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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

National Trust comments on plans for Windsor Hotel development

The National Trust is pleased that plans proposed for \$32m of heritage investment in the restoration and upgrading of the main body of the Windsor Hotel are included within more than \$260m of proposed redevelopment announced today. This investment would ensure that the grand old lady of Spring Street would once again become the magnificent luxury destination that she once was.

National Trust CEO Mr Martin Purslow said: “Whilst we remain concerned about aspects of the scheme particularly the height of the proposed new tower, the National Trust none the less welcomes the significant investment earmarked for the Hotel Windsor site. We are also supportive of the replacement of the 1961 building on the corner of Spring and Bourke Sts with an exciting contemporary design by Architects DCM. The Trust fully acknowledges that such a prominent site needs a quality design solution that reflects the scale and importance of its surrounds.”

True the Trust would prefer the top of the new addition to be level with the Windsor hotels cornice rather than puffed up to its towers, and for its utilitarian pool and plant room to be considerably less prominent from the steps of parliament, but Martin Purslow went on to say that:

“...the Trust welcomes the architects proposal to integrate the old with a creative and contemporary new design. This proposal along with restoration and removal of later additions including the infill of the Windsor’s lower arcade and glazed portico, will enhance the use and long term viability of the old Windsor Hotel considerably. The proposal to construct a new return complete with windows to its northern tower end for the first time, and to provide a set back separation between old and new and a set back to the plinth to the new building is welcome and good practice.”

However the Trust regrets the proposal to demolish the 1880 / 1888 rear wing of the original building, and replace it with a 27 storey tower that far exceeds the height limit for the area. It is regrettable that investment in such a prominent city site cannot be economically viable if confined to the major restructuring and expansion of space and services in the principle floors, and integration with the significant additional volume of the adjacent new build. If successful the towers construction will inevitably create a dangerous precedent.

National Trust CEO Mr Martin Purslow went on to say that,

“The Trust is supportive of the need to modernise the existing arrangement of many of the internal spaces, circulation and servicing of the Windsor whilst respecting the areas of primary significance, but we question the need for further expansion that results in such a massive tower in clear contravention of mandatory height controls.”

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The Trust acknowledges that given the brief for a tower, that the architects have proposed an expensive design solution to diminish the visual impact on the Windsor and Bourke Hill precinct. Its surface aesthetic, devoid of visible structural elements, comprising an innovative wavy all-glass 'shower curtain' wall is moderated with white "modesty fritting", creating something more like a sculpture than a standard box-like building. However the proposed tower elevation will be very visible from Spring Street and Parliament east. The Trust has always strongly supported the planning controls that ensure that the Bourke Street Hill precinct retains its heritage character and low scale.

"If this proposal is indeed the only way forward to ensure investment in the retention and restoration of this much-loved landmark, we must ensure that the negatives do not outweigh the benefits and that we do not open the flood gates for the Bourke Street Hill precinct adjacent to our parliament to become a veritable Klondike for high rise developers ." Mr Purslow said.

The National Trust (Vic) is a not-for-profit, community funded organisation dedicated to preserving Victoria's heritage for future generations to enjoy.

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