

Project Scope - Customs House Facade Upgrade

File No: X002107

Summary

This report describes a project to conserve the sandstone facades and timber windows of Customs House at Circular Quay. Also included is the removal of hazardous materials, external lighting replacement and seismic bracing to certain façade elements.

Customs House is listed on the State Heritage Register and the project will require Development Consent.

This report seeks Council's endorsement of the scope of works, and consent to lodge planning consent as required for the endorsed scope.

Located in a prime position in Circular Quay, Customs House is in the heart of major commercial redevelopment works. The revitalised precinct will likely lead to greatly increased public use of the area, thereby increasing visitor foot traffic. It will provide strong opportunities for the City to engage with the public.

In 2016, Jackson Teece Architects were engaged to provide heritage architect consultancy services for Customs House façade restoration. Early stages of these works have been completed and the project is now ready to proceed to final design followed by construction. Preliminary investigations have been comprehensive, and feedback has been sought from peers within the heritage stonework and structural industry.

Concept designs for the required restoration works have been completed. The façade scope envisages three stages of conservation work over 18 months, which will be undertaken from scaffolding.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the project scope described in this report and Attachment A to the subject report for the purpose of design development and lodgement of a Development Application of work packages requiring consent;
- (B) note the indicative costs and financial implications detailed in Confidential Attachment B to the subject report; and
- (C) note the project budget as detailed in Confidential Attachment B to the subject report.

Attachments

Attachment A. General Scope of Work and Program

Attachment B. Financial Implications (Confidential)

Background

1. The Customs House building at Circular Quay was designed by Mortimer Lewis and originally built between 1843 and 1845. It was extended by James Barnet in 1889 and later extended and altered again several times.
2. The Customs Department occupied the building until 1990.
3. In 1998, the City leased the building from the owner, the Commonwealth of Australia, for a period of 60 years. Between 1995 and 1998, the City remodelled the interior for use as required under the lease and carried out repairs to the façade. Further internal works were carried out from 2003 to 2004.
4. The external façade has been shedding small pieces of sandstone, causing safety concerns. Regular local inspections with removal of loose stone ("makesafes") have been undertaken since 2014 to mitigate safety concerns.
5. In March 2016, Council approved a design tender to appoint a Heritage Architect to provide Architectural Services (ie surveying the facades, scoping and documenting the project, assisting with tenders and providing construction services).
6. Base survey work and initial scope has now been completed. The scope of work for full conservation (defined in repair longevity as 30 years) requires:
 - a construction duration of 18 months; and
 - scaffolding around the entire building programmed around three stages.
7. A review of the proposed scope has been carried out in an attempt to reduce the impact of scaffolding on the public and prioritise high-risk items. This has entailed some additional survey work and peer group reviews. Further survey work and seismic investigations are required prior to the tender for construction to adequately and sympathetically document the structural requirements for approval by the Heritage Council.
8. The most serious deterioration of the sandstone façade is to the cornices at the top of the building where water is entering the façade, and in many of the stone balusters on the roof which are gradually eroding. If not addressed, the deterioration of these cornices and balusters will become a risk over time.
9. To mitigate the risk of stone fall in the long term, it is recommended that a full heritage conservation scope be adopted to avoid long term deterioration of the building fabric. It is expected that works would be staged, with one façade being scaffolded at a time to reduce the impact on Customs House visually and operationally (for tenants and visitors). The anticipated time period for conservation construction works is 18 months.
10. This is the best way to reduce the risk of safety to pedestrians from stone fall, and avoid the risk of heritage fabric deterioration.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

11. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre - Customs House is the gateway to the City and open to everyone, with over 3,000 visitations daily. This beautiful sandstone building (and adjacent forecourt) is host to a number of dining and drinking venues including the iconic Café Sydney, Quay Bar and Young Alfred. The Barnet Long Room and Customs House Square (Forecourt area) are available for booking for functions and events. The conservation of this significant heritage building aligns with this strategic direction to ensure Customs House continues to contribute to creating 'a Lively and Engaging City Centre'.
 - (b) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City - Customs House is a well-loved landmark destination for locals and tourists. It is home of the popular City model and City library and host to many cultural events (Vivid, Chinese New Year, etc.) and exhibitions throughout the year. The conservation of this significant heritage building aligns with this strategic direction to ensure Customs House continues to contribute to creating a 'Cultural and Creative City'.

Risks

12. A recent Risk Review indicated that the building is subject to two risks: a safety risk caused by the fall of stone to pedestrians on footpaths below, and a risk of deterioration in the carved sandstone.

Social / Cultural / Community

13. Customs House is a nationally significant heritage building. Council has a duty of care to preserve the heritage for future generations and to make safe.

Environmental

14. It is considered that 'shoring up' the building with full conservation works in the form of lead weatherings, full desalination and replacement of spalling sandstone is a necessary step for long term conservation of the building.
15. Make-safe works however involve the necessary removal of spalling sandstone which results in the loss of heritage fabric. The proposed heritage conservation works (for the initial outlay) set the foundation for long-term stability of the building and the sandstone (30 years).

16. Whilst new salts can still be deposited on the façade from front-blown rain and the atmosphere, the accumulation of heavy salts on soffits and other façade elements can be mitigated by the addition of good lead weatherings on the cornices.

Budget Implications

17. Additional funding is required to deliver full conservation works. A summary of the financial implications is included in Confidential Attachment B.

Relevant Legislation

18. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW). A planner will review the scope of works to assess consent requirements for the project under this Act.
19. Attachment B contains confidential commercial information which, if disclosed, would:
- (a) confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom Council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business; and
 - (b) prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied it.
20. Discussion of the matter in an open meeting would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest because it would compromise Council's ability to negotiate fairly and commercially to achieve the best outcome for its ratepayers.
21. Local Government Act 1993 (NSW).
22. Heritage Act 1977 (NSW).

Critical Dates / Time Frames

23. Key dates for the project are as follows:
- | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|
| (a) | Design Development and Construction Documentation (including DA approval) | March 2019 - August 2019 |
| (b) | Tender Period | September 2019 - February 2020 |
| (c) | Construction | April 2020 - September 2021 |

Options

24. If the stonework is not repaired, the fine detailing on the façade will deteriorate and eventually be a risk of structural failure, causing the fall of stone.
25. If the seismic bracing is not included in the scope, the advice received from consulting engineers is that there is a risk of stone fall that could occur at some time in the future.

Public Consultation

26. Consultation has commenced with tenants, tenants' visitors and neighbours, including AMP. Careful and ongoing consultation will be required with tenants in the building to minimise disruption to their quiet enjoyment as is their right under their leases.
27. Applications for Development Consent and Heritage approval for seismic strengthening works will be made following Council's endorsement of the scope.

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