

12.1 CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN: SOUTH MELBOURNE MEMORIAL HALL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CHRIS CARROLL, GENERAL MANAGER, CUSTOMER, OPERATIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

PREPARED BY: ANTHONY SAVENKOV, HEAD OF REAL ESTATE PORTFOLIO (DEVELOPMENT & TRANSACTIONS)

TOM TEMAY, PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To note that a Conservation Management Plan has been prepared for the South Melbourne Memorial Hall.



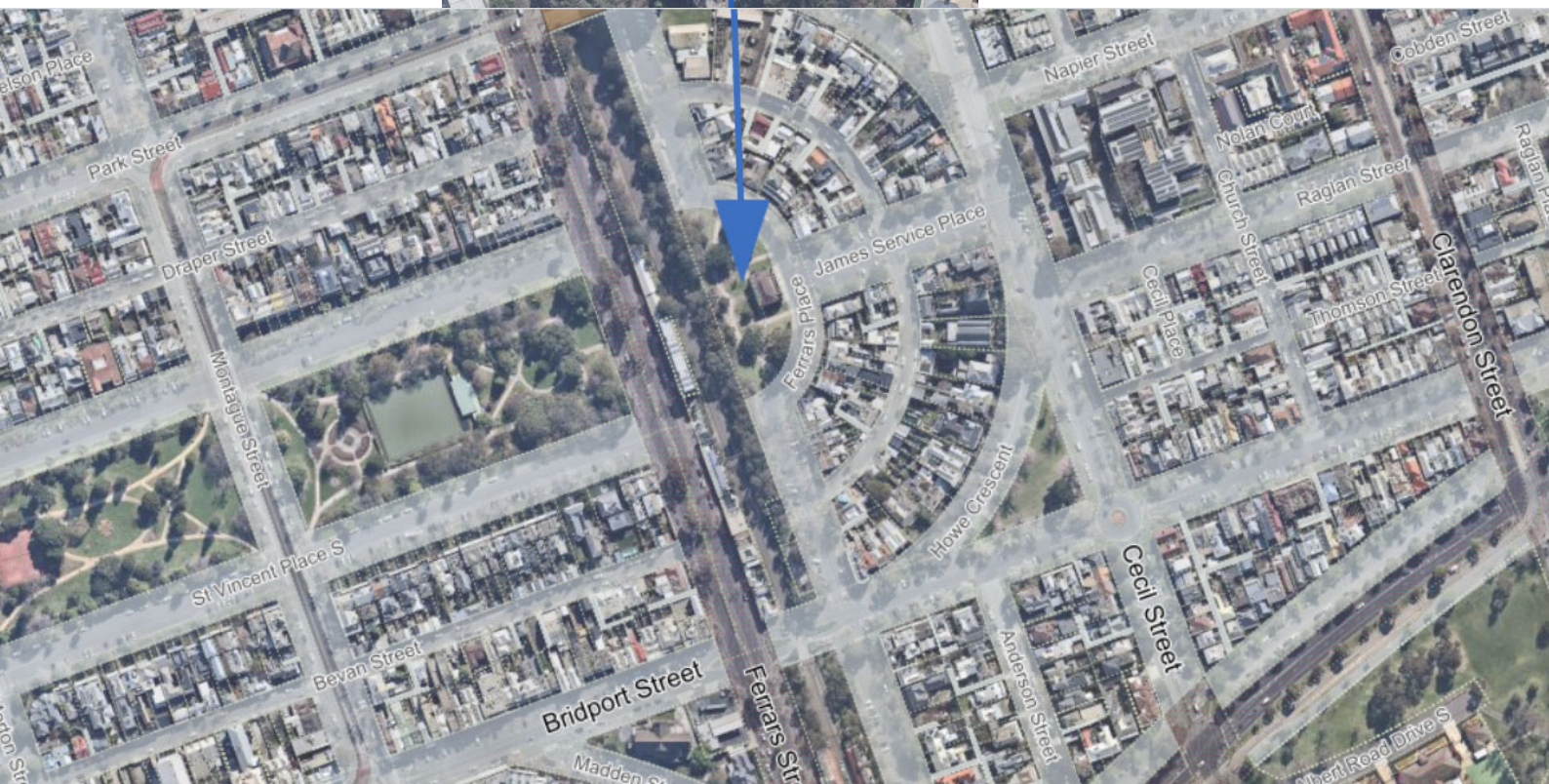


Image: location of subject site, at 14A Ferrars Place, South Melbourne.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The South Melbourne Memorial Hall was constructed in 1924 and 1925, at 14A Ferrars Place, South Melbourne, in recognition of the soldiers, sailors and airmen who served in the 1914-1918 world war.
- 2.2 It was not designed as a mere monument, but as a social place – with a local hall on the upper floor for public events, and a billiard and card room below reserved for members of the Returned & Services League of Australia (the “RSL”, then known as the Returned Soldiers’ Association).
- 2.3 The building will soon be 100 years old.



- 2.4 It has for decades been in a cycle of low utilisation, leading to deferred maintenance/ investment, and this further limiting utilisation.
- 2.5 The Hellenic sub-branch of the RSL leases the whole building at peppercorn rent. The lease ends in early 2026.
- 2.6 Next year Officers will consider strategic options for the building, to enhance its performance and social usefulness, and respecting its memorial role.
- 2.7 To support this, as well as to guide short term remediation of the building, a Conservation Management Plan has been prepared.
