

H2332 FORMER CABLE TRAM ENGINE HOUSE & TRAM SUBSTATION

253-263 BRUNSWICK ROAD BRUNSWICK, MORELAND CITY

Permit Application P39543**Why is the Former Cable Tram Engine House & Tram Substation of cultural heritage significance?**

The Former Cable Tram Engine House & Tram Substation is included in the Victorian Heritage Register under the provisions of the *Heritage Act 2017* for its historical and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

The place is historically significant for its association with the development of Melbourne's transport system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is one of the few examples of the adaption of part of an existing engine house for use as an electrical substation, thereby demonstrating two major stages in the development of Melbourne's tram system. It is a significant as a notable example of the engine houses constructed by the Melbourne Tramways Trust from the 1880s. It features most of the external principal architectural characteristics of a cable tram engine house. The place is also significant for its potential to contain significant nineteenth century archaeological remains and artefacts relating to the cable tram system, including deep brick-lined pits and cable races (tunnels) that span the length of the building.

What was the permit application for?

On 18 September 2024 Heritage Victoria received a permit application for the development of 253-259 Brunswick Road, Brunswick as a purpose-built student accommodation building. The permit application was advertised between 14 May 2025 and 27 May 2025.

Why has the permit been issued?

On 15 August 2025, a permit was issued by Heritage Victoria that allows for the redevelopment of the Cable Tram Engine House including construction of a seven-level building, and associated program of archaeology, conservation, repair, adaptation and interpretation works.

The permit includes conservation, paint removal, repair and adaptation works to ensure the place's ongoing use; a program of archaeology to ensure all significant archaeological features and deposits are investigated and interpreted; and a financial security to secure conservation and interpretation works.

Given the suboptimal existing condition of the place, and its poor presentation it is reasonable to consider new development to support and facilitate adaptive reuse. The proposed development as purpose-built student accommodation provides an opportunity to deliver an economically viable and ongoing use for the place, while supporting the protection, conservation, and interpretation of its cultural heritage values. In doing so, the proposal offers a sustainable long-term future for the place.

The primary negative impact arises from the construction of new built form above much of the original 1887 building, which will affect the visual setting and presentation of the place. However, this is balanced by a number of positive heritage outcomes, including substantial conservation works — such as the removal of inappropriate paint from the rendered string courses and bi-chromatic brickwork — archaeological investigations, and the implementation of an interpretation strategy.

Importantly, the original external extent of the place will be retained and remain legible. The proposed built form adopts a linear form that reflects the industrial character of the original structure beneath. Archaeological features associated with the cable tram system, including deep brick-lined pits and cable races, will be partially retained and exposed as part of the development.

A development proposal where there is no setback to new built form is not one that would usually be contemplated by Heritage Victoria. However, in this case it is considered successful and appropriate in the context of the cultural heritage significance of the place. The high quality design, materiality and detailing of the new development is acceptable in that it is contemporary in presentation and demonstrates an equivalence with the form of the heritage building beneath. The design approach was informed through a series of workshops with the Office of the Victorian Government Architect.

What are the next steps?

There are no third-party rights of appeal under the *Heritage Act 2017*. In relation to this permit, only the applicant or the owner may make a request to the Heritage Council to review the Executive Director's determination to impose a condition on the permit. A request for a review must be made to the Heritage Council of Victoria within 60 days of the determination of the application. The Heritage Council is an independent statutory authority established under the *Heritage Act 2017*.