council House, Perth*. As the public setting for the administrative, ceremonial and political activities of the premier – and oldest – municipality in Western Australia, Council House has held symbolic and practical meaning for a wide spectrum of metropolitan residents.

The image of Council House, of course, is not identical in the mind of each member of the community in general. Instead, the place is cherished among certain 'communities of interest' as being of special significance to them. In this regard, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA) has written to the City of Perth in support of retention of the place on architectural, historic and social grounds, while 42 members of the RAIWA have made individual submissions in similar terms. (Criterion 4.1)

Nonetheless, Council House was from the start, and has remained, a controversial building with many sections of the public strongly for or against the style of design it epitomises. (Criterion 4.1)

The building is symbolic of the Perth's transformation into a modern city of the second half of the 20th century, and contributes much to the 'sense of place' people retain in the continuum of an evolving city. The building continues to appear frequently in tourism promotions, reflecting not only its architectural landmark status but also the community's identification of Council House with 'Perth' as a place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

The building is a rare intact example of an early 1960s modernist office building in Perth. The MLC (1957) and R&I Bank (1961) buildings represent an earlier generation of modernist buildings, the T&G (1960) and SGIO (1958) buildings have had their external cladding replaced, and the Commonwealth Bank (1962) in William Street and the ANZ Bank (1965) on St George's Terrace have been demolished. Dumas House (1964), although not dissimilar in character, does not display the same refinement of detail, or dazzling transparency. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Council House, Perth stands out amongst Australian office buildings of the 1960s as a fine example of minimalist modern architecture. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Like many buildings of its period *Council House, Perth* suffered from the use of asbestos insulation, which was removed between 1995 and 1996. A major refurbishment was undertaken between 1997 and 1999. The place is now in good condition.

12.3 INTEGRITY

Council House, Perth has a moderate to high degree of integrity, as it continues to be used for the purpose it was originally built: an administrative centre for the City of Perth. Changes include movement of the city library; levels 2-4 have been leased out for private office accommodation; level 11 now contains Civic Reception and Mayoral administration; level 10 is solely for elected members' offices and dining facilities. Level 9 remains as Council Chambers; and levels LGF, 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are used for administration, with the CEO located on level 8.

12.4 AUTHENTICITY

The 1997-99 refurbishment campaign made significant alterations to the fabric of *Council House, Perth*. Certain basic design elements of the original building were incorporated, including the total reinstatement of the Facade T sun hoods, recreation of Ground Floor ceilings and marble facings, retention of original lift cars and granite podium and entry foyer floors.

Generally all floors were completely gutted as well as the glazing from the windows being removed. However, the Council Chamber level (Level 9) had the timber mosaic border and original colour carpet T Pattern (which was specially woven) reinstated. Planning of all other floors should be considered as new, only retaining the standard module imposed by the external glazing for locations of internal partitioning and work station layout. Subsequently the lower ground floor has undergone another refurbishment with full height partitions being removed, half height partitions being installed and a staff lounge being created.

The entrance to the building from the terrace is now on grade (i.e. has ramp access) to meet access code requirements, doing away with the original steps. The lamp posts from Perth, Scotland were also placed in a new location at the time of the renovations.

Council House, Perth exterior has a high degree of authenticity, while the interior generally has a low degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The wording of this document has been adapted from 'Council House, St Georges Terrace, Perth: Conservation Plan', November 1993 by Schwager Brooks and Partners Architects and Heritage Consultants with amendments and additions by HCWA staff and the Register Committee.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

In the 1870s, the site now occupied by *Council House, Perth* was home to various public offices, probably associated with neighbouring Government House, a gardener's cottage with outbuildings, and some flowerbeds. By the 1890s, the public offices had become a Post Office and, by 1920, the gardener's cottage and flowerbeds had vanished to expand Stirling Gardens, and the Post Office had become the Department of Agriculture. In the 1930s, the Department of Agriculture building expanded, as did the Soldiers' Institute to the south, the latter housing the ABC by 1959. Finally, both the ABC and the Department of Agriculture moved to make way for *Council House* in the 1960s.¹

The design of *Council House, Perth* was the result of a national architectural competition conducted by Perth City Council in 1960 – *the Perth Town Hall Competition*. Perth was scheduled to host the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in 1962 and civic leaders were inspired to construct a modern administrative building, to reflect the city's growing stature. The brief for the competition required two principal elements, Administrative Offices for the Council and a Public Suite, comprising Banqueting Hall, Auditorium and Town Hall, to replace the colonial Town Hall in Hay Street.

