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49 Newcombe Street, Portarlington

Heritage Impact Statement

Prepared for Spiire

November 2025 –Final v1

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project brief

Extent Heritage Pty Ltd have been commissioned by Spiire to prepare a Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) for demolition and construction works at 49 Newcombe Street, Portarlington ('the subject site'). A narrow strip of land to the west of the subject site is subject to the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme for the neighbouring Residence (Former Post Office) (HO1562). The site is also subject to Design and Development Overlay Schedule 21 (DDO21) – Portarlington Town Centre. The purpose of this report is to consider the extent of heritage impact on the former post office associated with the proposed demolition of the existing building and construction of a three-storey building on the subject site. Relevant heritage matters specified in DDO21 will also be considered.

1.2 Relevant documentation

The following documents have been referred to in the preparation of this report:

- Architectural drawings prepared by Kerstin Thompson Architects Pty Ltd, dated 12 November 2025;
- Architectural design statement prepared by Kerstin Thompson Architects Pty Ltd, dated 14 November 2025.

1.3 Terminology

The terminology in this report follows definitions presented in the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 2013). Article 1 provides the following definitions:

Place means a geographically defined area. It may include elements, objects, spaces and views. Place may have tangible and intangible dimensions.

Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups.

Fabric means all the physical material of the place including elements, fixtures, contents and objects.

Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance.

Maintenance means the continuous protective care of a place, and its setting. Maintenance is to be distinguished from repair which involves restoration or reconstruction.

Preservation means maintaining a place in its existing state and retarding deterioration.

Restoration means returning a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing elements without the introduction of new material.

Reconstruction means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material.

Adaptation means changing a place to suit the existing use or a proposed use.

Use means the functions of a place, including the activities and traditional and customary practices that may occur at the place or are dependent on the place.

Compatible use means a use which respects the cultural significance of a place. Such a use involves no, or minimal, impact on cultural significance.

Setting means the immediate and extended environment of a place that is part of or contributes to its cultural significance and distinctive character.

Related place means a place that contributes to the cultural significance of another place.

Related object means an object that contributes to the cultural significance of a place but is not at the place.

Associations mean the connections that exist between people and a place.

Meanings denote what a place signifies, indicates, evokes or expresses to people.

Interpretation means all the ways of presenting the cultural significance of a place.

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1.4 Site identification

The site at 49 Newcombe Street in Portarlington, Victoria is located on the north side of Newcombe Street, between Harding Street to the west and Brown Street to the east (refer Figure 1). Newcombe Street is a commercial streetscape located at the top of a hill overlooking the foreshore. The streetscape includes a collection of buildings included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay from the Victorian and Edwardian periods and assorted later infill buildings. The street has a varied building stock, with the heights of buildings ranging from single storey to four storeys in the case of the Portarlington Grand Hotel (HO323). The subject site is wholly situated within the City of Greater Geelong municipality.



Figure 1. Aerial view of subject site.

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2. Heritage designations and controls

2.1 Statutory heritage controls

The adjacent former Post Office, including the narrow strip of land on the west of the subject site is identified on the following statutory registers:

- Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay (HO), Residence (former Post Office) (HO1562).

The site is not identified on the following statutory registers:

- Victorian Heritage Register (VHR);
- Victorian Heritage Inventory (VHI);
- National Heritage List (NHL) or Commonwealth Heritage List (CHL).

2.1.1 Planning and Environment Act (1987)

As noted above, a narrow strip of land to the west of the subject site is included within the City of Greater Geelong Heritage Overlay as the Residence (former Post Office) (HO1562). The former Post Office is identified as being of local significance in the *Bellarine Heritage Study* (Huddle, Howe, Lewis & Francis 1996). Places of local significance are defined on the City of Greater Geelong website 'Heritage Places' as follows:

C level (Local significance): places of local significance are included as heritage overlays in the Greater Geelong planning scheme, requiring planning permits for change.

The statement of significance for the former Post Office as included in the *Bellarine Heritage Study* (Huddle, Howe, Lewis & Francis 1996) is reproduced below:

The former Portarlington Office is of aesthetic, social and historic significance to the local Portarlington community.

