

Relevant Information for Council

FILE: X091578 **DATE:** 18 September 2025

TO: Lord Mayor and Councillors

FROM: Graham Jahn AM, Chief Planner / Executive Director City Planning, Development & Transport

SUBJECT: Information Relevant To Item 10.3 - Public Exhibition - Planning Proposal - Oxford Street LGBTIQA+ Heritage Items Stage 2

For Noting

This memo is for the information of the Lord Mayor and Councillors.

Purpose

To provide Council with additional information.

Background

At the Transport, Heritage and Planning Committee meeting on 15 September 2025, in response to a speaker objecting to the (cultural and social) heritage listing of The Bookshop at 207 Oxford Street, the Committee requested further information on:

- the purpose of the proposed local heritage listings
- their intended impact on future development, and
- what future recognition of these sites might involve.

Purpose of the proposed heritage listings

Important Note: The social heritage listings do not impinge on the extent of redevelopment potential of each site.

The social listings aim to acknowledge and preserve the LGBTIQ+ history of Oxford Street, as outlined in the City's Oxford Street LGBTIQ+ Social and Cultural Place Strategy (the Place Strategy). The Place Strategy prioritises:

- identifying places of significance to the LGBTIQ+ community, and
- ensuring public awareness of their historical value.

TKD Architects' *Oxford Street LGBTIQ+ Heritage Study* identified 6 socially significant sites:

1. The Oxford Hotel, 134 Oxford Street
2. Palms, 124 Oxford Street
3. Universal, 85-91 Oxford Street
4. Former Ruby Reds, 273 Crown Street
5. Former Taxi Club, 40-42 Flinders Street, and
6. The Bookshop, 207 Oxford Street.

Sites 1 to 3 were publicly exhibited in August 2025 with no objections. The outcome of this public exhibition will be reported back to Council later this year.

In December 2024, Council unanimously resolved to investigate sites 4 to 6 for heritage listing.

By heritage listing these sites, the objective is to make sure people know that these places have historical and social value in relation to the LGBTIQ+ community and Oxford Street, consistent with the Place Strategy.

The City's approach is consistent with the NSW Government's Draft NSW Heritage Strategy which includes an objective to "Embrace and reflect the diversity of our heritage" by "recognising a broader range of stories and values to better represent the history of New South Wales". The Draft Heritage Strategy says the NSW Government will:

- work with diverse communities to understand and recognise the stories and places that are important to them
- support social cohesion by fostering community understanding and sense of belonging to places, and
- encourage community connections with heritage through an emphasis on stories and intangible cultural heritage.

Impact on future development

1. Site-specific guidance

Prior to public exhibition, the City will develop inventory sheets for each of the proposed items as was done for sites 1 to 3. Inventory sheets contain site-specific management recommendations. The recommendations provide guidance on what should be done to conserve the significance of the place when it undergoes major development. Management recommendations vary from site to site. They complement and do not override the planning controls for the site.

Landowners can make submissions on the draft management recommendations during public exhibition for the City's consideration prior to finalisation.

Subject to final drafting, the draft management recommendations for each site are intended to be as follows:

Former Taxi Club, 40-42 Flinders Street

- Manage the significance of the building in accordance with Sydney LEP 2012 and Sydney DCP 2012.
- Retain and conserve the form and fabric of the building consistent with its contribution to the conservation area. Alterations and additions may occur and are to retain the building's contribution to the conservation area.
- Conserve the LGBTIQ+ historic and social significance of the place through interpretation on site.

Former Ruby Reds, 273 Crown Street

- The existing building can be demolished and replaced provided the new building interprets the LGBTIQ+ historic and social significance on site.

The Bookshop, 207 Oxford Street

- Manage the significance of the building in accordance with Sydney LEP 2012 and Sydney DCP 2012.
- Retain and conserve the form and fabric of the building consistent with its existing contribution status in the conservation area (outward appearance).
- Continuation of the retail use is preferable but not required.
- The removal of intrusive accretions on the Oxford Street facade is encouraged. Unpainted fabric including brick and stone is best remaining unpainted.
- Alterations and additions consistent with the controls for the Oxford Street Creative and Cultural Precinct may occur and are to retain the building's contribution to the conservation area.
- Conserve the LGBTIQ+ historic and social significance of the place through interpretation on site.

2. Interpretation of social significance

Major developments must incorporate interpretation of the site's history. The City encourages creative approaches and will collaborate with applicants to ensure meaningful outcomes. Minor works do not require interpretation strategies.