The winning design, one of 61, was submitted by architects Jeffrey Howlett and Don Bailey, who worked in the office of renowned Melbourne architectural firm Bates, Smart and McCutcheon.² The assessors were Professor Brian Lewis, Albert Ernest Clare (Principal Architect, PWD), Leslie M. Perrott Jr. and Harry Seidler (one of the leading exponents of Modernism in Australia). They described the design as:

a direct and satisfactory solution. Detailed examination established it as being capable of development into a most dignified and efficient Town Hall.³

Howlett and Bailey subsequently moved to Perth to set up practice in partnership for the design and construction of the administrative building, the first stage of the project. The builder was J. Hawkins and Son Pty. Ltd. In 1962, the cost of construction was reported to be £1,500,000.⁴

As is common with architectural competitions, the winning design was not constructed as shown. Originally, the major part of the ground floor of the offices was to be unenclosed, providing the principal approach to the Public Suite, immediately to the south, which was linked by a bridge. The Public Suite component of the original design was never built. The auditorium, a music venue now known as Perth Concert Hall, was designed later by Howlett and Bailey and constructed on another site further east along St George's Terrace.⁵

1 'Stirling Gardens, Perth: Conservation Plan', December 1997, Considine and Griffiths Architects, for City of Perth, pp. 109-14

2 *The Architect (WA)*, September 1960, p.18.

3 *ibid.*

4 *Daily News*, 1 December 1962, p.40

5 Bodycoat, R. 'Statement of Architectural Significance', November 1992

Work on the excavations for the building commenced in October 1961 and in November, the pouring of the concrete foundations commenced.⁶ The ceremonial accommodation of *Council House, Perth* was completed in time for the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in 1962, however the fit-out of the remainder of the building continued until March 1963. The building was officially opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, on 25 March 1963.

At the opening ceremony, the Queen unveiled a 2.4 metre high sculptural plaque set on a slim two-metre base. The base, a piece of granite from London's old Waterloo Bridge, carries the unveiling inscription. The granite was brought to Perth in 1939 when the bridge, opened in 1817, was demolished.⁷ It was in storage for 23 years awaiting an appropriate opportunity and much of it was used in *Council House, Perth*. The plaque, designed by Perth artist Geoffrey Allen, is copper gilt and bronze, with a design incorporating swans supporting a crown.

A 1963 article in *The Architect (WA)* provides a description of the physical layout of the building:

In detail, public access to the Treasury and Parklands Department is direct, as is that to the library. The administrative block, by its wide extension and comparative lowness, gives an almost maximum working space in relation to its gross area. In view of very recent proposals for high neighbouring buildings, it would seem that distinction may be achieved by moderation rather than by competition in height.⁸

There were a number of details incorporated in the design that attracted particular attention at the time of construction. The area on which *Council House, Perth* stands is floored with local grey Mundaring granite.⁹ The building was designed so that natural and artificial lighting has maximum visual effect, both internally and externally. The uninterrupted floor to ceiling double glazing provides the building occupants with spectacular views of the city and the river, while the building has a unique semblance of transparency, particularly at night, prompting one journalist to write that 'it has the effect of a glittering diamond in the city when night falls.'¹⁰ The tiled T-shaped sunshades quickly became the subject of comical references to a particular Lord Mayor. Located at floor level on each storey and installed like stage lights, concealed illumination lit up the drawn venetian blinds and gave stark dramatic treatment to the sun hoods and fins, which seem to stand end-on-end up the four walls of the building.

Prior to opening, the construction of *Council House, Perth* received a great deal of attention in the press, the majority of comments being favourable. *Council House* was seen as a prestigious new building that would contribute to the attraction of Perth. This is reflected in a comment in a major article in the *Sunday Times*:

Already hundreds of visitors have praised the architectural qualities of the building and its garden environment. *Council House* had become the envy of other cities. And already Perth people were proud of the building which will soon be the centre of the city's administration system.¹¹

The first seven floors provided office accommodation for various city council departments. The eighth floor was reserved for the Lord Mayor's suite and civic reception areas, and the ninth floor accommodated the Council chamber,

⁶ National Trust of Australia (WA), 'Council House', 9 May 1968, (Battye Library PR11359, p.3)

⁷ *West Australian*, 19 March 1963, p.11

⁸ *The Architect (WA)*, June 1963, p.25

⁹ *Daily News*, 1 December 1962, p.41

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *Sunday Times*, 5 May 1963, p.46

Councillors' lounge and meeting rooms. The tenth floor housed dining facilities for staff and a private dining-room for Councillors.

