

ratio:

**Amendment C387
Melbourne Planning Scheme
527 - 555 Bourke Street, Melbourne**

**Urban Design Evidence
Prepared by Tim Biles BA Dip TRP FPIA**

**Prepared for The Julliard Group
Instructed by Urbis**

August 2021



Urban Design Evidence]

Table of contents:

Section	Page No.
1 Introduction	1
2 Subject Site and Built Form	2
3 Discussion	7
4 Concluding Comments	9
APPENDIX A - Photographic Comparison	10
APPENDIX B - Additional Site Photos	12
APPENDIX C - Witness Statement	15

ratio:consultants pty ltd

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced without written permission of **ratio:**consultants pty ltd.

Disclaimer: neither **ratio:**consultants pty ltd nor any member or employee of **ratio:**consultants pty ltd takes responsibility in anyway whatsoever to any person or organisation (other than that for which this report is being prepared) in respect of the information set out in this report, including any errors or omissions therein.

ratio:consultants pty ltd is not liable for errors in plans, specifications, documentation or other advice not prepared or designed by **ratio:**consultants pty ltd.



1. Introduction

- 001 Proposed Amendment C387 (Am C387) to the Melbourne Planning Scheme seeks to implement findings of the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review 2020, principally by applying the Heritage Overlay to 137 individual places and 5 precincts, as well as revising a small number of existing Heritage Overlays. The amendment would also introduce separate Statements of Significance for all heritage places and precincts and update references in the planning scheme accordingly.
- 002 I have been instructed by Urbis on behalf of The Juilliard Group, owners of 527-555 Bourke Street, to review the proposed permanent inclusion of this property within a Heritage Overlay as a Significant Heritage Place, and consider whether, from an urban design perspective, the proposed permanent Heritage Overlay is warranted.
- 003 This statement examines the nature of the land at 527-555 Bourke Street (the site), the buildings constructed in the late 1960s, and the more recent building works to consider how the function of the site has changed over time. This assessment then informs a discussion of whether permanent inclusion in a Heritage Overlay would work for or against ongoing adaption on the site and whether it might have the effect of unintentionally compromising further improvements to the functioning of the site.
- 004 Whilst I am not a heritage expert, this statement does necessarily comment on heritage matters insofar as they intersect with urban design considerations. Urban design (and planning) involves judgements on the value of often competing aspects of the built environment. This requires an understanding of how places are used and how places adapt, and how this interacts with the value of their historic context.



Figure 1 - AMP Tower under construction in 1969

2. Subject Site and Built Form

- 005 The site is formed by its bordering streets, namely Bourke, William, Little Collins and Church, as shown in Figure 2. The site measures approximately 85m along Bourke Street and 90m along William Street, and has a fall of approximately 5m from the site's northeast corner to its southwest corner.
- 006 The site was planned with two buildings – a 26 storey tower holding the northeast corner (the AMP building), and a 6 storey 'L' shaped building wrapping around the frontages to Little Collins and Church Street (the St James building). These were designed by American architectural firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill with Bates Smart & McCutcheon acting as their local partner, and constructed between 1965-1969. I will not include a detailed description of the two buildings here, as this is set out in the proposed Statement of Significance, and I have discussed their changing form below.
- 007 The space between the buildings was planned as an open, publicly accessible plaza that connected Bourke Street to William Street, with small arcades through the St James Building linking to Little Collins and Church Street. The assessment of the site in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review 2020 suggests that the plaza may have been a negotiated trade-off that allowed building height above the height limits of the time in exchange for an offer of public space. As the images at Figures 2 and 5 show, outside of colonnades the original plaza was an open and austere space, with a large steel statue by artist Clement Meadmore (now removed) often providing the only presence.
- 008 I came to know the site when I worked at the corner of Queens Street and Lonsdale Street in the 1970s, and regularly used the plaza as a cut through on my way to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal at 500 Collins Street. Despite its convenience, the plaza was notorious for being an unforgiving environment, mainly due to sudden gusts of wind that were tunnelled into the space, but also for being simultaneously uncovered and often without sunlight due to the shadow of the AMP tower to the north, and despite there being a consistent building frontage to the plaza, there was little ground level activity.
- 009 The internal and street facing colonnades were also often challenging for pedestrians due to wind. In the manner of Post-War Modernist design, it was a largely inhospitable space to walk through and regularly criticised by those who tried to use it for respite or a simple coffee. As is the way of these things, it was a building that served to inform planning policy now referred to as urban design. The small streets and laneways that had been seen as

