

# 173-199 Elizabeth Street Coburg North

## Heritage Strategy and Management Plan



Report to the City of Moreland  
prepared for Urbex Pty Ltd

July 2008

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# 173-199 Elizabeth Street, Coburg North

## Heritage Interpretation Strategy

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### 1.0 Introduction

This report was commissioned by Urbex Pty Ltd, who is the Development Manager on behalf of the Joint Venture landowner undertaking a predominantly residential redevelopment of the former Kodak Factory at 173 – 199 Elizabeth Street, Coburg North. It has been prepared in response to Moreland City Council's redevelopment objectives for the former Kodak site (endorsed at the 13 September 2006 Council Meeting - DCD83). These objectives identify Council's priorities for the site and, once addressed to Council's satisfaction, it is anticipated that they will be translated into an agreed development outcome prior to Council agreeing to initiate any necessary amendments to the planning scheme.

This Heritage Strategy and Management Plan has been prepared in order to:

1. Recommend the best ways in which the site's heritage significance should be incorporated in the site's redevelopment.
2. Recommend how the site's heritage interpretation is best managed in the long term.
3. Consider the heritage significance of the adjoining Newland Estate to recommend the ways in which the site's redevelopment can best respond to this heritage precinct (e.g. in terms of acceptable built form, scale and setbacks at the interface between the site and the heritage precinct and appropriate access between the new development and the heritage precinct). Regard must be had to existing heritage assessments undertaken by Council, Kodak, National Trust and Heritage Victoria.

## 2.0 Listings

The Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Factory Complex is not subject to a Heritage Overlay or any other form of statutory protection in relation to heritage fabric.

Although the site was nominated for inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register in recent years, it was found to be of an insufficient level of cultural significance to warrant registration. Nor is it included on the Register of the National Estate. The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (File no B7337) classified the site at a state level.

The site is not identified in the City of Moreland’s Schedule to the Heritage Overlay, although the adjacent residential area to the south lies within the Newlands Estate Heritage Overlay precinct (HO124) (Figure 1). Any redevelopment should have regard to an appropriate interface treatment in order to successfully integrate the site with the surrounding urban fabric.

## 3.0 Background

The former Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Factory Complex is located at 173-199 Elizabeth Street, Coburg North, on an irregularly shaped site of approximately 28 hectares. A small creek known as Edgar’s Creek runs through the site. This creek runs from Edwards Lake in the north to meet the Merri Creek at a location near the Coburg Olympic Swimming Pool.



Figure 1 Map showing location and extent of adjacent Heritage Overlay areas

The site can therefore be divided into two distinct areas, namely that to the east of Edgar's Creek and that to the west with a bridge connecting the two. To the east of Edgar's Creek (approximately 20 hectares) the site is surrounded by residential properties and is bounded by Elizabeth, Boyne and Ronald Streets and the rear of properties along Tilley Street.

To the west of Edgar's Creek (approximately seven hectares) the site is surrounded by industrial properties and has access to Newlands Road. This area is to remain in the industrial zone and is outside the scope of this report.

Kodak announced the closure of its Coburg manufacturing operations in September 2004, and manufacturing ceased in December of that year. The company subsequently relocated the bulk of its remaining business operations to a new office in Collingwood in late November 2005.

In late March 2005, the City of Moreland commissioned Heritage ALLIANCE to undertake a heritage assessment of the Kodak site to help determine whether a Heritage Overlay was warranted. The resulting report, the *Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Heritage Assessment*, identified the factory complex as being of local significance. One of the recommendations was that 'all site elements that have identified as being of Primary and Contributory significance be included in the Heritage Overlay of the Planning Scheme to the City of Moreland.' According to this report, seven buildings on the site were identified as being of primary significance, and five buildings and other elements were deemed to be of contributory significance. The report recommended that all elements of primary and contributory significance should be retained.

