



## HERITAGE Impact Statement

89 York Street—London ON

October 26, 2015

### A. BACKGROUND

89 York Street is located within London's Downtown Heritage Conservation District. As part of the current development approval process, the City of London is requiring a heritage impact assessment for the development of a 10-storey, mixed-use commercial/residential building being proposed for this property. The primary intent of this assessment is to determine if any cultural heritage resources are impacted by the proposed development.<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of city-specific terms of reference or guidelines for an assessment—and the fact that there are no heritage buildings on, or abutting the property—city staff have directed the client to submit a *scoped* document in the format of a statement.<sup>2</sup> As required, the **HI**statement that follows includes/comments on the following:<sup>3</sup>

- a brief description of the development proposal
- the siting of the development proposal within the context of the Downtown Heritage Conservation District with specific reference to section 6.1.4—New Construction—in the Heritage Conservation District Plan
- the impacts of the proposed development—identifying positive and any foreseen negative impacts—with attention given to potential impacts on 88-90 York Street (across the street), a priority 1, class A heritage property

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<sup>1</sup> For a general list of examples of negative impacts see “Info Sheet #5, Heritage Impact Assessments and Conservation Plans” in *Heritage Resources in the Land Use Planning Process*, Winter 2006, Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, p3.

<sup>2</sup> Direction was set from discussion at an October 5, 2015 meeting with city planning and urban design staff in attendance, along with the project architect and project planner.

<sup>3</sup> For this *scoped HI*statement, sources referenced have been limited to the following: a) “City of London—Inventory of Heritage Resources,” by the City of London, 2006; b) “Downtown London Heritage Conservation District Plan,” by Stantec Consulting Ltd., March 2012; c) “Downtown London Heritage Conservation District Study-Final Report,” by Stantec Consulting Ltd., January 2011; d) Google Maps, <https://www.google.ca/>; e) “Info Sheet #5, Heritage Impact Assessments and Conservation Plans” in *Heritage Resources in the Land Use Planning Process*, Winter 2006, Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario; f) London City Map, <http://maps.london.ca/>; g) “Planning Justification Report—89 York Street,” by Kirkness Consulting Inc., n.d.; h) *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2010; i) “Urban Design Brief—89 York Street,” by Endri Poletti Architect Inc., July 2015.

## B. OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL<sup>4</sup>

The site for the proposed development—89 York Street—is a vacant property located at the southern periphery of London’s downtown core, west of the Talbot and York Street intersection [Figure 1]. The site is rectangular in shape (long + narrow) with a frontage of 17.8m (58.4ft), depth of 41.7m (136.8ft), and an area of 0.0757 ha (0.187 acres). It is bordered by CP rail lines (to the south), and is surrounded by parking lots and a number of low-rise commercial buildings (to the west) and bus station (to the east). The block facing the site directly across the street to the north includes a high-rise, 28-storey condominium complex (The Renaissance II), and two-three storey mixed-use commercial buildings (one of them a being a priority 1, class A heritage building at 88-90 York St.) The remaining street front is flanked by additional parking lots at the corner.

