

**Wodonga Olympic Pool**

**6 Stanley Street, Wodonga**

**Heritage Council Registration Committee**

**Hearing – 21 November 2012**

**Members – Mr James Norris (chair), Ms Helen Martin, Mr Bryn Davies**

# Decision of the Heritage Council

After considering a recommendation and the submissions and conducting a hearing into those submissions, pursuant to Section 42(1)(d)(i) the Heritage Council has refused to register the place and refers the recommendation and submissions to the City of Wodonga for consideration for an amendment to the Wodonga Planning Scheme.

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| **James Norris (Chair)** |  | **Helen Martin** |  | **Bryn Davies** |

**Decision Date – 13 February 2013**

**APPEARANCES**

**Executive Director, Heritage Victoria**

Dr Kerry Jordan appeared on behalf of the Executive Director.

**Nominator**

Dr Margaret Young appeared. She objected to the Executive Director’s recommendation. Dr Young also appeared on behalf of Ms Genevieve Johnston.

**Owner**

The City of Wodonga was represented by Ms Adeline Lane of Maddocks Lawyers. Ms Lane called Mr Peter Barrett, architectural historian and heritage consultant, as an expert witness.

**Other parties that appeared**

Ms Lisa Gervasoni appeared and made submissions in support of the Executive Director’s recommendation.

**Written submissions**

Written submissions objecting to the Executive Director’s recommendation were received from Mrs Jean Whitla, Associate Professor Hannah Lewi and Ms Judy Nyman. The Hon Bill Baxter made a submission in support of the recommendation.

**Introduction/background**

## The Place

1. The Wodonga Olympic Swimming Pool (‘the Wodonga Pool’), a complex of pools and buildings on a one hectare site located near the town centre, was opened in 1959, following four years of construction.
2. A brick entrance building leads to an Olympic-size pool, octagonal toddlers’ pool, learners’ pool, a water slide and small pool, change-rooms and a plant room. The pools and buildings are set in a grassed area with scattered trees.
3. A citation for the Wodonga Pool can be found in the inventory of the 2004 ‘Wodonga City Council, Victoria: Heritage Study’ prepared by Peter Freeman of Peter Freeman Pty Ltd. The entry for the Wodonga Pool states that it was not recommended for inclusion in the Local Planning Scheme, the Victorian Heritage Register (‘the Register’) or the Register of the National Estate.

## Nomination

1. The Wodonga Pool was nominated for inclusion in the Register by Dr Young on 29 March 2012.

## Recommendation of the Executive Director

1. On 18 May 2012, the Executive Director recommended that the Wodonga Pool not be included in the Register but be referred to the City of Wodonga for inclusion in the Wodonga Planning Scheme.
2. Four objecting submissions were received during advertising of the recommendation. Pursuant to section 40(1) of the *Heritage Act 1995* (‘the Heritage Act’), a hearing was required to be held.

**Site Inspection**

1. The Committee inspected the site, accompanied by a representative of Wodonga City Council and the Manager of the Heritage Council Secretariat, on 16 November 2012. No submissions were received during the inspection.

## Preliminary Matters

*Visitors Book*

1. As there were no objections from other parties, a visitors’ book loaned to Dr Young by the Wodonga Historical Society was tabled for inspection by the Committee and other parties.

*Submissions not relating to cultural heritage significance*

1. The City of Wodonga objected to the inclusion of submissions that did not relate to cultural heritage significance, particularly those in relation to the proposed redevelopment of the site and the options available to the Committee, under the Heritage Act, in making its decision. The City of Wodonga argued that, pursuant to Section 38 of the Heritage Act, the Committee may only consider submissions in relation to cultural heritage significance.
2. The Committee notes that Section 38 of the Heritage Act applies to submissions made during the advertising of the Executive Director’s recommendation. In reaching its decision, the Committee has only considered issues relating to whether or not the place is of cultural heritage significance. Future plans for the place have not informed the Committees decision.