The purpose built design of the eighth floor suites received particularly favourable comment in the contemporary press.

The eighth floor of *Council House* has given Perth a finer setting for creating good public relations than any other setting in the Commonwealth. ... The new reception centre, like most other parts of *Council House* commands a magnificent view of the Swan River and city foreshores. ... The whole set-up ensures a picturesque, smooth-running and hospitable welcome which few visitors would be able to forget.¹²

Local artisans, including David Foulkes Taylor, Helen Grey-Smith and Geoff Allen, were commissioned to design furniture and furnishings for the civic suites of *Council House, Perth*, providing both a stimulus and showcase for West Australian designers. The warmth and texture of crafted timber fixtures and furniture of the internal spaces stood in sharp contrast to the cold hard shiny external finishes.

At the end of 1992, Perth City Council announced its intention to move out of Council House in order for asbestos contamination to be removed. This announcement ushered in five years of controversy and extensive public debate over the future of the building. In October 1993, the State Government released the Perth Central Precinct Area Policies Review, which featured a 'Civic Precinct' or 'Central Perth Heritage Precinct'. This proposal called for the demolition of *Council House, Perth* and the establishment of public gardens on the site.¹³

The Western Australian media prominently covered the public debate that ensued. Those supporting the demolition focused primarily on the perceived ugliness of the place, and its supposed intrusion into a 'heritage' precinct of 19th century structures and gardens. Those in favour of retention spoke of the importance of the place as a fine demonstration of Post-War Modernist architecture, evidence of the continued civic use of the site since 1839, and the place's association with the 1962 Commonwealth Games. In 1995, a newly elected Perth City Council reviewed the demolition order and in 1996 it approved refurbishment of the building. Despite the support of Perth City Council, professional organisations including the Royal Australia Institute of Architects (WA), and many individual members of the public, in May 1997 the Minister for Heritage decided not to enter the place in the State Register of Heritage Places.¹⁴

From 1997 to 1999 *Council House, Perth* was subject to an extensive refurbishment campaign, carried out by Peter Hunt Architect, with a major part of the works comprising asbestos removal, the creation of a new underground car park to the rear, revisions to the forecourt, and a complete internal re-fit to satisfy the operation of the City's government in the late 20th century and the City's changing operational requirements. In 2006, *Council House, Perth* continues to maintain its original function as the city council's administrative centre.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The siting of *Council House, Perth*, the administrative offices of Perth City Council, was very much a reflection of its time. Set back from St George's Terrace, with its ceremonial forecourt and fountains, *Council House, Perth* was designed to stand apart from its surroundings, to be viewed as a splendid

¹² *Sunday Times*, 5 May 1963, p.47

¹³ Kelly, I, 'Council House, Perth: Caught between competing heritage values', Australian ICOMOS 20th Century Heritage Conference Paper, November 2001.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

isolated object set in the landscape of the surrounding gardens. Little attention, and no formal recognition, was paid to the historic buildings surrounding the site, which reflected the modernist architectural values of the early 1960s.

The ground floor areas of *Council House* were designed to be accompanied by a suite of public halls but, as is often the case with two-stage projects, the second stage was never built, and eventually Perth Concert Hall was built further along St Georges Terrace. This resulted in the ground floor having the appearance of being unconnected to its immediate surroundings, particularly at the rear of the building. The revised setting from the 1997-99 work made an improvement to the presentation of the rear of the place, and substituted urban park space for a car park.

