

Revitalisation Plan - Façade Painting
SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE BUILDINGS

SECTIONS 1 & 48, CITY



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Prepared for
City Renewal Authority
ACT Government

Prepared by



Cover Image: Shops at civic centre, Canberra, 1951, University of Melbourne Archives,
1979.0161.02594

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INTRODUCTION

What is a Revitalisation Plan?

This Revitalisation Plan has been instigated by the City Renewal Authority with a view to restoring and celebrating the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings as the high-quality landmark historic commercial centre of Canberra City.

A Revitalisation Plan defines works required to revitalise the *leased public areas* of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings as defined in the *City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017*. It addresses the condition of the buildings in a series of actions and provides details about remedial works to allow for the attainment of a cohesive condition and appearance for the buildings.

Leased public areas include the street façades and other external parts of the building that are accessible by or visible to the public including any element attached to the building and a structure or element on the land surrounding the building. The *leased public areas* have the greatest impact on the character of the city.

This Revitalisation Plan – Façade Painting defines repainting works to the street elevations of each building (excluding the colonnades) to create a cohesive colour scheme. It has been developed by Philip Leeson Architects and is consistent with the updated Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings (Philip Leeson Architects) which was approved by the ACT Heritage Council on 2 February 2022. This is the first revitalisation plan for the buildings with other revitalisation plans to be prepared for other actions at a later date.

Significance of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are included on the ACT Heritage Register and are significant as large and early commercial development in Canberra designed in the Mediterranean style by architect John Sulman. The Statement of Significance in the Conservation Management Plan reads -

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are significant as good examples in Canberra of the Inter-War Mediterranean style and are of added interest as large-scale examples of this style. This style was one of the distinctive designs used in the early decades of the development of Canberra as the national capital and use of the style declined after the 1930s.

The buildings are rare as:

- *Large scale commercial buildings dating from the early decades in the development of the national capital; and*
- *As large-scale examples of Inter-War Mediterranean style buildings.*

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are also unique in Canberra in the form of development – as the block by block development of the buildings was undertaken by individual leaseholders working to an overall design. The different approach in this case partly reflects the special circumstances of Canberra as a city built for and under the close control of government.

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings are of historic value as commercial buildings associated with the early development of Canberra as the national capital. While there were other substantial developments in Canberra from the same period, the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings were the major development in Canberra City, which was intended at the time as the commercial centre for the new city.

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings have played and continue to play an important role in defining Canberra City. They established the early character and scale of the city's retail and business area.

From the 1920s until at least the late 1950s the buildings were the major development in Canberra City and provided its focus. While they continue as a landmark in Canberra City, other development since 1960 has diffused the focus of commercial activity and changed the character and scale of Canberra City. Accordingly, the role of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings has been diminished.

The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings have a strong and special association with the architect Sir John Sulman. Sulman is an important historical figure in Australia, and part of this relates to his role with the Federal Capital Advisory Committee in the early development of Canberra in the 1920s. Sulman prepared the concept design for the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings, and they are one of only two places in Canberra that perhaps best present substantial and tangible evidence of his influence in Canberra.

The Sydney and Melbourne Building's design and details exhibit particular aesthetic characteristics, which were inherent in the original design and are valued by the community today.

Features identified as intrinsic to the heritage significance of the place in the ACT Heritage Register Entry comprise:

- a) *Exterior façade of the 'Melbourne and Sydney Buildings';*
- b) *Remaining original interiors;*
- c) *Central courtyards and remaining internal lightwells; and*
- d) *London Plane trees (Platanus x acerfolia) in the interior courtyards of both buildings.*

The approved Conservation Management Plan provides a more detailed breakdown of the significant features of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings and also identifies neutral and intrusive features. Specific characteristics identified as significant features relate to attributes that include the landmark qualities, the Inter-war Mediterranean style and the site planning.

Client and Purpose

This plan has been commissioned by the City Renewal Authority, ACT Government to support Revitalisation Legislation pertaining to the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings which is contained in the *City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017*.

The Revitalisation Plan seeks to identify opportunities and propose solutions to improve and maintain the buildings to an appropriate standard. The City Renewal Authority's objectives for the Revitalisation Plan are:

Commencing the revitalisation process

- To improve the presentation of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings by repainting the prominent street façades of both buildings as per this Revitalisation Plan – Façade Painting

In the short term

- To refurbish all of the *public leased areas* of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings to an appropriate standard;
- To encourage Lessees to invest in a coordinated way to maintain and improve the standard of an important historical asset;
- To develop mechanisms to ensure the *public leased areas* are maintained to an appropriate standard.
- To achieve a safer and cleaner precinct;
- To activate the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings through increased trade and visitation; and

- To support a mix of compatible uses.