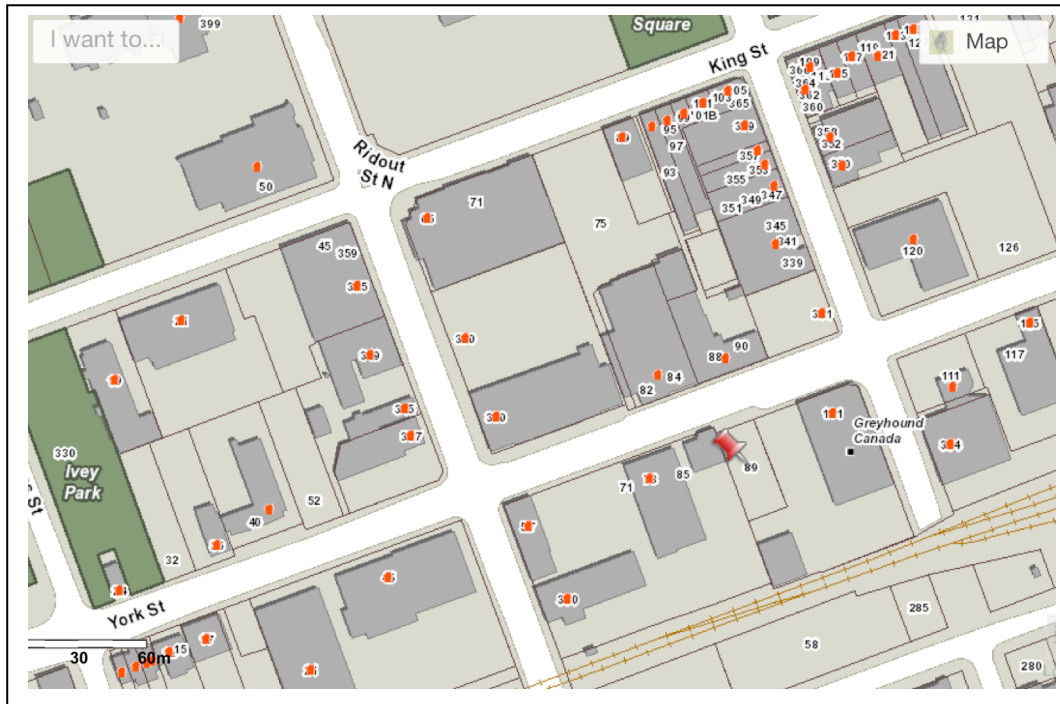


Fig. 1 Proposed development site (indicated w/red tack) and surrounding area

The overall quality in and around the site can be characterized as lacking cohesion in the urban fabric due primarily to the predominance of surface parking, vacant lots, single storey buildings and some inconsistencies in how buildings address the street wall. In particular, this section of York St. is overwhelmingly vehicular in character and not pedestrian in scale or friendly to pedestrian oriented activity.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For full description of development proposal, see “Urban Design Brief” and “Planning Justification Report” for 89 York Street.

<sup>5</sup> Note that York Street has one of the highest average measured daily vehicular volume in the HCD (see HCD Study-Final Report , p7.52).



Fig. 2 Proposed building design showing pedestrian scale at street

There is also a lack of visual uniformity in building massing, height, rhythm, and architectural styling collectively among the existing buildings in the area.<sup>6</sup>

The proposed development is for a 10-storey, mixed-use commercial/residential building containing a health food store, a variety of restaurants, offices and 18 residential units. The building—which was designed based on principles of Feng Shui and biogeometry—is also planned to provide space for a not-for-profit organization that will focus on community health and wellness promotion and education. The primary objective has been to create a high quality, multi-purpose building that provides resources, services and a healthy environment promoting holistic well-being.

*The approach taken in the development of the site begins to address some of the recognizable urban design deficiencies of the area previously mentioned.*<sup>7</sup>

Notably:

- The design visually enhances the streetscape along York St. and helps to promote a pedestrian-scaled experience at the street level [Figure 2].
- There is an enhanced sense of entry with the use of elevations and landscape elements.
- The visual effects of additional surface parking are eliminated since all parking is within the building using the 5BY2 parking system.

<sup>6</sup> The HCD Study and Plan account for this variability at some peripheries of the downtown district notably in this area.

<sup>7</sup> The design also directly responds to city policies and guidelines (see “Urban Design Brief” and “Planning Justification Report” for 89 York Street).

- The design sensitively responds to the highly diverse character of the area.
  - A mid-rise building is being proposed that is contemporary in styling, authentic to its period and distinguishable from other historical eras.<sup>8</sup>
- The design reflects key urban design principals and HCD Plan guidelines for new construction such as:<sup>9</sup>
  - a clearly defined/articulated building base,
  - enhanced continuity of the street edge,
  - the use of high quality materials on the exterior façade treatment,
  - pedestrian scaled elements at the street, and
  - full frontage build-out.
- Thoughtfully considered infill development (reflected in this design) begins to:
  - weave together the tattered urban fabric in this area.
  - help re-establish the street wall.
  - offer more services in response to downtown re-densification plans.
  - provide a supportive context for future development.

