

Australian Capital Territory

# Heritage Statement of Priorities 2026

**Notifiable instrument NI2026–89**

made under the

**Heritage Act 2004, s 18A (Ministerial statement of priorities)**

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**1 Name of instrument**

This instrument is the *Heritage Statement of Priorities 2026*.

**2 Commencement**

This instrument commences on the day after its notification day

**3 Ministerial statement of priorities**

I make the statement of priorities at schedule 1.

Chris Steel MLA  
Minister for Heritage  
23 February 2026

# Schedule 1

(see s 3)



# ACT Heritage Council **Statement of Priorities**

Chris Steel MLA  
ACT Minister for Heritage





# Heritage Minister's Foreword

Heritage places and objects, along with their traditions and stories, connect us to our past.

Canberra's heritage is a vital part of what makes our city so unique. It tells the story of who we are, where we have come from, and what we value. As our city grows and changes, we need to protect and celebrate our heritage in ways that respect the past while meeting the needs of future generations.



The ACT Heritage Council (the Council) and the Government work together to recognise, register and protect places and objects of natural and cultural significance. These priorities support the broader goals of heritage conservation and urban planning and encourage a collaborative approach. They reflect the evolving needs of our community, particularly in areas such as housing, sustainability, and cultural heritage.

A key focus is aligning heritage decision-making with the ACT's housing goals, including the commitment to deliver 30,000 new homes by 2030 under the National Housing Accord. The Council is encouraged to consider how heritage processes can contribute through things like adaptive reuse, housing near transport, and allowing for a mix of housing types. These decisions should align with key planning documents such as the ACT Planning Strategy, the National Planning Reform Blueprint, and the Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Priorities.

I encourage the Council to take a strategic, practical approach to decision making, one that recognises the complexity of managing heritage in a growing, modern city. This includes being involved early in the planning processes, exploring opportunities for adaptive reuse, and careful consideration to mid-20th century heritage, especially in Canberra's major town centres.

Our commitment to First Nations peoples remains central. Traditional Custodians have a vital role in protecting and managing Aboriginal cultural heritage. It is essential that our heritage systems continue to support respectful, genuine partnerships and elevate First Nations voices in these decisions.

We are also modernising how we manage heritage data. A new digital database will improve how quickly and accurately advice can be provided, making heritage information easier to access and better connect heritage with planning systems. The Council's support will be key to making this important reform a success.

In all its work, the Council is encouraged to consider the social, cultural, environmental, and economic context of the ACT, and support outcomes that reflect the Government's commitment to a balanced and inclusive approach to heritage.

I look forward to working with the Council and ACT Heritage to ensure Canberra's heritage is protected, celebrated and integrated as we build the city's future together.



**Chris Steel MLA**  
Minister for Heritage

# Heritage priorities

Section 16 of the Heritage Act 2004 (the Act) establishes the ACT Heritage Council (the Council) and section 17 enables the Minister administering the Act to appoint members to the Council.

Pursuant to Section 18A, the Minister may make a statement setting out the government's priorities in relation to the heritage of the ACT.

These heritage priorities are provided to assist the Council to set its strategic direction and inform its effort and focus. My expectations as Minister are that the Council will work to meet its statutory obligations and deliver the heritage priorities set out below.

This will require close collaboration with ACT Heritage, noting that priorities may be delivered by or through ACT Heritage.



Canberra's iconic bus shelters have a distinctive and recognisable design



## Priority 1: Consider the ACT Government's housing priorities in heritage decision making

The ACT has signed up to the National Housing Accord and deliver above our share of the national objective of building 1.2 million new well located homes over 5 years from mid-2024. The ACT Government's commitment is to enable 30,000 new homes by 2030.

The ACT Government is working to boost housing supply through enabling missing middle housing, transit-oriented development and supporting more housing at shopping centres, building new public, community and affordable housing.

In exercising its functions, I ask that the Council has regard to housing supply as whole of ACT Government and national priority. I also request that the Council has regard to the outcomes and specific actions under ACT National Housing Accord, National Competition Policy, the National Planning Reform Blueprint measures, the ACT Planning Strategy, and the Minister for Planning's Statement of Planning Priorities.



Hands-on conservation work at Rock Valley Homestead, Tidbinbilla, carefully repairing historic stonework as part of ongoing heritage conservation.

Whilst the planning law is subject to ongoing reform, I request that the Council consider the outcomes described in the Territory Plan at the time decisions are made.

To achieve housing outcomes, I ask that the Council consider how adaptive reuse, can be appropriately applied to heritage places in Canberra, to enable new housing, when making decisions.



