

12 May 2023

Janet Sullivan  
Heritage Victoria  
PO Box 2392  
Melbourne VIC 3000

**P38201 RFI Response** - Armadale House, 117 Kooyong Road Armadale, H0637

Dear Janet,

This letter has been prepared in response to a Request for Further Information (RFI), dated 14 April 2023, related to permit application P38201 – Armadale House H0637 (the registered place). This letter provides additional information and reasoning related to the proposed works and should be read in conjunction with the previously submitted documentation including the Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) and architectural drawings, prepared by Trethowan Architecture; as well as the landscape drawings prepared by Paul Bangay Studio.

The RFI outlined concerns with the proposed development within the front setting of the place, and notes that Heritage Victoria is not convinced that these works are necessary for the reasonable use of the place as a residence. These concerns relate to the proposed 'pool house' and 'toilet block' structures. The 'toilet block' is better described as a change room or amenities building; this letter will refer to this structure as a change room to better reflect its purpose and positive design intent.

Further, the RFI letter requests the following:

- *Details as to why the 'toilet block' [change room] needs to include a sauna, shower and toilet and cannot be limited to housing pool equipment.*
- *Further information associated with the proposed location of the 'toilet block' [change room]. The Heritage Impact Statement states the 'Positioning the structures to the west was found to be less functional', however it is unclear as to why the 'toilet block' [change room] or a smaller structure that is limited to housing necessary pool equipment could not be located to the north-west corner of the swimming pool which would recess it further on the block.*

The following letter outlines our response to the general concerns raised with development in the front setting, and the specific requests for information related to the change room. Additional comment is provided by the current owners of the place, included as appendices to this letter.

In summary, the proposed work is necessary to support the reasonable use of the place as a residence, has carefully considered the heritage significance of Armadale House, and has been designed following an exhaustive review of alternative options. From the beginning, it has been imperative for the new work at Armadale House to mitigate against impacts of the new childcare centre to the west (rear) of the site (approved under P31815). This is a large, visually dominating structure that overlooks the private garden and rear windows of the house. The location, scale and design of the proposed structures and landscaping have been developed to achieve the same aim, which is to ensure that the historic building of Armadale House is prioritised. The owners are aligned with Heritage Victoria in wanting to achieve the best result for Armadale House. The current footprint of Armadale House is unable to provide an appropriate level of amenity to the family. It is reasonable for the owners to achieve an appropriate house for their family. The owners have considered a range of options to achieve a heritage appropriate design. Some amenities of the house have been sacrificed from the overall scheme in order to achieve this.

# 1 Development in the Front Setting

## 1.1 Background

As the RFI notes, since March 2020 there have been two permits that allow for substantial change at the place. Firstly, P31815 allowed for the subdivision of the site and the construction of a new childcare centre to the rear (west) portion, leaving the house standing in the reduced eastern part of the site. The subdivision then allowed for the sale of the house and eastern piece of land on a separate title. Heritage permit P35172 allowed for repair and renovation to the house and garden to allow it to be appropriately reinstated as a private residence. It should be noted that the existing footprint of the house was not changed or added to, in contrast to most typical renovations of heritage houses adapted to modern family requirements. While the subdivision supported the restoration of the house and its reinstatement as a residence, it also placed a physical constraint on the use of the site by minimising open space at the rear, effectively forcing open space activities into the front setting, and limiting opportunities for new work on the remaining land. The current owners of the place have worked through a range of design options to manage these constraints while achieving a reasonable level of contemporary living amenity.

The current owners recognised that the subdivision left the house in a reduced and compromised setting. The land that the new structures are proposed to be built on was not included in the original subdivision plan prepared by the previous owner – the parcel of land now above the tunnel was originally approved to be an access road along the north boundary between Kooyong Road and the childcare centre. The current owners negotiated with the previous owner to construct an access tunnel rather than a road and return that strip of land along the north as a landscaped part of the Armadale House site. This achieved an improved outcome for Armadale House by increasing its landscape setting and removing hard landscaping which could detract from the place. This improved outcome was achieved at substantial cost to the owners, however they felt this was worthwhile to improve the place setting, minimise impacts of the access road, and increase their usable open space, which results in a good heritage outcome for the place. The current proposal places new structures on this reclaimed parcel, which would otherwise have been a blank wall and driveway.