It is anticipated that the proposed building will serve as a landmark within London's downtown through its innovative design and act as a hub for health education and promotion.

### **C. THE BROADER CONTEXT: SITUATING 89 YORK STREET WITHIN THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

The site for the proposed development is located within London's Downtown Heritage Conservation District. The HCD Plan has been in affect since 2013 and impacts a total of 339 (mostly commercial) properties in the downtown.<sup>10</sup> Conclusions from the HCD study that preceded the HCD Plan conclusively identify the core of the study area (essentially the original mercantile downtown core of London) as a heritage district (HCD Study, p9.60).<sup>11</sup> London's overall downtown landscape—which comprised the entirety of the study area—was characterized as “highly diverse” and not “displaying a single dominant character” (HCD Study, p4.38). The fact that the downtown contains a variety of styles, materials and construction types contributes to the area's uniqueness (HCD Study, p3.29). The HCD Plan includes objectives, policies and guidelines for managing change within London's downtown heritage district. Heritage character statements (Section 2.0 of the Plan) provide the foundation and criteria for these policies and reflect findings from the Study.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (p22) regarding the concept of legibility as follows: “Recognize each historic place as a physical record of its time, place and use. Do not create a false sense of historical development...” Although referencing more specifically preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of existing heritage resources, the concept of legibility can be more broadly applied.

<sup>9</sup> See “Downtown London Heritage Conservation District Plan,” pp6.39-6.43. For more detail, see p7 in this report.

<sup>10</sup> From “List of Heritage Conservation Districts”, [www.mtc.gov.on.ca](http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca). Note that the final HCD boundary is somewhat smaller than the downtown core as defined by the City's Official Plan.

<sup>11</sup> The study core was described as “[p]rimarily mercantile in nature, the buildings and environment held strong reminders and attributes of previous eras in London's evolution” (HCD Study, p9.60).

<sup>12</sup> The Ontario Heritage Act requires a heritage character statement as a component of heritage conservation district plans.

The conclusion of three separate statements (heritage, architectural and landscape) describe that the downtown district is diverse in character containing a variety of building types that differ in design, style, materials, detailing and scale. Value and distinction of the district is derived precisely from this DIVERSITY. The combined effect of surviving details from various periods (showing the evolution of the city) and recognizable patterns in the “urban landscape”<sup>13</sup> (that are linked by common ideas and elements), create a heritage character as well as “sense of place” that is unique (pp2.4-2.7).

The heritage character of the district is not only diverse, but is also not uniform throughout. This is the case with some of the peripheral areas of the district where the urban fabric is not cohesive, there exists limited priority heritage properties, and where there is no dominant, expressed heritage character. *The area in and around the proposed development site is one such area in the district* [Figure 3].