- 2.8 The Conservation Management Plan is the principal guiding document for managing this heritage asset.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes that a Conservation Management has been prepared for the South Melbourne Memorial Hall.
- 3.2 Notes that the Conservation Management Plan will help ensure that the future use, management and upgrades to the Memorial Hall enrich rather diminish its assessed heritage values.
- 3.3 Thanks the contributors to the Conservation Management Plan.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

Background

- 4.1 City of Port Phillip owns and/or manages a wide range of buildings with heritage significance.
- 4.2 One of these is the South Melbourne Memorial Hall, at 14a Ferrars Place, South Melbourne, (the "Hall").
- 4.3 City of Port Phillip is custodian of the building, managing it on behalf of the Crown as Committee of Management.

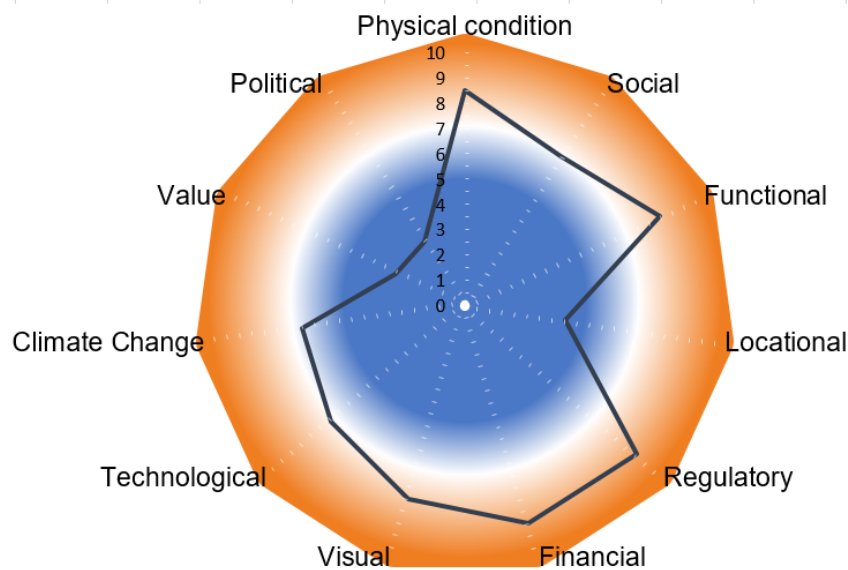
The building

- 4.4 The Hall is a two storey building, with cavity brick walls and simple, hipped terracotta tile roof.
- 4.5 It is a modest, dignified building in Georgian Revival style.
- 4.6 It is ninety six years old.
- 4.7 The Hall is within a local Heritage Overlay (HO440) of the Port Phillip Planning Scheme. It is not listed on the Victorian Heritage Register, nor is it included in the (non-statutory) National Trust Register.
- 4.8 The Hall is located in a quiet residential neighbourhood, in a semi circular garden that was originally part of St Vincent's Gardens, prior to being disjointed by the rail line.
- 4.9 It sits prominently at the end of wide James Service Place (formerly St Vincent Street East), facing the large Catholic orphanage at the opposite end.
- 4.10 The Hall has weak:

- utilisation;
- functionality – particularly the layout of its lower storey, internal appearance and user comfort; and
- compliance with the *Occupational Health & Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*.

