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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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**PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**

**HIGHFIELD HISTORIC SITE  
STANLEY  
FACILITIES UPGRADING**

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*Brought up by Mr Cox and Ordered by the House of Assembly to be printed.*

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**MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**Mr Wilson (Chairman)**  
**Mr Wing**

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**Mr Cox**  
**Mr Goodluck**  
**Mr Hidding**

By Authority: Government Printer, Tasmania

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Committee has the honour to report to the House of Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914* on the proposed facilities upgrading at the Highfield Historic Site, Stanley.

The Government acquired the Highfield property in 1982 and it was proclaimed as a conservation area and a State Reserve with the name "Highfield Historic Site" in 1983.

The Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS), with the assistance of the former Department of Construction, has carried out extensive conservation works at the Site to the value of approximately \$1.3m which has completed the basic stabilisation and weather protection of the buildings.

It is now proposed to further develop the Site to enable its potential as a visitor attraction to be fully realised. This will require the funding of the development works. It will also require the continuation of conservation works and maintenance of significant fabric.

Highfield Historic Site is a place of outstanding heritage value which has particular significance to north-west Tasmania. The Site has strong contemporary social value to the local community as a recognised historic place and focus for interest in history and heritage. The significance of the site is recognised in its nomination both on the National Estate and under the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act (1995)*.

The site evidences the arrival and achievements of the Van Diemens Land Company. Highfield House itself is a superb example of sophisticated design displaying remarkable architectural qualities in a picturesque setting and presents one of the earliest intact farm complexes from the Australian colonial period.

Merino sheep farming for wool developed in Australia as a result of the mechanisation of industry in Britain, with the consequent development of the cloth trade during the nineteenth century. To meet this need, in April of 1824 the Australian Agricultural Company was formed, to be based in New South Wales. In May of 1824, the Van Diemens Land Company, (VDL Co.) to be based in Van Diemens land, was established.

The VDL Co. was granted 500 000 acres of land in the north-west of Tasmania, and the initial stock, equipment and stores arrived from England in march 1826. The sites were surveyed and the grant of land finalised at 340 000 acres. Circular Head remained the chief establishment of the company, with Highfield as the company's headquarters.

The House, replacing temporary dwellings was constructed in 1832/4 and appears to have been designed around imported prefabricated units, doors, windows and floorboards.

Some alterations under the guidance of the colonial architect, John Lee Archer were commenced in 1844, but never completed. The declining fortunes of the VDL Co. during the 1850's caused the company's headquarters to be relocated to Burnie and the House leased out, then sold to the Ford family.

Numerous changes in ownership have been accompanied by some demolition of farm buildings, but few other substantial alterations.

## 2. PROPOSAL

Following the acquisition of the Site, the PWS applied its expertise to the immediate work of arresting the severe and rapid degradation of the house and outbuildings that was taking place.

The work was initially focused on the stabilisation and weatherproofing of the existing structures and landscape.

The necessary information to confirm the special significance of the site, the condition and conservation requirements of the buildings and landscape, and the establishment of policies on the intended uses for the site were obtained through a series of specialist investigations and reports.

During the period 1982 and 1990 approximately \$1.3m has been spent on works at Highfield Historic Site. The majority of this funding has gone into physical work at the Site. The funds were obtained from a variety of sources including National Estate Grants, Bicentennial funds and, more recently, the State Government's Heritage Asset Maintenance Program.

A business plan has been developed to establish the site as a major heritage tourism destination in the Northwest of Tasmania. This business plan provides opportunities for local businesses to lease areas for appropriate business activities onsite as well as the carrying out of essential conservation works to facilitate major interpretive displays, public enjoyment areas, and infrastructure support for business opportunities.

Whilst very few historic properties generate enough income to fully maintain or restore the cultural fabric of the site, it is anticipated that the Highfield enterprise, under the guidance of HHSI will ensure that the site continues to provide a unique heritage experience for visitors to Circular Head. HHSI will take on specific maintenance, management and marketing responsibilities for the site.

Delivering a quality heritage experience will generate increased visitor numbers which will in turn provide the future impetus for the community, businesses and Government to implement conservation work over and above that which is currently funded. Further development will be in accordance with the principles laid out in the Godden and McKay Precinct Study of 1992 as varied by contemporary standards, as approved by the Director, Parks and Wildlife Service and will be subject to the approval process under the *Historical Cultural Heritage Act (1995)*.