However, the recommendation to retain all site elements of primary and contributory significance was deemed unsustainable in view of broader issues relating to contamination, adaptive reuse and cost. Kodak therefore commissioned an analysis of the site which sought to balance heritage concerns with the necessity of creating an overall land use and redevelopment mix that would allow the introduction of a viable and appropriate mix of contemporary activities to the site. Given the difficulties inherent in the retention and reuse of the earlier buildings, the case was made that no overlay should be introduced to the site, and that alternatives to a heritage overlay – such as a photographic record, the archiving of materials, and the preparation of a heritage management plan – should be considered as an appropriate response to the particular interest and limitations of the site.

Council subsequently decided against proceeding with an amendment to the Planning Scheme to apply the Heritage Overlay controls of the Moreland Planning Scheme to the Kodak factory complex. Instead, the City of Moreland suggested that the significance of the site be recognised by a number of alternative mechanisms such as:

- The retention of Building 8.
- The relocation of part of the bluestone retaining wall and film testing backdrop into new public open space areas as part of the redevelopment of the site.
- The development of a Heritage Management Plan in conjunction with the successful purchaser of the site.
- Ensuring that Kodak's extensive collections of archival materials and photographs are retained with the appropriate institutions such as the State Library and Museum Victoria.
- Kodak to commission a model of the site for donation to Council for appropriate exhibition purposes.

#### 4.0 Statement of significance

A Statement of Significance for the Kodak factory was prepared as part of the Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Heritage Assessment. This Statement of Significance provides a detailed appreciation of the significance of the place and is provided in full below:

##### ***Heritage ALLIANCE Statement of Significance***

*Collectively, the entire factory complex is of historical, architectural, aesthetic and technological significance:*

*As the national headquarters of a highly important company that was in operation in Australia for almost a century, of particular significance both as the only local manufacturer of photographic films, papers and chemicals, and as a well-known and much-loved household name;*

*As the largest and most prominent factory complex in the City of Moreland (former Cities of Coburg and Brunswick), which has been a significant metropolitan centre for industrial development since the mid-nineteenth century;*

*As a fine and particular intact example of an architect-designed mid-century factory complex in a landscaped setting, of the type that proliferated in Melbourne's outer suburbs in the 1950s and '60s but has since become increasingly rare as sites are rationalized and redeveloped;*

*As a fine, intact and varied example of the work of Harry A & Frank L Norris & Associates, a noted and prolific firm of Melbourne commercial architects, whose post-war work demonstrates a highly personal strain of International Modernism distinguished by elegant detailing and ornamentation, and the use of high-quality materials and finishes.*

## 5.0 Interpretation

It has generally been determined that a simple approach to interpretation is most appropriate for the former Kodak Factory in Coburg North. The interpretation measures can be divided into three main categories: namely, those pertaining to general interpretation of the site, those relating to how retained fabric should be incorporated into the site's redevelopment (e.g. Administration building/ the film testing wall/ the retained bluestone wall/ previous Kodak signage etc.) and guidelines as to how the new residential development should interface with Newlands Estate.

### **Plaques**

It is proposed that either enamelled or etched metal plaques be prepared for distribution across the site. These will be prepared for most of the recently demolished buildings and structures on the site. The signage would ideally give a brief historical and architectural explanation, and include photographic or drawn imagery, and would be readily accessible to the public due to its external positioning. The number of plaques and their content will be confirmed with the City of Moreland as they are prepared. Each plaque will be located in an appropriate manner proximate to the former site of the element it commemorates.

### **Record of demolished buildings**

It is intended that the major types of record relating to demolished buildings will be the items outlined above, including photographs and plaques. It is not intended that the footprint of demolished buildings be identified in the redeveloped site, as this would conflict with the approved landscape treatment, and would not in any case provide an insight into the interest, appearance and role of these buildings.

### **Photographic record**

In accordance with the recommendations of the 2005 *Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Heritage Assessment*, detailed photographic documentation of the former Kodak factory site has already been undertaken, and Kodak went to considerable effort to ensure that a substantial portion of its own extensive collection of photographic and heritage archival holdings collected throughout its history was adequately re-housed with Museum Victoria and the State Library of Victoria. This provides a comprehensive overview of the appearance of the site and its component parts immediately prior to the commencement of the redevelopment, and will remain a valuable tool for the future interpretation and analysis of the site.

