**25 ST VINCENT PLACE SOUTH, ALBERT PARK**

**REASONABLE OR ECONOMIC USE**

The guidance provided within the Heritage Act relating to consideration of reasonable or economic use referencess the need to balance **the extent to which approval would affect cultural heritage significance** against **the extent to which refusal would affect reasonable or economic use.**

It further states that ‘Reasonable use’ and ‘Economic use’ are distinct and must be assessed separately.

**Economic Use**

When economic use is being considered, the proposed works should help the place to be economically sustainable. This should be a use that can continue for the medium to long-term, mitigating the possibility of continual changes. An economic use may generate the income necessary to cover the cost of conservation and maintenance.

In the case of 25 St Vincent Place, the house is, and always has been, a private residence. Economic use therefore does not apply other than to the extent that long term ownership and stewardship of a heritage place is likely to result in stability, deeper understanding and appreciation of the place, long term maintenance and care which result in economic as well as other tangible benefits, even though the place is in private ownership.

In this respect, allowing an owner to reasonably alter and upgrade their home to meet their own unique requirements is likely to result in long term ownership, **mitigating the possibility of continual changes** by avoiding the incidence of multiple successive owners, each further tweaking the home, and each time further eroding the historic fabric.

**Reasonable Use**

Heritage Victoria’s policy regarding reasonable use advises that, when determining a permit application, consideration may be given to the historic, recent and current uses of the registered place or object, other compatible uses of the registered place or object, the context and setting within which the place or object is located, and other relevant matters.

The history of No. 25 St Vincent Place South dates back to circa 1869 when the original home was constructed along with the adjoining dwellings to the east and west (numbers 23 and 27). The rear wing extension had been added by the mid 1890’s. Ownership of the home remained within the original owner’s family until 1948. The current owners purchased the home in 2019.

The home was built as a private residence and has remained as such. That is, there have been no other uses of this property other than as a residential dwelling and the current application does not propose any change of use.

To paraphrase the Statement of Significance for St Vincent Place Precinct, development of the special character of St Vincent Place has been characterized by a variety of housing stock including quality row and detached houses and by the gardens which remain faithful to the initial landscape concept. The gardens and their relationship with the residences facing them around St Vincent Place are a major contributing element to the importance of the precinct.

The home therefore cannot be considered in isolation. Its importance is inter-dependent on its setting and concomitant relationship with the other houses in the precinct and with the gardens. In this respect, the heritage value of the houses derives predominantly from their visible frontages which provide the interaction with each other, the gardens and the precinct as a whole.

Aerial views and real estate searches indicate that a large percentage of the existing homes in the precinct have undergone modern alterations and extensions which are not visible from St Vincent Place and therefore do not detract from the heritage value of the precinct. The question is whether the work has detracted from the heritage value of the individual heritage places.

In the case of the subject property, No. 25, we believe that, whether or not the proposed alterations are considered “reasonable use”, the current state of this home does not befit its heritage significance and, in reality, detracts from it. The photos provided show the poor quality and ad hoc nature of previous alterations to the dwelling. In this respect, we believe that comprehensive, considered, cohesive changes to the home can only have a positive effect on its heritage legacy.

The Burra Charter states in part:

The aim of conservation is to retain the cultural significance of a Place;

and

Places of cultural significance should be safeguarded and not put at risk or left in a vulnerable state.

The current owners purchased this home knowing and respecting its history and seeing its potential notwithstanding the controls and restrictions that would go with the property. Their vision is long term, which is evidenced in the extent and quality of the work proposed and the non-negotiable requirement for extensive basement car storage. Allowing them to realise their vision will keep the home with the family for many years, negating the possibility of multiple owners all putting their own individual stamp on the house, all further picking away at the original fabric and character of the home. In this respect, the proposal addresses the Burra Charter requirement that the place should be “… safeguarded and not put at risk or left in a vulnerable state”.

**Interpretation**

The Heritage Victoria policy on ‘reasonable use’ describes it as an objective assessment that is concerned with the reasonable use of the registered place or object, not what is subjectively reasonable. The example given is that “…refusal to issue a permit for an addition to a residence may affect the reasonable use of the registered place to a lesser extent if the place could generally be used as a residence by others without the proposed changes”.

We would argue that reasonable use is not a black and white concept and the above example, in this case, is not appropriate.

An acceptable interpretation of reasonable use of a place is very different when applied to, for example, student accommodation or public housing as compared to a house of this stature. The current conditions at 25 St Vincent Place may well be considered acceptable by 20-year-old university students. However, the owners of 25 St Vincent place and the other residents of St Vincent gardens precinct have invested heavily in their homes because they appreciate the history, significance, beauty, importance and potential of these dwellings. What is considered reasonable use cannot be completely objective in this respect and cannot be a “one size fits all” approach.

As custodians of these significant dwellings, Heritage Vic. must surely consider that whatever alterations are undertaken should be fitting of the homes’ stature. Materials and designs need to be of a standard, scale and quality that do not diminish the standing of the residence. When these homes were built, their owners would undoubtedly have adopted the most up to date building techniques and materials available and therefore, 200 years later, the same standards and philosophy should be applied.

The proposed works will ensure the continuing long term residential use of the property by providing a high degree of amenity to its occupants in keeping with contemporary lifestyle expectations.

**The project**

The proposed works will retain the original front rooms to the ground and first floors. A new kitchen and living area are proposed to the rear of the ground floor, serviced by a small, centrally located powder room. A lift will provide access to and from the basement. The existing two front rooms – the lounge and dining, will be retained in their existing format, apart from the removal of non-original cabinetry from the dining room and replacement of walls as required for the new works.

On the first floor, the front bedroom remains largely untouched, apart from relocation of the internal wall and door to the hallway. The second bedroom retains its basic form and dimensions but with internal re-configuration to provide a walk-in robe and ensuite, and the rear section provides two bedrooms, each with ensuite.

The project includes construction of a separate two-storey garage/studio to the rear, facing Bevan Street. A car lift will provide access to 6-car basement parking, a workshop, laundry, powder room and the lift accessing the ground floor.

This proposal is not excessive and is merely attempting to create a family home with a degree of amenity which is in keeping with the quality of the home and contemporary lifestyle expectations.

**Conculsion**

This is and has always been a family home. There could be no more “reasonable” use than to ensure its longevity by bringing it to a high standard of amenity through a considered, responsible, quality build that meets modern expectations and maximises its potential.

In summary, we believe that approval of this application will have **no adverse effect on the cultural heritage significance** of this building. The façade will remain completely intact and unchanged, and therefore the effect on the precinct will be non-existent. The proposed works to the rear will provide quality accommodation that is fitting for this important dwelling, which constitutes **reasonable use**.