Heritage Impact Assessment

Name: Apartment 154, Former Willsmere Asylum, Kew
Address: 154 Wiltshire Drive
For: Simon Waters

Proposal

The drawings prepared by Simon Waters, Architect, for the additions to the former Outdoors Women’s Ward, Apartment 154, have been developed following consultation with Heritage Victoria. The proposal is to construct a single room pavilion addition in the area of the existing deck on the northwest, and rear side, of the former women’s ward. The additions are proposed between the two mature oaks and would be constructed on screw piles located without damaging the roots of the trees. The addition will be clearly visible from Gate 2, accessing the western car park. There will also be limited visibility of the additions over the perimeter brick wall.

The proposed addition adopts the form and character of its host building, with modern glazing and a plinth to ensure that the modern origins are legible and there is no confusion that the addition was original or early. This legibility is assisted by application of colour scheme applied to the modern, rather than original, elements of the Willsmere complex.

To ensure subservience of the addition, it is to be set lower than the heritage host. The southwest wall of the addition is proposed to be set back 1930mm from the southwest end of the heritage building and the addition is to be separated by 2050 from the rear wall. The former Women’s Ward has undergone a number of alterations including changes to the openings of the rear wall. The existing introduced opening is to be utilized as a link to the addition so that there will be no change to the existing building other than this connection to already altered fabric.

To respond to the bluestone plinth of the host building and wider heritage complex a plinth of boards is proposed painted shale grey and projecting beyond the wall plane above as does its heritage counterpart. Although of lightweight construction the walls are to be rendered to match the original walls of the complex and painted to match the new
apartment walls, to differentiate new from old by minor tonal change. Whilst lower in base level the wall heights and stepped entablature below the eaves is to match the wall of the host building. With the width of the addition shorter than the host, the depth of the room is greater than that of the host and to limit the roof presence, and provide place for services hidden from view, the length of roof slope is to be the same length as the host building. To maintain the formal character of the complex the openings are set symmetrically in the north west façade and on the side facades a third ‘blind’ opening is the set into the wall to provide symmetry. The former Women’s Ward consisted of a number of rooms each with a door access to verandah along the front of the building. The full-length window openings are proposed as a reference to these repeated door opening with sashless glazing to one of each pair of the northwest windows. Three openings would be articulated on the side elevations, with one fixed glass, one sashless and that closest to the host being a blind opening. The framing of the windows is simple timber framing painted sage green to denote that the building is modern.

Assessment

The additions will be a new visible presence within the perimiter wall and so is a change to the setting of the Willsmere complex. The change is however to a section of the complex that is of secondary value, set behind and central to its primary host of the former Outdoors Women’s Ward. Just as this host building stands as a separate pavilion from the main complex of buildings, the proposed will read as a secondary pavilion to its primary host. The adoption of a character for the addition related to, but legibly differentiated from, the host building will prevent confusion as to origin and allow the addition to go almost unnoticed as a part of the greater complex. The set back and lowered height of the addition will ensure that it is perceived to be a structure subservient to its host, which will remain the evident front, entry and access to the secondary element. The addition adopts the approach taken with the other modern apartment building introduced within the original perimeter wall in utilizing the heritage asset by relating to the existing character without dominating and disrupting the setting. Other than a brief appearance on entry at Gate 2 the addition will have no visibility in juxtaposition with the primary views to the frontage of the complex or of the immediate host pavilion. All recommendations developed in discussion with Heritage Victoria have been adopted in the design. I am confident that residents of and visitors to Willsmere will not find the addition disruptive of their enjoyment of the heritage experience, or understanding, of Willsmere and recommend support on heritage grounds.