### Documentation

The history of the site has already been well documented in the *Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Factory Complex Heritage Assessment* prepared by heritage ALLIANCE (April 2005). It provides a solid basis for the ongoing understanding and interpretation of the site by the public.

The National Trust of Australia (Vic) also holds a file on the former factory complex (File no B7337).

### 6.0 Retained elements

According to Council's Objectives for Redevelopment of the former Kodak site, there were three elements on the site that were to be retained and relocated – namely the Administration building, the film testing backdrop and the bluestone wall.

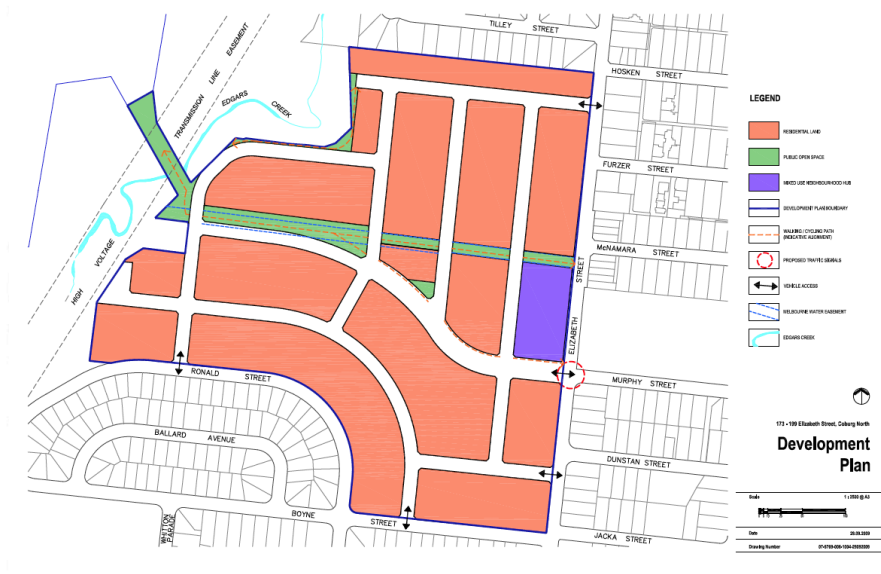


Figure 2 Current indicative concept plan of the former Kodak site

### Administration building

The Head office/ Administration building (c1962-63) is composed of three main elements: a large, six-storey office building on an elongated rectangular plan, a seven-storey tower containing the services core, and a double-storey entrance foyer. The north and south elevations of the six-storey element are constructed of curtain walls which are divided into bays by piers: each bay is then further divided by vertical metal fins. The east and west side elevations are expressed as simple

orange brick walls. The entrance building is expressed as a floating box raised on concrete piers. The walls are clad in polished black marble, while the Elizabeth Street facade is composed of a decorative screen of glazed breeze blocks. The building was completed in 1963. It is a suburban landmark by virtue of its prominence on the site.

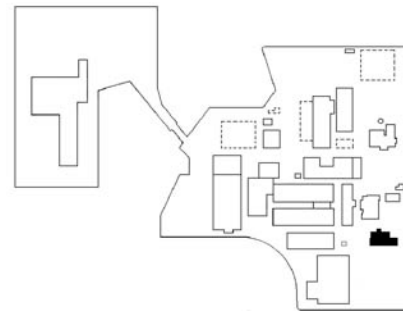


Figure 3 The Administration Building

The Administration building was identified as being of primary significance within the Kodak site and is distinguished by its volumetric composition and fine detailing. The Administration building is a handsome and relatively intact example of the work of important commercial architects HA and FR Norris, and is comparable to the firm's former TAA (now Qantas) head office in Franklin Street, Melbourne.