It is of significance in its contribution to the commercial main street of Portarlington and to the township and surrounding area as a centre of communication. It was important in linking Portarlington to the wider world by post and telegraph and later was also the site of the telephone exchange. It is one of the few elaborate architectural works constructed on the Bellarine Peninsula in the nineteenth century.

It is of LOCAL cultural significance.

2.1.2 Other relevant planning scheme considerations

The subject site is also subject to Design and Development Overlay (Schedule 21) of the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme. DDO21 includes the following relevant design objectives and responses that are related to heritage:

Streetscape Element	Design objectives	Design Response
Building Form	Ensure that new buildings are designed to respond to the characteristics of the site and locality and demonstrate a high standard of contemporary expression.	Generally, restrict buildings to a maximum height of two storeys. Higher elements must demonstrate that development: - Is sympathetic to buildings of heritage significance and any residential interface; - Is visually unobtrusive when viewed from the public foreshore; - Is visually unobtrusive when viewed from the public foreshore; - Is of high quality design.
	Design building forms that express the fine grain (narrow frontage) pattern of the town centre.	On larger sites articulate facades to emulate the fine grain (narrow frontage) pattern of the town centre.

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Figure 2 Plan showing the extent of DDO21 (indicated in purple) with the subject site indicated in red.

2.2 Heritage places in the vicinity

The subject site is in the vicinity of seven heritage items at:

Locally listed places

- Residence (former Post Office), 1 Harding Street, Portarlinton (HO1562);
- Band Rotunda and Weighbridge, Newcombe Street, Portarlinton (HO1575);
- Residence (former Family Hotel), 40 Newcombe Street, Portarlinton (HO1576);
- Shop (former Old Bakery), 48 Newcombe Street, Portarlinton (HO1577);
- Shop, 62 Newcombe Street, Portarlinton (HO1578);
- Grand Hotel, 76-80 Newcombe Street, Portarlinton (HO323); and
- R.S.L Hall, 8 Harding Street, Portarlinton (HO326).



Figure 3. Map showing the places subject to the Heritage Overlay in proximity to the subject site, with the subject site indicated in red.

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3. Physical description

The subject site comprises a two-storey building with metal cladding currently used for retail purposes. The building has a gable roof form clad in corrugated sheet metal. Along the west and east elevations are evenly spaced rectangular windows (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

A later addition has been constructed to the south elevation which adopts the same profile as the building, however with a slightly lower roof height. The entrance to the building is to the side of this addition.

The broader site is covered by soft landscaping, with some fences enclosing the land from Newcombe Street and the Portarlington Foreshore Reserve. The site slopes down to the north. A driveway with a pair of cyclone wire gates is located on the west side of the building.



Figure 4. View of the existing building on the site with the former post office behind.

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Figure 5. View of the subject site from the south-west.

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4. Proposed works

The proposed works are detailed in the enclosed architectural package prepared by Kerstin Thompson Architects dated November 2025. The works will comprise the total demolition of the existing site at 49 Newcombe Street and the construction of a new three storey development on the site, separated into two built forms, one fronting Newcombe Street, and the rear block addressing the Portarlington Foreshore Reserve. The proposed development will adopt a contemporary language of a three-storey masonry street frontage to Newcombe Street with articulated masonry side walls and secondary lightweight structural elements to make up the balcony composition. The building to the Foreshore Reserve presents as a more informal, lightweight structure with a stepped presentation.

The new development will be constructed of a neutral-coloured brick with hit and miss brickwork to the Newcombe Street extent to provide screening to the glazing, and batten screening to the glazing on the rear extent of the east and west elevations.

To the Newcombe Street elevation, which is intentionally set back to protect viewlines to the post office when approaching from the east, side wing walls will project forward of the main building line to enclose the balconies. This is modified at the upper level which adopts a low curved element to increase viewlines through the upper level. The balconies to the Newcombe Street elevation will be constructed of metal, with vertical palings, and glazed openings evenly spaced across the façade.

