

Submission to

The Tasmanian Legislative Council Inquiry

Into

Built Heritage Tourism in Tasmania

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The Tourism Tasmania Historic Heritage Strategy 2012-2015 summarised the appeal of historic heritage tourism in Tasmania:

Visitors to Tasmania are immersed in historic heritage; it's part of everyday life and the strong sense of place that is Tasmania.

Historic heritage permeates the experiences of visitors to Tasmania, whether as a backdrop, a setting or a direct experience and combines with the state's other characteristic experiences of nature, adventure, food and wine to provide rich multi-layered experiences.

Tasmania has conserved the buildings, precincts and townships of different historic periods, particularly colonial times. Many are in their original setting without modern intrusions and still in use within the community.

Traditions and stories from the past are strong in Tasmanian communities where Tasmanian families descended from convict and colonial settlers still live. Records of the past and movable heritage items are quite readily available and well conserved with many in displays and museums.

Southern Midlands Council (SMC) concur with that summary, however recognises that historic heritage is not necessarily a static occurrence that will draw visitors without some form of captivating and dynamic engagement tools to enhance the experience. Whilst decades of 'static management' have acted to preserve that heritage, particularly in rural areas where development pressure has not fiercely obliterated it, active management of the heritage resource is required to understand, protect and promote it.

During the 1830s, Oatlands was tipped to become the 'central capital of Van Diemens Land, with Surveyor Sharland mapping 50 miles of streets in 1827 and by 1835 Oatlands was burgeoning as a significant military and convict establishment with over 100 stone buildings, at least 12 hotels and a population around three times that of today. Hugging the main road between the northern and southern administrative centres of the colony, the district also boomed during that time, with a number of villages, over 20 substantial convict road and probation stations, and a network of coaching inns serving the traveller. In the late 1840s-1850s all of that changed though. The colony suffered an economic depression, the convict labour force was withdrawn, able-bodied men rushed to the Victorian goldfields and the district settled into a prosperous (at times) rural-based economy. The coming of the main-line railway c1880 opened up faster travel for people and goods between Launceston and Hobart and any notion that Oatlands was to become the interior capital was merely history. With that, the district settled into a century and a half+ of being a rural-based economy, dotted with picturesque villages, rural farm complexes, decaying convict sites, and the built and archaeological vestiges of that early wave of military and civil administrative infrastructure. A complex rural cultural landscape emerged, with settlers establishing and maintaining an antipodean version of the European landscape, interspersed with the Australian bush and still bearing the marks of thousands of years of aboriginal interaction with the land.

The historic environment of Oatlands and the region has long been recognised as a mainstay of the local economy. The 1993 *Tourism Vision, Oatlands Historic Properties* first formally identified that

potential through number of key heritage sites around Oatlands which were considered to be the 'icon' sites which would provide incentive for visitation to the township and region. These sites included the Callington Windmill, Oatlands Supreme Court House and Gaol, and Roche Hall. That report also identified the network of convict sites and wider cultural landscape of the region as contributory to the bigger picture of the region's heritage. The opportunity to capitalise on the historic environment was further detailed in the 2008 *Oatlands Integrated Development Strategy* – from which the Centre for Heritage initiative was conceived. A 2008 study into the tourism values and opportunities arising from the Southern Midlands cultural landscape identified opportunities for tourism product development from what was once described as one of the most *uninspiring landscapes in Tasmania*. The recent (2014) *Midlands Economic Development and Land Use Strategy* also strongly recognised the economic development potential of the districts rich history, built heritage and heritage landscapes to support the tourism industry. From this, arises the question as to why the current enquiry is limited to 'built' heritage tourism and not cultural landscapes? which are considered to be an equally important element of Tasmania's heritage appeal (despite the Tasmanian Heritage Council having done work to that effect in the early 2000s which appears to have gone nowhere – see further discussion below).

In terms of the direct management of built heritage places (with tourism potential) over the last decade, council has acquired all of the sites listed above with view of ensuring continued public access and use of these assets, and major restoration programs have been undertaken on all – which are now open to the public. The Oatlands Commissariat Store has also been purchased by Council and its restoration and opening to the public will add to that suite of buildings as a key tourism drawcard. This coupled with streetscape improvements, interpretive media, continued investigation of cultural landscapes and a major promotional program promoting heritage tourism opportunities has resulted in Oatlands becoming the premier heritage tourism destination in the Tasmanian Midlands. Council is continuing to build this momentum, with current initiatives such as a blacksmithing cooperative, horse drawn heritage, community based heritage crafts groups, support of local historical societies just a few of the initiatives currently being pursued.

