



Australian  
Institute of  
Architects

# New Ideas for Old Buildings

**Submission to the  
City of Sydney**

**27 April 2016**

## **SUBMISSION BY**

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## **PURPOSE**

This submission is made by the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to the City of Sydney in response to the New Ideas for Old Buildings Discussion Paper.

At the time of the submission the office bearers of the NSW Chapter are:

Shaun Carter (President), Joe Agius (Immediate Past-President), Sarah Aldridge, Melonie Bayl-Smith, Callantha Brigham, Jacqui Connor, Steven Donaghey, Ashley Dunn, Monica Edwards, Chris Jenkins, Peter Kemp, Alex Kibble, Kathlyn Loseby, Andrew Nimmo, Howard Smith, Peter Smith.

The Office Manager of the NSW Chapter is Audrey Braun. This paper was prepared by Murray Brown (Policy Advisor) and the Chapter's Heritage Committee for Chapter Council.

## **INFORMATION**

### ***Who is making this submission?***

- The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is an independent voluntary subscription-based member organization with approximately 11,553 members who are bound by a Code of Conduct and disciplinary procedures.
- The Institute, incorporated in 1929, is one of the 96 member associations of the International Union of Architects (UIA) and is represented on the International Practice Commission.
- The Institute's New South Wales Chapter has 3,348 members, of which 1,951 are registrable architect members – representing 43% of all registered architects in NSW.

### ***Where does the Institute rank as a professional association?***

- At 11,553 members, the RIAA represents the largest group of non-engineer design professionals in Australia.
- Other related organisations by membership size include: The Design Institute of Australia (DIA) - 1,500 members; the Building Designers Association of Australia (BDAA) - 2,200 members; the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) - 1,435 members; and the Australian Academy of Design (AAD) - 150 members.



# New Ideas for Old Buildings

The Institute is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this document.

The discussion paper is a well-argued response to a well-defined problem, but it has major deficiencies:

1. The problem is analysed solely in regard to the space requirements of the creative sector, but ignores other sectors, such as IT, retail and commercial start-ups, that presumably face similar barriers to the adaptation of spaces in existing buildings.
2. A number of the buildings that could be adapted are likely to be heritage items, yet the document ignores the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter process. This provides a clear and logical pathway – involving the analysis, conservation and adaptation of heritage buildings – that could be applied to the adaptive reuse of all existing buildings, regardless of their heritage status.
3. The author does not appear to have consulted the City's own heritage experts, who have considerable experience in dealing with the issues raised in the discussion paper.

The term 'existing buildings' is more useful than 'old buildings' as it encompasses all buildings currently or potentially in use. Existing buildings are arguably the 'black sheep' of the built environment, as the construction industry is primarily focused on new buildings. Yet existing buildings are where most of us live and work.

The adaptation of existing buildings increasingly occupies the attention of built environment professionals, but the industry has been slow to recognise the special needs of this cohort of buildings. Even the AACA competencies required for architect registration do not include recognition of the special skills required to undertake design work on the modification of existing buildings.

The NSW heritage management system provides a well-used and reliable set of tools to address the problem outlined in the document. The pathway to resolution can be achieved through a management plan or strategy that:

- analyses the history and previous changes to the building;
- determines which elements are fundamental to its significance and which need to be conserved;
- develops principles underlying potential changes and policies for undertaking them;
- presents options for configuring the spaces in the building for new uses;
- proposes a pathway for resolving compliance issues with the BCA and other building regulations.

In addition to this logical process, the Institute proposes that the City should establish a small reference committee modelled on the Heritage Council's Fire Access & Services Advisory Panel (currently disbanded but about to be reinstated) that includes experts from the key regulatory authorities, including the Fire Brigade and the City

itself. This panel can assist proponents to resolve issues in a positive and timely manner by agreeing on creative solutions that meet the proponent's user requirements without compromising regulatory compliance or heritage significance.

As noted by two of the speakers in Workshop 2 summarised in the discussion paper, the BCA is not a retrospective document; the key requirement is that alterations to an existing building must comply, even if the building itself does not. The creative interpretation of the code would benefit from the pragmatically focused committee described above as:

- compliance with the Code is performance-based; and
- all the buildings are within the Sydney LGA.