In the long term

- To celebrate the unique heritage character of the place;
- To realise the opportunity for a highly curated and vibrant destination with a strong identity; and
- To stimulate economic and social value for the Territory, its citizens and visitors.

Authorship

Philip Leeson Architects was engaged in January 2020 to update the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) and to draft a Revitalisation Plan for the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings in consultation with stakeholders, including building owners and the ACT Heritage Council. Consultation with building owners was facilitated by Communication Link as a sub-consultant to Philip Leeson Architects. This Revitalisation Plan – Façade Painting will be the first revitalisation plan.

Stakeholder Consultation

The City Renewal Authority worked with stakeholders through a series of engagement activities to understand the concerns, challenges and interests of the owners of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings and identify how to improve and maintain the buildings to the required and appropriate high standard.

Primary stakeholders consulted included:

- Owners and tenants of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings;
- ACT Heritage Council; and
- City Renewal Authority.

Engagement activities included face-to-face individual briefings and discussions, an online survey of owners, a separate online community survey, written feedback and submissions and stakeholder workshops.

As required in the *City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017*, the City Renewal Authority consulted with all building owners. In commissioning this Revitalisation Plan, the City Renewal Authority has sought to negotiate and jointly agree upon the works together with the owners.

A summary of engagement activities undertaken as part of the preparation of this Revitalisation Plan during 2020-2025 is provided in the table below. Initial engagement activities were undertaken in October and November 2019 by the City Renewal Authority, prior to the commissioning of the CMP and the Revitalisation Plan.

Date	Activity
19 February 2020	All owners of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings were invited to participate in a consultation workshop about the Revitalisation Plan and to be informed about activities around the building related to the updating of the CMP.
21 February 2020	Tenants of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings were approached throughout the day in a door knock to inform them about the Revitalisation Plan and activities related to the updating of the CMP and to fill any gaps in contact details of owners.
26 February 2020	First consultation with ACT Heritage to discuss priorities for updating the CMP and the focus of the Revitalisation Plan.
17 March 2020	First consultation workshop with owners held at Riley Hall, Canberra City Uniting Church. The focus of the workshop was to identify likely revitalisation activities and to discuss the potential implementation of this revitalisation work.
26 May 2020	Second consultation with ACT Heritage Council to present the draft Revitalisation Plan and CMP for feedback.
10 August 2020	Second consultation workshop with owners held at Riley Hall, Canberra City Uniting Church.
12 November 2020	Third consultation with ACT Heritage Council to agree upon the policies of the CMP with regards to proposed revitalisation actions.
5 March 2021	CMP lodged with ACT Heritage Council for approval.
12 March 2021	Draft Revitalisation Plan for Sydney and Melbourne Buildings issued to City Renewal Authority.
8 June 2021	Third consultation workshop to present CMP and Revitalisation Plan to owners.
21 June 2021	CMP revised and re-lodged with ACT Heritage Council for approval.
16 November 2021	Feedback provided by ACT Heritage Council on CMP.
13 December 2021	CMP revised and re-lodged with ACT Heritage Council for approval.
2 February 2022	CMP approved by the ACT Heritage Council with conditions.
December 2024 – February 2025	Final consultation for the Notifiable Instrument on the Revitalisation Plan was undertaken. The community expressed support for the painting works and ongoing maintenance of the buildings.

BUILDING REVITALISATION ACTIONS FAÇADE PAINTING

Actions to repaint the external street façades of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings

Action 1: Repaint External Street Façades



Current colour scheme to part of Melbourne Building. Note: different shades of cream have been used across the buildings, impacting on the presentation

In accordance with the conservation policy of the approved CMP, the repainting of the building is to reflect the prevailing colour scheme of recent decades. Currently, the colours vary between the individual blocks. A consistent colour scheme is to be applied across all individual blocks.

Location

New paint finishes are to be applied across both the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings as follows:

- Rendered street elevations facing Northbourne Avenue, London Circuit, Alinga Street, East Row and West Row;
- Rendered side elevations/returns facing Odgers Lane and Verity Lane (excluding face brick sections);
- Timber eaves linings facing Northbourne Avenue, London Circuit, Alinga Street, East Row and West Row;
- Timber rafter ends facing Northbourne Avenue, London Circuit, Alinga Street, East Row and West Row;
- Steel gutters and downpipes/elbows facing Northbourne Avenue, London Circuit, Alinga Street, East Row and West Row.

The focus of the façade painting works to be undertaken as part of Action 1 will be the painting of external elements that are readily visible from the streets which encircle the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings.

Purpose

To achieve a consistent colour scheme across the buildings that reflects the existing prevailing scheme which has been adopted in recent decades to highlight decorative features of the place. The emphasis for repainting will be on the outer face of the building, including the side elevations/rendered returns to the laneways.

Scope of work

A chronological outline of the proposed works is provided below. The preparation works listed below must be completed before the repainting to allow for the attainment of a suitable quality finish and reduce the likelihood of new finishes rapidly deteriorating. Appropriate testing and hazardous materials practices must be undertaken to manage risks associated with potential lead-based paint. All repair and repainting works are the responsibility of building owners.

Investigation and documentation phase

1. Contact the City Renewal Authority to organise a site visit to review and record the current condition of paint finishes.
2. Where paint finishes are in poor condition, test for presence of lead-based paint (to be undertaken by a hazardous materials expert).
3. Confirm scope of repainting works.
4. City Renewal Authority to engage Quantity Surveyor to prepare cost estimate.
5. Owners obtain necessary approvals (if required).

Works phase: all works to be undertaken by appropriately qualified tradespeople engaged by owners





1. Safely remove damaged paint. If paint is lead-based, safely remove and dispose of all loose/damaged paint using a suitably qualified lead remediation contractor.
2. Resecure loose gutters and downpipes where required.
3. Prepare substrate for repainting. Use a traditional, multiple coat render mix to repair minor damage to render (if required).
4. Prepare existing painted surfaces and protect surrounding surfaces from over paint.
5. Repaint the external street façades including mouldings from the ground surface to the parapet in accordance with the colour scheme below. Use acrylic paints, compatible with the existing modern paint layers.¹

¹ Acrylic renders or membranes along with textured paint finishes are not to be used.

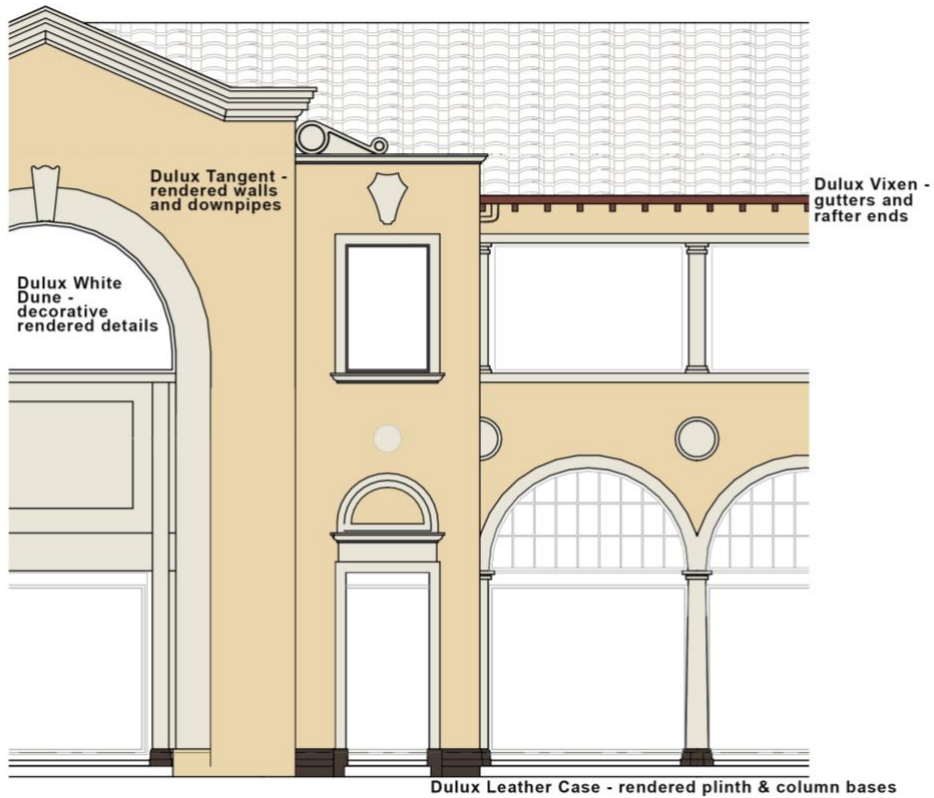
Paint Colour Specifications

Repainting of the external façades shall be undertaken in the following colour scheme. The schedule below is followed by a series of diagrams that show the location of each paint colour.