The appeal of heritage tourism is demonstrated by the increase in visitation to Oatlands between 2009-2012. The number of visitor nights in Oatlands increased from 4,300 nights in 2009 to 8,100 nights in 2010 (the year of the Callington Mill opening) – substantially above the state average growth. In 2011, visitation increased to 15,100 nights p.a. (i.e. fourfold in three years). This demonstrates the appeal of heritage as a tourism asset. Underpinning this, In 2009, the Tasmanian Tourism Industry Council engaged EMRS to conduct a phone survey of 1,000 Tasmanians to determine what they thought the key economic mainstay of Tasmania was. EMRS summarised that

Public perceptions in the 2009 survey are again that tourism has not only made the greatest contribution to Tasmania's growth in the past 5 years, but also that it has the potential to do so during the next 5 years.

In terms of built heritage tourism, as summarised above, the Southern Midlands has plenty to offer and the statistics above demonstrate that the management and promotion of such is effective.

This is also acknowledged in the Tourism Tasmania Historic Heritage Tourism Strategy 2012-2015, which makes particular note of Oatlands' intact Georgian streetscapes and convict sites. Around 44% of visitors to Tasmania engage in a heritage experience and there is a strategic desire to expand those experiences to areas outside the larger attractors (e.g. Port Arthur). That report also

details the desire for visitors to engage in 'creative experiences' – and specifically cites the strategy for Tasmania to deliver heritage skills training courses for a tourism market (Initiative 2.3.3). Oatlands is the venue of the *Heritage Education and Skills Centre* (HESC - a not-for-profit business unit of SMC), an initiative of that organisation is the promotion of experiential learning packages to a tourist market (note that HESC is making a separate submission to this enquiry).

The historic environment is considered to be a key commodity of the Oatlands district and the effective management and delivery of tourism products is an important economic staple for the region which is expected to continue to grow in coming years.

An independently formulated vision statement for the Southern Midlands (SGC Economics, 2014) included the following statement:

Apart from agriculture, there are other areas of potential growth and development. The municipality has a rich history and offers a wealth of heritage buildings and landscapes. This is an important part of the region's identity and a key driver of the local tourism industry. Council has shown leadership by taking business initiative. The Heritage Building Solutions and Heritage Education & Skills Centre and the Callington Mill precinct are clear examples of Council's attitude.

Council's vision statement reflects this: The Southern Midlands aspires to be a region that celebrates and benefits from agriculture, heritage and tourism, its spaciousness and central location, and that supports business growth and welcomes investment that strengthens and/or diversifies the local economy. The Southern Midlands will continue to collect, restore and interpret its heritage as a source for cultural & local identity, tourism development, construction and restoration skills and education for future generations.

The management of historic heritage within the Southern Midlands is governed by the *Southern Midlands Council Historic Heritage Strategy 2014-18*, which guides both the statutory heritage program (in conjunction with the planning scheme, discussed below) as well as the non-statutory heritage projects program. Part 17 of the strategy sets initiatives around heritage tourism (in support of initiatives in most other parts of the strategy) and initiative 18a seeks to build partnerships with relevant tourism bodies (e.g. Tourism Tasmania).

Further to the response to Point 1 (above), which summarises SMC's input into built heritage tourism, council recognises that the flow-on effects of built heritage tourism are a difficult thing to measure and may not be immediately 'profitable' within the context of a particular initiative or site.

This is perhaps best illustrated in the case of the Callington Mill operation at Oatlands. Whether or not the mill itself is a viable enterprise (i.e. as a milling operation), the figures cited in Point 1 clearly demonstrate that the mill as a built heritage drawcard has provided a renaissance for the town since its opening in 2010, acting as a catalyst for a range of other initiatives - e.g. overnight campervan park, a marked increase in private tourism-based businesses (e.g. cafes, B&B's, galleries etc.) within the town. All of which acts to increase the spend within the town, creating viable businesses, employment and boosting the economy of the town. An increase in employment results in increased youth retention in the district – employment opportunities providing an incentive not to leave the district – all resulting in a 'critical mass' which in turn feeds a loop to providing further

incentive to develop such initiatives (e.g. built heritage tourism experiences). This is where government, particularly local government, has the advantage in being the driver of built heritage tourism experiences – i.e. a government proprietor may not need to necessarily demonstrate the firm ‘bottom line’ that private enterprise requires, with benefits (both economic and social) being yielded through these flow-on effects.

Further to the above example, there are a number of successful privately operated heritage tourism initiatives within the region, driven by passionate and determined individuals who also recognise built heritage as a commodity. Shene (Pontville) and Fonthill (Lemont) are two examples of private-sector heritage tourism which have demonstrated the popularity of such initiatives.

Council see linkages and partnerships as a key contributor to the success of built heritage tourism in the region, with a long-standing association with organisations such as the Heritage Highway Tourism Association and the Tasmanian Visitor Information Network as examples of the need for a local government to think outside their own boundaries in order to maximise exposure to a wide market. Council were very pleased to see the release of the Tasmanian Government’s Historic Heritage Tourism Strategy 2012-2015, particularly those initiatives which sought to better engage local government in historic heritage tourism planning, however we note that it appears that many of the initiatives and goals in that document appear not to have been substantially progressed. That document had a review and evaluation process, whereby annual review of the strategy would be undertaken, but it is unclear as to whether that evaluation has been undertaken (and the nature of the findings of such). We urge the State Government to continue with the implementation of this strategy and offer to work collaboratively along such lines.

