QVB glass plea not clear-cut

Paul Nicolaou

It's almost a Sydney summer tradition for an offbeat "silly season" story to erupt and this season's candidate is the case of the Queen Victoria Building's stained-glass windows.

Involved is a controversial plan to replace the colourful panels with clear glass at the top of the QVB street-facing shopfronts.

The proposal has been greeted with a resounding, "Why now?"

It seems to be a solution searching for a problem and a case of, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it".

At the very least, the reaction is a reminder that this iconic Sydney building, slated for demolition in the 1960s, was saved and is now a treasure.

The QVB holds a special place in the heart of Sydneysiders – and in mine. It is one of our city's most iconic heritage buildings and a magnificent example of how historic architecture can be respectfully restored and repurposed for contemporary commercial life.

That is why any proposal to alter the QVB's appearance must be approached with the greatest care. These windows were installed around 40 years ago to faithfully replicate the building's original character and form part of the story that makes the QVB unique.

Business Sydney is always mindful of the needs of the business community, but we are not convinced that windows which have been in place for decades have suddenly become an impediment to commercial activity.

The QVB continues to thrive as a retail and tourism destination because of its character, not in spite of it.

A better solution is a united effort by business, retailers, government and council to drive more Sydneysiders and visitors back into the CBD.

Increased foot traffic, stronger confidence and a more vibrant city centre will do far more to support retailers than changing the fabric of an iconic building.

If we get the fundamentals right, encouraging people back into our city, any thoughts about changing the appearance of the QVB will quickly recede into the background.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney