4.0 Assessment of Significance

4.1 Evaluation criteria

The following assessment of heritage significance has been prepared using the current evaluation criteria published by the New South Wales Heritage Branch.

Criterion (a) – An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW’s cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of Lindfield)

The site, like most of the surrounding area is of local historic significance as part of an early land grant in the area and as land subsequently acquired by the Commonwealth Government in the period between 1915 and 1939 for “defence” purposes.

Part of the site may have been used as an Army rifle range, however, no evidence of this or any other early uses remain. The subject site was formed and subdivided in the late 1950s and does not appear to have been developed until the latter half of the 20th century when the Commonwealth Film Unit buildings were constructed.

The site is of some historic significance as the first, purpose built Government owned and run film facility in NSW that represents the growth and development of Government sponsored films and film programme developed to record and promote Australia for Australians and the world.

The site has had continuous use since operations began here in 1962. The various changes and major additions in the 1970s represent the anticipated and real growth and development of the Commonwealth Film Unit and changing administration, philosophies, role and technology. The recent changes, however, have resulted in a reduced use and need for such facilities, most of which have been removed and or are now out-dated.

Criterion (b) - An item 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 (or the cultural or natural history of Lindfield)

The site, the surrounding area is associated with early grantee William Henry and subsequent land owners and speculators, however, these do not appear to have developed the subject site in any significant way.

The existing buildings are associated with Screen Australia and its predecessors who were were responsible for the development of Government sponsored films and programmes and the development of the national programme and presentation of Australia to Australians and the world.

The early buildings are also associated with architectural firm, Baldwinson and Twibill, Public Works and associated government departments and instrumentalities who designed and constructed the buildings on the site.

The site is associated with the Commonwealth Government, who continues to own the site and a number of Government Departments who initially oversaw and managed the film Unit and later provided advisory and administrative assistance.
**Criterion (c)** - An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the cultural or natural history of Lindfield)

The buildings are good representative examples of “institutional” type buildings designed by (and on behalf of) Public Works in the period between the late 1950s and 1970s.

Whilst the buildings retain some interesting external and internal features, they are generally relatively simple face brick, steel and concrete structures constructed of standard and “maintenance free” materials.

Some of the buildings, including Sound Stage Building (eastern end of Building B), Theatrette Building, Building F (Music Studio/Theatre 7) and the Roxy Theatre, feature purpose designed spaces and elements and exhibit some late 20th century “stripped classical” and “brutalist” details. However, these are not outstanding examples of these styles of buildings. The early buildings have also been altered and modified in order to integrate the additions.

The buildings are spread over the site and are enhanced by landscaping, planting and bushland setting. They are, however, set back from the street frontage and due to the landscaping and surrounding trees and plantings make no particular visible contribution to the Eton Road streetscape.

The site retains a number of mature trees and plantings which appear to mostly date from the 1960 and 1970s but which contribute to the character of the area. The front setback and associated planting and “garden” also forms part and contributes to the character of the Eton road streetscape.

**Criterion (d)** - An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or Lindfield) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

The site is of high social significance as an early training ground and focus of the production and development of government run films, documentaries and television in the latter half of the 20th and early 21st century and is associated with the film community, managers, staff and their families and peers during this period.

**Criterion (e)** - An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW’s cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of Lindfield)

There are no known archaeological deposits on the site and it is considered that there is limited potential for early deposits due to the level of disturbance as a result of the clearing and construction of the various buildings, roads and car parking areas also landscaping and planting.

The Theatrette Building and Sound Stage incorporate some interesting and specialist detailing that has the ability to provide some information about the design and construction of theatres and film studios in the late 20th century, however, overall, the buildings generally incorporate standard construction techniques, building materials and details and do not have the potential to yield any new information that is not available elsewhere.
Criterion (f) - An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW’s cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of Lindfield)

The film production use of the complex is relatively unique, however, these uses are now very much reduced and much of the equipment, use and facilities are dated or have been relocated from the site.

The site retains theatre and studio spaces which are relatively unique in the local area, however, there are a number of private theatres, film and sound studios in Sydney and in the wider region.