As the most distinguished and one of the most prominent buildings on the Kodak site – and as perhaps the least problematic of a large number of extremely problematic buildings to adaptively reuse – earlier documents such as the *Kodak Heritage Assessment* by this office (August 2005) anticipated that it might be possible to retain and reuse the former Administration Building. For this reason Building 8 was not included within the demolition permit. We understand, however, that comprehensive feasibility studies have shown that retention and reuse of this building is not feasible for a number of reasons. Furthermore, the extent of change required to successfully adaptively reuse this building is such that its heritage significance would be substantially undermined. For instance, preliminary plans prepared by SJB Architects have shown that a number major modifications would need to be made to the building to ensure it complied with current building regulations whilst at the same time providing a level of accommodation commensurate with market expectations. These included the removal and replacement of all exterior glass and frames, the construction of



internal balconies, the addition of new windows on the north side and, most significantly, the construction of an additional two stories on top of the existing structure. Additionally, a purpose built structure would have been required to accommodate the requisite car parking. Clearly, however, these alterations and additions would fundamentally alter its appearance of Building 8. As the former Administration building relies to a substantial extent for its effect on a consistent commercial character, with the repetition of standard fenestration units, the extent of change required to refurbish Building 8 would undermine the significance of the single, isolated remnant. The possibility that the difficulties inherent in the retention and reuse of Building 8 might eclipse the benefits of converting the building was foreseen in earlier documents. For instance, the *Kodak Heritage Assessment* noted that:

*While the Administration building is of primary significance within the Kodak site, it may be that the building can be adapted for no viable use within the proposed redevelopment of the site. Certainly, there are a number of difficulties associated with converting the building to, for example, residential accommodation. Any proposed adaptation may require substantial alterations and replacement of much of the existing fabric, and this extent of change may substantially reduce the building's significance and its associated potential for interpretation. Furthermore, consideration also needs to be given to the costs associated with retaining historic buildings and how retention of the Administration building would affect the reasonable or economic use of the place, or cause undue financial hardship to the owner. The building may need to be adapted in order to comply with current building regulations, for example. While from a purely heritage perspective it would be desirable to retain all structures of primary and contributory significance, it is also important to recognise that the future success of the site depends upon achieving sustainable adaptive reuse outcomes.*

Should a permit for demolition of Building 8 be issued, it would be appropriate to undertake a detailed photographic record of the building and to deposit archival quality copies of this survey with Museum Victoria and/or the State Library of Victoria should this not have been done already.

### ***Film testing backdrop***

The film testing backdrop (c1960s?) is effectively a wall on a V-shaped plan constructed of eight panels of variegated materials: a smooth white panel, a geometric breeze-block screen panel, a face brown brickwork panel, a cement block panel, a random coursed panel of Castlemaine slate, a ti-tree brush panel, and a panel of interwoven-masonite strips. As its name suggests, the wall was used as a backdrop for film testing procedures. Although the exact date of construction is unknown, the materials used are characteristic of those common during the 1960s.



*Figure 4 The Film Testing Backdrop c2005*

The film testing backdrop was identified as being of contributory heritage significance within the site for its historical associations with the film testing procedures carried out at the Kodak site.

Documented in innumerable Kodak photographic tests, it was intended that the film testing backdrop was to be relocated and accommodated within one of the proposed open space areas of the redeveloped site. Since these earlier documents were prepared, however, an overhanging tree dropped a limb on the wall, effectively demolishing part of the film testing backdrop.

There are now effectively two options for incorporating the film testing backdrop into the new development. Firstly, it would be possible to simply reconstruct the wall to its original form elsewhere on the site, albeit using only half the original fabric. Alternatively, it would be possible to incorporate the variety of materials and textures found on the testing wall into the landscaping for the public open space. Coupled with the appropriate interpretative material, such an approach would still give insight into the former function that the various incongruous textures provided.

### ***Bluestone retaining wall***

Earlier descriptions of the smooth faced bluestone retaining wall (c1960?) noted that it was slightly battered and lay along the northern boundary of the Kodak site. It was reportedly constructed using bluestone pitches that were salvaged when Yarra Grange, Thomas Baker's house in Southampton Crescent, Abbotsford, was demolished. Thomas Baker first began to manufacture sensitised (dry) photographic plates at Yarra Grange in 1886, thereby pioneering photographic manufacture in Australia. Although Baker soon moved his cottage industry to a nearby three-storey brick factory, the company he founded later became Kodak (Australasia). The retaining wall was identified as being only of minor contributory heritage significance in the *Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Heritage Assessment*.