**Issues**

1. This section is not intended to be a complete record of submissions that were made to the Committee. It is a summary of what the Committee considers to be the key issues, followed by an explanation of the position the Committee takes on each issue.
2. Any reference to Criteria refers to the ‘Heritage Council Criteria for Assessment of Places of Cultural Heritage Significance’ (see Attachment 1 to this report).

**Summary of issues**

1. The Executive Director was of the view that the Wodonga Pool has significance to the local population but does not satisfy any of the criteria at a state level.
2. Ms Gervasoni, Mr Barrett and the City of Wodonga were also of the view that the Wodonga Pool does not reach the threshold for inclusion in the Register.
3. Dr Young submitted that the Wodonga Pool satisfies all of the criteria. Ms Johnston submitted that in terms of physical design, the pool satisfies criteria B, D, E and F and in terms of significance to the community, satisfies criteria A, C, G and H.

## Criterion A - Importance to the course, or pattern of Victoria’s cultural history

1. Dr Young and Ms Johnston argued that the Wodonga Pool is of importance to the course or pattern of Victoria’s history. Mr Barrett and the Executive Director held the opposite view.

*Submissions and evidence*

1. Dr Young submitted that the Wodonga Pool is of major importance to the course or pattern of Victoria’s cultural history and that it satisfies Criterion A for four reasons:
* as a regional site of importance;
* for its potential to revitalise cultural heritage given parallel activities of Places Victoria;
* for the nature of the funding for its construction; and
* for its demonstration of the shift from segregated swimming in natural watercourses to integrated, artificial pools.
1. Dr Young argued that for many travellers through the region, the Wodonga Pool was a resting place and, as a result, the pool changed the experience of travel through the northeast part of Victoria. She argued that Victoria's cultural development would have been different without the Wodonga Pool and for both of these reasons, it is of significance to the State.
2. The Executive Director submitted that the period immediately after World War II was an important time in the development of Victoria, which is illustrated by many things, including municipal swimming pools. It was put to the Committee that there is no doubt that swimming pools have played an important part in Victoria’s history, but that this example cannot be distinguished from other municipal swimming pools constructed around the State after World War II.

Regional site of importance

1. Dr Young argued that the Wodonga Pool’s importance as a special cultural site for regional Victoria is demonstrated by the positive comments from Victorian, interstate and international visitors recorded in the visitors’ book held by the Wodonga Historical Society. She submitted that the book contains comparisons provided by primary users and argued that it provides a rare and unique mode to demonstrate that the Wodonga Pool was regarded as superior.
2. In the Executive Director’s view, positive comments in the visitors’ book are not necessarily an indicator of state significance. The City of Wodonga also took this view and submitted that the visitors’ book is not a sufficient tool for comparative analysis as it does not provide expert opinions. Mr Barrett put to the Committee that very little weight should be given to the visitors’ book when determining significance.
3. Dr Young argued that ‘the long family road trip, often taken during summer, is a special aspect of Australian cultural life’. She put to the Committee that the Wodonga Pool was a special feature of many such road trips, made by Victorians and interstate and international visitors in the 1960s and 1970s. Dr Young also noted that the Wodonga Pool demonstrates the importance of transport networks and the Australian experience of outdoor Olympic swimming pools.

Parallel activities of Places Victoria

1. Dr Young directed the Committee’s attention to the announcement by the Victorian Government that Places Victoria will deliver a major revitalisation project in Wodonga. She submitted that the preservation of the Wodonga Pool would enhance the place-making activities of Places Victoria.
2. The City of Wodonga submitted that the activities of Places Victoria in Wodonga are not relevant to this Committee’s consideration.