Criterion (g) - An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW’s (or Lindfield’s)

• cultural or natural places; or
• cultural or natural environments.
(or a class of the local area’s cultural or natural places; or

• cultural or natural environments)

The Screen Australia site at Lindfield provided a venue and facilities for the development of government sponsored film industry.

4.2 Statement of Significance

The Screen Australia site at No. 101 Eton Road, Lindfield is of historic and social significance as a purpose built, Government run film studio with associated facilities. Initially constructed in c. 1960 the site provided much needed facilities for the developing Commonwealth Film Unit and represents the growth and development of Government sponsored films and film programme particularly in the latter half of the 20th century when this industry was at its peak.

The site has had continuous use since operations began here in 1962 and is associated with Screen Australia and its predecessors and various government departments who were responsible for the development and management of Government sponsored films and programmes and the development of the national film and documentary programme.

The site is of social significance as an early training ground and focus of the production and development of government run films, documentaries and television during the late 20th and early 21st centuries and is associated with the film community during this period.

The various changes and major additions in the 1970s and changes since represent the growth and development of the Commonwealth Film Unit also changing administration, philosophies, role and technology. Recent managerial and technological changes, and the migration and growth of screen production activity in the private sector, have resulted in a reduced use and need for the facilities here, which has impacted on and has reduced the use and significance of the site.

The buildings are associated with architectural firm, Baldwinson and Twibill and Public Works and are good representative examples of “institutional” type buildings designed by (and on behalf of) Public Works in the period between the the late 1950s and 1970s. Whilst the buildings retain some interesting features and purpose designed spaces and elements and exhibit some late 20th century modern details, they are generally relatively simple face brick, steel and concrete structures constructed of standard and “maintenance free” materials. They are not outstanding examples of their respective type of buildings. The early buildings have also been altered and modified.
The site trees, plantings and bushland setting contributes to the character of the building and area, however, the buildings make no particular visual contribution to the Eton Road streetscape.

The archaeological potential of the site and buildings is considered to be low.

The film production use of the complex was relatively unique, however, this significance has been reduced by the reduction of the use of the site, relocation and shift of uses and staff. Remaining equipment is now mostly out-dated. There are also a number of private theatres and film and sound studios in Sydney and in the wider region.
5.0 Constraints & Opportunities

This section takes into consideration matters arising from the statement of significance, procedural constraints imposed by cultural conservation methodology such as that of the Australia ICOMOS *Burra Charter*. It identifies all statutory and non-statutory listings that apply for the site and describes constraints and opportunities arising from these listings.

5.1 Implications of the Statement of Significance

The site and buildings are significant primarily for their historic and social values. The above analysis and statement of significance indicates that the site was used and evolved in accordance with the development Commonwealth Film Unit in the latter half of the 20th and early 21st century and that some of the significance of the site has been reduced by the managerial, technological and physical changes on the site and particularly the reduce use of the place.

Based on the above review and statement the implications are as follows:

- the use of the site and associations are of significance as opposed to the overall buildings, facilities and site elements;
- certain elements, such as the detailing in the Sound Stage and Theatres demonstrate the design of these types of spaces in the late 1950s and 1960s and The Roxy Theatre and music studio added as part of the 1970s works are of some interest;
- the social significance of the site as a training ground and as a “place where interesting people made interesting films in an interesting way” is of some importance;
- the open spaces, particularly setback from the site boundaries and Eton Road frontage contributes to the character of the area; and
- the “bushland” setting, mature trees and planting also contribute to the character of the site and area.

5.2 Issues arising from the physical condition of the place

The buildings are currently generally in good condition and well maintained.

The recent reorganisation, functional and managerial changes of Film Australia and creation of Screen Australia in 2008 in addition to changing technologies has resulted in a shift and wind down of operations on the site with a number of areas and facilities now vacated, tenanted and or used infrequently. The concern is that lack of use will impact on the condition of the place as on-going maintenance programs cannot be sustained.

5.3 Owner’s requirements

The re-organisation and shift of the role of Screen Australia has resulted in a reduction in the use of the site. In particular the shift in role from a “manufacturer” to more of a “management” role has meant that the buildings are now surplus to their needs and no longer required. Whilst Screen Australia maintains some administrative staff on site and have leased various part of the buildings to a variety of industry tenants, a large proportion of the buildings and spaces is now vacant.
Screen Australia has no further use for the site. The organisation has consolidated its core activities to its head offices in Woolloomooloo.

