

Levels of Heritage Significance

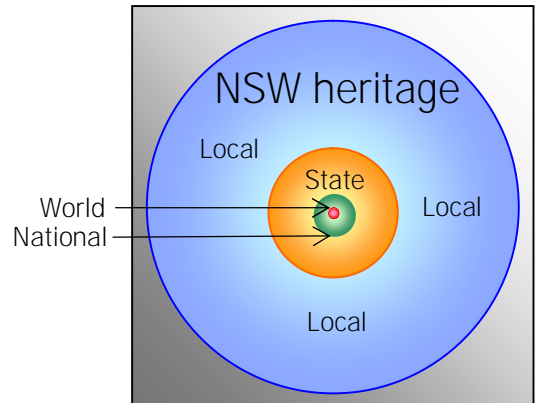
This guideline supplements the Heritage Council guideline *Assessing Heritage Significance*.

1.0 Recognised levels of heritage significance

The Heritage Council of NSW recognises only the following four levels of significance for heritage in NSW:

- Local
- State
- National
- World

Only these recognised levels of significance should be used for heritage assessments in NSW.



2.0 Meaning of different levels

The four levels of heritage are the places and objects worth keeping. All levels of heritage are important. Levels indicate the *context* in which a heritage place is important – within the local area, state-wide, Australia-wide or worldwide. ‘Local’, ‘state’, ‘national’ and ‘world’ significance is not about *ranking*, it’s about *context*.

A heritage place may have one or more level of significance. Most heritage in NSW is *local* heritage, meaning it is important to the heritage of the local area or region. Place-specific by nature, local heritage is no less important because comparable heritage of similar or different qualities exists in another area. The area or region of local heritage can cross local government area boundaries, contain more than one local government area, or only part of a local government area, such as the suburb, group of suburbs, ward, parish, county, catchment area, river basin or historic region.

Heritage places that are rare, exceptional or outstanding beyond the local area or region may be *state* significant. Unique or outstanding heritage in a national or international context may reach the *national* or *world* levels of significance. This proportion of local, state, national and world heritage is illustrated in the above diagram, with local heritage forming most of the heritage of New South Wales.

3.0 Management of different levels

Each level of heritage significance has a corresponding statutory listing and responsible authority for conserving these items:

- Local heritage items – listed on local environmental plans by local councils
- State heritage items – listed on State Heritage Register by NSW government
- National heritage items – listed on National Heritage List by Australian government
- World heritage items – listed on World Heritage List by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)



Local heritage
A good example of a brick arch bridge associated with the early 20th century electrification of the Illawarra rail line – Rail bridge, **Thirroul**, circa 1920s



State heritage
One of the oldest surviving bridges of colonial NSW, designed by the first colonial Superintendent of Bridges – **Lennox Bridge**, Parramatta, 1839



National heritage
An Australian icon and landmark achievement of 20th century engineering – **Sydney Harbour Bridge**, 1932

4.0 Assessment of level

The local or state level of an item is determined by using the Heritage Council criteria to assess its significance, as set out in the guideline *Assessing Heritage Significance*. The following sections summarise these criteria. For national and world heritage criteria, see the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website at: www.environment.gov.au

This assessment can take place as part of a council-wide heritage study or heritage study review, a thematic study of an item type, preparing registers of state agency heritage assets, nominating an item for listing or de-listing, or a heritage assessment, conservation management plan or statement of heritage impact for an individual item or place.

The wider the level of significance of an item, the more detailed the assessment. This ranges from a basic assessment of the significance of the item within the local government area context for assessing local heritage, to an exhaustive assessment of the significance of the item in a worldwide context for assessing world heritage.

Informed by an assessment using these criteria, the responsible listing authority determines the level of heritage significance of an item:

- Local significance by local councils – on advice of the local council heritage advisor
- State significance by NSW government – on advice of the Heritage Council of NSW
- National significance by Australian government – on advice of the Australian Heritage Council
- World significance by UNESCO World Heritage Committee – on the advice of international expert organisations

5.0 Local heritage significance

An item has local heritage significance when it is important in the local area for one or more of the following criteria:

- a) it is important in the course, or pattern, of the local area's cultural or natural history – known as *historic significance*
- b) it has strong or special association with the life or works of a person or group of persons, of importance in the cultural or natural history in the local area – known as *historic associations*
- c) it is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in the local area – known as *aesthetic* or *technical significance*
- d) it has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in the area for social, cultural or spiritual reasons – known as *social significance*
- e) it has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of area's cultural or natural history – known as *research potential* or *educational significance*
- f) it possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the area's cultural or natural history – known as *rarity*
- g) it is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of the area's cultural or natural places or cultural or natural environments – known as *representative significance*

Only one of the above criteria needs to be satisfied for an item to have local heritage significance. An item is not excluded from having local significance because other items with similar characteristics have already been identified or listed.