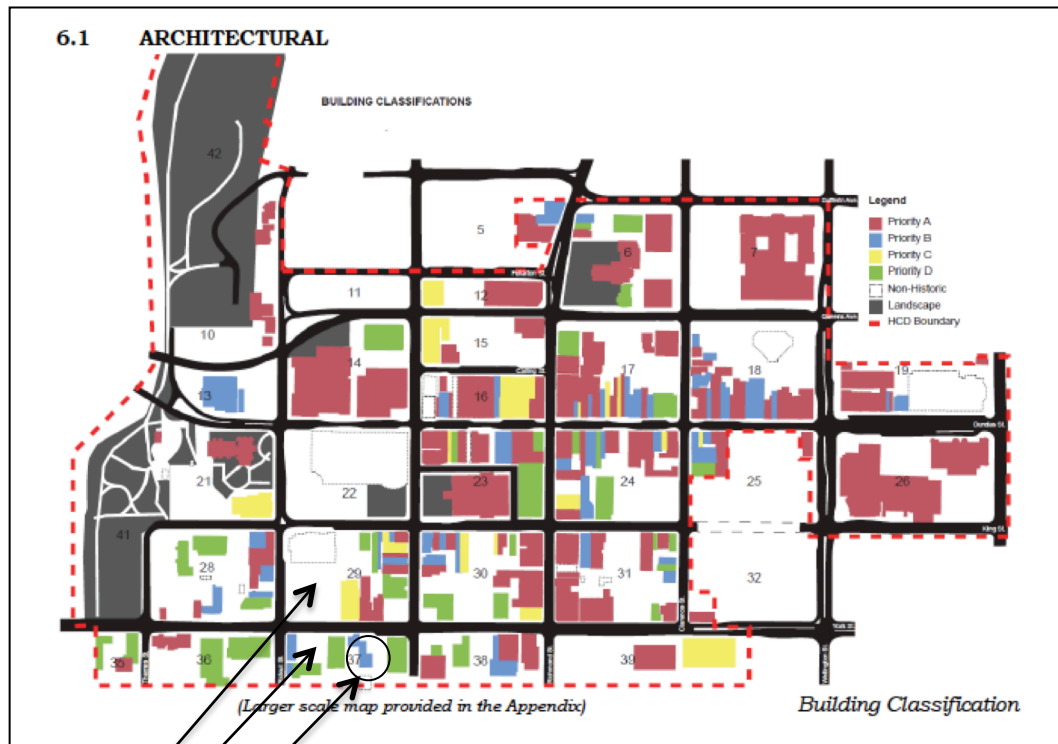
Fig. 3 Strip shopping area near-adjacent to proposed development site

Referencing the building classification plan from the HCD Plan [Figure 4], the proposed site for development is located within block #37—with block #29 directly facing the site across the street (to the north). With the exception of 88-90 York Street (located in block #29), the majority of the buildings either directly adjacent to the proposed development site or within the block #37, are not high ranking, priority heritage properties.<sup>14</sup> *The proposed development site is surrounded primarily by paved surfaces, vacant lots and by buildings that have no primary status within the district.* Note as well that the character of

<sup>13</sup> This includes traditional land patterns, streetscapes, gardens, parks, and open spaces (HCD Study, p2.6).

<sup>14</sup> See street classification plan and quadrant and property matrix (HCD Plan, p6.46, 7.70—reference blocks #29, #37).

the streetscape in this area of York Street is dual in nature reflecting both commercial and industrial/warehouse typologies; this adding to an already diverse, ununiform quality. The bulk of the HCD Plan provides guidance for the retention, conservation, and adaptation of already existing heritage resources in the district. Infill/new construction is addressed in section 6.1.4 of the plan and primarily suggests commonly recognized “good” urban design practices. The following table outlines suggested principles and guidelines from the HCD Plan and how the proposed development responds to each suggested guideline [Table 1].



block #29

block #37

location of proposed  
development site

Fig. 4 Building classification plan (HCD Plan, p6.19)