Council House, Perth has a rectangular plan form constructed with a concrete encased steel frame and clad with uninterrupted floor to ceiling panels of fixed double-glazing, set in aluminium frames. The floor to ceiling glazing introduced a radical change in safety regulations, as well as aesthetics. (Previously, fire regulations had required a solid spandrel panel separating floors to prevent the spread of fire.) A strong expression of T-shaped projecting sunscreens clad in white mosaic tiles provide external sun protection, while natural light is internally controlled by full length, adjustable venetian blinds. Thin blue spandrel panels externally mask the construction height between the suspended ceiling and floor level of successive storeys. The same exterior detailing is applied to all faces of the building. In the renovation works of 1997-99, the vertical sections of the T's were replaced. Lifts and service rooms are located at the eastern end of the building and air conditioning to all areas is distributed through ducting above suspended ceilings, generally of natural wood finish with acoustic properties.¹⁵

Of particular architectural interest is the consistency of the design detailing throughout *Council House, Perth*. The MLC Building (1957), also designed by Bates, Smart and McCutcheon, had introduced modernist aesthetics and construction technology to Perth, however Howlett and Bailey's design for *Council House, Perth* introduced a cleaner, more purist, image of detailing. A minimalist aesthetic, inspired by the German-American architect Mies van der Rohe, is clearly evident in the design. Wherever possible an uninterrupted floor to ceiling plane is maintained, be it in the glazing, lift doors or internal partitions. The emphasis is on the horizontal floor and ceiling planes, with vertical elements appearing to 'hover' between the two. This effect is achieved by the use of 'negative details' at the floor and ceiling. The front staircase, steel cantilevered entry awnings and fountains in the ceremonial forecourt of *Council House, Perth* are also evidence of the influence of Mies van der Rohe (Farnsworth House and Seagram Building, respectively).

The later enclosure of the western half of the ground floor has diminished the original impression of the building hovering above its podium, and the brightness of the building's polished appearance has dimmed with age. However the original concept of the crisp modernist design is still very evident.

Following the 1997-99 refurbishment, Levels LGF, 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are used for administration, with the CEO located on level 8. Levels 2 to 4 have been leased for private office accommodation; level 9 remains Council Chambers; while level 10 is solely for elected members' offices and dining facilities. Level 11, which was an additional floor of accommodation obtained in the refurbishment (previously a plant level), now contains Civic Reception and Mayoral administration.

¹⁵ Bodycoat, R., 'Statement of Architectural Significance', November 1992

The 1997-99 refurbishment works saw the complete removal of much of the internal fabric of the place as well as the external glazing. At this time the asbestos was removed from the building. The ground floor and Level 9 are the only floors to now bear much resemblance to the original internal fit-out of the building. All other floors have been completely refurbished with new design and materials. Generally the internal fit-outs of the floors include suspended plasterboard ceilings, half height partitions (with some full height to create enclosed offices) and carpet to the floors.

At ground floor the ceilings and marble facings were replaced with like material, as was the podium and granite floors. The lift cars were retained and refurbished with the interiors being modernised. The original paint colours to the lift doors of Ground Floor Foyer and Level 9 were reinstated.

Level 9 houses, as it has in the past, the Council Chambers. This floor was refurbished as a 'memory' floor and saw the reinstatement of some original fabric and replacement of material matching the original fabric. These materials included the timber mosaic border and original colour carpet T pattern (which was specially woven), the circular Chamber outer walls (although extended to accommodate larger patronage at Council Meetings), and the timber-grooved ceiling.

The position of the lifts at the eastern end of the building and the structural layout of the building were retained, as were the fire escape stairs to the western end.

Subsequently the lower ground floor has undergone another refurbishment with full height partitions being removed, half height partitions being installed and a staff lounge being created.

Externally the building saw the reinstatement of the facade T sun hoods, which included the replacement of the vertical elements. Above-ground car parking at the rear of the building was relocated to an underground basement level car park with interconnecting access within the building and a paved and grassed park area created above the car park.

The entrance to the building from the terrace, passing the renovated original water fountains and ponds, is now on grade (ramped) to meet access code requirements, doing away with the original steps. Access is now also available from the foyer level down to the rear LGF garden level. The lamp posts from Perth, Scotland were also placed in a new location at the time of the renovations.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

The State Register of Heritage Places contains five examples of buildings of the Post War International architectural style. The Register is still developing and it is expected that more examples of such architecture will be included in the future. There are three comparable, prominent examples included in the Register, *Port of Fremantle Passenger Terminal*, *Dumas House*, Perth and *Western Australian Police Service Complex*, Perth.