The rear (north) elevation will be largely glazed with a battened screens to provide some articulation and screening.

The roof of the southern built form will be flat with solar panels and roof plant while the roof of the rear building will be flat with low-lying native landscaping.

A basement will be constructed and accessed via a ramp on the east side of the property, separated from the east boundary by a green pedestrian walkway. A landscaped edge treatment will be constructed on the west side setback. The two built forms will be separated by a breezeway at ground floor but will incorporate linking balconies at the upper levels.

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5. Assessment of heritage impacts

5.1 Demolition

The proposed works will not involve the demolition of any fabric subject to the heritage overlay and therefore will not have an adverse impact on the adjacent former post office. Demolition works within the narrow land extent of the subject site will involve the removal of existing landscaping and will not result in an impact on fabric of heritage significance.

5.2 New development

While the new development will be predominately located outside the heritage overlay, a small extent of the site to the west will be included. The heritage strategies included at Clause 15.03-1L of the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme notes the following:

Design development in heritage areas to provide a contemporary interpretation that relates to the location, bulk, form and materials of existing or neighbouring significant heritage places.

Clause 15.03-1L of the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme also includes a policy document 'City of Greater Geelong Heritage and Design Guidelines 1997'. These guidelines include specific directions for the construction of a new building in a precinct or for new buildings in proximity to individually listed heritage buildings. Of relevance to the proposed works is the following commentary from the guidelines:

...The aim of infill development in urban conservation areas is to create new buildings which retain and enhance the existing heritage character. To do this, the new building should both harmonise with the existing character and be a good design solution. The new building should be recessive and never visually dominate or obscure views to heritage assets. It should never copy or replicate heritage buildings. An infill development is a contemporary piece of design...

...The proximity of the building to the boundaries of the site should reflect the corresponding position of neighbouring buildings...

...The amount of facade articulation on existing buildings will also influence how well the infill fits with the streetscape. With Federation or Edwardian buildings, projecting bays break up the front facade and provide three dimensional modelling. Verandahs achieve the same effect for many other building styles. Placing a flat fronted infill building in a context like this is inappropriate...

Additionally, the relevant decision guidelines as included at Clause 43.01 of the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme includes the following of relevance to the proposal:

The significance of the heritage place and whether the proposal will adversely affect the natural or cultural significance of the place.

Whether the location, bulk, form or appearance of the proposed building will adversely affect the significance of the heritage place.

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Whether the location, bulk, form and appearance of the proposed building is in keeping with the character and appearance of adjacent buildings and the heritage place.

Whether the proposed works will adversely affect the significance, character or appearance of the heritage place.

As discussed in the architectural design statement, consideration of the broader streetscape, and in particular buildings subject to the heritage overlay, have formed the basis of the design of the new building. This has resulted in a design which adopts a fine grain articulation to the Newcombe Street elevation which is typical of commercial streetscapes. The overall design approach including the articulation, considered front setback and lightweight materials results in a design which responds to its context and fits appropriately into the streetscape embodying the coastal character of the town.

Through the adoption of considered design approaches, the new building, while being greater in height than the adjacent post office, will not adversely impact an understanding or appreciation of the heritage building or its setting and will ensure the recognised heritage values of the post office are not diminished or adversely impacted by the adjacent development. The mass of the new building is set back behind the main building line of the former post office, which ensures that the post office retains visibility and primacy in the streetscape. It is noted that while the overall building height is greater than the adjacent former post office, the upper level of the new development adopts a greater setback to ensure that this level is not overly dominant in relation to the heritage neighbour. The relationship between the two buildings is further managed through design techniques and architectural elements including a curve to the side masonry walls at the top level of the new development and arched openings to the solid walls to allow additional glimpsed views.

In designing the new built form, consideration for the relevant design guidelines has been undertaken to ensure that the contemporary design is readily identifiable, and that the location, bulk, form and appearance of the new building will not impact the presentation or understanding of the post office and its significance.

