

## **Submission to Legislative Council Sub-Committee regarding the inquiry into the built heritage in Tasmania.**

### **Preliminary Comment**

I approach this exercise with mixed feelings.....

In my view this inquiry should be justifiable simply as a result of the existence and richness of our built heritage. To show some interest in our built heritage because it may provide some residual value to the tourism industry is disappointing.....but none-the less consistent with past experiences.

As is obvious from my comment above the context in which I make this submission relates to the lack of interest shown by successive State Governments in relation to Tasmania's built heritage. During my working life with various Governments there has been no meaningful acknowledgement of our rich built heritage and its strategic potential preferring to leave the 'issue' of heritage to the 'ad-hoc' consideration of Local Government. With Local Government having a focus on short-term development control rather than taking a broader strategic planning approach the deterioration of this national asset will continue.

A compounding problem leading to the continuing deterioration of this asset is that heritage 'supporters' are in a minority, having little political influence as opposed to the financial and political 'grunt' of the 'development' lobby who generally have the 'ear' of State and (in particular) Local Government. This situation will remain unchanged until the State Government takes a leadership role through the introduction of a State Planning Heritage Policy (State Policy and Projects Act) and sets a new direction through the State Planning System.

My view regarding the 'plight' of our built heritage is built upon my experience in the planning and development 'field' over a number of years and in particular my personal involvement in the planning and development of Battery Point since I moved into that suburb some 15 years ago. I am sure that my comments are equally applicable to other heritage areas in the State but I refer specifically to Battery Point to illustrate my experience(s) and make my point.

Be assured that the heritage values of Battery Point (and Salamanca generally) as they exist today do so as a result of the foresight, dedication and endurance of a few incredibly dedicated people over many years commencing when the Battery Point Planning Scheme was approved over 40 years ago. The introduction of the Battery Point Planning Scheme in the early 70's was in itself a 'battle' between 'champions' of our built heritage, developers and the Hobart City Council. Nothing much has changed in that respect except that Battery Point and Salamanca (despite development pressures) has to a large extent been 'saved' from total destruction. The popularity of Salamanca and (to a lesser extent) Battery Point is certainly NOT the direct result of efforts of any recent State Government or the Hobart City Council who have continually seen these heritage areas as 'short-term' development 'opportunities'. Development 'opportunities' they certainly are, but in my view those 'opportunities' lie in a completely different direction.....one of protection and enhancement of their heritage values. The new Interim Hobart Planning Scheme entrenches the Hobart City Councils disappointing 'short-term' approach and when finally approved this new planning scheme will be another 'nail in the coffin' of our rich built heritage....and consequently an opportunity lost.

The Hobart City Council has 'jumped on the band wagon' in more recent years regarding the values of Salamanca....almost applauding themselves. They do not seem to recognise that Battery Point is actually part of Salamanca and if appropriately managed would offer significant additional benefits over time. The numerous whalers' cottages together with the more significant historic homes in Battery Point were once the residences of those that worked in and developed historic Salamanca and are no less important (in the heritage context) than the Salamanca ware-houses and the Hobart water-front. Battery Point receives a lower level of consideration and protection simply because it currently offers a lower level economic and social benefit. To have these two significant heritage areas (Salamanca and the older parts of Battery Point) in separate planning schemes has no particular logic and represents short-term thinking. Similarly there are parts of Battery Point currently subjected to the heritage provisions of the Battery Point Planning Scheme (and the new draft Interim planning scheme) that have little or no heritage values.

I can only re-iterate that until the focus shifts from short-term economic decision-making to an emphasis on State strategic outcomes the heritage values of our historic built environment will continue to deteriorate.

I acknowledge that my submission is directed at Tasmania's built heritage in the 'broader urban planning' sense rather than providing a focus on individual heritage properties which is an equally concerning issue. Fortunately individual heritage properties are relatively well protected however heritage areas in the broader sense (e.g. urban street-scapes) remain open to 'abuse' and it is this 'abuse' that will eventually reduce Battery Point to a 'hotch-potch' of heritage houses bearing no resemblance to the historic residential 'snap-shot' that it reflects today. It is this broader historic residential 'snap-shot' that has the potential to provide to the State a tourism asset that no other State can match. To allow development to 'drift' in a negative incremental fashion will eventually result in an ad-hoc collection of historic buildings rather than securing the 'higher prize' referred to above. The integrity of what we have today will only be retained by the Government recognising the values of our rich heritage and under-pinning that recognition with strong planning controls.