The aim therefore is to secure a rezoning of the site and offer it for open market sale for residential development.

5.4 Heritage management framework

5.4.1 Statutory requirements

The site is not covered by any instruments under the *NSW Heritage Act* (1977) or recognised on the State Heritage Inventory.

The site is not listed as a heritage item by Ku-ring-gai Council or located in a heritage conservation area, however, native trees and planting are protected.

There are no heritage listed items in the immediate area of the site. Items in Grosvenor road are physically and visually separated from the site. There is some interest in the adjacent UTS site which has been identified as a significant place and for it late 20th century architectural character.

As such theoretically there is no impediment to demolish or remove the buildings, roads and associated elements on the site provided that mature trees and plantings, where possible are maintained and there is no adverse impact on any heritage or potential heritage items in the “vicinity”.

5.4.2 Non-statutory implications

The site has not been included on the *Register of the National Estate* or classified by the National Trust of Australia (NSW).

The site, buildings and elements have not been recognised by any other heritage bodies.

As such theoretically there is no impediment to demolish or remove the buildings, roads and associated elements on the site.

5.5 Archaeological management

The site was initially developed in the late 1950s/ early 1960s when photographs indicate much of the area was cleared. The site and garden areas around the buildings also appear to have been created from around this also been changed and altered cleared and redeveloped as part of the 1970s additions. It therefore considered unlikely that any early archaeological resources remain as this development would have disturbed any significant archaeological resources on the site.

The buildings themselves remain as examples of late 20th century “modern” buildings, however, generally incorporate standard construction materials and details. As noted above, some of the buildings incorporate “specialist” details that indicate the use and construction period. If these elements cannot be retained, then these should be recorded.
5.6 Building regulations

The National Construction Code of Australia is concerned with establishing uniform building regulations across Australia. Generally, minimum standards are required to be reached in building works.

The main provisions of the Code concern structural requirements, fire resistance, access and egress (including provisions for people with disabilities), services and equipment and health and amenities.

An assessment of compliance of the building with the Code has not been carried out for this report, however, any future use and works will need to comply, or be deemed to comply with the BCA.

The purpose design of some of the spaces and other use considerations such as location and National Construction Code requirements may prohibit and make adaptive re-use difficult.
7.0 Conclusion

The above analysis indicates that the overall site is of historic and social significance associated with its various associations, use and development in the late 20th and early 21st century. Analysis of the heritage management framework demonstrates that there is no theoretical impediment or requirement to retain the buildings.

7.1 Guidelines & recommendations

Based on the above assessment the following is recommended:

- The architectural plans and material pertaining to the site held by Screen Australia should be consolidated and compiled and handed over to the National Archive or NFSA for safe keeping and to supplement records and material already held by these institutions.

- Consideration could be given to adaptive re-use of the buildings. If the buildings, particularly the main structures that incorporate special details such as the the 1960s Theatrette and Sound Stage buildings and 1970s music recording building and the Roxy Theatre cannot be adaptively re-used then they should be recorded prior to any changes or demolition.

- Any future works could also consider the retention of a sample building as a reminder of the former use of the site.

- All of the buildings, including their context and site elements and main spaces should be photographically recorded prior to any changes or demolition of the site.

- Any new use or development to the site should incorporate some interpretation of the former uses of the site using techniques such as retention of a sample building, street naming, use of signage and or landscaping.
8.0 Bibliography


Australian Dictionary of Biography.


Film Australia, *A moving history of Australia: Film Australia eighty years* (undated).


Ku-ring-gai Historical Society website.

Land and Property Information, Old Systems, Certificate of Titles, Deposited Plans.


National Film and Sound Archive.


Plans held by Screen Australia.


Screen Australia website.
9.0 Appendix

9.1 Select building plans

The following is a selection of the few remaining original plans held by Screen Australia dated September 1959, 24 September 1965 (survey) and September 1973.
9.2 Select images held by the National Film & Sound Archive