

# "BACK TO THE FUTURE" A FUNDAMENTAL CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSING A 1970S OFFICE BUILDING.

## 1. Site Coverage & Footprint (The "Hidden" Asset)

1970s buildings often have "site coverage" advantages that are legally impossible to get today.

- Verify Site Coverage: Does the existing building cover 90–100% of the land?
  - Compare to Modern Overlays: If you knocked it down, would modern set-back and "Activity Centre" rules force you to build on only 70% or 80% of the site?
  - The "Existing Use" Benefit: Confirm that maintaining the current structure allows you to retain this maximum footprint, providing more internal area than a brand-new build on the same dirt.
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## 2. Location & Accessibility Fundamentals

1970s office hubs were built during an era where car access was king, which is now a major drawback again.

- Arterial Access: Is the building positioned near major arterial roads (like the "wide streets" of South Melbourne) rather than congested, "trendy" narrow lanes?
  - Parking Ratios: Does the building offer better on-street or on-site parking than newer developments in the same area?
  - Proximity to "Activity Centres": Is it near a train station? Simon notes that locations once considered "unfashionable" (like being right next to tracks) are now valuable due to state government density pushes.
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## 3. Structural "Bones" & Conversion Potential

Look at the building not for what it is, but for the "value scenario" it could become.

- Floor-to-Ceiling Height: Is there enough clearance to modernize services (HVAC/Lighting) or convert to residential use?
  - Adaptive Reuse: Can the building be converted into high-demand "service provider/allied health use or boutique residential apartments?
  - The Entry Price vs. Build Cost: Simon's rule of thumb: If the building + land cost is roughly half the cost of "land + new build," the fundamentals are likely strong.
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## 4. Legal & Regulatory Due Diligence

As a valuer, Simon emphasises looks at "rigor and integrity" over agent hype.

- Zoning & Overlays: Check for recent changes in the municipal planning strategy. Does the current overlay allow for future height increases while you use the existing building now?
  - Environmental & Compliance: For buildings of this age, check for "concrete cancer," asbestos, and modern ESM (Essential Safety Measures) compliance.
  - Planning Surety: Does the building have an existing permit or "established use" that avoids the 12-month (or longer) wait time of a new development?
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## 5. Tenant & Income Strategy

If you aren't occupying it yourself, assess the "just in time" service potential.

- Retail Mix: Can the ground floor accommodate "homogenous" but stable service tenants like cafes or laundromats?
- Immediate Occupancy: Is the building functional enough to provide immediate cash flow while you "bide your time" for the next market cycle?