Although, ideally, it was proposed that the bluestone wall could remain in situ, this wall was dismantled as part of the site remediation process. The bluestone pitchers have been retained, however, and are currently stored on-site. Given this, it is recommended that these bluestone pitchers be incorporated into the landscaping of the new public open space along with appropriate interpretative material.

## 7.0 Newlands Estate

### **Newlands Estate Interface Development Guidelines**

Given that the adjacent residential area to the south is under the Newlands Estate Heritage Overlay precinct (HO124), any redevelopment of the former Kodak site should have regard to an appropriate interface treatment in order to successfully integrate the site with the surrounding urban fabric. While the site also shares a small boundary with the Edgar's Creek Reserve Precinct (HO72) to both the north and south, this is not of sufficient length to impact the Edgar's Creek Reserve HO precinct in any significant way.

The *City of Moreland Heritage Review* by Allom Lovell & Associates Pty Ltd (1999) provided the following Statement of Significance for the Newlands Estate:

*The Newlands Estate Precinct is of state historical, social and architectural significance. It is one of the first large-scale estates developed by the Housing Commission of Victoria in Melbourne, and one of the most extensive comprising low- to medium-density housing in line with theories promoted by the British and American Garden Suburb and New Town theorists. It is a notable example of such Garden Suburb planning, and it retains a high degree of intactness. That part of the estate which falls within the City of Moreland is perhaps of greater significance than the portion to the east of Elizabeth Street, as it forms a largely self-contained area bounded [sic] isolated from the rest of the City of Moreland by Edgar's Creek.*

The guidelines developed below outline the type of development that would generally be appropriate in the areas of the former Kodak site that have some degree of heritage sensitivity. In particular, they relate to the interface between the former Kodak site and the heritage precinct area to the south – namely the northern side of Ronald and Boyne Streets. They address issues relating to the following:

- Subdivision pattern
- Built form – height, scale, bulk and setbacks
- Appropriate access between the new development and the heritage precinct

### **Subdivision**

- Subdivision of the northern sides of Ronald and Boyne Streets should respect the existing pattern of development found in the neighbouring Newlands Estate precinct.

### **Built form**

*New buildings adjoining the Newlands estate Heritage Overlay area areas should respond to the architectural qualities of the area.*

- Accepting that a general scale of two storey development is proposed for the eastern portion of the former Kodak site, taller buildings and medium density development should either be located towards the middle of the site – near the current location of Building 8 – or along Elizabeth Street.
- New buildings immediately adjoining the Newlands Estate Heritage Overlay area should adopt a height, scale, massing and general form that is sympathetic to that found in the adjacent heritage overlay area. In particular, new development on the north side of Boyne and Ronald Streets should not overwhelm existing residences on the opposite side of the street. To this end, new residences along these streets should not present more than two storeys to the street.
- New dwellings directly opposite the Newlands Estate heritage Overlay area should adopt setbacks similar to those of buildings opposite in order to reinforce the prevailing local siting patterns and to ensure that new development does not overwhelm the streetscape.
- Buildings may be contemporary in style provided they adopt an understated character and do not visually dominate the streetscape.
- Reproduction of historic architectural styles should be avoided and new buildings should be easily distinguished from original historic fabric of the Newlands Estate area.

## 8.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, it has generally been determined that a simple approach to interpretation is most appropriate for the former Kodak Factory. Given the difficulties inherent in retaining and reusing many of the earlier buildings, the case was made that no overlay should be introduced to the site, and that alternatives to a heritage overlay – such as a photographic record, the archiving of materials, and the preparation of a heritage management plan – should be considered as an appropriate response to the particular interest and limitations of the site. Rather than amending the Planning Scheme to apply the Heritage Overlay controls, the City of Moreland therefore suggested that the significance of the site be recognised by a number of alternative mechanisms as set out in their redevelopment objectives for the former Kodak site. The interpretation measures can be divided into three main categories: namely, those pertaining to general interpretation of the site, those relating to how retained fabric should be incorporated into the site's redevelopment (e.g. Administration building/ the film testing wall/ the retained bluestone wall/ previous Kodak signage etc.) and guidelines as to how the new residential development should address the Newlands Estate Heritage Overlay precinct (HO124) to the south. These can be summarised as follows:

