

Legislative Council Inquiry into Built Heritage Tourism in Tasmania
Submission by Hobart City Council

February 2015

The Hobart City Council welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Legislative Council's Inquiry into Built Heritage and Tourism.

The Hobart City Council notes the Sub-Committee's terms of reference are:

To inquire into and report upon the management, preservation, tourist marketing and promotion of built heritage assets in Tasmania, with particular reference to:

- 1. The current and future potential contribution that built heritage makes to tourism in Tasmania;*
- 2. The role of Government;*
- 3. The role of tourism organisations;*
- 4. The role of heritage organisations;*
- 5. Any relevant considerations in other jurisdictions;*
- 6. Any other matters incidental thereto.*

The current and future potential contribution that built heritage makes to tourism in Tasmania

The Hobart City Council recognises the importance of Hobart's cultural heritage, and the vital role that this plays in tourism, which is one of the city's major economic forces.

In terms of colonisation, Hobart is the second oldest of the Australian capital cities, established in 1804, just 16 years after the settlement at Port Jackson. Hobart retains much of its nineteenth century colonial heritage, with many of its major landmarks predating the settlement of Melbourne (1834) and Adelaide (1836). Hobart has examples of colonial Georgian architecture which are of international significance, and this can be said of Tasmania generally. The survival of this heritage places the state in a special position. Tasmania has a higher than usual number of intact colonial villages and towns – places like Evandale, Richmond, Oatlands and Ross still retain the special attributes of nineteenth century small urban settlements within a rural setting.

Tasmania's built heritage is one of its greatest assets – something that sets the state apart from other destinations. Whole villages and streetscapes have survived with minimal adverse intrusion. In Tasmania there is a level of variety and intactness not found elsewhere. Recently the town of Stanley was used as a key location in filming of *The Light Between Oceans*. The state's built heritage provides a ready backdrop for such ventures, requiring minimal production work in order to transform an existing streetscape.

The importance of Tasmania's built heritage was recognised even a century ago, and subsequently by government initiatives such as the Scenery Preservation Board and by community organisations such as the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania). In the past decades there has been increased recognition by local government agencies and (from 1997) the Tasmanian Heritage Council.

The role of Government

The state government has an important role in the management, preservation, tourist marketing and promotion of built heritage assets in Tasmania. The government is responsible for the care of many heritage assets – including hospitals, schools, bridges, as well as the more obvious heritage sites. By utilising heritage buildings for government activities, the government is directly supporting the conservation of the assets which it has inherited.

Local government has a special role in the protection and promotion of local heritage places – and also in relation to local and regional tourism.

Local councils also have an important role as owners and managers of heritage property. These assets range from ornate town halls to grandstands ... from transport depots to aqueducts. Councils have the opportunity to lead by example in their approach to property management.

The Hobart City Council is directly responsible for many significant heritage properties, including the Town Hall (1864-66), the Lady Franklin Museum (1842), the City Hall (1915), three nineteenth century defence batteries, various parks and recreational areas, monuments and a number of other places. The Hobart Council Centre is itself located within an Art Deco landmark, the former Hydro-Electric Commission building (1937-38).

In 1997 the Hobart City Council commissioned a comprehensive heritage audit of all Council owned assets including buildings, parks and other municipal infrastructure. The structure of the audit was compatible with a similar exercise undertaken by the Tasmanian Government, and the data compiled has been linked to Council's asset management systems.

The audit has provided a framework for future studies and work programs. The audit has established priorities with respect to the preparation of conservation plans and other heritage protocols. Conservation plans have been prepared for the Town Hall and Carnegie Building, the Lady Franklin Museum, the former Beaumaris Zoo site, the City Hall, the Queen's Battery and Alexandra Battery. A cultural heritage management plan for the Queen's Domain has also been completed.

The *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993* articulates various objectives of the planning process established by the Act. These include:

(g) to conserve those buildings, areas or other places which are of scientific, aesthetic, architectural or historical interest, or otherwise of special cultural value

To this end, planning schemes include lists of places which have been identified for their heritage importance.