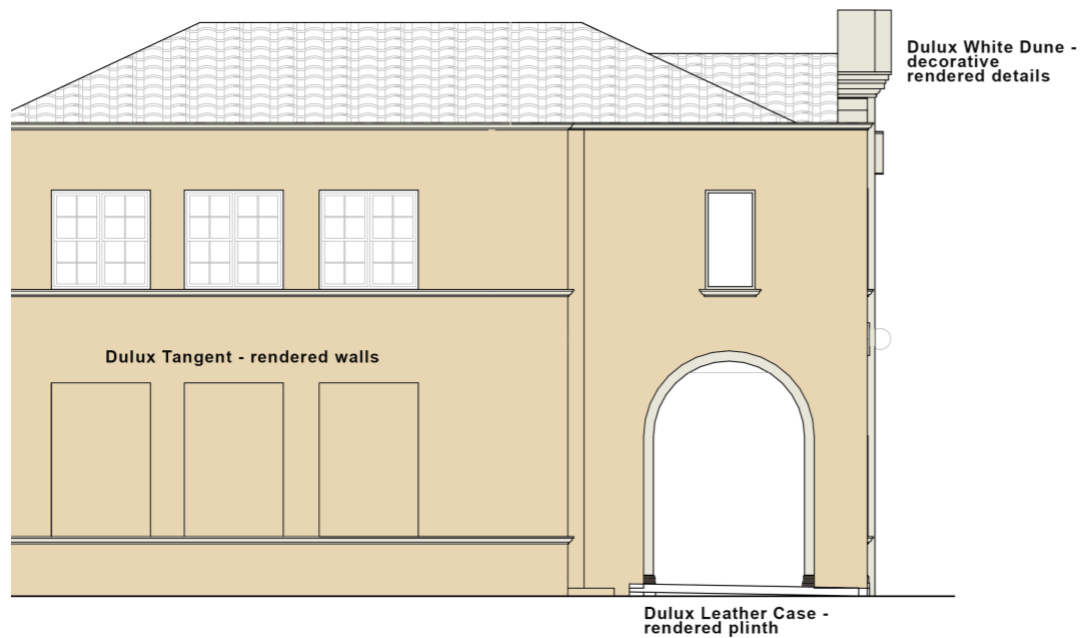
Table 1: Paint colours for repainting works²

Element	Colour
<p>Rendered elements: external walls (excluding items identified separately below)</p> <p>Timber/fibre cement elements: sheeted over windows to laneway returns</p> <p>Metal elements: downpipes</p>	<p>Dulux Tangent (S14F2)</p> 
<p>Rendered elements: columns (including capitals), portal pilasters (including capitals), portal friezes, reveals to portals, portal nameplates, mouldings, capitals, spandrels, bulls-eye</p> <p>Timber elements: eaves linings (soffits)</p>	<p>Dulux White Dune (SW1D6)</p> 
<p>Rendered elements: column bases and rendered skirting to portals</p>	<p>Dulux Leather Case (S03A9)</p> 
<p>Timber elements: rafters</p> <p>Metal elements: eaves gutters</p>	<p>Dulux Vixen (PO5A8)</p> 