The design approach is sympathetic to the buildings of heritage significance within the vicinity. While adopting a greater height and utilising a more contemporary materiality, the use of patterned brickwork articulation and screening elements on the east and west elevations assist in breaking down the large expanses of brick to provide a simple, sympathetic backdrop when viewing the new building within the broader streetscape context. This applies to the views from the southeast and the southwest where the post office is most prominent. This approach to the design is in accordance with the relevant sections of the design guidelines and ensures that the new building is understood as a secondary element within the streetscape which will not overwhelm or dominate the surrounding heritage fabric, while remaining a simple and discrete introduction. The setbacks to the new building, including the upper level sitting behind the transverse ridgeline of the former post office roof, also reinforce the primacy of the heritage building in the streetscape.

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5.3 Design and development overlay

In considering the relevant sections of DDO21, of consideration from a heritage perspective is whether the proposed bulk, height, and massing of the new building is appropriate in proximity to the heritage building.

The built form adopts significant setbacks from all boundaries to provide sensitive interfaces with neighbouring properties. The visualisations included in the Design Statement prepared by KTA demonstrate the muted presentation of the upper level which assist in making it recessive when viewed obliquely. The setback of the upper level sits just behind the main traversing gable of the former post office ensuring the new development does not interrupt views of the main building frontage of the post office and particularly from oblique viewpoints. On this basis, the proposed setbacks are not considered to adversely impact the adjacent post office (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Visualisation prepared by KTA showing the proposed view from the street of the former post office

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Further, the incorporation of articulated brick wall on the east and west elevation will provide a sympathetic backdrop to the adjacent former post office. The materiality of the new building is proposed to be complementary to the adjacent post office while also demonstrating its modernity. This has been achieved through the use of a light colour brick which sensitively contrasts with the darker decorative brickwork of the post office, while providing complementary materiality. The external brickwork provides a solid form to contrast with the secondary lightweight elements including glazing and metal balconies which add visual interest while remaining simple in its presentation and with a limited material palette.

While a visible element, the upper floor will read as a secondary element to the main building form in views from Newcombe Street. The setback, materiality and design in particular helps to reinforce the recessive form of the upper level. The brick facade provides a solid base, contrasting with the more lightweight, predominantly glazed presentation of the upper floor. This materiality, in association with the setback and curved wing walls, ensures that the upper floor will be a recessive element, in contrast with the lower levels of the building and the adjacent former post office.

The rear form of the new development will adopt a contemporary form and presentation utilising similar materials to the Newcombe Street presentation. The separation of the built form will reduce the overall bulk and prominence of the development, while creating amenity for the residents and providing a stepped approach towards the Portarlington Foreshore Reserve.

The façade as it presents to Newcombe Street will utilise a forward projecting bay emulating the fine grain pattern of the town centre, and reducing the overall bulk of the building. This approach is supported by the design guidelines which encourage the use of projecting bays to break up the façade. The use of varied treatments to the upper levels also assists in breaking down the structure into smaller components when viewed from the street and responding to the finer grain nature of the Newcombe Street streetscape.

The Schedule to DDO21 includes design objectives that seek to protect the views and vistas from the Town Centre, and views between the main commercial shopping strip and the foreshore are key to this. The setbacks and incorporation of cut outs and glazing will enable views through to the foreshore from Newcombe Street, while the form and design of the new building will be legible as a stepped profile in part following the contours of the land. The additional introduction of a landscape roof and batten screening to the rear built form will further assist in blending this element into the adjacent green landscape.

6. Conclusion

The revised proposal uses a design language and materiality that effectively responds to the adjacent heritage place, and heritage places in the vicinity. This approach is compliant with the relevant objectives and strategies of Clause 43.01 and Clause 15.03-1L as well as DDO21. The scheme is one which has had consideration for the relevant viewlines and vistas and has responded to these elements through a thoughtful approach to massing and scale, while providing a contemporary response to the predominant urban pattern of the town and utilising a materiality that is respectful and complementary to the adjacent post office. As a result of the

considered design process, the overall outcome is one which will not adversely impact the heritage significance of the adjacent heritage place.

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