secondary access and service corridors became recognised for their potential contribution to central city life. Through this process buildings 'learnt' - mostly for the better but sometimes not.

- 010 New and old buildings found ways to activate service lanes and create interfaces with streets that were engaged with street life. The downdraft wind consequences of taller building proposals were tested, and buildings refined and replanned to minimise impacts at the ground plane. Slope was better resolved in new designs and car parking in basements discouraged, reducing the impact of wide crossovers on the street. The consequences of shadow were more forensically analysed.
- 011 Policy and design appreciation turned from it being 'all about the building' to it being 'about the place of the building' in its context and the life of the city. This coincided with a quest to bring higher levels of residential occupation to the city; a 24 hour city and not 'Collins Street 5pm' as Brack so incisively observed it.

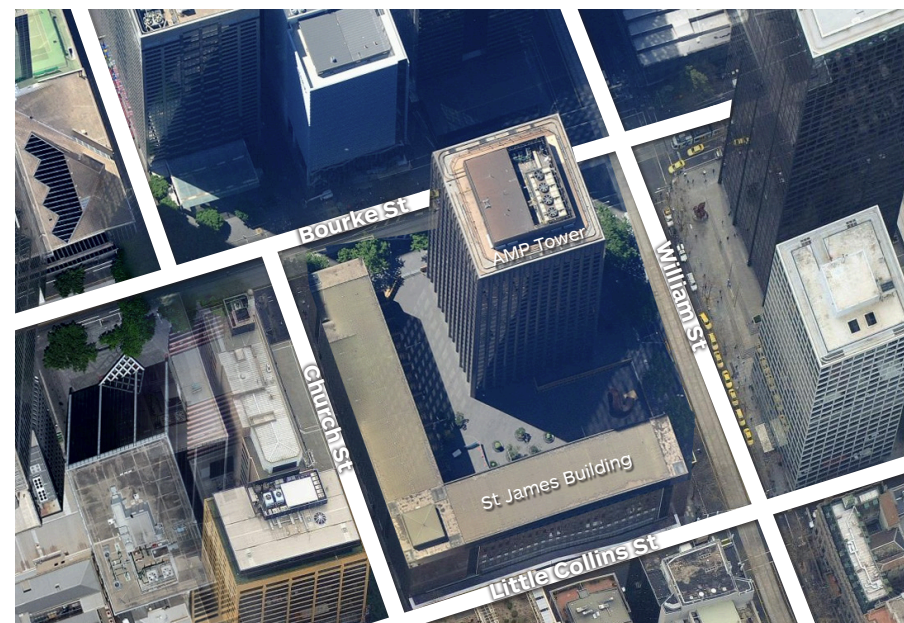


Figure 2 - The Site; AMP Tower and St James Building in 2010

- 012 In the case of the AMP building, it is my understanding that at some time in the 1990s, the then owner of the site had a wind study performed to measure and explain the local wind conditions.
- 013 Several planning permits were issued in the 2000s for works primarily focused on the St James building, but also for the lower two floors of the AMP building. These designs were informed by wind testing and aimed to reduce uncomfortable wind conditions as well as to overcome some of the other recognised shortcomings of the original design. They also sought to add floorspace in select locations.
- 014 In 2011-2012 the following additions and insertions were constructed:
- A - A double storey structure was added to the eastern side of the AMP building, which now accommodates a bank and a restaurant.
 - B - An additional 3 storeys of office were added on top of the St James Building.
 - C - Hard and soft landscaping works were undertaken in the plaza.
 - D - Single storey glass fronted structures were added to the internal colonnades of the St James building, that now accommodate shops, restaurants and bars.
 - E - Shops were inserted into the ground floor colonnades of the AMP building.
 - F - A glass canopy was added to the western section of the plaza.
 - G - Glazed openings were added to the ends of the St James building's Bourke and William Street frontages, with access to ground floor commercial tenancies.
 - H - The glazing line in the retained sections of the St James building's internal facades was pushed out to incorporate areas that were formerly external walkways / balconies.
 - I - Shop frontages and a canopy were added at ground level to the Little Collins Street frontage of the St James building.