4.11 That the majority of the Hall's current users are elderly and/or mobility impaired intensifies the risks arising from its disability non-compliance.

Chart: the building's level of obsolescence



4.12 The building is in good condition overall. That said, it is well due for significant remediation, including:-

- extensive mortar repointing (to walls, chimney, roof hip capping);
- extensively decayed timber subfloor;
- addressing failed ceiling joist connections;
- replacing the first floor plaster ceiling;
- replacing cracked/missing terracotta roof tiles; and
- adjusting the roof gutter and replacing corroded downpipes.

4.13 These short term works are necessary to avoid premature decline or failure of the building, and risk to persons.

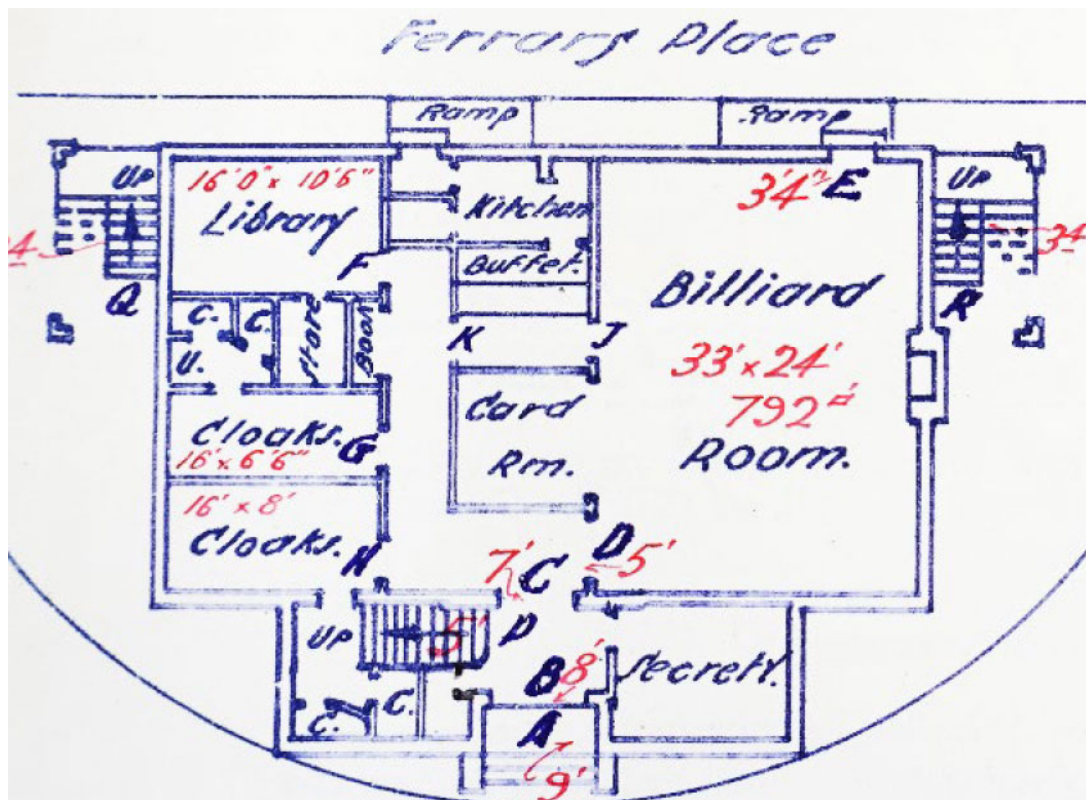
4.14 In the longer term, addressing the functionality and compliance predicament of the building will cost over \$1.25M. Such investment makes most sense if aligned with a plan to boost the usefulness and utilisation of the building.

4.15 Officers intend to consider strategic options for the Hall in the second half of calendar year 2022, and Brief Councillors on a recommended approach.

4.16 A key challenge is to maximise the social return from Council money potentially to be invested in the asset, including to boost utilisation.

