

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

### **Reason for Designation**

The whole of Parliament Hill as a complex is designated Classified because it is in its entirety a symbol of Parliament and Canadian government, because it is one of the better Canadian examples of design at a larger scale, and because it has been the site of numerous nationally significant events and ceremonies.

The foundation of the design of the Parliamentary Complex was the brilliant siting of the buildings on Barracks Hill. Especially as viewed from the north, the design of the buildings and the treatment of the site together made a High Victorian picturesque composition of international significance. In its more formal southern aspect the complex was rendered a fully harmonious whole by Calvert Vaux's simple but inspired retaining wall and lawns. The fence along Wellington Street is, on its own terms, a significant design and an example of advanced craftsmanship.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the complex lies in the relationship between the buildings and the distinctive outdoor spaces around them. The meaning and heritage character of the complex depends on, and is animated by, the tension between its formal, almost austere, centre, and its rugged, apparently wild, periphery. Parliament presents its formal face to the town: the Wellington Street fence is the original and defining iteration of the Town/Crown dichotomy (to use the current slogan) that of a greater or lesser extent has always informed the urban design of Ottawa. Its placement, linearity, and the regulated access it affords are essential to the heritage character of the complex.

The parliamentary lawns are the formal centre of the complex. Their essential character is simplicity approaching austerity; they represent order. Calvert Vaux's graceful retaining wall and podium are the basic form-giving element of the space reinforced by the circulation pattern and grades. The relationship between the new Centre Block and this podium is part of Pearson's design, and has acquired an historical significance of its own. Photographs showing the retaining wall unencumbered by foundation plantings are very persuasive. It is essential to the complex that the lawns of Parliament retain an extreme simplicity of form and materials as a meaningful contrast with the busier spaces near the periphery and as an elegant complement to the gothic architectural vocabulary.

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## **Parliamentary Complex (cont'd)**

The spaces between the buildings and the cliff were developed in the gardenesque tradition, and spoke to Major's Hill Park, which was designed at the same time in the same tradition. These were pleasure grounds offering informal, but cultivated, delight in contrast with the formality of the parliamentary lawns on the one side and picturesque wildness of the cliffs on the other. The summer house, bowling green, and planting beds have disappeared from this space; it has now a more or less utilitarian character. This has had the unfortunate effect of making the cliffs seem merely inadvertent and untended, and the parliamentary lawns, almost barren. It would greatly enhance the heritage character of the Parliamentary Complex if the gardenesque park was reinstated in these spaces. Statuary on the hill is now concentrated in this zone; this is appropriate to the style historically enunciated in this area. The introduction of new elements such as statuaries should be carefully managed to respect the historic design intent of the grounds.

One of the wisest landscape decisions taken on the Hill was to preserve the cliffs in an essentially wild state. This is necessary to the splendid image the Hill presents when viewed from the north; the continued maintenance of apparently natural woods on the cliffs is essential. The demarcation of selected views through this fringe of wild out to distant prospects is a part of this design tradition appropriate to the site, but now not much in evidence.

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