



PARKVILLE ASSOCIATION INC

Box 54, Parkville 3052

HO 394 Former College Church, Royal Parade, Parkville – objection to proposed demolition of existing toilet block to enable construction of new detached multipurpose building

1 The application

Permit application number P26858 is to undertake demolition of the existing freestanding brick toilet block to the north of the church building to enable the construction of a new detached building to accommodate teaching and gathering spaces with ancillary accommodation including toilets and a kitchen and associated landscaping.

2 The Parkville Association's position

2.1 Summary

In summary, the Parkville Association objects to the above proposed works on the following grounds:

- the toilet building is part of the original construction and fabric of this significant church and should be conserved rather than demolished;
- the former College Church was designed and built to be viewed in the round and this aspect contributes to its cultural and architectural heritage significance;
- the size, location and design of the proposed multi-purpose building will have a very substantial and adverse impact on the heritage significance of the former College Church.

The Association considers that there is potential for an appropriately designed downsized new building that conserves and integrates the existing toilet building in some form and complements the heritage significance of the former College Church. Use of an architect skilled in designing new buildings in the context of buildings of State heritage significance would assist in achieving a suitable outcome.

2.2 The purposes of the Association

Two of the purposes of the Parkville Association are 'to initiate and take action to assist the integration, development and advancement of the Parkville community' and 'to conserve the fabric and amenity of Parkville'.

As a result, this application represents a conflict for the Association as we acknowledge that the Mar Thoma Church congregation forms part of the (non-residential) community of Parkville yet what the Church proposes to do to the former College Church will result, in the Association's view, an unacceptable impact on the heritage significance on this distinctive element of the local built environment.

3 Objection to demolition of the toilet block

The toilet outbuilding in question is clearly shown on the MMBW plans of 1899 (p5 of the Heritage Impact Statement [HIS]). Although this outbuilding is not included in the citation of the Former College Church on the Victorian Heritage Register, the Association considers that it has heritage significance as original fabric and exhibits clear evidence of the design and function of the original church complex. Indeed, the retention of external toilets on rear lanes has been required in the residential areas of South Parkville on heritage grounds by the City of Melbourne.

This toilet block is in reasonable condition (although recently reroofed) and has the potential to be incorporated into a new, small scale facility to serve similar purposes.

The HIS's assertion that the presence of this very small existing outbuilding (say 6 square metres) as justification for construction of a substantially larger building (approximately 131 square metres) is stretching credulity and should not be given any credence as justifying the demolition of this building – particularly as the new building (large floor area, attached by screens to church etc) would have any of the location or contextual relationships (freestanding, small size etc) to the existing church building.

4 Concern about the heritage impact of the proposed multi-purpose building

4.1 Loss of the sense of the church as a building in the round

The former College Church was designed and built to be viewed in the round and this aspect contributes to its cultural and architectural heritage significance. The HIS acknowledges that the church building was designed to be viewed in the round (p14 and photos on p8) and combined with a very small site area, there is no opportunity to site a new building that will not compromise the heritage significance of the existing building. As shown on the elevation and sections, the proposed multipurpose building would intrude into views of the existing church from all key directions and eliminate the sense of this significant church being able to be viewed in the round.

4.2 The excessive size of the proposed multi-purpose building

The proposed new building is quite large relative to the floor area of the existing church and, as a result, would be 'shoe-horned' into the narrow area between the Church and the Parkville Tennis Club and would wrap around the western elevation of the Church. It is noted that the proposed building would be set down to some extent (relative to existing ground level) to try to reduce its visual bulk and impact. It is noted that the proposed building is too close to the western boundary of the site and, indeed, canopy elements appear to extend beyond the boundary.

The Association queries the inclusion of a green roof on the proposed multi purpose building on the basis of providing '...a delightful aspect to the otherwise modest and restrained building and would help to integrate the proposed building into its park surroundings' (HIS p 15) when the justification for sinking the building is to allow for views to the northern façade. The Association considers that a green roof would not be sympathetic to the Church building and potentially could cause problems if not properly maintained.

4.3 Suitability of the building for the existing and proposed use

Perhaps the Mar Thoma church community of 320 families (p 14) (which suggests a total potential congregation in excess of say 1,000 people) is too large to be appropriately accommodated by this small church building with or without the proposed multipurpose centre. At the very least, the Association considers that the extent of the functions to be accommodated and related building needs to be downsized to facilitate design of smaller, less intrusive ancillary facilities

The Association disagrees with the assertion in the HIS (p 15) that:

Continuation of the church use of the building is in turn fundamental to its significance and care.

There are many examples of the continuing heritage significance and perhaps improved conservation of church buildings when converted to other uses such as residential, institutional or commercial.

5 Urgent need for conservation works

The Association suggests that the conservation works should be undertaken in advance of proposed multi-purpose building (if approved) due to the acknowledged ‘...poor and dangerous condition...’ of some elements of the church building rather than over a proposed 12 year program of conservation works to address areas of deterioration – presumably largely after construction of the new multipurpose building. Rather the construction of any downsized ancillary facilities should be staged to enable immediate funding and completion of urgent conservation and building safety works.

6 Conclusion

The Association considers that there is potential for appropriately designed downsized new ancillary facilities that conserve and integrate the existing toilet building in some form and complements rather than detracts from the heritage significance of the former College Church. Use of an architect skilled in designing new buildings in the context of buildings of State heritage significance would assist in achieving a suitable outcome.