Armadale House is significant as a modest example of a boom-era mansion. Its current footprint and setting are both significantly smaller than originally (Figure 1), and therefore the place is now more modest than it was historically. The original garden setting was largely to the east and south of the house, with the area to the north comprising paths and more functional elements. The proposed addition of small, discrete, new structures away from the house avoids increasing the size of the house and does not impact its modest appearance. This location is also in line with the historical focus of the formal garden towards the east and south with structures and functional elements at the north. The proposed structures are reversible and will have no permanent impact on the legibility of the modest scale of the house. Alternatively, extending the house to provide new space would change the footprint, increase the overall scale, and interrupt the understanding of the place as a modest mansion. Impacts on the setting are mitigated by locating the new work away from the house in a concealed location.

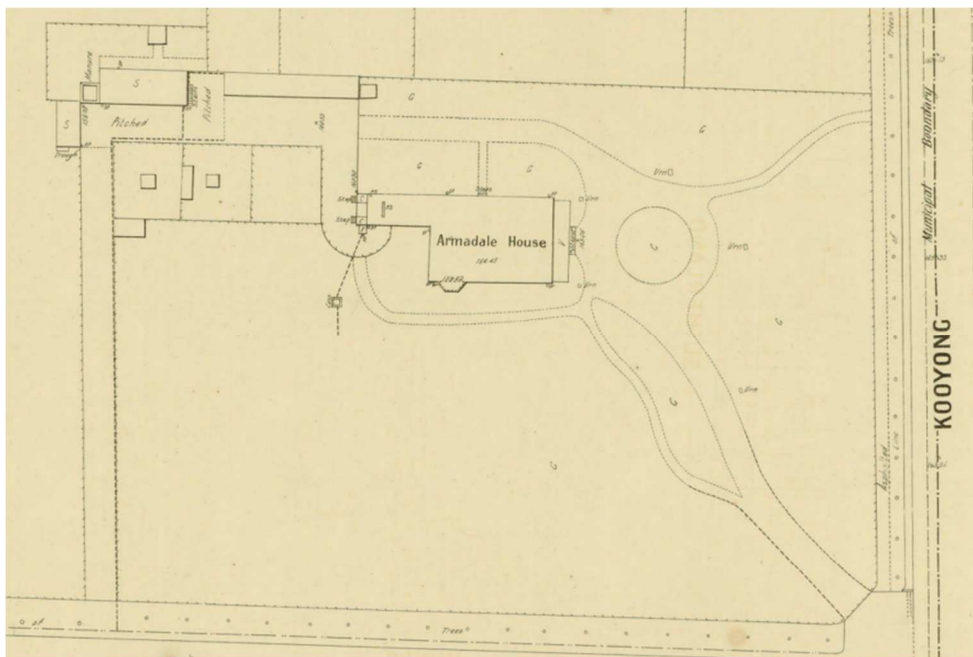


Figure 1: MMBW map of Armadale House dated 1900. The footprint of the house and the setting are larger than currently, and the site includes outbuildings. Source: State Library of Victoria.

## 1.2 Reasonable Use of the Place

Reasonable use of the place is as a large, family residence that supports contemporary living requirements. For Armadale House to successfully return to a residential function the house and garden needs to provide appropriate space for all members of the family to live and entertain. The house is comparatively small relative to the size of the land and comparable neighbours, and it does not provide the required informal living spaces or options for different family members and their needs. The upper floor comprises bedrooms and bathrooms, while the lower floor provides a formal sitting room, dining room, study, and open plan kitchen and living area. The formal sitting room and open-plan living are the only two living spaces. The family is therefore limited in how they can use the house and whether they can have guests or different activities. It is unreasonable to expect teenagers and younger children to use a formal sitting room, or for the adults to use the dining area while the children are using the lounge. A busy family of six requires flexible living arrangements with a mix of shared and private spaces, room for guests, and functional outdoor space. The house in its original footprint does not provide the spatial options that a modern family of this size would reasonably require. As the majority of the garden is located in the front setting there are minimal opportunities to enjoy it from inside the house. Only the formal sitting room, dining room and two bedrooms face the main part of the garden. It is reasonable for the family to be able to enjoy the garden from an informal living area, or for multiple members of the family to appreciate the garden at the same time. It is reasonable, therefore, for a residence to support the needs of family life.

## 1.3 Options Considered

Options for resolving the spatial inadequacies of the house were considered within the constraints of the place, particularly adjacent development to the west. The landscaping design provides a row of tall trees along the western boundary to shield views to/from the childcare building, which visually dominates this part of the site and overlooks the house and garden. The overarching design aim to mitigate the impacts of the childcare centre was a priority when considering the various options for providing additional living space. Consideration was given to extending the house with a new addition; extending into the basement; and to creating separate structures, disconnected from the house at various locations within the setting.

