



Heritage Impact Statement for: **St Kilians Catholic Church Complex** **173 McCrae Street and 2 Havelock Street, Bendigo**

Victorian Heritage Register Number:

No H1341 - ST KILIANS CATHOLIC CHURCH

Greater Bendigo Heritage Overlays:

- HO2 - Baxter Street precinct
- HO179 - 173 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Catholic Church
- HO183 - 173 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Hall
- HO184 - 181 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Ladies Hall

This Heritage Impact Statement forms part of a permit application for:

Partial demolition of existing buildings, structures and landscaping and works associated with the extension and modification of the adjoining school playground.

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1.0 Significance of the place

The St Kilian's Catholic Church Complex consists of several buildings scattered across a number of sites that have been amalgamated.

The entire complex is within the Greater Bendigo heritage overlay HO2 Baxter Street precinct.

Within the complex there are four individually significant sites which are included in the heritage overlay in their own right: HO179, HO183, HO184 and HO185.

One of the individually significant sites is also included in the Victorian Heritage Register: HO179.

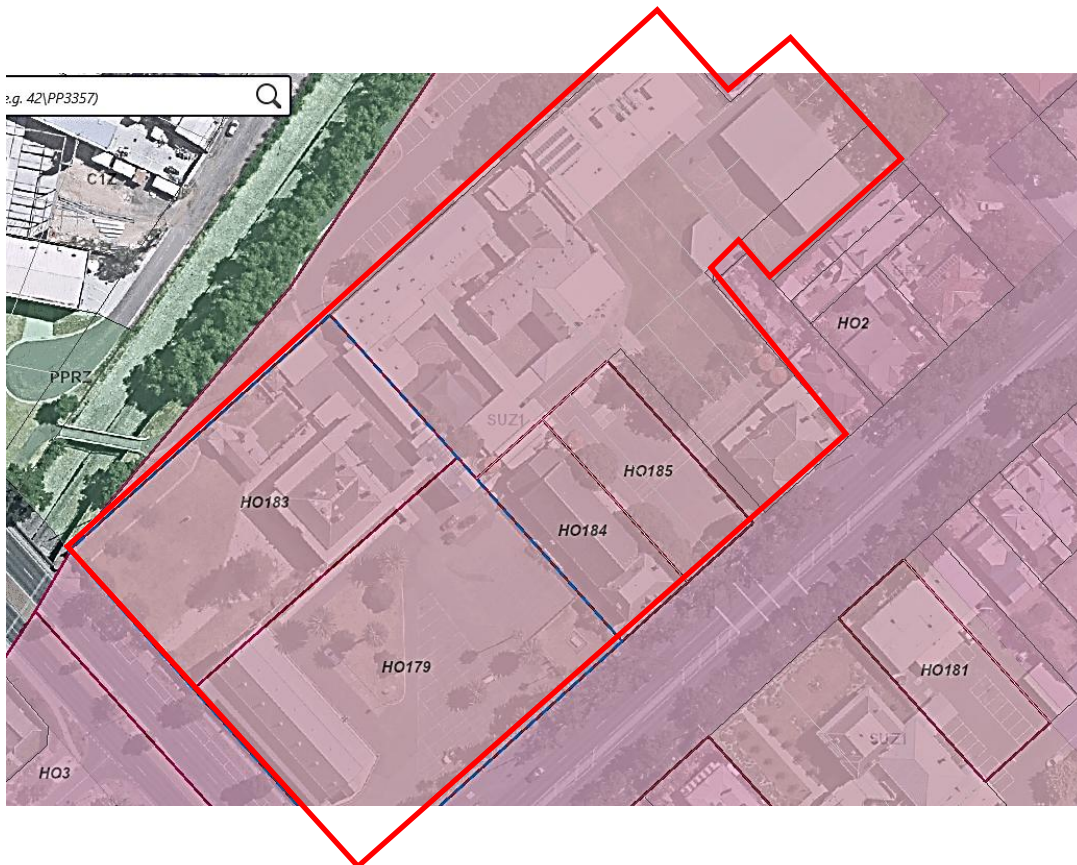


Image 1: Site plan showing the various heritage overlays that apply to the St Kilian's Catholic Church Complex which is outlined in red.

1.1 VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER

No H1341 - St Kilian's Catholic Church (same area as HO179)

Statement of significance:

Within months of gold being discovered in Bendigo in 1851, the Rev Father Dr Henry Backhaus (1811-1882) arrived on the diggings and celebrated the first mass. For over a year he conducted services in a tent before a bark and slab chapel was built for him by the diggers. The first St Kilian's church was constructed in 1857. A sandstone structure of Gothic design, it served the congregation until it was replaced by the present St Kilian's church in 1888 thus perpetuating continuing use by the Catholic Church. Designed by the notable local architect W. C. Vahland (1828-1915) the Gothic timber structure of kauri, oregon and hardwood was originally intended to serve as a temporary pro-cathedral until such time that a cathedral could be built.

The 1860 German organ and the bell and bell tower of 1869 from the former church were accommodated at the new premises. After the opening of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in 1901, St Kilian's became a parish church.