Pool’s construction

1. Dr Young submitted that the Wodonga Pool is important to the course or pattern of Victoria’s history as an example of regional ingenuity and community spirit. She argued that, although many shires used community-raised funds for similar building projects at the time, this is a good representative example given the relative lack of wealth in the region and the ‘cohesion’ of groups who provided volunteer labour, including new migrants and the army. According to Dr Young, ‘the pool became a focal point for community-building in this growing regional centre...and this special regional aspect is of major importance to the course of Victoria’s cultural history’. Dr Young submitted that the community involvement and sharing between councils demonstrated by the Wodonga Pool’s construction is significant in what was a time of regional dislocation.
2. The Executive Director submitted that community involvement in the construction of community facilities, particularly pools, is so common as to be the norm. Ms Gervasoni and Mr Barrett agreed, pointing out that many pools in northern Victoria were built with the help of community fundraising and volunteer labour from local citizens. Mr Barrett gave as an example the pool at St James, built in 1954 when the community only had a population of 300.

Shift from segregated swimming in natural water courses to integrated, artificial pools

1. Dr Young submitted that the pool is illustrative of the shift from segregated swimming in natural waterways in the nineteenth century to the creation of artificial public pools. According to Dr Young, the open air communal change rooms are ‘an early example of a historic shift away from private bathing boxes and associated prudery’.
2. Ms Gervasoni identified ‘bathing places’ as a relevant theme from *Victoria’s Framework of Historical Themes* (February 2010) and submitted that the transition from natural swimming places to chlorinated pools is an important phase in the history of these places in Victoria. She also noted a significant period of municipal public pool building which began in the interwar period and expanded in the postwar period, particularly in association with the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.
3. The Executive Director submitted that the change from swimming in natural water courses to artificial pools occurred throughout Victoria in the early to mid twentieth century and is not particular to the Wodonga Pool.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee finds that Criterion A is not satisfied and that the Wodonga Pool does not demonstrate importance to the course or pattern of Victoria’s cultural history.
2. The Committee was not convinced by arguments that the Wodonga Pool is a regional site of importance for domestic and international visitors or as a rest stop for those on long road trips. The Committee agreed with the Executive Director and Mr Barrett and placed little weight on the entries quoted from the visitors’ book.
3. The benefits or otherwise of the activities of Places Victoria in Wodonga are not within the Committee’s consideration. Submissions in relation to these activities have not informed this decision.
4. The Committee formed the view that the fact that the Wodonga Pool was constructed using community fundraising and volunteer labour is not of such historical importance as to satisfy this criterion.
5. The Committee notes that the Wodonga Pool is an example of one town’s transition from natural to artificial pools, but is not convinced that the place is a strong, early or notable example of this transition worthy of recognition at a state level.

## Criterion B - Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria’s cultural history

1. The parties disagreed about whether the place possessed rare or endangered aspects of significance in Victoria’s cultural history.

*Submissions and evidence*

1. According to Dr Young, the outdoor pool, once common across regional and suburban centres, is now becoming rarer. She submitted that many fine examples have been demolished or modified and that ‘[t]he Wodonga Pool presents an opportunity to retain an exemplar of this uniquely Australian type of public and recreational post WWII amenity before there are too few left in Victoria’.
2. Associate Professor Lewi submitted that the pool merits inclusion in the register ‘because of its increasing rarity in regional Victoria’.
3. Dr Young identified the change rooms and an unusually long bicycle rack as being rare elements. She submitted that the change rooms were ingeniously designed using sun and air-drying to facilitate hygiene and ventilation and that the bicycle rack is a reminder of the popularity of cycling in the past.
4. The Executive Director submitted that country pools, as a group of places, are not endangered and that the change rooms and bicycle rack are common and not particularly notable elements. Mr Barrett shared this view and submitted that the place cannot be considered to possess an uncommon, rare or endangered aspect of the cultural history of Victoria.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee finds that the Place does not satisfy Criterion B. The Committee gives weight to the Executive Director’s submission that country pools are not endangered and was not convinced that the elements identified as rare (the change rooms, unusually long bicycle rack, etcetera) elevate the pool to such a level that it warrants inclusion in the Register.

## Criterion C - Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria’s cultural history

1. The parties disagreed on the place’s potential to yield significant information. The Executive Director did not consider this criterion to be relevant.