- 015 These additions and insertions are shown in Figures 3 and 4 and in the photographs overleaf.

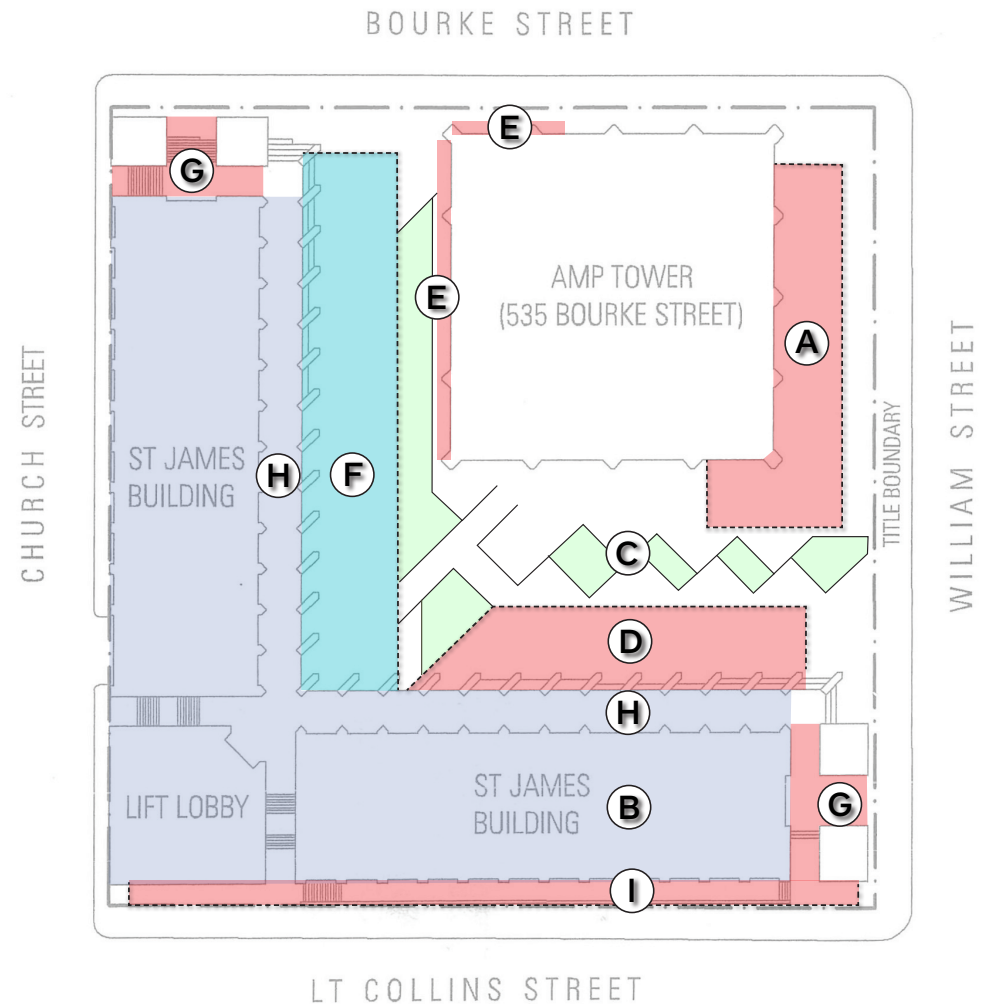


Figure 3 - Original Site Plan of the complex and additions and insertions (in colours)