An earlier scheme proposed a ground floor addition to the house at the north-west corner, extending into the north side set back. This approach accommodated the required amenities within the house itself. Feedback from Heritage Victoria was to consider positioning this element further west to be

more visually recessive from the front of the property. This was carefully considered but was dismissed as it was not functional with internal connections and produced a severely compromised outcome. Opportunities to extend to the west are constrained by the proximity of the childcare centre and the need to shield the house from overlooking. Any extension to the house would be constrained to the ground floor as a double storey addition would not be possible given the existing upper floor windows. As such, the only option to screen the site from the childcare centre is to plant large trees. The soil requirements of screening trees further limit the size of any extension, which would need to be small to avoid interrupting the tree root and canopy growth. Such a compromised extension at the west (single storey, small footprint) would not provide an acceptable functional outcome. Furthermore, extending to the west would impact the precious garden setting and would remove the only area of private open space from the kitchen, which is nevertheless compromised and overlooked by the childcare centre. Maintaining landscaping to the west is essential to minimise the impact of the childcare centre, and to provide private garden amenity to the household. Finally, any new addition to the house would compromise its immediate setting, undermine the legibility of its footprint and impact integrity and original fabric. In the end, the option of an extension in the west or north-west was rejected in favour of preserving the landscaping that is required to shield the childcare centre and retaining the existing footprint of the house. This outcome also preserves the positive impacts that were achieved by removing the later additions.

As an extension to the house was dismissed, consideration was then given to locating informal living spaces in the basement. Whilst this option was not preferred as it constrains the children underground, it was progressed as it provided the required amenity without any visual change to the house or its setting. The primary ambition of having a garden design that mitigated the impacts of the childcare centre meant that the redesign of the basement (removal of vehicle accommodation and a reduction in living space – amended November 2022 under permit condition 6) was so compromised it was not worth the expense of doing it. Arborist advice was that the basement would likely interfere with the soil depth / width requirements of the trees proposed for the western boundary wall and therefore impact the root system of these trees and their growth. Therefore, the decision was made to remove the basement entirely from the proposal (amended February 2023 under permit condition 6). This decision prioritised maintaining the garden and planting out the childcare centre to ensure it does not overshadow and visually overwhelm Armadale House, but at the expense of the living space required. The owners have sacrificed the basement and compromised their initial design to accommodate the childcare centre.

At this point, options for adding further living space were exhausted, and the garden setting was reconsidered. A range of options outside the footprint of the house were considered but dismissed. A small garage was approved at the south-west corner. A second storey could not be added to the garage due to its being directly north of the neighbouring property and planning requirements prohibit this option. A separate structure in the north-west corner was considered, but the outcome was compromised by the spatial requirements of trees along the western boundary. This left a very small, dark space essentially forming a tunnel of trees between two buildings. Leaving enough space for the boundary trees would bring the structure forward which encroaches past the envelope of the house and compromises the setting. The overarching aim to preserve the screening trees resulted in a functionally unworkable building and setting at the north-west corner. The south-east corner was also considered, but this is directly in front of the envelope of Armadale House and would result in an adverse visual outcome.

On review of the whole site, the east part of the northern side setback was found to be the most functionally logical and least impactful location that could accommodate the required living space. Feedback from Heritage Victoria following the pre-application meeting in January 2021 was taken into account when preparing the current proposal, which was discussed at another on site pre-application meeting in September 2022. Options for locating the new structure along the north boundary were discussed, including a suggestion to position new work within the concealed dogleg corner created by the tunnel wall so as to minimise visibility of new work. A follow up email, dated 25 October 2022, affirmed that Heritage Victoria *'may consider a small structure in the proposed location that is sympathetic to Armadale House and appropriately designed, subject to detailed design'*. With this feedback in mind, efforts were made to develop an appropriate design that is modest, recessive and visually concealed. The proposed location within the concealed corner was found to be the least visually prominent site for new work, and considerable efforts have been made to design a simple, visually recessive structure, and to use landscaping to shield / green this area



to minimise its presence. The landscape design has been altered to try to reduce any potential visibility from the public realm. Acknowledging it is within the front setback of the place, it reads as a part of the garden and an extension to the existing tunnel wall and is at a sufficient distance from the house to be visually separate and not be detracting. (Figure 2). The new work will not be evident but read as an extension of the tunnel wall. The new structures are set back approximately 24 metres from the street frontage which is a considerable distance that has negligible impact on the appearance of the place from the street.