## Priority 2: Contribute to the Construction Productivity Agenda for the ACT

Heritage is directly linked to the planning and construction system in the ACT. I request that the Council should contribute to the ACT construction productivity agenda for the ACT (the Agenda) which is aimed at reducing regulatory burden, streamlining approval processes and supporting innovation in the construction sector.

It is my expectation that the Council will develop policies, procedures and practices that simplify information and guidance, reduce unnecessary processes of complying with the Act and maximise certainty for property owners and developers, while encouraging sympathetic and innovative development.

I ask Council to review their decision-making processes and the content of those decisions to, where possible, achieve efficiencies to achieve a timely decision-making process and be responsive to heritage stakeholders to ensure that they get timely and appropriate updates regarding the status of their heritage requests.



Canberra Theatre Centre illuminated at dusk, a landmark reflecting our city's cultural heritage.

I request that the Council provide advice to the City and Environment Directorate on specific actions to contribute to the Productivity Agenda and respond to any issues raised regarding heritage processes as part of consultation on the Agenda.



## **Priority 3: Participate in the development of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design framework**

The development of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework (the framework) will establish an integrated land-use and transport plan for the extension of Canberra's mass-transit light rail line to Woden.

I request that the Council provides input into the heritage aspects of the Framework including practical opportunities to incorporate yet unrealised heritage planning from Griffin and the NCDC that could contribute to the transit-oriented development plan.



An aerial view of Canberra's Southern Corridor.



## **Priority 4: Prioritise the preservation of important examples of ‘mid-century modern’ homes**

Canberra is home to some of Australia’s best examples of mid-Twentieth Century modern design. They contribute substantially to the architectural, social, and planning history of the ACT.

While a number of these places have already been recognised on the ACT Heritage Register or are subject to existing nominations, many others remain under-assessed or undocumented.

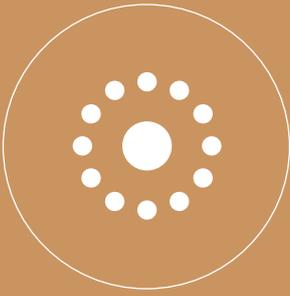
I note the foundational work undertaken by the Heritage Trust and GML Heritage in their publication *Modernist Houses in the Australian Capital Territory*.

With Canberra densify through, it is critical that the preservation of examples of mid-century modern homes is prioritised.

Noting the conflict of heritage and modernist values, the Council should consider how protection can be achieved in a way that respects modernist principles including adaptability, functionalism, and progressivism.



Modernist architectural design of Benjamin House featuring sharp angles and reflective surfaces, set against a backdrop of autumn foliage.



## **Priority 5:** **Strengthen the role of First Nations peoples in their role as Traditional Custodians of their cultural heritage and enhance protection for First Nations' cultural heritage**

The ACT has a rich and unique natural and Aboriginal heritage, and places of cultural and political significance.

A key priority for the Government is the protection and conservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage and places through active engagement with First Nations peoples in a way that harmonises with the present and future development needs of the ACT. Traditional Custodians must play a significant role in the conservation and management of their cultural heritage, the preservation and conservation of their culture places and objects, and in the planning and development of their traditional lands.

I expect that the Council will continue to engage with Representative Aboriginal Organisations (RAOs) and other Aboriginal groups to ensure that heritage policies and decisions sensitively, genuinely and meaningfully consider Aboriginal history and culture. I expect the role of Traditional Custodians and the consideration of First Nations cultural heritage to be front and centre in the Council's approach.



The rock art at Yankee Hat, Namadgi National Park is among the oldest known drawings in the ACT.



## Priority 6: Consider climate change and sustainability

The Government is committed to delivering climate change, sustainability and emissions reduction as well as delivering heritage conservation outcomes. A balance must be struck so that heritage buildings and places can retain their character and other attributes that heritage listing seeks to conserve, while being adapted to suit the needs of present and future occupants and ensuring they are accessible for all.

The ACT Government is implementing the National Construction Code (NCC) 2022 which includes the Liveable Housing and Energy Efficiency Provisions. Council must be aware of and informed by the NCC 2022 and consider how its provisions may impact heritage buildings. Through these standards the Government is supportive of sympathetic renovations of heritage residential buildings and adaptive reuse of heritage buildings to meet contemporary standards of accessibility and energy efficiency.



Canberra Glassworks chimney, a heritage-listed structure, symbolising the balance between preserving historic character and adaptive reuse.



## **Priority 7: Co-operate with ACT Heritage in the implementation and delivery of the system reform program, including improvements to the quality and provision of heritage data**

In recent years, the ACT Government has invested in the scoping of appropriate system reforms to provide an accurate and reliable Heritage specific database.

