

11 February 2015

Committee Secretary,  
Legislative Council,  
Parliament House,  
Hobart,  
Tasmania 7000.

**Re. BUILT HERITAGE TOURISM IN TASMANIA**

I wish to make the following submission to the Legislative Council inquiry.

**Introduction and definition.**

Physical built heritage includes, but is not limited to monuments, groups of buildings, sites, installations and remains, which have universal value. Outstanding universal value includes aesthetic, historic, scientific, social and cultural perspectives that can be transferred between generations.

In this submission I refer to built heritage as historic buildings only.

Built heritage is a significant component of Tasmania's image and brand. Tasmania being the second oldest European settlement in Australia and was important to the development of the nation, particularly during the period from settlement until 1835, when a significant number of commercial and residential buildings were erected. Much of this built heritage remains, largely as a result of Tasmania being "preserved in relative poverty" and is now seen as a significant asset of the State.

However, much of Tasmania's built heritage from the early 1800's and later is increasingly in danger of becoming beyond repair and ceasing to be an asset.

**Conservation of remaining built heritage.**

It is now well recognised that conservation of built heritage is best achieved by the introduction of a commercial adaptive re-use for that building. Such re-use may or may not be the same or similar to its original use. Failure to establish a viable commercial re-use in a refurbished building will prove costly and will not prevent its eventual decline.

Experience from Europe, particularly France and Britain, has shown adaptive re-use can be done sensitively to retain the inherent and important heritage values. Planning regulations in both countries have been drafted to accommodate such development allowing flexibility of use while preserving heritage values.

Tasmania's relative slow economy and low population restricts the re-use opportunities in Tasmania's old buildings, many of which are located in rural regions. The task then of maintaining these buildings is left to the private or public owners, which is in many instances, problematic.

## **Tourism and other Opportunities**

Tourism presents a great opportunity for the re-use of Tasmania's built heritage. There are already excellent Tasmanian examples including Brickendon Estate, Woolmers, the Oatlands Mill and Pump-house Point. The Oatlands Mill is a good example of mixing a commercial activity (flour milling) and tourism within a heritage building.

Tourism opportunities established in historic buildings must incorporate 'living' elements of activity to compliment the historic appeal. Further, the re-use activity must be sustainable in its own right, not reliant on the merits of the history for survival, but coexist for mutual benefit.

In Britain and France, the successful re-use of historic but redundant buildings is not confined to tourism. Residential use has been widely encouraged and taken up both in urban and country regions. New commercial uses such as craft brewing, data storage, office space and furniture manufacture are but a few of many examples of bringing new life to old buildings.

## **Tasmania's Challenges**

### Planning Laws & Regulations.

I am aware of the complexities and difficulties of allowing new adaptive re-use activities in old buildings. Prescriptive planning laws and regulations often don't allow re-use activity despite the building being suitable for the proposed purpose. Given the large number of planning schemes in Tasmania, the problem becomes more complex.

### Cost to maintain.

The cost for private or public owners to maintain existing heritage buildings in safe and sustainable condition can be prohibitive, particularly as the income generating capacity of many is minimal. This usually leads to decay and decline of the building.

### Cost of refurbishment.

While I am aware that the building code does allow for flexibility in working with heritage buildings, however, the cost of compliance in refurbishment to allow a new use can be prohibitive. The costs associated with fire prevention, access including disabled access and provision of services can create special difficulties. I am also aware relatively small grant funds have been made available to assist in maintenance and refurbishment.

Absence of Government Policy within strategic plan.

I am not aware that the conservation of the State's built heritage is listed in the economic plan for the State. The absence of a policy for the support of built heritage does not provide the leadership and support necessary to maintain existing structures without providing for the search and adoption of appropriate re-use activity.

In conclusion, Tasmania has a very rare asset in its built heritage, estimated to account for approximately 30% of the entire Australian built heritage. Examples here in Tasmania and more extensively in Europe have demonstrated that redundant historic buildings can provide sustainable work places within urban and rural areas while maintaining heritage values and providing 'life' into buildings that would otherwise continue to decay.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Warner