guideline/principles (6.1.4—HCD Plan)		design response/comment	
<b>A   general principles</b>	1	conserve character-defining elements of neighbouring buildings	adjacent buildings are not priority heritage buildings; new dev. will not directly impact any features of 88-90 York St.—a heritage priority “A” property across the street (to the north)
	2	new dev. physically and visually compatible w/ historic place while not replicating in whole	the urban fabric of the area surrounding proposed dev. is not cohesive, there exists limited priority heritage properties, and the overall heritage character is elusive; proposed dev. design sensitively responds to the highly diverse character of the area, reflects “good” urban design practices and exhibits contemporary styling that is authentic to its period and distinguishable from other historical eras; see footnote #8
	3	new dev. decipherable from historic precedent and complementing adjacent heritage buildings	
	4	roof shapes/major design elements complementary to surrounding buildings and heritage patterns	
	5	setbacks of new dev. consistent with adjacent buildings	new dev. built to street line
	6	new buildings/entrances oriented to street; encouraged to have architectural interest	has an enhanced sense of entry with/use of elevations and landscape elements
	7	new dev. respond to unique conditions or location (i.e. corner properties); provide architectural interest/details @ both street facades	not a corner site
<b>B   façade composition</b>	1	new dev. to enhance character of street using high quality materials (brick, stone and slate)	proposed dev. features a prominent building façade using quality materials in a pleasing colour palette
	2	detailing to add visual interest and texture	building articulation (material/colour) breaks the mass of building
	3	one storey commercial face of new dev.	entrance and base of building clearly articulated and reflects commercial function with strong entry and extension of interior-exterior at street level; commercial function exceeds 1 storey, but facade treatment reads as 2 separate floors
	4	up to 80% glazing is appropriate at-grade; 2 <sup>n</sup> + ~50% glazing (with 25% < and <75%)	façade surface/glazing treatment is w/in suggested guidelines
	5	horizontal rhythm/visual transitions between floors articulated	pleasing façade, punctuated w/balconies, visibly exposed vegetation and graphic glass which reveals an expected rhythm determined by its internal structure and window positioning (typical in contemporary design)
	6	floor-ceiling height of ground floor to be consistent w/heights + respect scale of adjacent buildings	adjacent buildings are single storey which is discouraged in the district
	7	new dev. to respect significant design features and horizontal rhythm of adjacent buildings	adjacent building (to west) is a heritage priority “D” building with limited significant design features
	8	blank façades permitted facing main or side streets	there are no blank facades
	9	new dev. sympathetically designed to district heritage attributes (massing, rhythm of solids and voids, significant design features, and high quality materials)	area surrounding proposed dev. lacks visual uniformity in building massing, height, rhythm, and architectural styling collectively among the existing buildings
<b>C   setback + height + massing</b>	1	new dev. to maintain and enhance the continuity of the street edge by building out to front property line	building brought near front property line—consistent with the adjacent properties along the streetscape
	2	façades to be 2 storeys min. no more than 18m max	proposed dev. is 44.3 meters (10 storeys) in height with no upper floor setbacks; entrance and base of building clearly articulated and pedestrian enhanced, lessening the impact of perceived impact of building height at street level
	3	new dev. to consider perception of building height from the pedestrian’s view on the sidewalk	design visually enhances the streetscape along York St. and helps to promote a pedestrian-scaled experience at the street level
	4	scale and spatial understanding of district be retained while allowing for new dev.	area surrounding proposed dev. lacks visual uniformity in building scale; see footnote #8
	5	2 storeys <, setback upper floors of building from building line (2m for each two metres of height)	proposed dev. is 44.3 meters (10 storeys) in height with no upper floor setbacks—limited ability to setback upper floors due to programming requirements, building footprint and narrowness of site
	6	upper floor setbacks required on buildings exceeding heights of neighbouring buildings by over one storey	adjacent buildings are single storey
	7	setback/step-backs not permitted <13m bldg. height	proposed dev. is 44.3 meters in height
	8	new dev. abutting existing structures at the building line to match adjacent building height—or provide visible/apparent offset in height to maintain the visual integrity of the existing structure	no building abutting to the east; adjacent building to the west is single storey heritage priority “D” building
	9	with/exception of York St., new dev. w/in district encouraged to retain 3-4 storey height @ building line	proposed dev. is at the building line on York St. and is 44.3 meters (10 storeys) in height
	10	single storey new dev, is discouraged	proposed development is 10 storeys
	11	new dev. to build the full extent of the property width fronting the HCD streets	new dev. extends the full width of the property
<b>D</b>	<b>landscape + streetscape (6.2.3—HCD Plan)</b>		
	1	discourage the placement of non-heritage service facilities such as service boxes, parking and utilities in highly visible locations or within view sheds.	proposed dev. does not have parking in front; there is a lay-by-lane (req. by City Transportation Division) to enable vehicles to wait before entering the parking facility w/in building if another vehicle is entering or existing; this does not constitute parking but a traffic management strategy; design dedicates 3m across the front to provide for this lane