Use

- 4.17 The land on which the Hall sits is reserved for “a Memorial to Sailors and Soldiers who served in the war which commenced in the year 1914”.
- 4.18 The intention however, was not to build on the site a mere monument. Rather the Hall was intended as a useful building to serve social needs of the community, whilst memorialising those who served in the relevant military forces.
- 4.19 In 1924, City of South Melbourne requested permission from the Commission of Public Health to construct the public building. It was noted by the architects that the ground floor billiard room was reserved solely for the use of Returned Soldiers’ Association members, while the large upstairs hall would be public space for events such as concerts.
- 4.20 This mix of uses is also reflected in the original floorplan sketches.



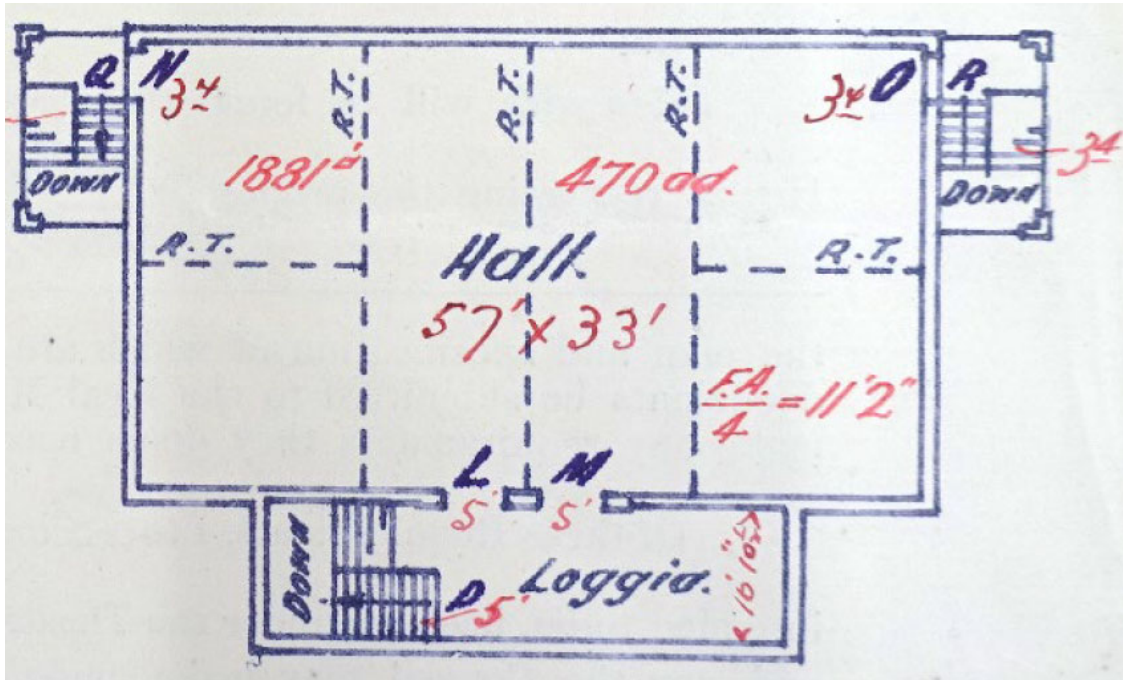


Image: original sketch of lower and upper floors of the Memorial Hall.
Source: Public Records Office of Victoria.

- 4.21 Council paid £1500 of the cost of the constructing the building, to supplement £2500 raised by a hundred strong committee through donations and fundraising.
- 4.22 Once built, Council appointed a group of persons associated with the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia ("RSL") as committee of management of the asset. This included responsibility for keeping it "in a state of good repair".
- 4.23 Membership of the South Melbourne sub branch of the RSL diminished and the general repair of the property deteriorated.
- 4.24 In response, Council at times completed outstanding works, contrary to the terms of the Committee of Management Agreement.
- 4.25 By 1982 the Health Department of Victoria requested that significant repair, rectification and safety upgrades be undertaken. When this was not fully done, they ordered that the works be completed and prohibited the building being used for public functions.
- 4.26 Membership of the RSL sub branch had diminished, and they had insufficient money to undertake the work.
- 4.27 Through negotiations it was agreed that trusteeship of the building would revert to Council, with the RSL branch having a right to use part of the ground floor for meetings and social activities.