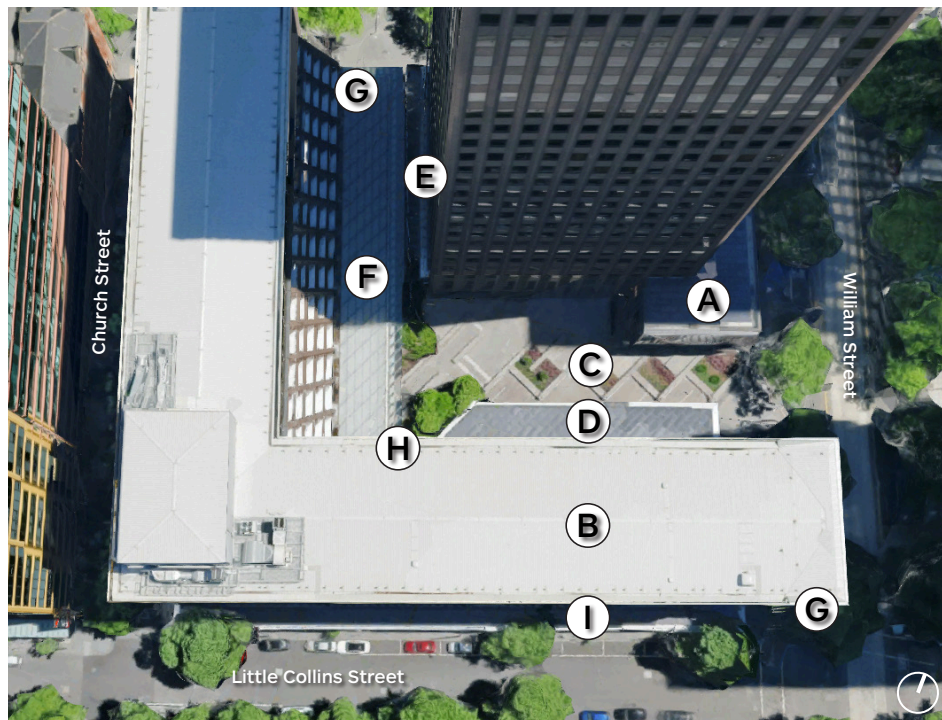


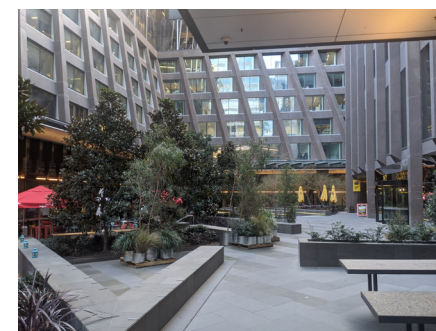
Figure 4 - Additions and Insertions - photo locations image



A - 2 storey volume on William Street side of AMP building



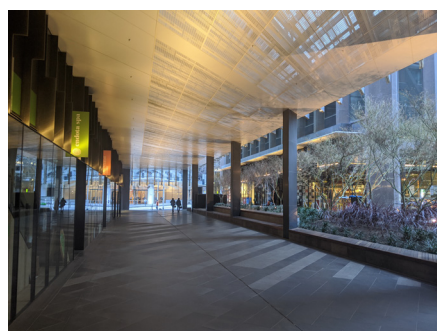
B & H - Additional levels on St James Building



C - Internal Plaza



D - Additional volume facing the internal plaza



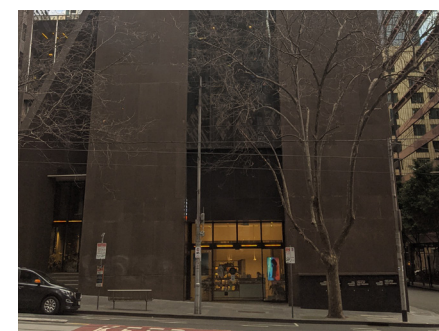
E & F - New canopy cover along the western part of the public plaza