St Kilian's Church is of architectural, aesthetic, and historic importance to the State of Victoria.

St Kilian's Church is architecturally and aesthetically important as an intact and unusually large timber church. Featuring a long nave with clerestory and side aisles, the church is significant for its fine

hammerbeam ceiling, impressive series of timber arches, crafted joinery, uniformly designed ecclesiastical furnishings including 56 curve end pews, the Backhaus stump chair, Baptismal font, small nave table, high Altar and reredos, High Altar side table, main altar candlestick, the timber sedilia, two side altars and two side altar tables. These together with the superbly carved German organ and its bench seat, make this all timber interior unique among churches in Victoria.

Other notable features include the historically important bell and bell tower, the iron and granite fence and palms plants, which are aesthetically important for their formal streetscape qualities.

The stepped row of Washingtonia palms alternating with shorter Canary Island palms which border the Chapel and McCrae Street frontages and the Backhaus' gravesite is unusual and of note.

St Kilian's Church is historically important for its association with Rev Dr Henry Backhaus, pioneer clergyman of the Roman Catholic Church on the Bendigo goldfields from 1852 to his death 1882. He is buried in the grounds.

The church is also historically important for its association with architect, W.C. Vahland, and is the only known timber church of his design.

1.2 GREATER BENDIGO HERITAGE OVERLAYS

HO2 Baxter Street precinct

How is it significant?

The Baxter Street precinct is of local historic and aesthetic significance. St Kilian's Church complex has historic associations with the prominent Roman Catholic clergyman Dr Henry Backhaus.

Why is it significant?

The Baxter Street Precinct provides a snapshot of the early residential development of Bendigo. Located just outside the city centre and focussed around the St Kilian's Church complex in McCrae Street, the church was established in 1857 by important Roman Catholic clergyman Rev Dr Henry Backhaus. The current buildings represent the church's redevelopment in 1888 by Backhaus and architect W C Vahland. The association is strengthened by the rather rare Australian practice of a gravesite at a church with Backhaus' grave being adjacent. (Criterion H)

The area is an important reminder of Irish immigration to Bendigo in the 1850s, many of whom settled around St Kilian's Church and are documented in early rate books as living in the surrounding streets. The precinct is also associated with alluvial gold mining carried out along the Back Creek and Bendigo Creek from the early 1850s. Later associations with the Sandhurst Tramway Company from 1897 and their association with the Electricity Supply Co. of Victoria are remembered in the naming of Tramways Avenue and a small triangle of land and curved roadway leading to the tram depot. (Criterion A)

Land sales in the area, largely conducted throughout 1860s-1875, resulted in a number of allotments being developed with examples of Victorian style houses; it was by the end of the Edwardian era, however, that this area's character had been formed, with houses lining both sides of Baxter Street. The area is significant for its retention of a large proportion of Victorian and Edwardian era houses and several commercial premises also dating from these eras. Later Inter-war houses also form contributory elements that are compatible with the scale and form of the older dwellings. The area is characterised by small single storey houses with hip and gable roofs, consistent setbacks, construction materials of both weatherboard and brick, front gardens, and low fences.

The mature elm trees on streets including Havelock, Hargreaves, Hopetoun, Baxter, and Tramways Streets are important contributory elements. Gravel verges, where they occur in Havelock Street, provide more informal and older aesthetics to the public realm.

James Delacour's bakery stood at the Hopetoun Street corner and Joseph Hadden, cab driver, at the McCrae Street end. Among the more important houses of this era are 66 Baxter Street, inhabited by Robert P Foster early last century, and 76 Hargreaves, Daniel McCall's house, but most houses are representative of the period (such as Constable Thomas Scholes' house at 30 Baxter), combining to produce a cohesive expression of the city's development at that time.

HO179 - 173 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Catholic Church

No known local statement of significance available

HO183 - 173 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Hall

No known local statement of significance available

HO184 - 181 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Ladies Hall

No known local statement of significance available

2.0 EXISTING CONDITION OF THE SUBJECT BUILDINGS AND LAND:

The St Kilian's Catholic Church Complex consists of several buildings scattered across a number of sites that have been amalgamated (refer to Image 1).

This application relates to existing structures and land that are located in only one part of the entire site (refer to images 2 and 3 below).



Image 2: Area of land associated with the proposed works shown shaded in red above