### **General interpretation of the site**

As part of the general interpretation of the site, it is proposed that a number of plaques be prepared for distribution across the site. These would provide a brief historical and architectural explanation of most of the recently demolished buildings and structures on the site, and would include photographic or drawn imagery. The number of plaques and their content will be approved by Council prior to their installation.

In accordance with the recommendations of the 2005 *Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Heritage Assessment*, detailed photographic documentation of the former Kodak factory site has already been undertaken, and Kodak went to considerable effort to ensure that a substantial portion of its own extensive collection of photographic and heritage archival holdings collected throughout its history was adequately re-housed with Museum Victoria and the State Library of Victoria. The history of the site has also been well documented in the *Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd Factory Complex Heritage Assessment* prepared by heritage ALLIANCE (April 2005).

### **Retained elements**

According to Council's Objectives for Redevelopment of the former Kodak site, there were three elements on the site that were to be retained and relocated – namely the Administration building, the film testing backdrop and the bluestone wall.<sup>1</sup> Although earlier documents anticipated that it might be possible to retain

<sup>1</sup> These objectives identify Council's priorities for the site and, once addressed to Council's satisfaction, it is anticipated that they will be translated into an agreed development outcome prior to Council agreeing to initiate any necessary amendments to the planning scheme.

and reuse the former Administration Building (c1962-63), feasibility studies show that the extent of change required to successfully adaptively reuse this building would substantially undermine its significance. Any proposed adaptation would require substantial alterations and replacement of much of the existing fabric, and this extent of change would substantially reduce the building's significance and its associated potential for interpretation. Consideration also needs to be given to the costs associated with retaining Building 8, in particular the costs incurred in adapting the building to comply with current building regulations. Should a permit for demolition of Building 8 be issued, it would be appropriate to undertake a detailed photographic record of the building and to deposit archival quality copies of this survey with Museum Victoria and/or the State Library of Victoria should this not have been done already.

Documented in innumerable Kodak film testing procedures, the film testing backdrop – which was identified as being of contributory heritage significance – was intended to be relocated and accommodated within one of the proposed open space areas of the redeveloped site. Since these earlier documents were prepared, however, an overhanging tree dropped a limb on the wall, effectively demolishing part of the film testing backdrop. Two options for incorporating the film testing backdrop into the new development now exist: either the wall could be simply reconstructed to its original form elsewhere on the site as originally envisioned, or the materials and textures found on the testing wall could be incorporated into the landscaping for the public open space, accompanied by appropriate interpretative material.

Although, ideally, it was proposed that the bluestone retaining wall (identified as being only of minor contributory heritage significance) that lay along the northern boundary of the Kodak site could remain in situ, this wall was dismantled as part of the site remediation process. The bluestone pitchers have been retained, however, and are currently stored on-site. Given this, it is recommended that these bluestone pitchers be incorporated into the landscaping of the new public open space along with appropriate interpretative material.

### **Newlands Estate Interface Development Guidelines**

In general, new buildings directly adjoining the Newlands Estate Heritage Overlay precinct (HO124) to the south should respond to the architectural qualities of the area in terms of setbacks, height, scale, massing, bulk, and general form. New dwellings directly opposite the Newlands Estate – namely on the north side of Boyne and Ronald Streets – should not present more than two storeys to the street and should not overwhelm the streetscape. In terms of general urban design issues, the subdivision of the northern sides of Ronald and Boyne Streets should respect the existing pattern of subdivision development found in the neighbouring Newlands Estate precinct. Taller and medium density development should either be located towards the middle of the site, or along Elizabeth Street. There should be appropriate access between the new development and the heritage precinct, and

future redevelopment of the former Kodak site should generally have regard to an appropriate interface treatment in order to successfully integrate the site with the surrounding urban fabric.