The Southern Tasmania Regional Land Use Strategy 2010-2035, declared by the Minister for Planning in November 2013, contains a number of regional policies intended to enhance the protection of historic cultural heritage values across the region with the key policy being:

CV2 Recognise, retain and protect historic cultural heritage values within the region for their character, culture, sense of place, contribution to our understanding history and contribution to the region's competitive advantage.

All new interim planning schemes are required to be consistent with the Regional Land Use Strategy [*Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993* s.30E(6)].

Some local government authorities have been more active than others in identifying community heritage values – some councils appear content to leave this work to the state agency.

In Hobart, the three existing planning schemes each contain heritage registers. These registers are largely based on work undertaken by the National Trust in the 1960s and 1970s. Since 1995 the Hobart City Council has undertaken systematic heritage studies – the results of which are incorporated within the Hobart Interim Planning Scheme.

This will result in a substantial increase in the number of identified heritage places; the numbers of heritage-listed places in the new scheme is 3338 (currently 1848). Hobart is also fortunate to retain within its older suburbs many areas and streetscapes which have now been identified as Heritage Precincts. In the new planning scheme approximately 19.4% (567 ha) of Hobart's urban area will be included within Heritage Precincts.

In 2007, the Council adopted a clearly-defined community vision (*Hobart 2025 – a Strategic Framework*). The Vision describes what the community of Hobart – its residents, businesses, community groups, private and non-private stakeholders – want the City to be by 2025.

The 2014-2019 strategic plan sets out priority areas of activity, working within the overall strategic framework of the *Hobart 2025* Vision. The first of these priorities is Economic Development, Vibrancy and Culture; the second is Urban Management.

The Strategic Plan articulates the following context for issues relating to Economic Development, Vibrancy and Culture:

Hobart is a growing centre for the development of tourism, events, arts and culture, science and education. These activities will enable the Council to leverage off the economy and manage growth in a sustainable way, along with strengthening Hobart's recognition internationally and to attract inward investment that enhances the City's culture.

Strategic Objectives for 2014-2019 include:

- *Enhance partnerships with State Government, key investors and economic players in research, education, arts, culture and tourism (1.2);*
- *Improve Hobart's international relations and international recognition (1.4);*
- *Deliver quality visitor services and to respond to changing demographics and cultures (1.10)*

In relation to Urban Management, the management and promotion of cultural heritage is identified as a key priority. The Strategic Objectives include:

- *Further identify, protect and promote heritage assets and values in Hobart (2.8)*

A key element of any heritage strategy at local government level is the exploration of opportunities for promotion and public education. The provision of knowledge about the wealth and diversity of a city's heritage assets assists in developing public appreciation of cultural heritage values, and ultimately assists in ensuring that places are valued and retained. Opportunities for promotion, education and cultural tourism are explored in a variety of forms. The presentation of educational and promotional material is a major aspect of the Hobart's heritage and conservation program, and the Council has published several brochures and books which celebrate Hobart's heritage.

The development of tourism and the management and promotion of cultural heritage are inextricably linked in the City of Hobart. For much of its history, visitors have flocked to Hobart to enjoy the rich heritage of the city.

The role of tourism organisations

The Hobart City Council operates Tasmanian Travel and Information Centre, located in the heart of Sullivans Cove at 20 Davey Street, Hobart. This is the primary gateway and information point for visitors to Hobart. In the 2013-2014 financial year, a total of 210,965 people visited the Information Centre.

While some visitors may stay in Hobart for a week or so, many visitors spend only a short time here. Visitors on cruise ships spend only a few hours. But the majority of visitors to Hobart come with at least some vague knowledge of the city's history and an expectation that they will be able to see evidence of the city's colonial past in its preserved buildings.

By the conclusion of the current 'season' there will have been 37 cruise ship visits to the port of Hobart, bringing a total of 103,079 passengers and crew – many of them keen to explore Hobart's history and heritage.

The characteristic of short-term visitation to Hobart is not new. In 1893 the Tasmanian Improvement and Tourists Association published a leaflet "How to Spend a Few Hours in Hobart" for distribution to local hotels and on the steamers calling into Hobart. In the 1970s the National Trust and tourism organisations developed an informative series of brochures called "Let's talk about ..." Sometimes these brochures were illustrated; often they included a map. Invariably, they included some reasonably well-researched historical information so that a visitor could get a quick snapshot of the place they were visiting. Brochures were prepared for most towns and villages throughout Tasmania – there was even one for Anglesea Barracks.