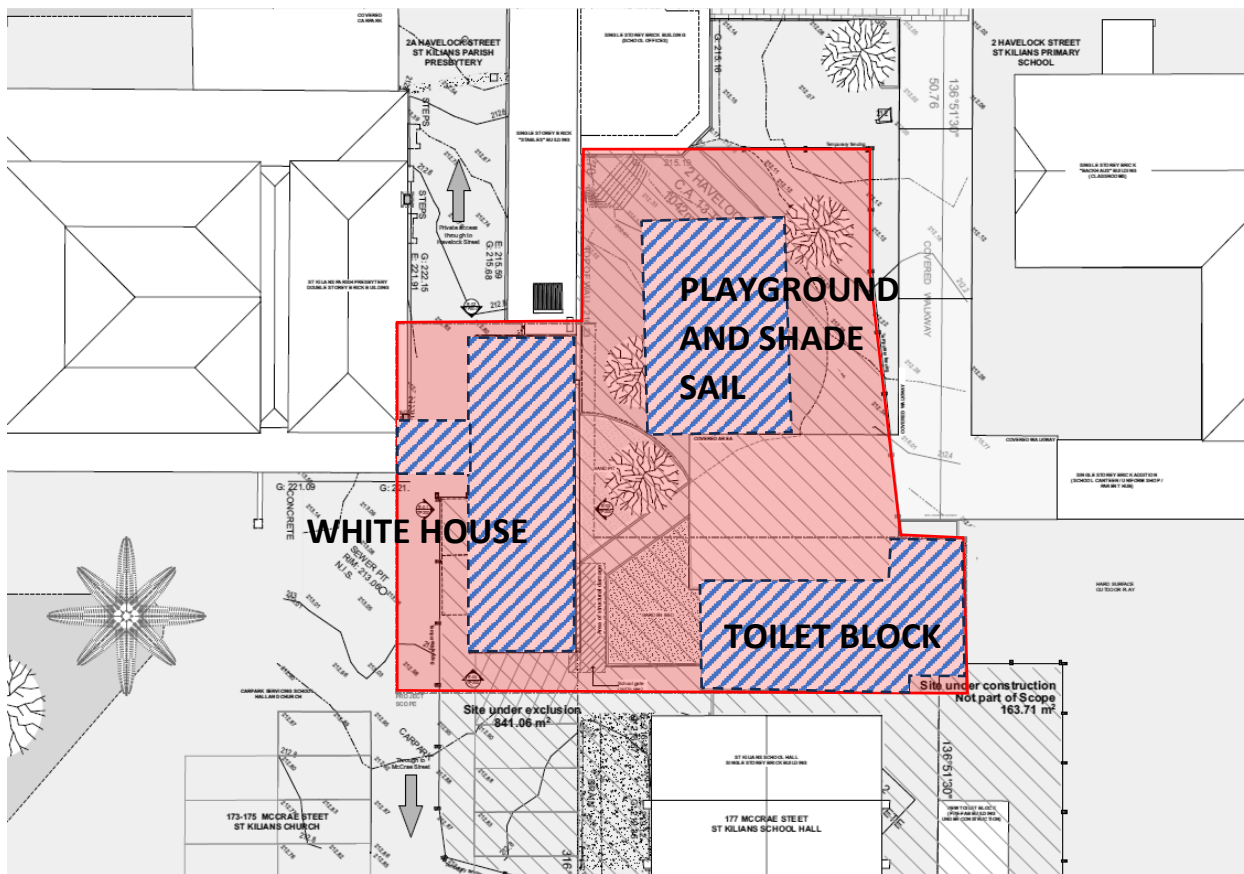


Image 3: Detail of area affected by the proposed works shown in red above. Buildings/structures to be demolished hatched in blue.

2.1 EXISTING CONDITION OF WHITE HOUSE

The 'White House' is a two-storey red brick building. The building has suffered from documented structural problems since 2006 and several previous attempts to stabilise the building have failed.

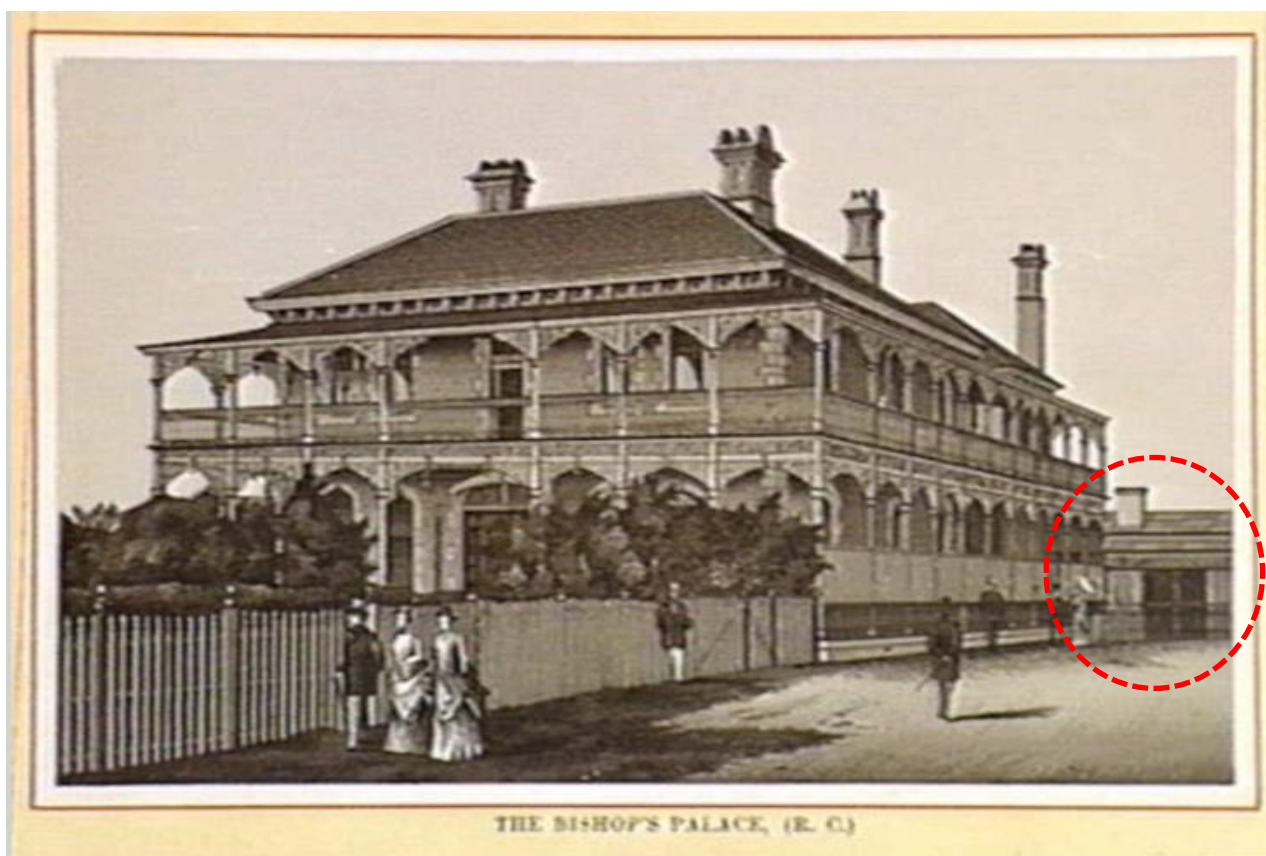
Several sinkholes have developed close to the footings of the building which indicate that the issues with its foundations are extending beyond the building's footprint. These have resulted in the building and the land around it being declared unsafe and the erection of safety fencing. Remedial works have been investigated however it has been identified that there is a risk that these repairs may or may not permanently stabilise the building due to excessive ground water in the area and that undertaking these works may potentially undermine other parts of the building.