G - Retail frontage to William Street



I - Additional volume and canopy along Little Collins Street frontage



G - Retail spaces towards Bourke Street

016 The more recent works have undoubtedly had a significant impact on the buildings and the space around the buildings. The effects on how the site functions can be summarised as follows:

- Dangerous and uncomfortable wind conditions are now less common in the plaza and the space around the building, although anecdotally there are still times when wind is an issue.
- By introducing shops and restaurants that spill out into the public areas and establishing hard and soft landscaping that provides seating, foliage and wind mitigation, the plaza is a more welcoming and energetic space that can be enjoyed rather than just traversed.
- Where it was once blank walls and an elevated walkway, the Little Collins Street frontage is now almost continuously lined with active uses at ground level, and is a far more inviting and interesting environment.
- The removal of the external areas in the upper levels of the St James building and the insertion of large, glazed openings at either end of the building has increased the level of natural light to these levels.

017 Effects on building form as a result of the more recent works include the following:

- The unique form of the St James building's internal facades, which featured a grid of concrete piers angled in both plan and elevation, is now less distinctive than its original form due to newer elements masking where the building formerly met the ground and a loss of overall proportion. This can be seen in Figure 5.
- The St James building is now also clearly a hybrid of older and newer building fabric. This is not a negative consequence in urban design terms, but is worthwhile noting.
- The double storey form added to the base of the AMP building, on the site's most prominent corner, impacts the visibility of and the connection to the St James building and the public plaza from this intersection, as shown in Figures 7, 8 and 9 on page 6. This form also has a somewhat discordant relationship with the AMP building in terms of proportion and materiality.

018 Nevertheless, the analysis by Context in informing this Amendment says of these additions:

"Overall, the complex retains a high degree of architectural integrity to the Post-War Modernist style in fabric, form and detail. While it has undergone some alterations, these changes do not diminish the ability to understand and appreciate the buildings and their plaza setting as a fine example of a Post-War Modernist multi-storey commercial building."

019 The benefits of the recent works in improving the site's internal function and the way it relates to the public realm are evident, and while the evolution of the buildings thus far has plainly had some impact on their original form, these measures have allowed the site to both improve and adapt, and suggest that ongoing improvement and adaption should be encouraged.



Figure 5 - The Public Plaza and Meadmore's Sculpture in 1970



Figure 6 - The Public Plaza in August 2021

3. Discussion

- 020 As I have already noted, in the decades since the site was planned and developed the level of scrutiny given to major development applications has increased in depth and substance, due to the changing nature of planning and building policy. Also due to a greater understanding of urban processes and how buildings work. Technology has also made buildings far more complex and made assessment of buildings more sophisticated.
- 021 As an example, it is common for planning application assessments to include built form and amenity testing through visual impact modelling, shadow modelling and daylight modelling and it is not unusual to require tower proposals to undergo wind testing (Design and Development Overlay Schedule 10, which applies to this site, requires a wind analysis report for buildings greater than 40m in height).
- 022 Reflecting this increased complexity and understanding, contemporary planning controls and urban design policy now provide detailed directions about the scale and arrangement of buildings, how they interface with public areas and matters of design. Understandably, urban design policy is most detailed when addressing larger development sites and dense, central city areas.
- 023 Relevant urban design policy in this location includes two Design and Development Overlays (DDOs) that currently apply to the site – DDO1 and DDO10.
- 024 DDO1 manages active street frontages, and amongst other things, asks that at least 80% of a street frontage to a major pedestrian area is a display window or other use that provides pedestrian interest and interaction.
- 025 DDO10 manages built form, and generally expects buildings to take a podium and tower configuration. DDO10 also includes requirements relating to wind, overshadowing, street wall height, setbacks above street wall and tower separation.
- 026 A Council adopted planning scheme amendment (Am C308) that is currently with the Minister for approval seeks to introduce a revised urban design policy for Central Melbourne in the form of DDO1, which will include a complementary illustrative design guide.