An additional consideration for the Pool House in this location was that the pool requires 48 sqm of solar heating collectors in a nearby location. Trethowan advised the owners that locating solar collectors on the north face of the roof of Armadale House would have adverse visual and physical impacts on the house. Our recommendation was that other locations be considered. The garage roof was considered as an option but was deemed not workable because the garage is shaded by the house, and additionally would require extensive pipework underneath Armadale House, with greatly reduced efficiency due to distance. The Pool House roof, therefore, is critical. The solar collectors comprise concealed pipework laid flat against the Pool House roof. The Pool House location, therefore, supports the proper functioning of the pool and avoids adverse impacts of solar collectors on the roof of Armadale House. Without passive solar collectors the pool would require heating with gas or electricity which is not feasible and would be a poor sustainability outcome.

In consideration of whether these new structures should be moved further west, we note they would be closer to the house and would begin to impact on its appearance in its setting and be more visible from the street. The smaller change room is partly concealed by, and blends into, the pool house. Both structures are further concealed and softened with planting and concealed by the dogleg corner of the tunnel wall. The proposed location solves the problems presented by the constraints of the site and provides positive functional outcomes:

- Conceals the unattractive dogleg corner of the tunnel wall.
- Is tucked away in the corner, out of sight of Kooyong Road, the public realm and the house.
- It is close to the pool to enable solar heating.
- Is cost effective to construct.
- Provides better amenity to have a play area for children that flows out into the main garden area of the property.



Figure 2: View of the proposed scheme within a landscaped setting. The house is the dominant visual element, while the pool house and change room are partially concealed by the tunnel wall, new landscaping, and are at a distance from the house. Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2023.

## 2 Change Room

The RFI requested details of why the change room needs to include the proposed functions, and further information regarding its location. The proposed location has been discussed, in part, above, and further considerations are discussed below.

### 2.1 *Details as to why the 'toilet block' [change room] needs to include a sauna, shower and toilet and cannot be limited to housing pool equipment.*

The change room incorporates the pool equipment within a weather-protected space, and provides a toilet, shower and changing area accessible from the pool. This is required as there is no appropriate nearby facility without going into the house. It is not a good outcome for the family to come inside, straight from the pool, without first being able to dry off and change. There are safety and general maintenance concerns with people moving through the house dripping wet from the pool, and/or dirty from the garden. The change room supports the safe and reasonable use of the pool, and minimises risks associated with bringing water and dirt into the house.

The change room is also necessary to provide facilities for gardeners who will need to be employed to maintain the landscaping and pool. The approved landscaping is extensive and beyond the capacity of the owners to maintain without external assistance. It has been estimated that it will take two gardeners two days a week to properly maintain a garden of this size, or one person four days. The proposed garden setting is a positive heritage outcome for Armadale House. Gardeners will need to be employed to maintain the setting and preserve this positive outcome, and they will require amenities to do so. Gardeners will require a place to sit, have a break from the rain, use the restroom etc during their working hours. The change room allows for appropriate and dignified amenity for gardeners, and any other workers, without needing access to the interior of the house. This provides flexibility for workers to come at different times when the family is not home and protects the private internal spaces of the house. The change room, therefore, supports the ongoing maintenance of the setting and the reasonable use of the place. The size and shape of the change room structure is determined by the size of pool equipment and these functional requirements. The square footprint then allowed some additional space for the sauna.

### 2.2 *Further information associated with the proposed location of the 'toilet block' [change room]. The Heritage Impact Statement states that the 'Positioning the structures to the west was found to be less functional', however it is unclear as to why the 'toilet block' [change room] or a smaller structure that is limited to housing necessary pool equipment could not be located to the north-west corner of the swimming pool which would recess it further on the block.*

The change room is proposed in the same location as the previously approved pool equipment. As noted above, the change room supports the use of the pool and provides amenities for gardeners or other people working outside the house. It needs to be located close to the pool so the equipment is accessible, so that the family can conveniently use it, and it is accessible to workers. Locating the change room in proximity of the pool house reduces the distance of services runs and costs for these works. Consideration was given to a location further to the west, but this was found to be less functional for all the required uses and too far from the pool house for the family to comfortably use.