Due to the long-term problems with the building's footings and the failure of repeated attempts to stabilise the building, it is now considered that full demolition of the subject building is the most reasonable and appropriate way forward.

2.1.1 Brief history of the White House

The subject building is colloquially known as the "White House".

The earliest known reference to a building in the same location as the subject building comes from a print entitled "The Bishop's Palace, Bendigo" which dates from 1881.



THE BISHOP'S PALACE, (R.C.) [BENDIGO] [picture]. (1881). [<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/4268818>]

The image above shows a single-storey building at the rear of the main building (shown circled in red above). This is not the same building that currently exists in this location.

In November 1891, tenders were called for the erection of a new brick building at the Bishop's Palace, Bendigo.

It is unknown if this tender related to the subject building as there been several brick buildings constructed near the main presbytery building, including stables, garages as well as the subject building.

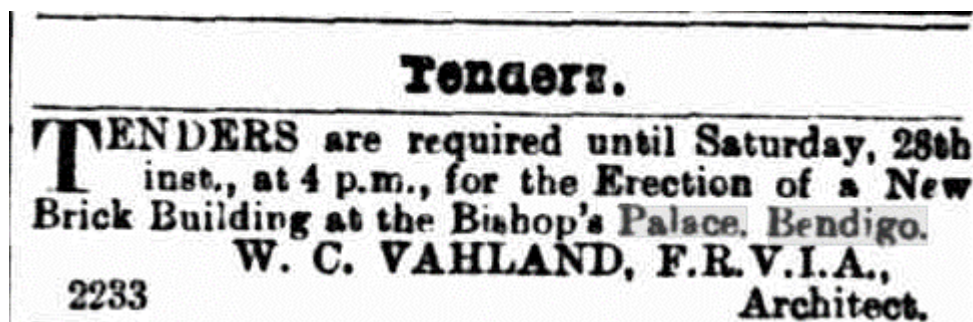
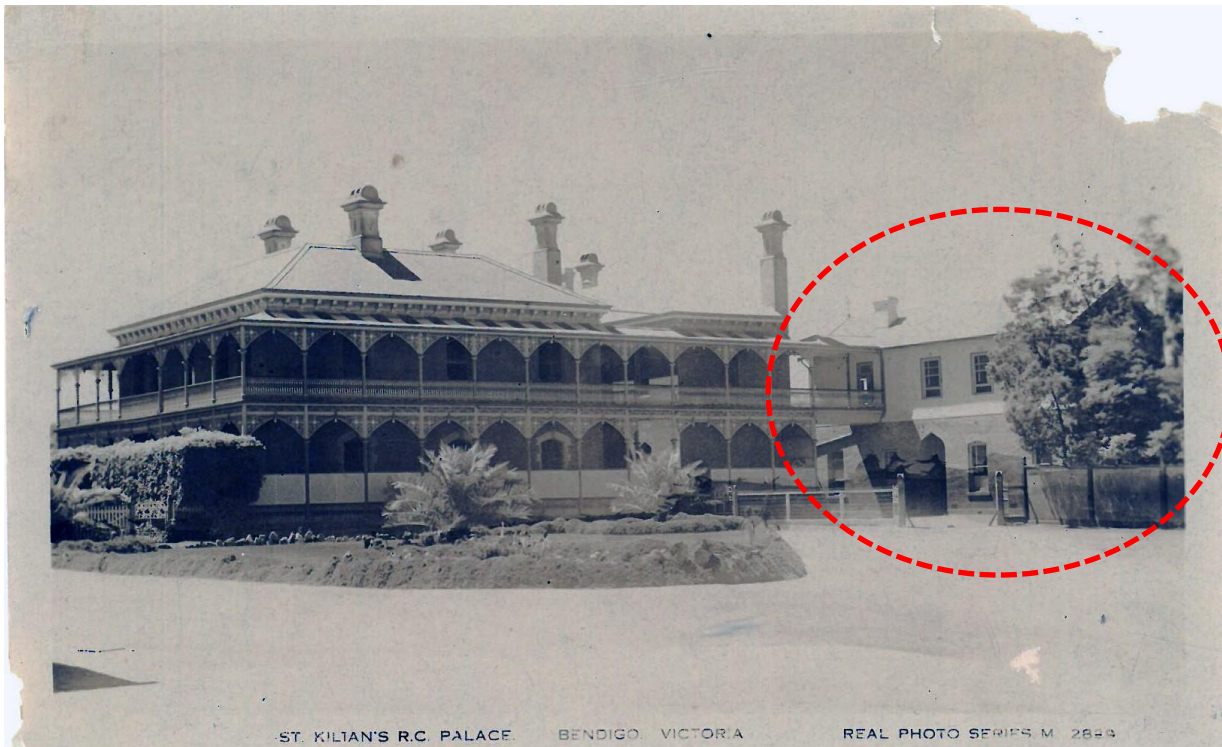