Figure 7 - Corner of Bourke Street in 1970



Figure 8 - Corner of Bourke Street in 2021



Figure 9 - Corner of Bourke Street in 2021

- 027 The revised DDO1 would not address building envelope requirements, but would otherwise provide very detailed guidance for development in Central Melbourne in relation to the pedestrian network and public interfaces, building mass, building program and design detail.
- 028 Design objectives in the Council adopted version of the revised DDO1 seek to ensure that development promotes a legible, attractive pedestrian environment; integrates with and makes a positive contribution to its context; has an internal layout with a strong relationship with the public realm and provides an interesting, human scaled and safe edge to the public realm.
- 029 The revised DDO1 specifies that development should retain and improve the quality of existing pedestrian connections and arcades, and specifies that redevelopment of sites with existing publicly accessible private plazas should retain at least 50% of the area of that plaza where it is oriented to a main street, helps reduce pedestrian congestion and is a high quality space with opportunities for stationary activity. Plazas should be open to the sky, accessible, provide opportunities for stationary activity, incorporate active frontages and landscape elements, and have access to sunlight.
- 030 In terms of building program, the revised DDO1 encourages high quality and active interfaces between the public and private realm, including a range of tenancy sizes at lower levels and the ability for the building to adapt to other uses over time, and discourages long expanses of frontage without a building entry.
- 031 The revised DDO1 also encourages public interfaces to provide a visual connection between the public realm and interior spaces, avoid blank walls visible from the public realm and provide continuous weather protection on main streets. On sloping sites, a direct connection should be established at grade to usable space within ground level, with level transitions contained within the building envelope.
- 032 The intent behind the more recent additions and insertions on the site was based in some of the same principles and design features promoted by the proposed DDO1, particularly those relating to the interface between the buildings and the public realm, and this is an admirable demonstration of how the site has adapted.



Figure 10 - Little Collins Street in 2009 (source: Google Streetview)



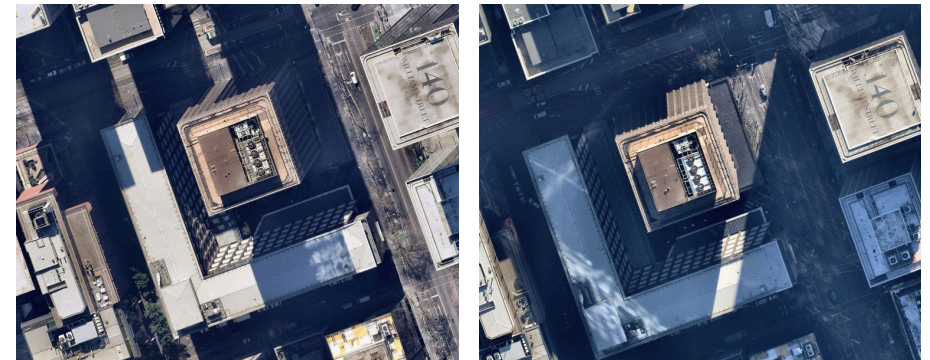
Figure 11 - Little Collins Street in 2019 (source: Google Streetview)

033 However, if the site were to be evaluated against such a detailed set of urban design guidelines in full, there would be certain areas and certain parts of the buildings that would still be found wanting. One area is the plaza, which has a more comfortable level of enclosure, but poor lines of sight and less than ideal sunlight access as shown in the aerial photographs at Figure 12, as well as wind effects that have been moderated by the 2011-2012 works, but remain an issue. Another is the Church Street frontage shown at Figure 13, which has large areas of blank wall, contributes very little to the street and has no public connection to the plaza.

034 The issues that have emerged on this site, and have begun to be addressed by the more recent works, are mostly unique to the site. Firstly, as it forms a whole street block, there were numerous options for how building volume was arranged across the site. The site planning choices made resulted in an inhospitable plaza that has required significant interventions. Secondly, the hundreds of metres of street and plaza frontage across the site were not managed appropriately and resulted in significant lengths of poor interface to public space.