MEETING OF THE PORT PHILLIP CITY COUNCIL 1 DECEMBER 2021



STH MELB R.S.L
MEMORIAL HALL
FERRAS PK
SOUTH MELB

file at CIGP
from 19/5

DEAR SIR

WE OF THE R.S.L GIVE OUR CONSENT
TO OUR PREVIOUS MEETING AGREEMENT.
WITH THE PROVISION THAT WE RETAIN
THE BOTTOM FLOOR OF THE BUILDING FOR
OUR REMAINING MEMBERS.
WE AGREE FOR YOUR SOLICITORS TO DRAW UP A
AGREEMENT RE THIS MATTER

CITY OF SOUTH MELBOURNE

DATE RECEIVED 21 MAY 1986

FILE No 1-15

REFERRED TO ~~PLANNING~~ FERRAS

CIGP

899

BEST WISHES
FAITHFULLY YOURS
Ed [unclear] PRESIDENT
John Little SECRETARY

Above: 1986 confirmation of RSL relinquishing management of the South Melbourne Memorial Hall.

- 4.28 In 1987 Council provided the RSL branch a seven year lease to use part of the lower floor.
- 4.29 Under hire, licence and lease arrangements, the remainder of the floorspace was used by various parties, including the St John Ambulance Brigade, the Weight Watchers Club, Richmond Fellowship (operating a faith based mental health service).
- 4.30 South Port Community Health Centre occupied the first floor under a lease with the term from 1988 to 1992.
- 4.31 The lease to the RSL branch lapsed in 1994, though the parties appear not have realised this until 1996.
- 4.32 At around that time, a successful advocacy campaign by Bruce Ruxton OBE for the RSL resulted in a new RSL sub-branch – the Hellenic branch – being installed in the Memorial Hall, and them being allocated the whole floorspace, despite it being ceded by the RSL just ten years earlier. This displaced use by others.

MEETING OF THE PORT PHILLIP CITY COUNCIL 1 DECEMBER 2021



RETURNED & SERVICES LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA (Victorian Branch) Inc.

ANZAC HOUSE, 4 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3000
TELEPHONE: (03) 9650 5050 (03) 9655 5555 FACSIMILE: (03) 9654 2262

Patron: HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN
State President: B.C. RUXTON O.B.E.
State Secretary: JOHN P.A. DEIGHTON, M.A.

BCR:JM

24 April 1996

Jon Hickman Esq
Chief Executive Officer
City of Port Phillip
Town Hall
ST KILDA VIC 3182



Dear Jon

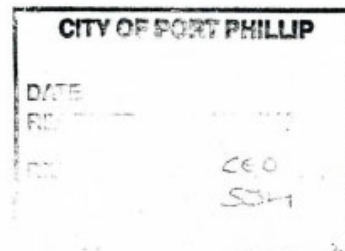
I am wondering whether any conclusions have been made concerning the first floor of the South Melbourne RSL premises.

We are eager to go with you and to install the Greek Sub-Branch in that area. They are a very good group of people and, in fact, they are all good Australians and the premises will not be used for anything untoward.

I have not as yet approached the Port Melbourne Sub-Branch about them amalgamating with South Melbourne, but if you could clear up the tenure of the South Melbourne premises for me, I would appreciate it.

Yours sincerely

B C RUXTON
State President



Above: one of several Council file records of (the late) Bruce Ruxton of the RSL seeking a floorspace increase and to install the Hellenic sub-branch as occupier.

4.33 Interestingly, the tenure arrangement was only formalised from 2015 onwards, when the RSL branch was granted a lease for the whole building. From 1998-2015, the RSL held consecutive occupation licences, and nominally, their occupation area was limited to part of the lower floor.

Current use

4.34 The current lease to the RSL branch ends in January 2026.

4.35 It is a lease of the whole building, with repair and maintenance largely the responsibility of City of Port Phillip.



- 4.36 The rent is \$104/year, about four hundred times less than the cost of providing the space.
- 4.37 The lease notes the rent has been substantially discounted “to support the Tenant in its activities as a RSL to: ensure that programs are in place for the well-being, care, compassion and commemoration of serving ex-service Defence Force members and their dependents; and promote Government and community awareness of the need for a secure, stable and progressive Australia for members of the City of Port Phillip community”.
- 4.38 Recent financial statement lodged by the sub branch indicate that it produces a modest financial surplus each year and has net assets of approximately \$290,000, comprising cash at bank.
- 4.39 The RSL sub branch typically uses the lower floor of the building for its twice weekly gathering of members, and the upper floor for occasional functions, primarily wakes and holiday events – for example, Mother’s Day.