A new heritage specific database will improve the timeliness and efficiency of responses to development submissions and registration nominations, speed up the consultation processes on Heritage matters, align development priorities with heritage conservation, streamline the heritage management and conservation in line with the various environmental variables, as well as fostering greater community awareness and appreciation of the social and economic value of protecting the ACT's important heritage places and objects.



The heritage registered Northbourne Flats, set among mature trees along Northbourne Avenue, with traffic moving through Canberra's inner north.

As this project enters the implementation phase, I ask that the Council work in co-operation with ACT Heritage to ensure delivery of this significant ACT Government program.

It is my expectation that in making such decisions of balance, the Council has regard for the social, cultural, environmental and economic circumstances prevailing in the ACT and the objectives of the Government with respect to those circumstances.



## **Priority 8: Regard to be given to ACT Government policies and legislation**

Whilst the Council is required to make independent decisions, it must do so within the ACT Government's established governance framework and the land and planning system of the ACT and consistent with Government policies.

To achieve appropriate heritage conservation outcomes in the ACT's land planning and development system, the Council is to consider published ACT Government policies and strategies, and those advised by me in writing, relevant to its functions.



Inside detail of Taglietti designed modernist home, McKeown House.



## Priority 9: Council governance, conduct and reporting

### Core governance principles and professional conduct

The Council is expected to consistently uphold and further develop robust governance practices, ensuring transparency and accountability in all its operations. Members are required to act with informed impartiality and professionalism, demonstrating leadership in heritage management.

### Stakeholder relations and communication

The Council is expected to maintain clear and effective communication with, and consider advice from, senior executives and staff within the City and Environment Directorate (CED), particularly ACT Heritage, which serves as the Council's secretariat and primary source of advice and information.

A professional and respectful working relationship with the ACT Heritage team is essential to achieve shared heritage outcomes for the Territory.

Given the Council's statutory functions often intersect with the regulatory responsibilities of other bodies (such as the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, Access Canberra, the Suburban Land Agency, the City Renewal Authority, Transport Canberra and City Services, Infrastructure Canberra, and local planning authorities), the Council is expected to work effectively with these entities.

In line with its functions under the Act to promote community awareness and understanding of heritage, the Council is expected to implement and maintain a communications program. This program should clearly inform the public about its statutory planning role within the ACT's land planning and development system and ensure timely dissemination of its decisions.

Broad engagement with all relevant stakeholders is anticipated when the Council is developing policy and heritage guidelines (as per section 26 of the Act).

Specific consultation with Representative Aboriginal Organisations is mandated for all matters pertaining to Aboriginal places and objects, in accordance with section 31 of the Act.



A quiet residential street in Mawson, reflecting the suburb's mid-20th-century origins and suburban character.

## Ethical conduct

In all interactions with stakeholders—including the community, First Nations groups, industry representatives, heritage interest groups, and other agencies and authorities—the Council will adhere to the ACTPS Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics.

## Reporting obligations

I expect the Council will, through the Chair, inform me in a timely manner of any issues affecting its capacity to exercise its statutory functions and powers under the Act.

Beyond statutory reporting duties (e.g., under section 26B concerning public consultation), the Council is expected to provide the Minister with an Annual Report by October 31st each year. This report will detail progress against this Statement of Priorities, with specific reference to the Government's priorities (outlined below), and achievements against the agreed outcomes in the Council's annual Action Plan.

**Annexed Annual Report:** As a public authority under the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004*, the Council is also required to produce an annual report to be annexed to the City and Environment Directorate Annual Report. This annexed report is also expected to document progress against this Statement and the current Action Plan.

This Statement of Priorities is to be published on the Council's website and made readily accessible to the public.



Interior of a heritage railway carriage in the ACT, illustrating mid-20th century design features including original seating, fixtures, and layout.

## Operational policies and procedures

The Council is expected to continuously maintain, review, and develop its operational policies and procedures. This ensures its functions are performed effectively, efficiently, consistently, and transparently, in full accordance with the provisions of the Act and this Statement.

Particular attention should be given to ensuring Council processes maximize certainty for applicants and stakeholders, facilitate consistent and timely assessments and decisions, and impose the minimum necessary regulatory and administrative burden on the ACT Heritage team to achieve appropriate heritage outcomes.



## Period of effect

This Statement of Priorities takes effect from the date of signing with ongoing effect unless amended or revoked by me as the Minister.

As responsible Minister, it is my expectation that the Council will, through the Chair, provide me with regular information on its activities and performance and bring to my attention, in a timely manner, any information on significant issues affecting the Council's functions and work.

I ask that the Council provide me with a written response to this Statement of Priorities within 6 months of its notification. Following this, I require annual updates regarding the progress of the intended actions. These should be aligned to the financial year and provided within 4 weeks after 30th June in any given period.

**Chris Steel MLA**  
Minister for Heritage

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**ACT**  
Government