035 The interstitial space on the site is its most distinctive characteristic from an urban design perspective, but also what makes it challenging. Compared to a mid-block city site, where external changes to an existing building over time would be primarily cosmetic in nature, the adaption of the buildings on this site and the space around them has wider implications. The changes made so far have shown the ability of the site to evolve and the effectiveness of adaptations to respond to the site's context and the needs of its users, and demonstrate that continual improvement has accumulative benefits.

Figure 12 - Sunlight access in the public plaza



September 7th - 1:05 PM

June 21st - 11:42 AM



Figure 13 - St James Building frontage to Church Street

4. Concluding Comments

- 036 The original buildings and site planning created challenges for how this site functioned - for passers-by, occupants of the buildings and for the site's management. Several propositions were put forward to how to address some of these challenges, and take greater advantage of the site's qualities. The works done in 2011-2012 made a considerable contribution to how the building functioned, particularly at ground level, by improving conditions in the plaza and improving the way in which the two buildings interface to the streets around them. These changes have demonstrated the ability of the site to adapt, while reinforcing the original design concept of the plaza and avoiding an excessive impact on the original form of the buildings.
- 037 All buildings adapt over time, as uses in and around them constantly change. The rate of change within office buildings is regular and often comprehensive, as it adapts to the needs of changing tenants and the increasingly complex nature of office-based work. The ability of central city buildings, and office space in particular to adapt is becoming increasingly relevant due to rapidly changing patterns of work and market demands.
- 038 Like most office buildings, the internal use and configuration of the St James building and the AMP building has been continually modified over time. However, the unique value created by the public plaza and the unique responsibility demanded by such a significant interface to public space have also necessitated modifications to the way the buildings interact with public space. These modifications have reinforced that this site is not just a historically valuable piece of the puzzle, but is a more actively integrated part of its setting and a place that should be allowed to physically evolve so that its value can also evolve.