Image 5: Source: "Advertising" Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) 27 November 1891: 4.



It is estimated that the image above was taken c.1913-1927. The building circled in this photograph is the same as the subject building.

The original purpose of this building is unknown however it is clearly associated with the presbytery building not the actual church itself. In recent times it is believed to have been used as shared accommodation for visiting seminarians.

2.1.2 Physical description of the White House

The elevations included in the drawings in Appendix 2 are an accurate reflection of the subject building.

A close inspection of the building reveals a number of details that confirm that this building was originally a single-storey building, possibly built c.1890s, and that an upper floor level was added later, possibly c.1920s.

External brickwork:

The ground floor level and the upper floor level are constructed of slightly different coloured bricks. The images below show that while the difference in bricks is subtle at the front (southwest elevation), it is more prominent at the rear facing the school.



Wall vents:

The air vents fitted to the ground floor level are cast iron (see below), which are Victorian in style. These indicate a construction date prior to 1900.



The air vents to the upper floor level are terracotta. These indicate a construction date from the 1920s.



The use of two different air vents in a single elevation is clear evidence that the ground level and the upper floor level of this building were built at different times.

Windows:

The ground floor level window and door openings are different. Those at the ground level have pointed arches that match the openings of the main presbytery building. The shape of these openings is indicative of the work of W.C. Vahland, who was identified as the architect in the tender posted in 1891.

The upper-level openings are slightly arched. This confirms that the top and lower floor levels were most likely not built at the same time.



Both the upper and lower floor levels have double-hung timber framed windows that match. These frames were most likely all installed at the same time, but on the basis that the ground floor level is believed to be earlier, it is likely that the existing window frames at the ground level, have been replaced. It is indeed possible that all the timber window frames have been completely replaced at some time.

Chimney:

The existing chimneys are rendered and include a rough cast finish which was common in the 1920s. They are similar to the style of chimneys on the adjacent St Kilian's Hall. The building's original chimneys were obviously demolished when the upper floor level was added.

Other alterations:

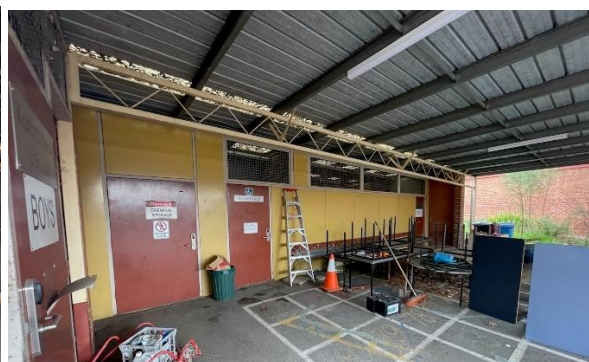
Works were carried out on the building in late 2012/2013.

The original roof cladding, which appears to have been slate (matching the original presbytery building) was replaced with galvanised corrugated steel.

An external steel fire escape stair and a new door opening in the northwest elevation at the upper floor level was constructed at that time.

The existing solar panels on the north-east roof plane were installed in early 2013.

2.2 EXISTING CONDITION OF TOILET BLOCK



The existing toilet block is of no heritage value. It is a rudimentary brick structure with a flat roof that was probably constructed c.1970s/80s. A large flat roofed area is attached to the north side of the toilet block to provide under cover area to the playground.

The toilet block has been deemed unfit for use and has been partially dismantled for some time.