*Submissions and evidence*

1. Dr Young submitted that the continued use of the pool presents the potential for social history to be collected. She also put to the Committee that the insitu facilities and associated artefacts (such as the visitors’ book) had potential to yield significant information.
2. Mr Barrett held that the place does not have any apparent potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the history of Victoria.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee finds that the Place does not satisfy Criterion C. In the Committee’s view, the physical facilities and documentary evidence relating to the place (including the visitors’ book) do not indicate a likelihood that the place contains physical evidence of historical interest that is not currently visible.

## Criterion D - Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects

1. The parties disagreed about whether the place is a representative example of a class of cultural places worthy of inclusion in the Register.

*Submissions and evidence*

What is the class of cultural places in question?

1. Dr Young and Ms Johnston submitted a number of classes of cultural places that the Wodonga Pool could be considered to demonstrate the principal characteristics of, including:
* ‘an intact early example of the modernist artificial pool located in the heart of a regional centre’;
* ‘a hard-won community built, public amenity and landscaped place’;
* postwar 1950s pools;
* modernist outdoor swimming pools; and
* modernist pools built after the 1956 Olympics.
1. Ms Johnston submitted that the learners’ pool in particular is representative of artistic public pool design of the postwar era and argued that it is an excellent example of an increasingly rare postwar Olympic pool architecture.

What are the principal characteristics of these places?

1. Ms Johnston submitted that features common to pools of similar age are: community funding, a central location, a T-shaped design, tiling, change-rooms, bicycle rack and landscaped setting.
2. Dr Young noted that although the diving blocks and boards have been removed, all alterations that have been made to the complex are reversible.
3. At the hearing, both Dr Young and Mr Barrett gave a set of characteristics of the class of place to which they believed the Wodonga Pool belongs.
4. The features that Dr Young nominated included:
* central location;
* open changing spaces;
* mixed use: Olympic adult pool, toddler pool; and
* community participation.
1. Mr Barrett’s nominated features included:
* entry pavilion;
* mixed use: adult and toddler;
* diving options;
* landscaped setting;
* 55-yard pool length; and
* other pools for particular purposes.

What distinguishes this particular example?

1. Dr Young submitted that the Wodonga Pool is distinguished from other examples by its expansive size, surrounding landscape and location within central Wodonga. In her view, there are no comparable pools on the Register.
2. Ms Johnston put to the Committee that the Wodonga Pool is a particularly good example as it has exceptional qualities such as extensive grounds covered in grass from a local stock route, and a central location in a ‘historic’ area.
3. The Executive Director submitted that the Wodonga Pool is not an outstanding example, but is typical of 1950s regional swimming pools, of which there are many throughout the State. The Executive Director’s written submission noted that there are ‘many other examples in Victoria and there are more intact examples which better demonstrate their original form and features’. However, Dr Jordan withdrew this statement during her verbal submission. According to Dr Jordan, most regional swimming pools of the 1950s are set amid lawns and trees and this particular example is not remarkable in this respect. She also submitted that the T-shaped design and modernist entrance building are not particularly notable and seen in many other pools in Victoria.
4. Ms Gervasoni surveyed 327 pools in Victoria while researching her paper ‘Pre Olympic Swimming Pools in Victoria’. She concluded that concrete pools are the best represented type in Victoria and that there are at least 60 municipal concrete Olympic-sized pools in Victoria. She submitted that six of these are of a very similar form to the pool at Wodonga.
5. Ms Gervasoni argued that the Wodonga Pool is not a good example of its kind and does not demonstrate a level of intactness or innovation to warrant inclusion in the Register. She submitted that better representative examples may be found at Swan Hill, Daylesford and Castlemaine. However, as concrete municipal Olympic-sized pools are not rare, Ms Gervasoni submitted that it is difficult to determine which may be the best examples. In her view, none stand out as meeting the criteria for inclusion in the register.
6. Mr Barrett argued that the Place is one of a number of public swimming pools built in country Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne in the decades immediately following World War II. He argued that the complex is not particularly intact and many of the alterations and additions are unsympathetic. He also submitted that there is no highly resolved or consistent landscape plan. Mr Barrett submitted that although the place demonstrates the principal characteristics of a public swimming pool, many of these elements are commonly found at public pools across the State. In his view, probably the most unusual pool complex of the period is the Shepparton pool complex, which featured a man-made beach on the side of the adjacent Lake Victoria.
7. The Executive Director submitted that it may be appropriate to include an example of a postwar swimming pool in the Register; however, she was of the view that in the absence of a typological study or a detailed comparative analysis it is not appropriate to add individual examples on an *ad hoc* basis. Ms Gervasoni concurred with the Executive Director and submitted that the limited comparative analysis that has been undertaken has not made the case for the elevation of the Wodonga Pool to such a level of significance as to be included in the Register.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee was satisfied that the Wodonga Pool was part of a significant phase of municipal public-pool building which began in the interwar period and accelerated in the postwar period, particularly in association with the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. The Committee was supplied with evidence to suggest that many of the principal characteristics of this class of place are evident in the Wodonga Pool (albeit with some modifications, such as the removal of diving blocks) including:
* outdoor, chlorinated main pool;
* other pools for particular purposes;
* mixed use: adult and toddler;
* landscaped setting; and
* associated buildings and infrastructure (such as an entry pavilion, shop and change rooms).
1. The Committee was not satisfied that this example is worthy of registration. The Committee noted the evidence that over 50 public pools were built in Victoria in the 1950s alone; and that there are likely to be more intact, earlier or more influential examples than the Wodonga Pool that may be worthy of registration. The Committee notes that a typological study may assist in identifying more significant examples.