The opportunity for providing information to visitors in a convenient and accessible manner has never been so good. People can find out about places before they visit; they can access information from various electronic devices – notebooks, tablets and mobile phones. QR (Quick Response) codes can be scanned to provide information on places, links to additional research, audio and video clips – all of which would have been quite unimaginable to a visitor in 1893.

The Council has produced a number of booklets and brochures on historical themes and these are made freely available to visitors. Brochures include "Historic Hobart Places" - an illustrated and annotated map of central Hobart, with 51 key buildings, designed as a self-guided walking tour; "Hobart's Historic Cemeteries and Burial Grounds" - which examines the various burial sites throughout the city and suburbs, and examines their establishment and subsequent evolution; and a "Women's Walk" - which examines sites of significance to women or associated with notable women. The Council has also assisted other groups in preparing brochures such as the "Errol Flynn's Hobart" guide, the "Soldiers Memorial Avenue" map and guide and an "Engineering Heritage Walk of Sullivans Cove".

The Council has also contributed to the 'Greater Hobart Trails' website, which presents a variety of self-guided walking tours in a convenient format. Maps and information can also be downloaded and printed. These walks include walks entitled 'Battery Point Sculpture Trail', 'Historic Battery Point' and 'Classic Urban Parks' – as well as many other walking and riding trails beyond the city centre. The Council conducts cultural heritage walking tours based around urban parks through its 'Bush Adventures' program.

The Council also publishes a CBD Mobility Map and a guide to Public Art in Hobart.

But information has to be presented in a variety of ways – some people like the printed brochure that they can hold; some people will buy a souvenir booklet ; others prefer to follow a tour guide, listening to the stories gradually unfold. No matter what medium is used to impart information, high standards of historical accuracy should be maintained. Tasmania has access to many respected professional historians, and the message that is presented to visitors should be well-researched and accurate. Telling people that Government House was designed by convict architect James Blackburn, for example, presents a confusing and inaccurate story. There is merit in establishing some mechanism for accreditation of historical interpretation – or at least for checking the stories being presented.

In addition to being accurate, information should also be presented in an engaging manner and should be relevant to a wide audience. The best historical interpretation is well-organised and focuses on key themes.

As well as being accurate, the message given to visitors should also be based on reality and authenticity. With so many fine heritage-listed buildings and streetscapes throughout Tasmania, the idea of constructing a “historic” sandstone windmill near the Richmond Bridge (as was proposed in the 1990s) is unnecessarily misleading. It is preferable to spend resources on the conservation of *real* heritage, rather than constructing some poor imitation.

Sometimes the authenticity of history is compromised by ‘branding’ and marketing. The Midland Highway is one of the state’s major historical routes, connecting the cities of Hobart and Launceston since the early nineteenth century. It is *not* the “Heritage Highway” and such nomenclature almost suggests that the many other old routes – often built with convict labour – are themselves devoid of ‘heritage’ qualities. The historical names of roads and features should be celebrated and promoted.

Careful presentation and promotion of built heritage helps people understand the importance of preserving historic places and the challenges that confront managers of sites. Visitors to Port Arthur can see first-hand the amount of work undertaken to stabilise significant structures; they can see their entry fees being put to good use.

There appears to be a great thirst for knowledge in relation to cultural heritage – not simply from visitors, but shared by locals. Many cultural heritage professionals and owners of heritage places underestimate the public interest in heritage. For example, the recent archaeological excavations at Myer and in Elizabeth Street have attracted great public interest from passers-by, eager to find out more. There are stories waiting to be told ... but the landowners and project managers do not necessarily always appreciate the opportunity of enhancing understanding of their cultural assets.

Tourism revenue maintains businesses by creating 'spend' (in the year ending September 2014, visitor expenditure was estimated at \$1.74bn). This financial input in turn assists in the conservation of historic places. When people stay at 'The Elms' or 'The Lodge on Elizabeth' – or when they dine in Salamanca Place, they are also visiting historic sites, directly interacting with the state's built heritage, and contributing to the state's economy.

