

Robur Tea Building, 28 Clarendon Street, Southbank (VHR H0526)

Q&As

What is Robur Tea Building?

The Robur Tea Building was included in the Victorian Heritage Register in 1982. It was constructed between 1887 - 1888 as a warehouse for Fergus and Mitchell, manufacturing stationers and its name relates to its later use as a tea warehouse.

The Robur Tea Building is of historical, architectural and scientific significance to the State of Victoria and is one of the finest and most prominent examples of a nineteenth century warehouse in Melbourne. It was, and continues to be, a landmark and is one of the few surviving industrial and warehouse buildings that once dominated the south bank of the Yarra River.

The brick building is supported by an innovative system of 450 ironbark piles and concrete rafts, and demonstrates one of the earliest uses of steel beams to support the floors.

What has happened?

On 5 October 2022, Heritage Victoria received a permit application for proposed works to the Robur Tea Building. The development proposal comprised construction of a series of seven integrated towers and buildings ranging in height from 27 to 3 levels and surrounding the Robur Tea Building on the north, south and west elevations. Partial demolition was proposed to connect the Robur Tea Building to the new development, as well as conservation works.

On 31 May 2023, the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria refused the application on the grounds that:

- The construction of seven interconnected towers and buildings would have significant visual impacts on the place. The combined height, number and density of the tower components and their proximity to the Robur Tea Building would cause substantial harm to the cultural heritage significance of the place. The Robur Tea Building would be consumed by the proposed development and the ability to understand and appreciate the place as a freestanding landmark building would be lost.
- The proposed demolition works to the north, south and west elevations to allow for access between the Robur Tea Building and the proposed development would have adverse physical impacts on the cultural heritage significance of the place.
- The proposal is based on highest and best use of the place and not the cultural heritage significance of the place. It is considered to be an overdevelopment of the heritage place.
- It has not been demonstrated that economic sustainability via a smaller development with less impact on the cultural heritage significance of the place is not achievable or that refusal would affect the reasonable and economic use of the registered place as commercial office space or any other reasonable use.
- The negative impacts of the proposal outweigh the benefits. The benefits could be achieved with a less intensive level of development.

What happens next?

The owner or a person with a real and substantial interest in the place may request a review of the Executive Director's determination to refuse the application. A request for a review must be made to the Heritage Council of Victoria within 60 days of the refusal of the application.