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

There is no doubt that areas like Battery Point contribute to the 'tourism' experience. Simply by its proximity to the social and tourism 'hub' of Salamanca historic Battery Point in particular provides a focus for tourism operators and visitors offering a unique national experience to visitors. I re-iterate parts of Battery Point are an original 'snap-shot' of life 150 years ago.....it is not 'make believe' .....it is not 'Disney-land' .....not yet anyway.

Heritage areas similar to Battery Point offers the tourism industry a 'product' that is of little or no cost to the industry or Government however without Government assistance by way of stronger planning controls the integrity of these areas will continue to decline and become less relevant in heritage and tourism terms. This decline will occur over time to the detriment of all interests and will go almost un-noticed becoming a victim to the 'deaths by a thousand cuts' syndrome. It is of course this gradual deterioration that enables Governments to avoid responsibility.

This State 'asset' could be much better protected and enhanced.....it simply needs more 'sensitive' heritage planning controls developed in accordance with a strategic vision that recognises the broader economic, tourism, education and cultural benefits. This broader approach is something the Hobart City Council seems unprepared to take preferring an ad-hoc approach under 'loose' planning controls which enables Council to consider marginal and inappropriate developments. It is not a priority of the Hobart City Council to consider that the integrity of heritage values of an area might be compromised by 'creeping' inappropriate development. 'What damage can another small inappropriate development do?'...seems to be the Council test.

In my opinion it is also a fallacy to take the view that 'marginal' (or weaker) heritage controls increases the potential for more development and therefore more economic activity. This is not the case in my view. In the majority of cases 'marginal' and 'inappropriate' developments in Battery Point have (fortunately) been prevented (not by the Hobart City Council) but rather at the planning appeal stage either by actions of individual residents or the Battery Point Community Association. This situation (whilst some-what satisfying) is quite undesirable being frustrating, expensive and leads to delays and community confrontation. Development potential in the 'economic sense' in heritage areas is generally confined to extensions, renovations and re-developments and planning scheme provisions should be appropriately drafted to facilitate and enhance existing heritage values rather than drafted to allow or 'squeeze in' the next inappropriate development.

The motivation provided to me personally to purchase and redevelop my property (to the extent that I did) was the protection afforded to me through the existing Battery Point Planning Scheme. The (so called) 'restrictive' development provisions in the Battery Point Planning Scheme were an incentive to me.....not a deterrent. The principles and objectives of the planning scheme were reasonably clear and in my view provided 'protection' on my investment. If I were to redevelop today under the proposed new draft Interim Hobart Planning Scheme (which unfortunately is proposed to replace the current Battery Point Planning Scheme) I would have second thoughts as I would not have the confidence that my financial investment would be protected or that my personal (heritage) objectives could be realised.

There also seems to be a culture in some areas of the Hobart City Council that residents wishing to 'redevelop' a heritage property in Battery Point are doing so to achieve some personal gain and in some perverse way that gain is at the exclusion or expense of the broader community. This rather 'immature' and 'misplaced' thinking is responsible for an increasing level of division between residents and the Council and until policy objectives are clarified for heritage areas community division will continue and heritage areas will continue to deteriorate.

It is my view that the State Government needs provide leadership and facilitate a 'culture' change recognising that 'heritage conservation' is in itself 'development' and that the economic potential is 'greater' where higher level heritage controls are an 'incentive' to those wishing to redevelop or renovate. Heritage 'development' is 'enduring'. Its value to the community by its nature appreciates over time.....unlike traditional forms of developments which depreciate.

No doubt there will be some that will say the strict heritage controls are a dis-incentive to development and for those that have no particular interest or affinity in our built heritage that may well be the case. Insofar as the broader public interest is concerned however in my view this attitude is unable to be defended in relation to the more significant heritage areas and should not

dictate the policy objectives. It is clear that the decisions that need to be made are of a higher level policy nature.....Just how do we want our rich heritage areas to be developed and for what purpose? Do we want these historic areas to be developed and protected to retain their heritage integrity.....or is it acceptable to allow some 'inappropriate' 'development' and 'land use' intrusion to gradually dilute the integrity of these heritage precincts and eventually over time destroy their integrity? That is the strategic question that must be addressed by the Government.....not by Local Government, not the TCCI, not the Property Council, or the Master Builders etc.

### **Role of Government**

The role of (State) Government is to provide clear strategic policy direction to decision makers in accordance with best practice and in the States' interest. Without Government leadership, policy direction and co-ordination the enduring benefits the Tasmanian built heritage that could be provided to tourism (and other interests) will not be realised. Without this policy direction Local Government will continue to address heritage issues in an ad-hoc manner facilitating short-term local priorities and lobbying pressures resulting in the continuing deterioration of this asset.

Issues associated with individual State and National Trust owned heritage properties also require attention and in this respect I would support an investigation into the concept of a State lottery as a funding source. A budget provision (State and Federal) providing a dollar for dollar contribution to heritage bodies (National Trust and Community organisations) that have maintenance responsibilities for 'listed' heritage properties could provide an incentive to raise additional revenue.

There are other options that could be considered such as rate remissions to heritage property owners and assistance to property owners that wish to renovate heritage properties through the development application process. Some heritage grants are already available and this option could be extended.

### **Role of Tourism and Heritage organisations**

The success of bringing tourism and heritage interests together relies on the question of respect and understanding. It appears to me that the tourism industry has a focus on service delivery and economic outcomes.....quite a different focus to that of heritage interests. This difference should not be seen as one 'interest' as being any more relevant or important than the other. The real challenge is to broaden the understanding of heritage values within the local tourism industry and how those values can contribute in a positive way to achieving more beneficial tourism outcomes. I firmly believe that our built heritage could be a valuable addition to the Tasmanian visitor experience. It certainly needs to be recognised by heritage interests that the focus of many tourist operators is an economic one and that compromise on both sides may be necessary at various times. With goodwill and agreed policy direction compromise is achievable but I do not support a concept reduces the integrity of the heritage stock simply to attract a short-term pro-development 'hit'. I firmly believe that a quality approach is not only necessary but would deliver to the tourism industry an additional high quality product that the industry can be proud and one that will endure. This approach would be consistent with the 'high quality' Tasmanian brand.

The role of heritage organisations is clear....to protect the national estate. Insofar as individual heritage properties are concerned this is a huge funding challenge and I can only refer back to my earlier funding proposals to assist in providing the additional funding that is required in maintaining the heritage estate.

The broader urban heritage question is however quite a different matter. It is not so much a question of funding. This aspect requires a greater focus on the protection of heritage values through stronger (State) policy and planning scheme provisions...rather than direct Government funding. If appropriate planning controls are in place heritage property owners will respond by investing in their properties. The role of heritage organisations is to provide professional advice to decision makers in relation to heritage issues but recognising the economic nature of the tourism industry and understanding that benefits need to flow both ways.

#### **Any relevant considerations in other jurisdictions**

I consider that the Local Government Association of Tasmania is a fundamental organisation in achieving a consistent and acceptable approach to the issue of maximising the potential of the built heritage in tourism terms. I would be more confident of achieving realistic outcomes if Local Government were an equal partner in any initiative to better understand the benefits of a more co-ordinated approach involving heritage and tourism issues. It would be necessary for the State Government to set clear guidelines to the LGAT in order that individual Councils cannot divert the fundamental aims of any Government initiative that might be proposed.

#### **Any other matters incidental thereto**

I see similarities between the potential provided by our built heritage to the tourism industry to that provided by our National Parks. Those similarities may not be comparable insofar as (user) numbers are concerned but like other quality State assets (fishing-golf-food-wine-marine-the Arts-etc.) our built heritage will add to and compliment the high quality and varied experiences we should be seeking for visitors. The high quality Tasmania brand is no less important in the 'heritage space' as it is for other tourism related experiences.

Our built heritage offers something that no other State asset can ever offer and by its (currently) authentic nature will only become more valuable as it ages. The sure way to ruin this 'golden egg' for the future is to ignore the asset or dilute its authenticity and pander to mediocrity.

#### **Final Comment**

I have no confidence in the State Government taking any positive action unless there is a realisation that heritage per se is not 'anti-development'. I do not have dollar figures but I would contend that 'redevelopment' (in the economic sense) that has occurred in Battery Point over the past 40 years would be considerably higher than in any other Tasmanian suburb. This trend will continue as older

buildings are inevitably renovated and/or extended.....provided the investment and heritage values and amenity of residents remains protected.

Not only do heritage areas provide a continuing economic stimulus to the building industry but offer an equally important addition to business generally. One needs only to look at the growth of Salamanca where over a very short time it has become the centre of tourism and social activity. Appropriately protected and managed Battery Point (and similar heritage areas) will continue to 'grow' in a similar vein and compliment the tourism experience. Let us not forget that Salamanca as we know it today was destined for total destruction only 40 years ago but was 'saved' by a few crazy heritage buffs....

It is imperative that the State Government takes a leadership role by providing policy direction developed as a result of consultation with heritage professionals and incorporating that policy through the State planning system.

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