Port of Fremantle Passenger Terminal is a steel framed two storey structure constructed in the Post-War International style in 1961-62 and located hard up to the timber quay on Victoria Quay at Fremantle and was entered into the State Register of Heritage Places on a permanent basis in 2000.

Dumas House, Perth is a fourteen-storey government office building constructed in the Post-War International style in 1966 and was entered into the State Register of Heritage Places on a permanent basis in 2000.

Western Australian Police Service Complex, Perth a nine storey administrative building and attached three-storey police station and lock-up, constructed in the Late-Twentieth Century International style in 1965 and 1975 and was entered into the State Register of Heritage Places on a permanent basis in 2003.

Although not on the State Register, also comparable is *ABC Building*, Adelaide Terrace, a 1958-60 Post-War International Style building.

Buildings of this period placed on heritage registers in other states include:

Historic Buildings Council (Victoria)	ICI House, 1958
Central Sydney Heritage Inventory (NSW)	Liner House, 1961
	AMP Building, 1962
	Australia Square, 1966

A number of Sydney buildings from this era have been demolished, including Unilever House and ICI House, part of the East Circular Quay development.

Council House Perth is considered one of the finest examples of the Post War International style in Perth.

13.4 REFERENCES

The Architect (WA), September 1960

Bodycoat, R., 'Statement of Architectural Significance', November 1992

Brew, P. and Markham, M., *Howlett Architectural Projects*, Perth: UWA, 1992

Kelly, I., 'Howlett and Bailey: the major designs', *Architecture Australia*, June 1991

Schwager Brooks and Partners, *Heritage Assessment and Conservation Plan for Council House, St Georges Terrace Perth* (for the City of Perth, 1993)

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

APPENDIX

1. Public Responses and Submissions to HCWA on the heritage value of Council House

As noted in the Assessment of Social Value, the Heritage Council has received a number of submissions on the cultural significance of Council House. The submissions have been prompted by the actions of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA). The RAIWA, as the representative body of the architectural profession, has formally determined that in its opinion Council House 'is a significant building which should be conserved' and has supported this view with a written comment on the Conservation Plan. (Letter attached.)

On the basis of the assessment of significance in the Conservation Plan, the National Trust (WA) has classified the building and publicly requested the City Commissioners to reconsider their decision. (Attached.)

Following the announcement that the City Commissioners have recommended that Council House be demolished there have been letters of public support for the retention of the building in the *West Australian*. Supporters include Paul Ritter, a former Perth City Councillor and Town Planner; Harry Seidler, internationally prominent Australian architect and one of the judges of the 1960 competition; and Graham Brooks, who completed the Conservation Plan for Council House. (Letters attached.)

As of 30/6/94, there have been no letters in the *West Australian* in support of the demolition of the building. However, on the evidence of a straw poll taken during Heritage Week, and general public conversation, the community does not *like* the building. (The question asked at the National Trust's Heritage Fair was 'Is this building part of our heritage?' 200 people said no, 90 said yes, and 10 said don't know.)

The current public dislike or indifference to Council House is in marked contrast to the public response when the building was completed in 1963, and during the following two decades. The aesthetic taste of the community and its attitudes to buildings should be put into historical context.

In the 60s, when Council House was built, buildings of the 1900-40 period in Perth and Fremantle were admired by few people. New buildings of the 60s were admired as evidence of our State's prosperous future and pre 1900 buildings were admired as evidence of our colonial past. Stage 2 of the Council House project was predicated on the demolition of the Supreme Court Building (1903). (Even the National Trust focussed its attention on colonial buildings, and still doesn't own a 20th century building.) But, in the last twenty years community awareness of history and our attitude to architectural aesthetics have changed and the remaining buildings of the 1900-40 period are regarded much more favourably. It is reasonable to presume that with time the same change in attitude will occur to the better examples of 1950s and 60s buildings in Western Australia, if they still remain.

2. The Central City Heritage Precinct

The recommendation of the Perth City Commissioners that Council House should be demolished is primarily based on the argument that the tall, steel and glass office building does not sit comfortably within a precinct of colonial heritage buildings. City Council representatives agree Council House is a culturally significant building, but state the building impinges on the integrity of the heritage precinct.