When the landowner or future developer is putting together a major redevelopment proposal for the site, the heritage listing flags the social significance as a primary objective to be addressed. Depending on the proposal, such significance can be addressed in infinite ways. The City wouldn't place limitations on the landowner or future developer coming up with an innovative form of interpretation.

3. Planning controls and development potential

Since the introduction of the Oxford Street Cultural and Creative Precinct controls in 2022, over 6,600 sqm of new cultural and creative space has been approved via major redevelopments and vertical additions to heritage items and contributory buildings.

For the Oxford Street sites, the City has already determined that, subject to the delivery of cultural and creative floor space and an appropriate heritage response, that they can accommodate vertical additions. This will be reflected in their site-specific management recommendations.

For 207 Oxford Street, planning controls were increased (FSR from 3:1 to 3.75:1; height from 12m to 18m) in 2022. Heritage listing does not prevent vertical additions, provided proposals respond appropriately to the site's heritage values.

Interpretation examples of social significance

Les Girls (Empire Hotel), 18–32A Darlinghurst Road

Approved in November 2024, the redevelopment includes a mixed-use building with a medical centre, retail, two pubs, hotel accommodation and 52 apartments.

Heritage management recommendations noted the existing building could be demolished and replaced and required:

- interpretation of the original Les Girls venue
- architectural references to the 1962 building, including its curved corner, balconies, awning, and signage replicating the original “Les Girls” lettering, and
- ground and first floors to retain food, drink or entertainment uses, reflecting the Empire Hotel's social history.



Figure 1: Perspective view towards The Empire with development along Darlinghurst Road to the left showing proposed interpretative artwork incorporated into the curved form the Empire corner facade. (Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects, 2020)

The approved design incorporates:

- conservation and reconstruction of key elements
- interpretive signage and graphics in the foyer and public domain, and
- public artwork integrated into the curved corner facade

Gadigal Station (Sydney Metro)

As part of its heritage interpretation strategy, GML Heritage produced *A City in Motion*, a film permanently displayed at the station. The film explores:

- movement and connection across time
- Gadigal Country's enduring cultural significance, and
- the choreography of city life through historical and contemporary footage.

Elsie Refuge (former), 73–75 Westmoreland Street, Glebe

Australia's first women's refuge, now returned to residential use, is State heritage listed for its historic and social significance.

Recognition includes:

- a commemorative plaque and
- a mural, and
- a renamed pedestrian path: Elsie Walk.

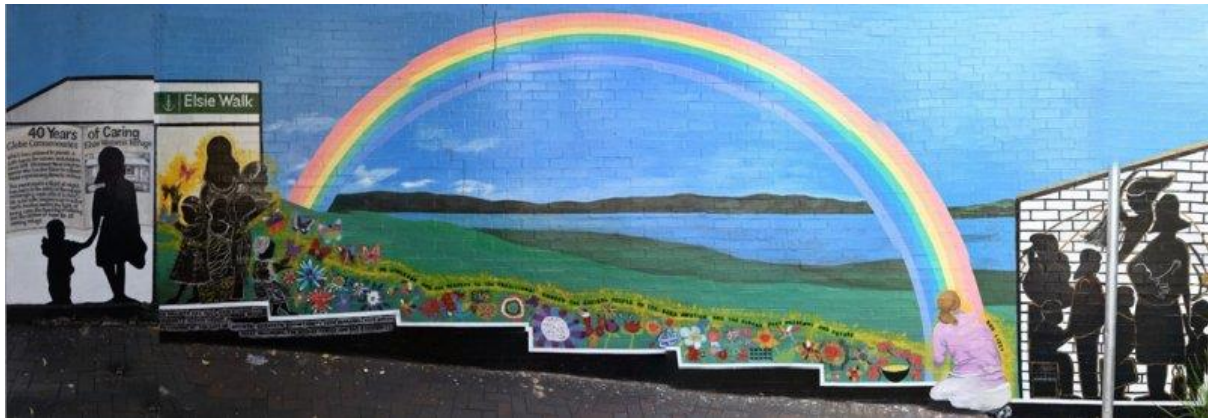


Figure 2: A panoramic shot of the Elise mural on Elise Walk.

Other examples of social heritage is associated with the Botany Road Precinct controls such as former Aboriginal Legal Service and the former Aboriginal Medical Service

Memo from Graham Jahn AM, Chief Planner / Executive Director City Planning, Development & Transport

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Approved

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