Table 1 Proposed development design response to HCD Plan guidelines

#### D. THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT AND IMPACTS ON HERITAGE PRIORITY PROPERTIES

The majority of the buildings in and around the proposed development site (block #37) are not priority heritage properties, with the exception of 88-90 York Street (located in block #29) to the north of the site.<sup>15</sup> Constructed in c1911, the building is three-storeys, constructed in yellow brick, and reflecting the “industrial style” of the period.<sup>16</sup> Now appearing as one complex, the building originally comprised two separate buildings that were then connected; this is apparent today at the location of the covered alleyway that connects York St. to the rear of the complex.<sup>17</sup> This property is listed on *London’s Inventory of Heritage Resources* (2006) as a “Priority 1” status property, and has been ranked a “Priority A” property under the HCD Plan; both indicate the highest level of heritage importance and significance of attributes [Figure 5].



Fig. 5 Building complex at 88-90 York Street (from HCD Study, p3.27)

Although a significant heritage resource, this building **NOW** stands alone in this area. In other areas of the district, particularly the downtown core, there are significant groupings of buildings—“intact streetscapes”—that reinforce the original heritage continuity along the street edge.<sup>18</sup> Each building is distinctive and part of a larger, visual whole. *This is*

<sup>15</sup> See Figure 4 indicating block locations and building classifications.

<sup>16</sup> See “City of London-Inventory of Heritage Resources”, p55.

<sup>17</sup> See HCD Study (p3.27) for background of the property: “88 York Street is a three storey structure which was built on top of the original foundry. This expanded the industrial nature of the building to also incorporate woodworking and machine shops. Prior to the buildings being connected, the left building housed the ‘Ontario Spring Bed and Mattress Company’ and the right building, ‘The London Machine Tool Company.’”

<sup>18</sup> See reference to the concept of streetscape grouping and continuity in the HCD Study (pp3.23-3.26).