Similarly, modelling of the site showed that the proposed location, while within the front setting, was less visually impactful on the house. Moving the change room further to the west (rear) would not assist to conceal it from view but rather would bring it closer towards the house (Figure 3 and Figure 4). When viewed from the front gate (the only public view into the place) the proposed change room location is away from the house and the new structure does not visually compete. While a location further west is more recessed behind the house any work in this area would still be visible and would, in fact, start to visually compete with the house. When viewed from the rear of the site, moving the change room to the west and closer to the house makes it more dominant and detracting as an element within the setting (Figure 5 to Figure 6).





Figure 3: The change room in the proposed location (indicated by arrow), when viewed from the front gate.  
Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2023.



Figure 4: The change room (indicated by arrow) if it were moved further west and closer to the house.  
Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2023.





Figure 5: View from the rear (north-west) of the site towards the change room in its proposed location (indicated by arrow). Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2023.

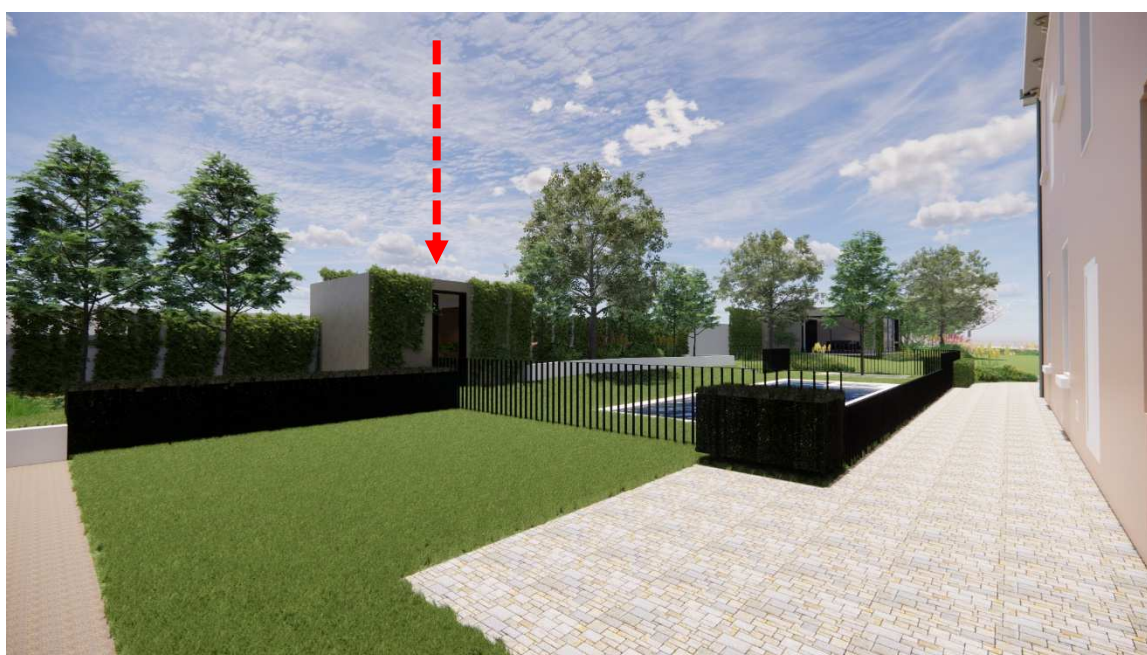


Figure 6: View from the rear (north-west) of the site towards the change room if it were moved further west (indicated by arrow). Source: Trethowan Architecture, 2023.

### 3 Other Considerations

The RFI letter states that it is *important that the front setting of the house maintains an appropriately soft landscape garden rather than a proliferation of new building, structures and hard landscaping*. It is agreed that the remaining setting of the place should be preserved and enhanced, given the extent of past change. It is for that reason that the current owners sought to increase the area of soft landscaped setting to the north by negotiating the tunnel rather than a roadway. Significant efforts have been made to develop a respectful landscape design with the aim of providing an appropriate garden setting. The design includes reinstating a curved driveway and removing the large areas of hard paving and carparking that were previously located in front of the house.



It is not agreed that the proposed small structures represent a *proliferation of new building, structures and hard landscaping*. The pool house is to be located in place of the endorsed cushion court basketball area. The pool house does not reduce the amount of soft landscaping and, in fact, additional soft landscaping has been introduced to further conceal and soften the new structure. The change room does not replace soft landscaping as it takes up the footprint of approved pool equipment which can now be hidden vertically. The current scheme proposes a minimal additional area of stepstone path and a small section of hard landscaping in front of the change room. Within the context of the wider landscaped setting the reduction in soft landscaping is negligible and is far outweighed by the positive impact of the approved new landscape design. As the pool house is located against the tunnel wall it reads as a continuation of that hard boundary element. When viewed from the front gate, only one wall of the pool house is visible. Whereas a freestanding element would have at least two visible elevations and this, in combination with the pool house and tunnel wall, would read as three separate elements. The proposed location is intended to minimise the appearance of new structures and blend into the existing wall.