The current tourist infrastructure proposal is estimated to cost \$600,000 and the balance of (as yet unfunded) conservation works has been assessed as \$750,000 (1995).

### 3. CAPITAL WORKS REQUIREMENTS

#### Work to Date

During the period between 1982 and 1990 approximately \$1.3m has been spent on works at Highfield Historic Site. The majority of this funding has gone into physical work at the place. Works completed to date have included:

##### Highfield House—

- Stabilisation of the external envelope of the building.
- Reconstruction of the verandah, including roof, columns, treillage and paving.
- Reconstruction of the original roof and roof repairs.
- Attention to damp.
- Taking up relaying of flooring.
- Repair and reconstruction of external joinery.
- Miscellaneous masonry.
- Installation of services, (but not reticulation).

##### Outbuildings—

- Repair and stabilisation generally.
- Reconstruction of stable roof, and vault ceiling (including new lights).
- Hypothetical reconstruction of stalls.
- Replacement of stable pavement where missing.
- Stabilisation and repairs to barn.
- Excavation of cobblestone yard.

##### Landscape/General—

- Planting of cypress hedge around funerary monument.
- Construction of fences and gates.
- Stabilisation of stone fence, but removal of one section.
- Bicentennial plantings including avenue of *Pittosporum*.
- Miscellaneous plantings of *Araucaria* and *Prunus*.
- Installation of temporary toilet.

#### Works Priorities

The capital works that are needed to develop the Site to achieve the Operational objectives include a number of conservation works of high priority.

In the medium to long term and subject to funding, conservation works are to be carried with the objective of attaining the desired level protection and restoration appropriate to the heritage significance of the site, generally in accordance with the priorities identified in the Precinct Plan.

#### 4. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT WORKS 1997-1998

|                                    | \$      |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| HHSI Proposed Works 97/98.....     | 234 000 |
| Employment of Project Officer..... | 50 000  |

Whilst the site has remained open with current staffing arrangements, little development of the enterprise operating on site, marketing opportunities, interpretation development, or continuation of site enhancement has occurred.

The Project Officer's brief is to run and expand the site enterprises, develop and implement an interpretive strategy, and assist with project implementation under the direction of the Board of Management. The Senior Ranger Stanley will be responsible for day to day supervision of the Project Officer, including compliance with industrial and award conditions.

Whilst this funding is required for the first Twelve months progressively the Enterprise revenue generated can partially pay for the position.

Liaison with Cultural Heritage Branch interpretation officers and business the section of the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) is to be undertaken in developing both aspects of the site

|   | \$     |
|---|--------|
| Initial Landscaping and Site Maintenance..... | 33 000 |

This includes:

Repair of exterior render and paint work on the house and timber around site (tender let by Cultural Heritage Branch of the PWS)

Installing paths to facilitate visitor flow around the site (lay over existing fabric where possible) ref Godden and Mackay

Development of 1840's garden immediately to the North of the House ref: Godden and Mackay, liaison with Cultural Heritage Branch PWS

Trimming of hedges on southern boundary of the site.

|                              | \$     |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Archaeological Surveys ..... | 20 000 |

Any survey work required to adequately record fabric that is likely to be disturbed throughout project implementation and to identify and record new discoveries of existent fabric to be tendered by the Cultural Heritage Branch (PWS) in liaison with the Management Board.

|  | \$     |
|--|--------|
| Construction of Drive, Toilet and Car Park ..... | 94 000 |

Toilet reconstruction and relocation will be in accordance with Godden and Mackay with the exterior appearance of the building to resemble the paling clad chook house or the Ford era garage. The actual location of the toilet will depend on the outcome of negotiations to locate the carpark and the overall flow of visitors though the site.

|                           | \$    |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Access for Disabled ..... | 5 000 |

As a component of the landscaping of the site, facility will be made for disabled access to the house and other key heritage elements of the site such as the house verandah.

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|   | \$    |
| Enterprise and Directional Signs and Fencing..... | 5 000 |

As the layout and visitor flow alters, signage will be required to redirect visitors via the one access and direct people to house entrance etc.

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|---|--------|
|   | \$     |
| Installation of Basic Kitchen Facilities..... | 25 000 |

As recommended by Godden and Mackay the Butlers pantry was to be provisioned with facilities for light food preparation. While this facility is still considered appropriate the kitchen elements should be able to be fully concealed so that it doesn't impinge on visitor flow or the aesthetics of the room in the event of functions or other interpretive needs for this space in the house.

### Summary

Traffic flow and visitor flow have been major drawbacks in the development of income and increasing visitor numbers to the site. Targeting these projects first allows for the interpretive strategy to influence the level of repair and reinstatement of the fabric of internal spaces in the house. Improved landscape elements around the site will enhance visitors experience on the site.

Savings in the first year from only partial annual salary costs will be used to implement the cyclic maintenance schedule of the conservation plan.

## 5. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT WORKS 1998-1999

HSSI Proposed Works 98-99—\$200 000.

|                                 |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|
|                                 | \$     |
| House Interior Restoration..... | 60 000 |

To permit interpretation to be installed in parts of the house that currently present a dust problem or access difficulties stabilisation and presentation works will be required especially in the stairwell and upstairs rooms.

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|----------------------|--------|
|                      | \$     |
| Project Officer..... | 50 000 |

Continuation of the project officer will allow for completion of the Interpretive strategy and allow for progress on implementation of both the off site and house interior interpretation.

|                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
|                              | \$     |
| Off Site Interpretation..... | 15 000 |

Development of interpretive panels for Surrey hills, Middlesex plains, and Helyer gorge will concentrate on telling the story of the links between the property, the VDL Co and Highfield.

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|  | \$     |
| House Interpretation and Visitor Reception ..... | 55 000 |

The house and surrounds is to be once again seen as the centre of the North West coast with a reception room acting as an interpretation and information centre for today’s tourism industry. Stanley and Circular Head has lacked a focal point for visitor information other than the Nut chairlift which caters for those riding the chairlift only.

The room which would best serve this purpose is the Drawing room with house tours commencing either from there or from the Kitchen end.

House themes to include VDL Co early days (Study); Circular Head Society 1840 style (possibly drawing room/dining room); Servants / masters relationship (Kitchen / Butlers pantry ); Families of Highfield (nursery); and the site’s relationship with the community in the twentieth century. Period furniture will be displayed in the Dining Room, Drawing room and possibly upstairs rooms, restoration of the site in the smaller rooms of the house.

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|--|--------|
|  | \$     |
| Barn and Outbuilding Conservation Works..... | 20 000 |

The barn requires bird proofing. Stabilisation is also essential for the long term survival of the fowl house and lime shed which are an integral part of the landscape.

Summary

Any surplus financial returns from the enterprise will be expended on marketing, minor maintenance, and required fixtures. The expenditure of this year’s funding will result in a well presented, well maintained site capable of entertaining visitors with an educational informative heritage experience for 1 to 2 hours, provide basic refreshments, and assist in planning further activities in the Circular Head Region.

6. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT WORKS 1999–2000

HHSI Works program 99–2000—\$200 000.

|                             |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
|                             | \$     |
| On Site Interpretation..... | 28 000 |

Grounds and outbuilding interpretation will be developed in line with the interpretive strategy to provide a further dimension to the visitor experience on-site. The project Officer will be responsible for liaising with the Northern Region of PWS to ensure strategy is regularly monitored.

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|--|--------|
|  | \$     |
| Upper Floor of Chapel Conservation Works ..... | 30 000 |

The upstairs chapel area requires conservation and restoration works to facilitate the use of the room as a management area for office space and resource storage.

|                      |        |
|----------------------|--------|
|                      | \$     |
| Project Officer..... | 40 000 |

Whilst the project officers role progressively evolves toward a site/enterprise manager after completion of infrastructure developments, Interpretation and facilitation of the site's potential heritage concession operations will be the primary focus. During this year the site will be more fully marketing itself through word of mouth and increased local business endorsement.

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|----------------------|-------|
|                      | \$    |
| Resource Centre..... | 5,000 |

Provide a range of heritage resources focusing on North West coast regional European and Aboriginal history.

|  |        |
|--|--------|
|  | \$     |
| Purchase of Marquee and Furniture..... | 15 000 |

An analysis is recommended of hire availability, potential use and returns on such an investment prior to purchase. Should the purchase option not proceed, funds will be spent on maintenance of the site.

|                  |        |
|------------------|--------|
|                  | \$     |
| Maintenance..... | 28 000 |

Some stabilisation works carried out in the 1980's will require revisiting to ensure fabric condition is maintained in a stable condition. Exterior mortar, building waterproofing and building surrounds drainage will need to be reassessed for required action.

|                                |        |
|--------------------------------|--------|
|                                | \$     |
| Toilet Facility—Functions..... | 35 000 |

The barn will be the main indoor function facility on site. Issues such as fire exits, fire extinguishers etc will need to be addressed as well as a toilet facility within close proximity to the building. Careful market analysis and heritage assessment will be required before committing fully to this.

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|   | \$     |
| Catering and Concessionaire Infrastructure..... | 19 000 |

In addition to basic house provision facilities in the house a kitchen facility has market potential attached to the threshing barn. This is to facilitate the use of the threshing barn as a function centre capable of feeding larger groups. As previously stated this proposal needs careful market analysis with the inception of two new function /restaurant centres in the North West since Godden and Mackay was written in 1992

## Summary

This program of works has been developed from previous documents with a change in focus that the HHSI believes is more realistic, will continue to grow community support, and provide key elements to the long term viability of the site. Further, it will provide facility for appropriate businesses to choose to operate on a heritage site that provides a rich mosaic of information and colonial experiences in an entertaining way.

HHSI recognises the key role the Parks and Wildlife Service will play in facilitating this development through its cultural site management expertise, interpretive experience and through its commitment to the on going maintenance of the intrinsic heritage fabric of Highfield Historic Site.

## 7. CONSERVATION WORKS

Although currently unfunded, funding will be actively sought to complete this complementary program.

It is envisaged that the life and amenity created by the business development works will naturally promote an interest in the continued restoration of the property.

Further Conservation Works have been assessed by Godden McKay and include:

### Balance of Conservation Work

- House interior
- Barn
- Agriculturists cottage
- Workman's cottage
- Cart shed
- Chapel
- Barracks
- Signage, equipment and collections
- Future gardens development

|   | \$        |
|---|-----------|
| Conservation Works including fees ..... | 750 000   |
| GRAND TOTAL ALL WORKS .....             | 1 300 000 |

## 8. EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Thursday, 18 December 1997. The Committee met at the Highfield Historic Site at Stanley for an inspection and then held a public hearing at Highfield. The following witnesses gave evidence:

- Mr Donald Ranson, Manager, Cultural Heritage Branch, Parks and Wildlife Service
- Mr Graeme Corney, Senior Heritage Advisor to the Tasmanian Heritage Council
- Mr Peter Alexander, Manager, Business Services, Parks and Wildlife Service,
- Mr Stuart Dudgeon, Acting District Manager North-West, Parks and Wildlife Service
- Mr James Smith, Mr Michael Buckby, Ms Christine Medwin, Highfield Enterprise Group,
- Mr Stephen Sallans, Regional Manager North, Parks and Wildlife Service

Mr Alexander was the first witness to give evidence to the Committee. He outlined the project, both past and that which is proposed:

"The money for which approval is currently being sought is to further a partnership between the Parks and Wildlife Service and what is to become the Highfield Historic Site incorporated body, currently the Highfield Enterprise Group. Parks is very supportive of that process because we are actively encouraging the community to be involved in the work for which we owe a statutory obligation. I have been asked specifically by the Director of the Parks and Wildlife Service to express his support for the group and for the program of works which they are putting forward.

As you are all aware, especially having been around this place this morning, of the significance of this site, preserving that site, and preserving it to visitors is a goal which is common to both sides of this partnership. We would like to suggest that the submission which we are putting forward represents the outcome of a planned approach to achieving those goals which gives the best of public and private sector cooperation and ensures a responsible use of the funding.

Briefly, the State purchased the property in a very dilapidated state in 1982 and it immediately went about the task of saving it from further degradation. In the early years I do not think there was much of a strategic plan—I think that is fair to say—but there was a strong commitment and a recognition of the importance of the site. The fact that those people did that work at that time has put us in a position of now moving forward in a much more strategic sense. I guess that comment goes due to the fact of the amount of money which has been spent on the property over the years. Over the last few years conservation works have continued, subject to a continued struggle for funding, as everyone experiences. Visitors have been welcomed to the site but there has been a limited ability to provide adequate facilities.



The continued interest of the local community, represented by the Highfield Enterprise Group, has emphasised not only the site but its context as a potential centre for tourism to the Circular Head region, so Highfield can act as a drawcard to bring tourists to Stanley and it complements the other local attractions. This has spin-offs to the whole community in the length of time that visitors stay and the quality of the experience they have while they are here. That is the view of the committee and it is fully supported by Parks. So we recognise that although the conservation of the cultural heritage is our statutory responsibility, restoring the site simply for its own sake is an uphill battle, both in securing funding and in making the task relevant to the public.

One of the key attractions is emphasising the tourist aspects of the site, and the works program which we are asking you to consider is directed at tourist infrastructure. There will be a growing perception of the property's value in the eyes of the community and this way will ensure its future for the heritage money and that the heritage restoration will follow the perception of value and bringing the site alive.

The present situation is that the Parks and Wildlife Service has restored the site to a point where it is attractive to visitors and it is able to be used as a venue for functions and community events, and I think this was well recognised recently at the reopening of Port Latta, where I think a lunch was held here et cetera. I think that sort of event shows not only the potential of the property as a venue but it recognises its important status on the north-west coast. The Parks and Wildlife Service remains the owner of the site and remains responsible for the conservation of cultural heritage.

As far as developing the business potential of the site goes and ensuring its future, the time has come to pass the torch and to involve the private sector and interested people. We are confident that the Highfield Historic Site Incorporated body will develop the site appropriately within the guidelines contained in the submission that you have before you.

The Parks Service will retain responsibility for a specified range of maintenance issues and for restoration subject to funding. The Parks Service will also continue to provide any kind of support for the site, which will range from professional advice on archaeological issues to some of the general maintenance like keeping the grass cut. The Parks Service will also oversight the money to the extent that it will provide audit and be ultimately responsible for the funding, although the management of the funding and the works program will be under the control of the committee."

Mr Buckby of the Highfield Enterprise Group explained how the Group came into being and some of its objectives. He stated:

"The Highfield Enterprise Group was established about 15 to 16 months ago and it was basically put together as a business perspective towards Highfield and the whole site. It was made apparent quite early on that within two years, unless something was done drastically, the site itself would be closed to the general public because of the dwindling funds. So the group was put together and we looked at the reports that have been established over many years, notably with Godden and McKay in 1992, the precinct study, and reports since then as well.

We looked at a number of ways that Highfield could generate some revenue to at least maintain itself as a tourism and cultural centre for the north-west coast. What we have done basically is looked at interpretation of the site. We did not want to compete with other historical sites throughout Tasmania and just have a static site, so we thought the ideal way to do that, with the lively history of this area, was interpret that in the most modern way we could with funds for the public, so the public can have something to come to this area and want to come back to this area.

If I could just go through the draft Highfield development plan briefly, Mr Chairman, it was prepared by the Highfield Enterprise Group, and you will see some of the ideas that we have looked at as to how to come about generating revenue for the site. One was with interpretation, as I have mentioned; one was creating a visitor centre and reception area within the house. This will primarily focus on Stanley in the north-west, the cultural and natural heritage, as a starting point for house and site tours and collecting site fees and it will move on through the architectural and restoration interpretation. As we mentioned on the tour this morning, restoration interpretation, even though it is a small aspect, it is still very interesting for some people in the community who wish to find out how interpretation and restoration is carried on from a very run-down site."

### 9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The evidence present to the Committee demonstrated to the Committee the need for the proposed work to be carried out. There has already been significant remedial work carried out, which was absolutely necessary to literally prevent the main building and a number of the out buildings from falling down.

The proposed combined Government and Community support for the continued development and management of the Highfield Historic Site set out a sound basis for the future of a most significant area.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends the proposal, in accordance with the specifications submitted at an estimated total cost of \$1 300 000.

Parliament House, Hobart  
March 1998

S. J. WILSON, M.L.C., *Chairman.*