

## **Melbourne Observatory**

### **Q and As**

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#### **The Place**

The Melbourne Observatory, Birdwood Avenue, Melbourne is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) and is of scientific, historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria. The complex of buildings includes the Great Melbourne Telescope building (1869), the Photoheliograph Dome building erected specifically for the observation of the transit of Venus in 1874, the Magnet House (1877) and the Astrograph House (1889). It was one of the few well-equipped observatories functioning in the Southern Hemisphere in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, providing the world with basic scientific information unavailable from other sources. It was instrumental in providing Victoria with accurate time, as well as meteorological statistics and was vital in the exploration of Antarctica at the beginning of the twentieth century.

#### **What has happened?**

On 25 October 2021, Heritage Victoria received a permit application for a proposal to install safety lighting consisting of 18 new 500mm-high light bollards and two power bollards. The permit application advised that the lights were necessary following a Risk Management and Safety Audit which identified issues with staff safety due to a lack of light between the car park and work hubs.

The original proposal also included one 4m-high light pole. Following discussions with Heritage Victoria and the Astronomical Society of Victoria, the pole was replaced with two short bollards, minimising the amount of upward light and reflective light off building surfaces.

The permit application was publicly advertised between 30 March 2022 and 19 April 2022 and 8 submissions were received. The submissions objected to the proposal and raised issues relating to the impact of the works on the quality of night observations, as well as general concerns regarding RBGV's management of the site.

On 24 June 2021, a heritage permit with conditions was issued by Heritage Victoria for the installation of the lights. It was considered that:

- The design and scale of the proposed new lighting and power bollards was recessive and that they will be clearly distinguished as new elements while being sensitive to the setting of the Place.
- The bollards are below eye level, with some positioned within garden beds and views between the buildings and sense of open space will not be interrupted.
- The potential impact relating to light spill on observatory operations has been mitigated through light spill mapping, the low height of the bollards and the ability to turn the lights off either by timer or manually.
- Hand-digging trenches for cabling and reinstating any cut paths to match existing will mitigate any potential physical impacts.

#### **What happens now?**

A review by the Heritage Council of Victoria of the Executive Director's decision to issue the permit can be requested but only by the permit applicant, owner or government asset manager, or a person with a real and substantial interest in the place.