An item does not have local heritage significance when it is not important in the local area under any of the above criteria.

See the inclusion and exclusion guidelines for each of the above criteria in *Assessing Heritage Significance*, Section 7.

6.0 State heritage significance

An item has state heritage significance when it is important in NSW for one or more of the following criteria:

- a) it is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history – known as *historic significance*
- b) it has strong or special association with the life or works of a person or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history – known as *historic associations*
- c) it is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW – known as *aesthetic* or *technical significance*
- d) it has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons – known as *social significance*
- e) it has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history – known as *research potential* or *educational significance*
- f) it possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history – known as *rarity*
- g) it is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's cultural or natural places or cultural or natural environments – known as *representative significance*

Only one of the above criteria needs to be satisfied for an item to have state heritage significance. An item is not excluded from having state significance because other items with similar characteristics have already been identified or listed.

An item does not have state heritage significance when it is not important in NSW under any of the above criteria.

See the inclusion and exclusion guidelines for each of the above criteria in *Assessing Heritage Significance*, Section 7. *Guidelines for Nominations to the State Heritage Register* gives further guidance on assessing state heritage significance under these criteria.

7.0 No other levels of significance recognised

An item either has, or does not have, local, state, national or world significance. The Heritage Council of NSW does not recognise any other level of significance for heritage in NSW. Other sub-classifications or additional levels such as 'low local significance', 'high local significance', 'low state significance' or 'regional' are not recognised.

Use of 'exceptional', 'high', 'moderate', 'little', 'low', 'intrusive' significance or other expressions of degree only relate to grading components of a place, not the overall level of significance of a place. These gradings are described in section 6 of *Assessing Heritage Significance*.



Local heritage
Good examples of modest Victorian terraced housing of Paddington, demonstrating the 19th century development of Paddington – circa 1890



State heritage
An outstanding Federation Arts and Crafts country homestead by architect, John Horbury Hunt – *Booloominbah*, Armidale, 1888



National heritage
One of the finest Colonial Georgian residences and oldest surviving public building in Australia – *Old Government House*, Parramatta, 1799-1816

8.0 Re-assessment of levels

For items previously assessed as having an unrecognised level of significance, the consent or listing authority is responsible for re-assessing these items to establish their correct level of significance using the Heritage Council criteria set out in *Assessing Heritage Significance*.

Decisions by the consent authority on the future management or listing of items in NSW should only be based on recognised levels of significance.

9.0 Definitions

Item means a place, building, work, relic, moveable object or precinct (Heritage Act 1977: section 4). Use of this term does not mean the place is listed.

Area generally means the local government area.

Local heritage significance in relation to a place, building, work, relic, moveable object or precinct, means significance to an area in relation to the historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic value of the item (Heritage Act 1977: section 4A).

State heritage significance in relation to a place, building, work, relic, moveable object or precinct, means significance to the State in relation to the historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic value of the item (Heritage Act 1977: section 4A).

National heritage significance means places with outstanding natural, Indigenous or historic heritage value to the nation (*Heritage criteria and thresholds*, Australian Government fact sheet 17)

World heritage significance means cultural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity (World Heritage Convention Operational Guidelines: paragraph 49]

Local heritage makes the greatest contribution to forming our living historic environment, more so than the small number of outstanding items of state, national or world significance. Greater than the sum of its parts, the varied collection of local heritage in an area enriches its character and gives identity to a neighbourhood, region or town in a way that cannot be reproduced. Local heritage is often what makes an area distinctive or exclusive in the long-term, even if the heritage features were once in a neglected state or considered unremarkable like Paddington in the 1960s. Desirable areas often feature large numbers of local heritage listings. *Below:* Local heritage of different periods and types from (1) Manly, (2) Paddington, (3) Parramatta



Levels of Heritage Significance was prepared by Claudine Loffi for the Heritage Office, NSW Department of Planning in 2008.

Photographs by Stewart Watters (Boooloominbah), Bill Nethery (Thirroul rail bridge) and Claudine Loffi (all others) for the Heritage Office, NSW Department of Planning.

This guideline is endorsed by the Heritage Council of NSW.

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