Previous proposals have been put forward related to this heritage place, prior to the current owners taking possession. An earlier scheme (heritage permit P23807) was approved to use the whole site for a childcare centre and to construct new buildings in the front, side and rear setbacks, and to locate car parking in front of the house (Figure 7). This scheme would have resulted in hard landscaping and multiple new buildings within the setting of the place, resulting in a detrimental impact to the place. The current owners were made aware of the approved works under P23807 when purchasing the property; it provided them a benchmark for the scope of work that would be acceptable at Armadale House and factored into their decision to purchase. The owners felt, in purchasing the property, that a better outcome could be achieved for this significant place. To that end, they negotiated with the previous owner to remove later additions to the house and to create a tunnel at the north boundary to reclaim that land as the garden setting. The current proposal represents a much more sympathetic approach and a better heritage outcome than the previously approved scheme. A refusal of this application would be inconsistent with the precedent set by P23807.



Figure 7: Site plan of proposed childcare centre under P23807. Source: Perkins Architects.

#### 4 Conclusion

In reviewing this application, consideration should be given to the cumulative positive outcomes that the owners have achieved at Armadale House. The minor works currently proposed do not counterbalance these benefits.

A reasonable use of the place as a family home includes adequate living space that is suitable for adults, children of different ages, and any guests. The current footprint of the house does not provide adequate space for the required living accommodation for a large family such as the owners. These spaces and functions must, therefore, be located outside the existing footprint of the house. In the comparison with contemporary expectations of a house of this scale the current proposal is very modest. In the context of similarly scaled homes, the current proposal does not compare favourably in terms of amenity and space. Without the proposed additional informal living

spaces the current owners would not reasonably be able to use the place as their family home. In a competitive housing market, with a limited range of potential purchasers, the place does not offer a level of amenity comparable to properties of similar scale, location and value. Ensuring the place remains in use, and can be occupied as a residence, is essential to its long-term preservation. In that regard, the place must offer comparable living standards to attract people with the capacity to purchase and maintain the property. The current footprint of the house fails to do this and cannot reasonably do so without additional informal living space. A refusal of the current proposal would affect the reasonable use of the place as a family home, and subsequently jeopardise its ongoing occupation.

Several options were considered for locating new work including an extension or in a basement. Location options are constrained by the reduced rear setting following the subdivision, the desire to retain the legibility of the house's earlier footprint, the aim to mitigate against the new childcare centre with landscaping, and project costs. Through a series of design investigations and project compromises, the current location was found to be the least impactful and most practical option.

It is acknowledged that the proposed new structures are located within the front setting of the house, however they are not adjacent nor in front of the house. It is tucked in behind an existing wall and with appropriate planting the structures will not be evident / visible. The location and design of the pool house and change room have been carefully considered to minimise visibility and to avoid a range of adverse impacts to the house and garden. On balance, and with regard to P35172, the current owners will achieve an overall positive outcome for the place that outweighs any potential impacts the proposed work. The owners have demonstrated that they value the heritage significance of Armadale House and have made substantial efforts and investments to achieve a significantly improved outcome for the place, especially when compared to the previously approved permit P2380. The owners have responded to concerns raised by Heritage Victoria, and are seeking to achieve a reasonable and functional family home for this effort and investment. The ongoing works under P35172, and the approach to the current proposal, are driven by an intention to mitigate against adverse impacts of the subdivision and childcare centre approved under P31815.

Both the pool house and the change room are required for the reasonable use of the place as a private family residence. Contemporary expectations include informal living spaces that can be used by all members of the family; allowing adults, teenagers and younger children to be involved in a variety of activities and to have guests. The current footprint of the house does not provide space to allow the family to live in a way that suits their needs, therefore new space needs to be provided outside the current footprint. It is imperative for the house to be occupied to support its ongoing preservation.

We trust that the above information responds to the RFI and provides the requested level of detail. We would be happy to discuss further if additional clarification is required. Should you wish to clarify any aspect of this letter please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,



Claire Miller  
**Trethowan Architecture**