2.3 EXISTING CONDITION OF SHADE SAIL & PLAYGROUND

The existing sail cloth is a relatively recent structure of no heritage value. It appears to be in fair condition.

The existing surrounding playground (as well as the carpark on the west side of the White House) is predominantly finished in hard surfaces although there a couple of small trees and some limited plantings.

The landscaping and hard surface areas appear to be in fair condition apart from where sink holes have emerged.

3.0 CURRENT USE OF THE SUBJECT LAND

NOTE: The entire area associated with this application is currently unused and fenced off as an exclusion zone since 2023 due to safety concerns.

White House: This building is not in current use due to structural concerns. It was previously used as shared accommodation for visiting seminarians.

Toilet block: This building is not in current use.

Playground: Areas close to the White House (east, south, and west) are not in current use due to concerns associated with potential underlying sink holes.

4.0 PROPOSAL

4.1 THE PROPOSED WORKS

The demolition of a double storey red brick building known as the White House, a toilet block, and part of the existing playground associated with St Kilian's school.

Following the demolition of the White House, the associated stairs and covered walkway linking it to the Parish Presbytery building, the subject land will be amalgamated with the adjacent school playground area. Redevelopment and extension of the existing school playground will be in accordance with the plan shown below (refer to image 4).

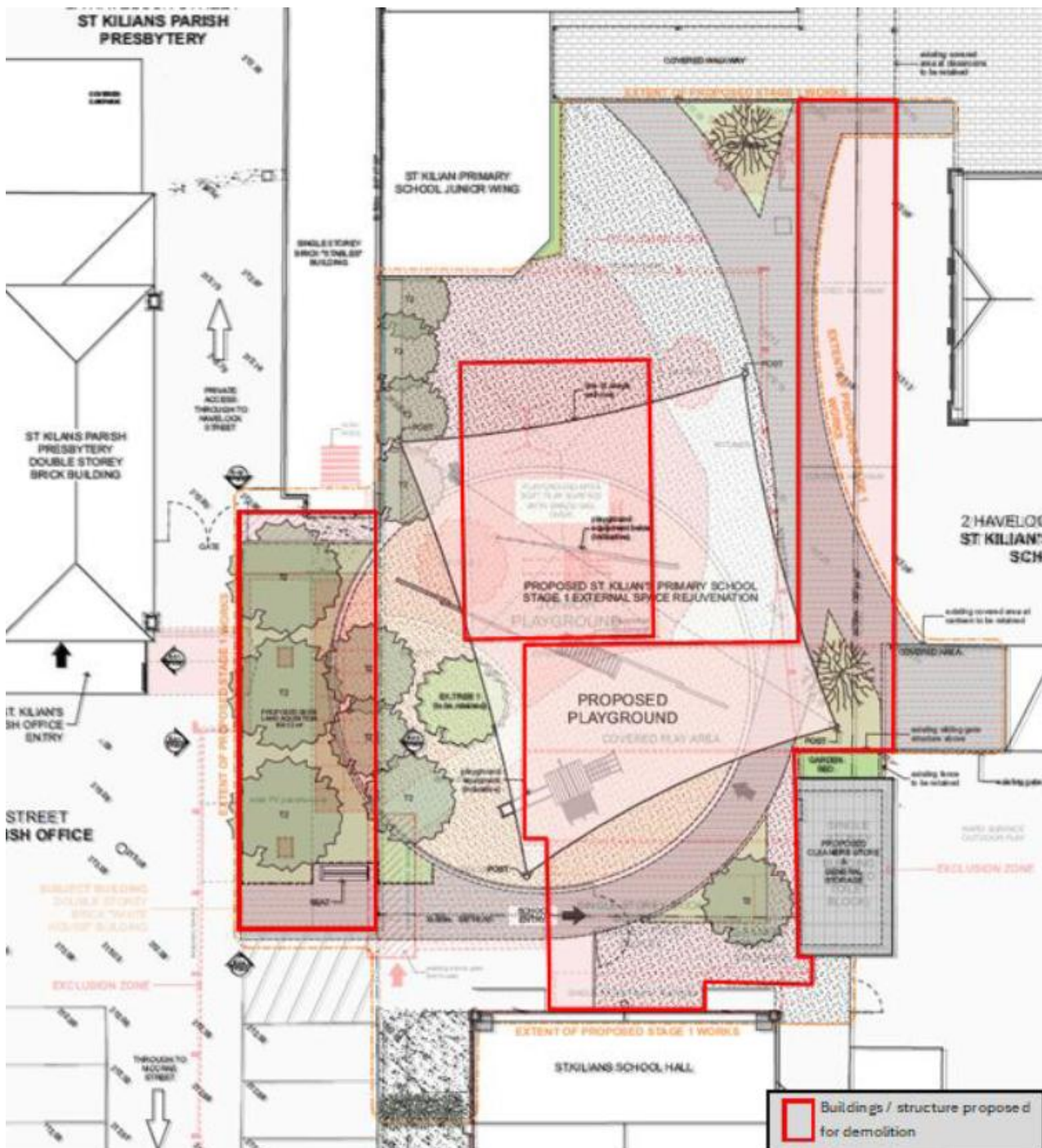


Image 4: Extract from proposed redevelopment and extension of the school playground area.