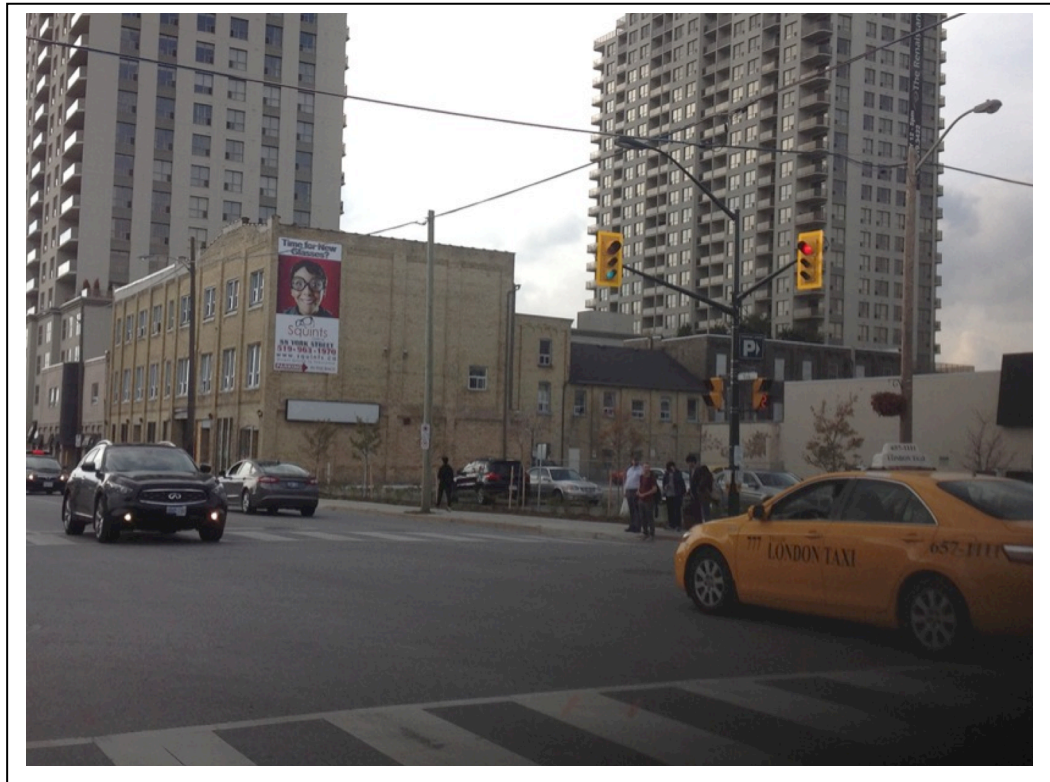


Fig. 6 View of 88-90 York Street (in foreground) with high-rise condominium complex behind

*not the case in this area of the district along York Street.* Nearly all of the supportive heritage fabric that would have surrounded this property in the past has been replaced by surface parking, vacant lots and functional, non-styled buildings. 88-90 York St. would have at one time been part of more cohesive industrial/warehouse district exhibiting a character of its own. *However, the building **NOW**—in and of itself—is notable, but does not exert a strong presence on the streetscape or the character of the broader area.*

The near-adjacent, high-rise condominium complex (at the corner of York and Ridout Streets) has **ALREADY** impacted the “look and feel” of this area, as well as expected parameters for future infill/new development [Figure 6]. Comparatively, the development being proposed for 89 York Street is considerably much more modest in scale. *Because the heritage character of the surrounding area is elusive, foreseen negative impacts on that character of 88-90 York St. are negligible.* However, clearly there are positive benefits. Thoughtfully considered new development exhibiting a high quality of urban and architectural design (such as what is being proposed here) is expected to help re-establish the urban fabric of this area and provide a supportive context for future development—ultimately contributing to a “new” heritage of the area.

## E. SUMMARY

This brief Heritage Impact Statement fulfills city staff requirements that a scoped statement be submitted as part of the current development approval process for the proposed development at 89 York Street in London.

Key conclusions from this statement suggest the following:

- **OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL**– High quality, new infill development (that thoughtfully considers architectural and urban design principles—such as what is being proposed at 89 York St.) will begin to address some of the recognizable urban design deficiencies of this area along York Street.
- **THE BROADER CONTEXT**–The urban fabric in and around the area surrounding the proposed development is not cohesive, there exists limited priority heritage properties, and the overall heritage character is elusive. The design for the proposed development sensitively responds to the highly diverse character of the area, reflects “good” urban design practices and exhibits contemporary styling that is authentic to its period and distinguishable from other historical eras. All relevant HCD Plan guidelines (relating to new/infill development and landscape + streetscape) have been addressed/responded to within this HIstatement.
- **THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT AND IMPACTS ON HERITAGE PRIORITY PROPERTIES** – The majority of the buildings in and around the proposed development site are not priority heritage properties, with the exception of 88-90 York Street. This building is notable, but does not exert a strong presence on the streetscape or the character of the broader area. The high-rise condominium complex (at the corner of York and Ridout Streets) has **ALREADY** impacted the “look and feel” of this area. Comparatively, the development being proposed for 89 York St. is considerably much more modest in scale, and foreseen negative impacts on the character of 88-90 York St. are negligible.

Downtown London’s Heritage Conservation District Plan is progressive and forward-thinking; it acknowledges that the “challenge in creating a successful [heritage district] is to create a delicate balance of preserved buildings, modern infill, and increased density for a vibrant and diverse downtown” (p3.30).<sup>19</sup> As current and future infill/new development occurs along this area of York Street, it is entirely appropriate that the review process be flexible in interpreting and applying guidelines—assessing proposals on the merits of suitability of purpose, commonly recognized urban design practices, and heritage standards to ensure the future of an ever-evolving district.

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<sup>19</sup> See related physical goals and objectives of HCD Plan (p3.10): to “[i]nfluence the renovation or construction of modern era buildings so that it is done with regard to the District and complementary to the character and streetscape” and, to “[s]uccessfully implement these objectives while fostering an environment of growth and renewal going forward.”