The role of heritage organisations

The Tasmanian Heritage Council was established by the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995* and commenced in 1997. The general functions of the Heritage Council are articulated in section 7 (1) of the Act:

- (a) to advise the Minister on matters relating to Tasmania's historic cultural heritage and the measures necessary to conserve that heritage for the benefit of the present community and future generations; and
- (b) to work within the planning system to achieve the proper protection of Tasmania's historic cultural heritage; and
- (c) to co-operate and collaborate with Federal, State and local authorities in the conservation of places of historic cultural heritage significance; and
- (d) to encourage and assist in the proper management of places of historic cultural heritage significance; and
- (e) to encourage public interest in, and understanding of, issues relevant to the conservation of Tasmania's historic cultural heritage; and**
- (f) to encourage and provide public education in respect of Tasmania's historic cultural heritage; and**
- (g) to assist in the promotion of tourism in respect of places of historic cultural heritage significance; and**
- (h) to keep proper records, and encourage others to keep proper records, of places of historic cultural heritage significance; and
- (i) to perform any other function the Minister determines.

While much of the Tasmanian Heritage Council's day to day work focuses on identification and protection of heritage places through the statutory processes, the agency has a much broader role in relation to conservation, management and promotion of Tasmania's heritage assets. The Tourism Industry Council is represented on the Tasmanian Heritage Council. Initiatives such as the regular Heritage Newsletter assist in promotion of Tasmania's heritage, though the Heritage Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to works approvals probably achieve greater public recognition than its broader educational functions.

Any relevant considerations in other jurisdictions;

No submissions under this term of reference.

Any other matters incidental thereto.

There is provision in the *Building Regulations* for relaxation of controls in relation to buildings of historical interest:

20. Farm, historic and special-use buildings

(1) Subject to subregulation (2), a building surveyor may grant an application for a certificate of likely compliance for a farm building, or a historic building, on the Heritage Register, in respect of building work which does not fully comply with the deemed-to-satisfy provisions of the Building Code of Australia, if the building surveyor considers that the requirement –

(a) is inappropriate for the building due to its use, likely occupancy, location, design or form of construction; and

(b) may reasonably be varied.

This provision should be more widely promoted and used, so that historic places are not unnecessarily modified. The authenticity and experience of staying in a ‘colonial bed and breakfast’ establishment is lost when doorways are widened, mantelpieces and staircases removed and the interior given a clinical contemporary fit-out.

Similarly, a balanced commonsense approach should be adopted in relation to risk management. If necessary, sensitive alternative solutions should be explored before jumping to the most expedient outcome. For example, the construction of a domestic-style pine fence around one of the state’s iconic lighthouses (Cape Bruny) led to a community outcry – and subsequent reconsideration by the responsible agency.

The Hobart City Council provides financial support to owners of heritage places through its Heritage Account. Each year, approximately \$60,000 is made available to eligible projects.

The Heritage Funding program has been operating for 12 years and its success is subject to ongoing monitoring. The relatively small amount of money available means that it is essentially an incentive scheme – the Council providing a ‘helping hand’ to projects deemed worthwhile. With such a rich heritage of major nineteenth century buildings in Hobart, including outstanding churches, colleges and other institutional complexes, funding demands always seem to exceed available financial resources. The Council’s Heritage Funding Program is inadequate to meet such expectations. However, the Council has made substantial grants toward the conservation of St David’s Cathedral, St Mary’s Cathedral and St George’s Church. The Council also funded the preparation of a Conservation Plan for Holy Trinity Church.

Tasmania has a very rich heritage of nineteenth century churches – some of international significance. The survival of these buildings, particularly in small rural communities presents an ongoing challenge. Finding compatible uses which do not involve irreversible loss of heritage fabric warrants serious effort by the levels of government and by members of the broader community.

With popular television shows like *Tony Robinson's Time Walks*, *Who's Been Sleeping in My House* and *Who do You Think You Are?* there is a surging interest in genealogy and connecting people with place. Visitors to Hobart regularly enquire about their convict ancestry, where their grandparents were married or are buried etc. Tasmania should capitalise on this interest.

Conclusion

The Hobart City Council looks forward to the conduct and outcome of this Inquiry. The Council will continue to work with other levels of government, the business community, organisations, visitors and citizens to ensure that our cultural heritage assets are adequately protected, and that the experience and appreciation of these assets is enhanced.