The set of eight drawings entitled “St. Kilian’s White House” prepared by Bree Architects, dated 5/7/2024 are attached as Appendix 2.

The drawings include a site plan which indicates the location and context of the subject area as well as elevations of the White House. A site survey showing all the surrounding buildings, significant features and landscaping has been provided. The title boundaries and street names are shown on the survey plans.

4.1.1 Proposed demolition of the White House

A structural engineer’s report was undertaken by C&S Consult Group in December 2022. A copy of this report is attached as Appendix 3.

The following plan (SK4) outlines how the demolition works would be undertaken (refer to image 5).



5.0 ASSESSMENT AGAINST STATE AND LOCAL HERITAGE LEGISLATION

5.1 ASSESSMENT OF DEMOLITION OF A NON-CONTRIBUTORY BUILDING WITHIN THE LAND ASSOCIATED WITH ST KILIAN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH AGAINST SECTIONS 101(2) AND 101(3) OF THE HERITAGE ACT 2017

5.1.1 Impact of the proposal on the cultural heritage significance of No H1341 - St Kilian's Catholic Church

The extent of registration for No H1341 - St Kilian's Catholic Church includes: All the land marked L1 on Diagram 600048, held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described in Certificate of Title Vol 1038 Folio 537, City and Parish of Sandhurst, County of Bendigo.

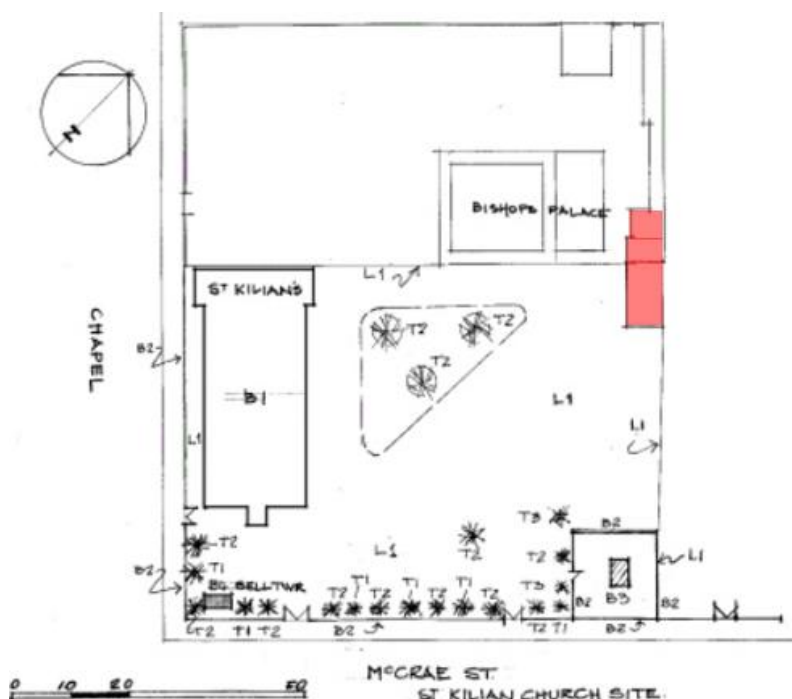


Image 6: Diagram 600048 showing the extent of land and various elements included on the Victorian Heritage Register. Subject building is highlighted in red. It is not identified as a building of heritage interest.

The White House is directly associated with the St Kilian's presbytery, identified in Image 6 above as the Bishop's Palace which is within both HO2 and more specifically HO183 of the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme. The land associated with St Kilian's presbytery is not included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Part of the White House extends onto the land associated with the adjacent St Kilian's church which is included on the Victorian Heritage Register (No H1341 - St Kilian's Catholic Church). The White House is not identified as a significant building. It is therefore considered that it does not contribute to the significance of the church itself.

As the White House is considered a non-contributory building, the demolition of this building will have **no effect** on the cultural heritage significance of the registered place (St Kilian's Catholic Church) if the proposal were to be approved [s101(2)(a)].

5.1.2 Reasons why the proposed works should be supported

The proposed demolition of the White House will have no effect on the reasonable or economic use of St Kilian's Catholic Church although the number of car spaces currently available to users of the church will be restricted due to existing and potentially future sink holes in the carpark area.

If this proposal were to be refused, the reasonable or economic use of the adjacent St Kilian's school will be affected as the area dedicated to outdoor space would be restricted. The school stands on land that is included in the Greater Bendigo heritage area.

The proposed demolition of the White House will have no effect on the protection and conservation of the St Kilian's Catholic Church.