² Minor updates to table undertaken 7 January 2026



Typical elevation of part of street façade showing paint colours³



Typical elevation of return to laneway showing paint colours

³ Minor updates to elevation undertaken 7 January 2026

IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE

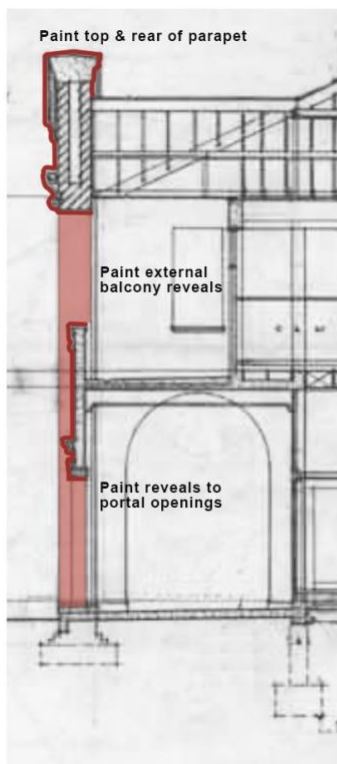
Mechanisms for realisation of the plan

Delivery

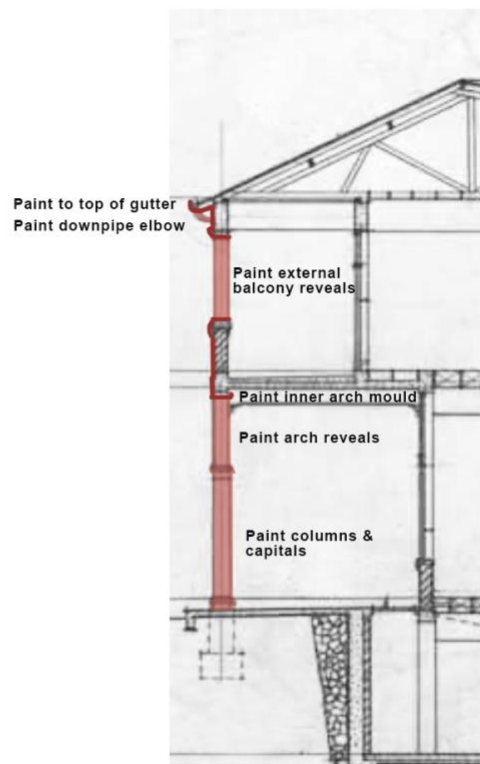
The repainting of the street façades will be the first action completed to the *public leased areas* of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings, with subsequent actions to be detailed in a separate Revitalisation Plan. The façade painting works are to be undertaken by individual building owners in accordance with this Revitalisation Plan. Funding to complete the works will be provided by the City Renewal Authority and will be based on costings prepared by a Quantity Surveyor.

Façade Painting: Inclusions/Exclusions

As previously noted, the focus of the façade painting works will be the painting of external elements that are readily visible from the streets which encircle the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings. The general extent of the painting works that will be funded by the City Renewal Authority is described on the diagrams below with further detail on relevant inclusions and exclusions provided in the ensuing table. Owners will be responsible for any structural repair of the substrate and other major repairs (if required).



Section through portal



Section through typical balcony

Sections showing extent of façade painting (red colour)

(Source: adapted from 1941 drawings, National Archives of Australia, A2617, Section 90/14137)

Table 2: Works to be funded by the City Renewal Authority as part of Action 1: External Street Façade Repainting

Inclusions	Exclusions
Testing for lead-based paint	Testing of paint finishes outside the Action 1: External Street Façade Repainting works area
Visual inspection of external street façades to assess condition and develop scope of works. Documentation of existing condition and proposed works	Inspection of unrelated elements including roofs, lighting, shopfronts, colonnade/balcony soffits and pavements
Removal of loose/damaged paint (including minor removal of damaged lead-based paint)	Removal of later fixtures and fittings, including flagpoles to portals Extensive or wholesale removal of lead-based paint
Minor patch repairs to render	Structural repairs
Minor repairs to existing timber rafters, eaves gutters and downpipes (such as refixing)	Replacement of gutters or downpipes, works to internal rainwater goods and stormwater systems (including defects caused by tree roots). Other works to address water ingress. Any works involving bird proofing and leaf guard (commercially installed gutter guard that is not visible from the street is to remain in place). Works to lights Works to signage
Painting to street facades of Sydney and Melbourne Buildings as shown in the diagrams above. Painting to include rendered returns to laneways	Repair and/or reinstatement of windows to rendered laneway returns. Where there is sheeting over windows, this will be painted to match the adjacent render. Painting of window frames to first floor balconies and shopfronts
Painting of render to top and rear of gabled portal parapets and rendered chimney	Painting of metal flashings to portal parapets. Works to existing roof access systems

Approvals

Where works require any closure of footpaths around the buildings a Temporary Traffic Management (TTM) Plan is required. This must be authorised by Roads ACT. Owners and their contractors should take into account planned road closures associated with light rail and other construction activities in the area.

Heritage approvals are not required where the repainting of the building is undertaken in keeping with the colour scheme set out in the approved CMP and this Revitalisation Plan. The removal of signage that is noted as intrusive as well as the completion of works that are scheduled in the approved CMP can also be undertaken without heritage approvals. Any works that are not set out in the approved CMP require approval from ACT Heritage before works commence.

Other works, such as structural repairs, may require both heritage approval and Building Approval. Some works may also require Development Approval.

END.