Despite the success stories described above, council does raise serious concern at the lack of funding for property owners (including councils) to assist in the conservation of heritage assets. Whilst council has been successful in the past in obtaining funds from schemes such as the Tasmanian Government’s *Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund*, as well as the Tasmanian Heritage Council’s *Heritage Conservation Fund*, these schemes have now been wound-up which means that there is no funding available whatsoever for owners of heritage places in Tasmania (whether private or council owned) to contribute to their maintenance. This has forced council (at least) to become more creative with grant-seeking and incorporating (for example) tourism, education or economic development aspects into what might ordinarily have been primarily a heritage project. Whilst some success has been made in this direction (e.g. through the Tasmanian Community Fund) and it may be a positive thing to require thinking outside the square when approaching a heritage project (i.e. incorporating tourism/education components etc.), the disbandment of the main heritage funding streams open to Tasmanian heritage property owners is considered to represent the Tasmanian Government’s shunning of the need to provide assistance to heritage property owners to offset the impost provided by regulation.

Aside from the role as a site owner/manager, local government has a role in the statutory management of heritage places which has an influence on the way built heritage tourism operates. For instance, the *Southern Midlands Planning Scheme 1998* (SMPS) identifies a number of heritage areas (e.g. Oatlands, Kempton, Mangalore, Campania etc). which have provisions that seek to maintain the heritage character of those areas so as to avoid development which may erode the heritage values (and core heritage character which appeals to a tourist market) of those areas.

It is proposed in the *Southern Midlands Draft Interim Planning Scheme 2014* that provisions also be implemented which allow for non-conforming use and relaxation of other planning scheme provisions for heritage places if it can be demonstrated that a heritage benefit can be gained through that use or development – this discretionary provision may be used to facilitative adaptive reuse of heritage places for tourism initiatives which may ordinarily be prohibited upon that place (for example, conversion of a disused church to a commercial space so as to make its upkeep financially viable, or use of disused heritage farm buildings for non-rural purposes). The scheme (current and draft) also has (not necessarily heritage) provisions which act to protect the evolving the rural cultural landscape (e.g. zoning constraints on further subdivision and residential development) which act to preserve a rural cultural landscape yet not inhibit the ongoing viable use of land for agriculture.

It is considered that the State Government does not have (or exercise) such ability to maintain and promote heritage areas (for tourism benefit) or be able to use such discretion to promote flexible adaptive reuse of heritage places, nor does the HCHA recognise cultural landscapes as a heritage asset which has the potential for tourism engagement (despite the 2006 *Tasmanian Heritage Act Review* making recommendation that it do so).

For instance, although the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995* (HCHA) has the ability to declare 'Heritage Areas', this provision is currently not utilised. The HCHA does not have provisions for 'use' of heritage places (although it is acknowledged that this is best managed at a local government level through planning schemes in any instance). A substantial flaw in the HCHA is the inability to consider the heritage impact of development on places *adjacent* to a heritage place, which has resulted in a number of examples of what could only be deemed inappropriate development destroying the setting and curtilage of heritage places – eroding that core appeal which the state aims to 'sell' as a tourism product.

Recent planning reforms across the state have allowed local government to finesse heritage provisions, redesignate and widen heritage areas, declare new areas and formulate specific provisions for the management of heritage values, setting and character as well as incorporate a range of provisions which aside from the management of heritage, may act to facilitate and encourage built heritage tourism. Recent reviews of the HCHA at a state level have not had such advantages for heritage management – being primarily concerned with improving procedure rather than actual on-ground heritage outcomes and being wholly focused on a 'place-by-place' approach (i.e. not improving any processes around setting, cultural landscapes or heritage areas).

For the above reasons, council believes that local government has a far greater role in the management of historic heritage insofar as it pertains to built heritage tourism, and are concerned that with moves towards the state/local split (as detailed in documents such as the GML *Tasmanian Heritage Act Review 2006*, and the Tasmanian Governments *Assessing Historic Heritage for Application with the Historic Cultural heritage Act 1995* (2011) this management will be limited to heritage areas and places of local heritage significance – with the potential for individual iconic places of state significance being less rigidly managed within the context of built heritage tourism. Council does not consider that the state is taking the lead in this initiative however has a great deal of confidence in local government to do so. Local government have the ability to balance a range of considerations when managing built heritage tourism initiatives within the wider planning framework (both council owned places and privately owned places within their respective municipal regions), have the ability to provide incentive to property owners through relaxation of planning scheme

provisions for heritage properties, are able to consider wider flow-on benefits. Of course, this is reliant upon having a particular council who have sufficient vision to see the long-term benefits of built heritage tourism, as well as that resource being available within that municipal area, however we believe that the Southern Midlands Council model is one which represents excellence in the management and promotion of built heritage assets for both tourism and local benefit.