5.2 ASSESSMENT OF FULL DEMOLITION OF THE WHITE HOUSE AGAINST THE HERITAGE PROVISIONS OF THE GREATER BENDIGO PLANNING SCHEME

The heritage provisions of the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme are set out in the following clauses:

- 02.03-5 Built Environment And Heritage
- 15.03-1S Heritage Conservation
- 15.03-1L Post Contact Heritage Conservation - Greater Bendigo
- 43.01 Heritage Overlay

The key considerations of these various clauses are:

- *Whether the demolition, removal or external alteration will adversely affect the significance of the heritage place.*
- *Whether the proposed works will adversely affect the significance, character or appearance of the heritage place.*

5.2.1 Significance of the White House to the heritage overlays HO2 and HO183

The earliest known reference to the building known as "The Bishop's Palace" (also HO183 - 173 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Hall) is from an album of lithographs based on photographs, dated 1881. The photo shows a well-established two-storey Victorian style building with a decorative iron verandah and balcony and a mature front garden. A single-storey building is shown at the rear of the main building however this is not the same building that currently exists in this location.

The White House first appears as a two-storey building in a photograph taken c.1913-1927 although it appears to have been a modification of the earlier building. The original purpose of this building is unknown however the pedestrian link to the main building at the first floor level clearly confirms that its use was associated with the main building.

At it currently stands the integrity of the White House as a contributory building to the main building is poor as it has been substantially undermined by the construction of an additional floor level and does not reflect its original appearance as probably designed by WC Vahland.

5.2.2 Justification for the demolition of the White House

The White House has been structural assessed on a number of occasions since 2006. The building has suffered from documented structural problems over a long period of time and several previous attempts to stabilise the building have failed.

NOTE: It is of relevance to note that the nearby original St Kilian's church, built of sandstone in 1857, was demolished in 1887 on account of faulty foundations and that timber was used as the construction material on account of the instability of the original foundations.

Several sinkholes have recently developed close to the footings of the building. These have resulted in the building being declared unsafe and the erection of safety fencing. Remedial works have been investigated however it has been identified that there is a risk that these repairs may or may not permanently stabilise the building due to excessive ground water in the area and that undertaking these works may potentially undermine other parts of the building.

A structural engineer's report was undertaken by C&S Consult Group in December 2022. A copy of this report is attached as Appendix 3.

The report detailed the various previous attempts to stabilise the building. It also outlined several different approaches to addressing the current condition of the building however the ultimate recommendation was for it to be completely demolished due to the unstable foundations of the land beneath the building.

The proposed method of demolition is set out in image 5 above.

Following the demolition of the subject building, the associated stairs and covered walkway linking it to The Bishop's Palace, the subject land will be redeveloped as additional playground area for the adjoining school.

5.3 ASSESSMENT OF FULL DEMOLITION OF THE TOILET BLOCK AND ADJACENT PLAYGROUND AREA AGAINST THE HERITAGE PROVISIONS OF THE GREATER BENDIGO PLANNING SCHEME

5.3.1 Significance of the toilet block and adjacent playground to the heritage overlays HO2 and HO184

St Kilians Hall (HO184 - 181 McCrae Street, Bendigo, St Kilian's Ladies Hall) was designed by WC Vahland and constructed in the late 1880s to serve as a school and for general purposes such as concerts and for general purposes.

The existing toilet block and adjacent school playgrounds are relatively recent additions to the St Kilian's church and the broader church complex.

It is considered that the toilet block and the playground make no contribution to the significance of St Kilians Hall (HO184) or the broader Baxter Street heritage precinct (HO2).

5.3.2 Justification for the demolition of the toilet block and adjacent playground

The demolition of these non-contributory elements will have no impact on the significance, character or appearance of St Kilians Hall (HO184) or the broader Baxter Street heritage precinct (HO2) as neither of these elements are visible from the principal street frontage of the site in McCrae Street.

6.0 Conclusions

1. The proposed full demolition of White House should be supported in accordance with the Heritage Act 2017 for the following reasons:

- The White House is non-contributory to the significance of H1341 - St Kilian's Catholic Church;
- Full demolition of the White House will have no effect on the reasonable or economic use of H1341 - St Kilian's Catholic Church;
- If full demolition of White House were to be refused the reasonable or economic use of the adjacent St Kilian's school playground will be detrimentally affected;
- The proposed demolition of the White House will have no effect on the protection and conservation of the St Kilian's Catholic Church.

2. The proposed full demolition of White House should be supported in accordance with the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme for the following reasons:

- The integrity of the White House as a potentially contributory building to the main Bishop's Palace (HO183) is poor as it has been substantially undermined by the construction of an additional floor level and does not reflect its original appearance as probably designed by WC Vahland.
- The White House has been structural assessed on a number of occasions since 2006. The building has suffered from documented structural problems over a long period of time and several previous attempts to stabilise the building have failed.
- Several different approaches to addressing the current condition of the building have been considered however the ultimate recommendation was for it to be completely demolished due to the unstable foundations of the land beneath the building.

3. The proposed full demolition of toilet block and the adjacent playground should be supported in accordance with the *Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme* for the following reasons:

- The toilet block and the playground make no contribution to the significance of St Kilian's Hall (HO184) or the broader Baxter Street heritage precinct (HO2).
- The demolition of these non-contributory elements will have no impact on the significance, character or appearance of St Kilian's Hall (HO184) or the broader Baxter Street heritage precinct (HO2) as neither of these elements are visible from the principal street frontage of the site in McCrae Street.