## Criterion E - Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics

1. The parties disagreed on the importance of the place’s aesthetic characteristics.

*Submissions and evidence*

1. Dr Young submitted that the pool and wading pool ‘embody the functional and stylistic characteristics of postwar modern utility in architecture and building’. She submitted that the ‘brave’ wing design is uncommon and has both aesthetic and functional values. Dr Young also identified the modernist entrance pavilion, intricate octagonal tiling, change-rooms, geometric layout of the pools and grounds and the surrounding landscaping as having aesthetic value.
2. Ms Johnston submitted that the pool has aesthetic significance and identified the sand-coloured tiles, tiered steps, landscape and buildings as being of particular value.
3. The Executive Director argued that the Wodonga Pool is not an outstanding or ‘remarkably intact’ example of modernist design; it conforms to the typical design features of pools of its time. The buildings are of no particular interest, being utilitarian in nature and not architect-designed.
4. In Mr Barrett’s view, the complex does not have a particularly high level of aesthetic value. He agreed with the Executive Director that most of the elements are utilitarian in nature and commonly found in municipal pool complexes.
5. The Executive Director also submitted that Heritage Victoria’s horticulturalist did not believe any of the trees to be significant.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee finds that the Place does not satisfy Criterion E. The Committee was not convinced that it had been demonstrated that the aesthetic values of the place reach the threshold for inclusion in the Register.

## Criterion F - Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period

1. The parties disagreed on the place’s importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

*Submissions and evidence*

1. Dr Young submitted that the pool should be recognised as a major site of regional ingenuity and civic initiative with relevance at the state level. She put to the Committee that the design of the pool, allowing easy access for the aged and disabled, showed uncommon foresight.
2. Ms Johnston submitted that the learners’ and toddlers’ pools demonstrate technical achievement and creativity. She also argued that the landscape and building design are technically significant and that community involvement lead to creative solutions such as the use of turf from a local stock route for surrounding lawns.
3. In Mr Barrett’s view, the place does not demonstrate a high degree of creative or technical achievement that is significant to a particular period of the history of Victoria. The Executive Director agreed, pointing out that the pool was constructed to designs that were standard at the time.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee finds that the Place does not satisfy Criterion F. The Committee was not convinced that the technical achievements and creative exploits identified in submissions are at such a level as to reach the threshold for inclusion in the Register.