The Conservation Management Plan

- 4.40 A conservation management plan is a document that investigates and establishes the cultural heritage significance of a place.
- 4.41 It makes recommendations about appropriate ways of conserving this significance by setting out a conservation policy which:
- identifies the (physical) condition of the place, along with its history of development;
 - acts as a record of the decision-making process; and
 - is reviewed regularly (typically every ten years) or when the place is subject to major change
- 4.42 A conservation management plan defines the kinds of changes that can be made without compromising the heritage significance.
- 4.43 It supports good heritage management and is an integral part of a total asset management approach.
- 4.44 The Conservation Management Plan has been prepared for City of Port Phillip by Andronas Conservation Architecture, with historical research and heritage significance assessment by Landmark Heritage, and structural engineering investigation and advice by Mark Hodgkinson Structural Consulting Engineers.
- 4.45 All three firms have specialised experience in heritage buildings and their conservation.
- 4.46 The Conservation Management Plan has been:
- prepared in accordance with nationally accepted practices as described in the Burra Charter; and
 - structured in accordance with Heritage Council of *Victoria’s Conservation Management Plans: Managing Heritage Places: A guide (2010)*.
- 4.47 It is included as **Attachment 1**.
- 4.48 The document has been prepared principally for operational purposes. However, given that there is public interest and value putting on the public record, Officers present it for noting.



- 4.49 Regarding the future use of the building, the Conservation Management Plan recommends to:

Seek more intensive uses of the Memorial Hall, either for the general community and/or veterans, to financially support the ongoing preservation of the building (maintenance and upkeep), as long as this does not require alterations to significant building fabric or impede the ability for its regular use as an RSL. The impacts of intensification of use on residential setting should be considered, for example, parking and noise issues.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 Preparation of the Conservation Management included an interview and the input of with the Hellenic sub-branch of the RSL.
- 5.2 The Conservation Management Plan has benefited from feedback from Council's Heritage Officer, Council's Team Leader Arts & Heritage, and Council's Asset Planner.
- 5.3 The Conservation Management was referred to City of Port Phillip's Cultural Heritage Reference Committee for comment.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The consequences of ineffective heritage asset management include reduced asset life; loss of civic esteem; community dissatisfaction; delays to project delivery; unscheduled or unexpected major expenditure; and functional inefficiencies due to the asset being used ineffectively/inappropriately.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 Council is responsible for allocating public money to the management of the municipal property portfolio. The Conservation Management Plan will help City of Port Phillip appropriately care for this public building and ensure that financial investment made in it will enhance its heritage value.
- 7.2 It will also help avoid unscheduled or unexpected major expenditure, or premature failure of the asset.
- 7.3 The Conservation Management Plan helps prioritise expenditure and reduces delays when undertaking changes to the building by ensuring that heritage considerations are at the forefront.
- 7.4 Having a conservation management plan improves City of Port Phillip's chances of securing external funding to support renewal, upgrades and conservation of the building.
- 7.5 The Conservation Management Plan has cost approximately \$29,000 to prepare, including a condition assessment, structural assessment, and landscape heritage assessment. Officer time was also required.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 The Conservation Management Plan supports City of Port Phillip to improve the environmental performance of the Memorial Hall without adversely impacting its heritage.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 Heritage buildings record the community's identity, by providing physical evidence of its history and development.

- 9.2 They contribute to a sense of place, adding local character and identity.
- 9.3 Ineffective heritage asset management can lead to community dissatisfaction and a loss of trust and confidence in Council.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 Effective heritage asset management aligns with strategic direction “Liveable Port Phillip”.



Image above: photo of rear (western side) of the subject building.
Note the bowed roof, suggesting structural distress, and the unsympathetic additions of air-conditioning units and venting.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.1.1 With this report the Conservation Management Plan for the South Melbourne Memorial Hall is formalised.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

- 11.2.1 The Conservation Management Plan helps us understand and embrace the inherent heritage qualities and values of the South Melbourne Memorial Hall.
- 11.2.2 It provides guidance on how the heritage significance should be respected in any future use, management, alteration or repair of the facility.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

- 12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any direct or indirect interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. South Melbourne Memorial Hall Conservation Management Plan