Some building precincts are deliberately designed and built as a unified whole; the Place des Vosges, Paris and the Crescent, Bath are examples. Other precincts, whose elements are built over a number of years, achieve their unity through adherence to a set of building regulations and a restricted range of building materials, e.g. the Georgian squares of London and the streets of terrace housing in Paddington. While other precincts, although visually diverse, are united by a dominant function; e.g. UWA campus and Fremantle Hospital.

The Central City Heritage Precinct approximates the latter type of precinct. The predominant buildings in our mental map, rather than in reality, are those designed to serve prominent public functions. They include Government House, the Town Hall, St George's Cathedral, the Treasury and, until late last year, Council House. And, with the exception of Council House, these buildings are all 19th century, solid, low rise, brick buildings. However, the buildings within the precinct have little else in common.

The ages of the buildings range from the Old Court House (1836) to the Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Building (c.1985). The architectural style of the buildings includes Colonial Grecian (Old Court House, 1836), Victorian Tudor (Government House, 1863), Victorian Free Gothic (Town Hall, 1867), Victorian Second Empire (Treasury Building 1874-1902), Federation Free Classical (Titles Office, 1897), Federation Academic Classical (Supreme Court, 1902), Post-War International (Council House, 1963) and Late twentieth century Late Modern (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Building, c.1985). Add the different styles of the Weld Club, St George's Cathedral, the Deanery, Burt Hall, Government House Ballroom, R&I Bank Building, the Law Chambers and the Playhouse, and it is apparent there are not two buildings within the precinct of the same architectural style.

The buildings were not designed to be viewed as an ensemble. Burt Hall blocks the street view of the Cathedral's southern transept and sanctuary, the Law Chambers overshadows the Cathedral and prevents a full view of the Titles Office, Government House Ballroom turns its back on Stirling Gardens, Government House turns its side to the Terrace, the Supreme Court hides within the landscaping of Stirling Gardens and ignores the adjacent Old Court House, the oldest building in Perth.

Prior to the 1970s this area existed as a precinct only in so far as the colonial Surveyor-General had set aside the land for a public domain and this had determined the subsequent location of prominent public buildings within the area. In this respect the decision of the State Government, by Act of Parliament in 1954, to locate the Perth City Council within the area was a deliberate continuation of this tradition. The designation of this area as a heritage precinct is a fairly recent planning strategy, presumably to enable the implementation of a heritage planning policy.

However, a heritage precinct planning policy that favours the retention of one type of heritage over another, irrespective of the cultural significance of the buildings, should be considered with caution by the Heritage Council. The impetus for the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877), the forerunner of the conservation movement in Britain, was the activities of the Victorian Gothicists whose overzealous restoration work showed a lack of respect for the historical value of other existing buildings. The Burra Charter (1988) recognises this issue as a continuing concern. Article 5 addressing the issue states: 'Conservation of a place should take into account all aspects of the cultural significance without unwarranted emphasis on any one aspect at the expense of others.' The point is explained in more detail in the Illustrated Burra Charter.

3. The presence of Council House within the Heritage Precinct

The argument that 'Council House is a good building, built in the wrong place', is undermined by the fact that State Parliament specifically passed an Act in 1954 to vest the land in the PCC. Council House is sited within the precinct not because of an accident of history, but rather because Parliament and the Perth City Council agreed that the area was the most appropriate location for such an important administrative function. The location of Council House was a continuation of the traditional siting of public buildings in the public domain.

This is not to deny that Council House, as it stands, has problems of integration within the precinct. Council House was designed and built on the assumption that it would eventually be linked to the suite of Public Halls. The second stage of the project never eventuated, the Concert hall being built further down the Terrace. This has resulted in a lack of integration at the edges of the Council House podium; the western side of the podium presents a hard edge to the gardens, the eastern side is edged by a bitumen driveway, and the unbuilt rear area is used as a carpark. However, these problems can be resolved by sympathetic urban design rather than demolition of the Council House.

Dealing with the future of Council House within Stirling Gardens, and the heritage precinct, is a conservation management issue. There is an obvious visual attraction in the concept of demolishing Council House and extending Stirling Gardens to create an area of new garden and the reinforcement of an impression of a heritage precinct of 19th century colonial buildings, but these benefits have to be carefully weighed up against the loss of Perth's most culturally significant building of the early 1960s.

We are now bemused that thirty years ago anyone could seriously consider demolishing the Supreme Court; in 2020 will the same thoughts occur regarding the fate of Council House?