## Criterion G - Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions

1. The parties disagreed about the level of social significance of the place.

*Submissions and evidence*

1. Dr Young submitted that the pool is important to a group of Victorians who visited it for relaxation, recreation and cultural learning about Victoria in its regional context. She conceded that this group is ‘nebulous, diffuse and difficult to trace’. Dr Young put to the Committee that the pool is also particularly associated with local groups such as very young and very old pool users, the Wodonga Swimming Club, and the Blue Light Disco. She also argued that the Wodonga pool has a significant association with the community members who were involved in its construction, including the army and migrants.
2. Associate Professor Lewi submitted that the pool should be included in the Register ‘because of its cultural and social significance, both as a physical place, a long-standing community amenity and asset’.
3. In terms of the place’s current social value, Dr Young conceded that although the place was of value to the local community, visits to the pool by the broader Victorian community may have lessened. Ms Johnston argued that a review of community campaigns (such as petitions) provides evidence of the current cultural heritage value to the community.
4. The City of Wodonga submitted that in proceedings at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, petitions do not carry a great deal of weight due to limited probity. Ms Lane argued that petitions do not constitute evidence of community attachment of social value at the state level.
5. Mr Barrett submitted that although the visitors’ book indicates that the pool was used by people from across the State, the special or strong association this place has currently could only be considered to be with the local community. He indicated that there was a case for social significance at a local level; however, he held that there is no strong or special association with a particular community that would make the place of importance to Victoria.
6. In the Executive Director’s view, the Wodonga pool is not socially significant to Victorians.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee finds that the Place does not satisfy Criterion G. The Committee agrees with the submissions of the Executive Director, Ms Young and Mr Barrett that there is evidence that the place is significant at a local level for its associations with Wodonga Community groups. However, the Committee was not convinced that there is a strong, special and current connection sufficient to meet the threshold for state significance.

## Criterion H - Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria’s history

1. The parties disagreed about the importance of the place’s association with a person or groups of persons of importance in Victoria’s history. The Executive Director did not consider this criterion to be relevant.

*Submissions and evidence*

1. Dr Young submitted that the place has a special association with the community and volunteer labour that were instrumental in its creation.
2. Mr Barrett held that there is no apparent special association with the life or works of a person or group of persons of importance in Victoria’s history.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee finds that the place does not satisfy Criterion H. The group of people identified by Dr Young have played a significant role in the life of the local community, but their contribution is not, in the view of the Committee, of such great importance that it warrants recognition at a state level.

## What are the Heritage Council’s options?

*Submissions and evidence*

1. Dr Young made submissions about the Heritage Council’s options. She submitted that if the Heritage Council does not accept that the Wodonga Pool should be included in the Register, it should refer the recommendation and submissions to the City of Wodonga for consideration for an amendment to a planning scheme. Dr Young argued that the place is at least of local significance and noted that all parties, other than the Council, say that the place should at least be protected under the planning scheme.
2. Dr Young also submitted that the Heritage Council should make full use of its powers and of the activities of other government agencies (such as Places Victoria) to find a resolution that will preserve the pool.

*Discussion and conclusion*

1. The Committee notes that it has the ability to make recommendations to other planning authorities and government agencies to ensure the protection or conservation of a place. In this case, the Committee recommends that the City of Wodonga consider an amendment to the Wodonga Planning Scheme.

**Conclusion**

1. The Committee finds that the Wodonga Olympic Pool does not reach the threshold for state significance in relation to any of the Heritage Council’s criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register and refers the recommendation and submissions to the City of Wodonga for consideration for an amendment to the Wodonga Planning Scheme.



**ATTACHMENT 1**

**HERITAGE COUNCIL CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF PLACES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGIFICANCE**

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| CRITERION A | Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria’s cultural history. |
| CRITERION B | Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria’s cultural history. |
| CRITERION C | Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria’s cultural history. |
| CRITERION D | Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or objects. |
| CRITERION E | Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics. |
| CRITERION F | Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period. |
| CRITERION G | Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions. |
| CRITERION H | Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria’s history. |

**These were adopted by the Heritage Council at its meeting on 7 August 2008, and replace the previous criteria adopted by the Heritage Council on 6 March 1997.**