Appendix A

Photographic Comparison



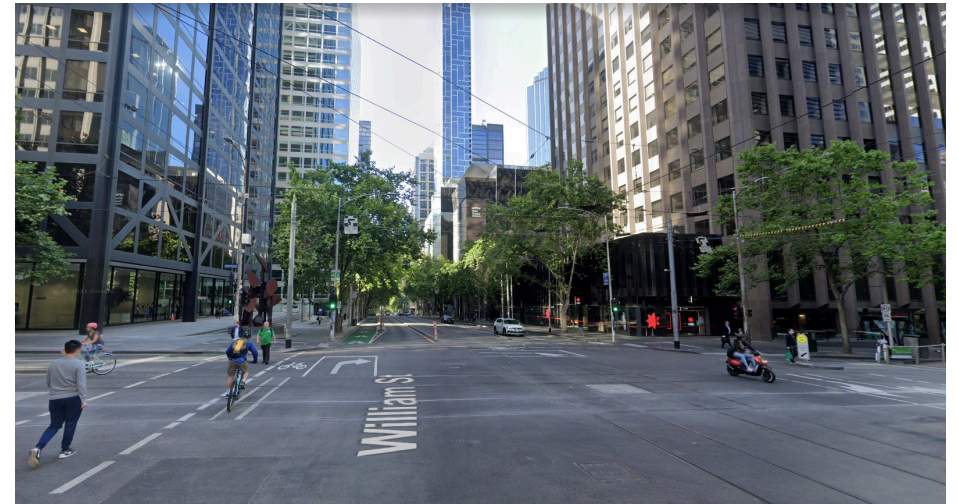
William Street - December 2009



William Street - July 2019



Bourke Street and William Street - December 2009



Bourke Street and William Street - December 2020



Bourke Street - January 2010



Bourke Street - June 2014



Little Collins Street - December 2009



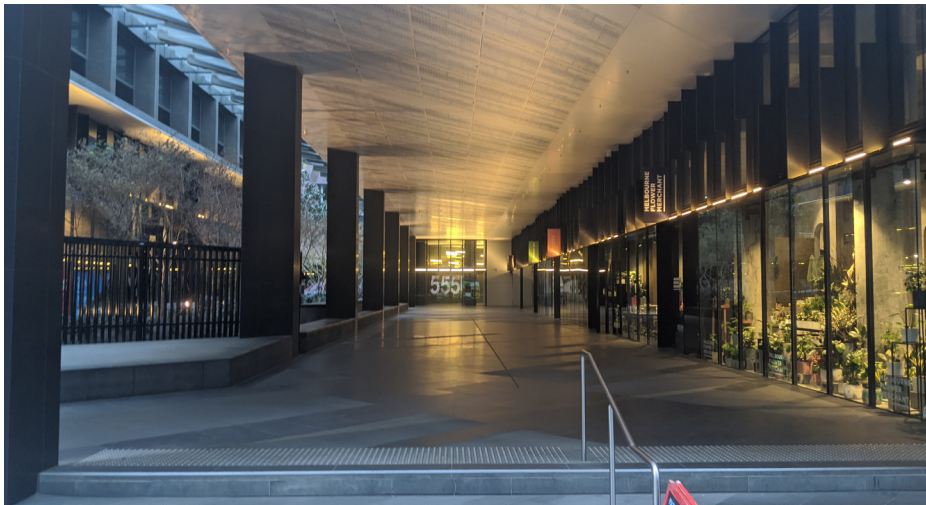
Little Collins Street - March 2013

Appendix B

Additional Site Photos



Glass canopy - plaza access from Bourke Street



Glass canopy area looking south. At the end, the St James Building pedestrian access



Alfresco area of bars and restaurants in internal plaza



Upper level additions on the St James Building



Plaza access and additional volume on William Street



St James Building and plaza access from William Street



Church Street looking south



Corner of Little Collins Street and Church Street looking east

Appendix C

Witness Statement

Timothy Biles
Ratio Consultants
8 Gwynne Street
Cremorne Vic 3121

Qualifications

Bachelor of Arts, Flinders University 1969
Diploma of Town Planning and Regional Planning, Melbourne University 1975
Fellow, Planning Institute of Australia

Areas of expertise

I have practised in the field of town planning since 1970 and qualified in 1975. My experience includes working in strategic and statutory planning for local government authorities and private consulting dealing with a variety of residential, commercial, industrial and conservation issues.
I give planning and urban design advice to a wide range of commercial and local government clients involved in the preparation of a range of commercial and residential projects.
I have also led a series of townscape plan studies as well as landscape and urban design programs across country Victoria and Melbourne.

Expertise to prepare this report

As a qualified town planner with over 40 years in practice I have had to assess and provide strategic and land use planning advice on a wide range of town planning and urban design issues.

Investigations and research

In preparing this evidence I have:

- Reviewed relevant parts of the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review 2020;
- Reviewed relevant planning policy and controls for the site; and
- Reviewed the planning scheme amendment documentation.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions I have been unable to visit the site immediately before the preparation of this statement. However I am familiar with the site having visited it on numerous occasions since the 1970s and subsequent decades.

I confirm that my instructions are to:

- Review the proposed planning scheme amendment and the proposed permanent inclusion of 527-555 Bourke Street within a Heritage Overlay as a Significant Heritage Place; and
- Address whether, in my opinion, the proposed inclusion is warranted.

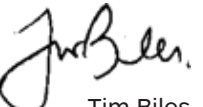
Summary of opinions

My conclusions are summarised in the concluding comments section of this report.

Declaration

I declare that I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and that no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld.

As well, this report was prepared with assistance from Ariel Utz Wirnsberger and Patrick Coombes at Ratio Consultants Australia Pty Ltd.



Tim Biles
BA DipTRP FPIA

ratio:

8 Gwynne Street
Cremorne VIC 3121

Suite 2, 12-14 Union Street
Geelong VIC 3220

(03) 9429 3111
mail@ratio.com.au