

## Heritage and Culture

### Fact Sheet by Dianne Firth posted 08 Jul 2008

This fact sheet provides information on how heritage issues may relate to your development. It addresses; what is heritage?; why heritage is important; how to determine what aspects of heritage are important; what if my site is on a heritage list or register?; and how to manage heritage in your development.

#### •Categorised under:

- Feasibility, Planning, Design, Construction, Lot Creation, Completion,
- Greenfield Development, Greyfield Development,
- Place Making and Social Sustainability,
- Developer, State Government,

## Introduction

All places have a past that reflects the diversity of communities and the unique qualities of the place. Although we can't keep everything, conserving places that people value is important for cultural sustainability because these places can enrich our lives by helping us understand the past, contribute to the richness of the present and be expected to be of value to future generations.

Heritage places may be identified and appear on national, state, territory and other heritage lists or registers. Check these for your proposed development. However, heritage values for the place may not have been identified or may be unclear or intangible until your development is proposed. It is therefore important to engage in a process of consultation with community and stakeholders at an early stage (see fact sheet on community engagement for more information) as well as establish a methodical process for collecting and analysing information before making development decisions.

The importance of a site's heritage can be assessed through its cultural or heritage significance. This is usually determined by valuing its heritage in terms of its aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations.

The aim of heritage conservation is to retain the cultural significance of the place. Issues of management can be

addressed through heritage controls such as Heritage Control Plans, Heritage Guidelines and/or Conservation Management Plans that focus on the future of the place and compatible uses that will protect cultural significance.

## What is heritage?

Heritage is what we inherit from the past that we value and want to pass on to future generations. It includes European, Indigenous and natural heritage.

The Parliament House Vista encompasses European, Indigenous and natural heritage values.

Buildings, precincts, objects and natural features have the ability to tell us about who we are, how we got here and where we might want to go.

Conserving heritage in proposed developments is important and derives from community concerns to protect places that they value.

If a development proceeds without consideration of the things that people value, then people may take action that disrupts or delays your development, such as through bad press or legal challenges.

Alternatively, conserving heritage can provide a valuable point-of-difference to your development and have the benefit of enhancing place-making and a sense of community.

There are several levels of heritage listing that have statutory obligations:

- World Heritage
- National Heritage
- Commonwealth Heritage
- State and Territory Heritage

There are several other listings that do not have legal standing. These include the National Trust Register and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects list of Significant Buildings of the 20th Century. These perform advisory and educational roles and are widely recognised as authoritative statements of the cultural significance of a place.

## Why is heritage important?

Heritage is important to the community as a whole. All Australian governments are committed to heritage conservation. They generally follow the approach of the International Council of Monuments and Sites, ICOMOS, an international organisation linked to UNESCO that brings together people concerned with the conservation and study of places of cultural significance. The Burra Charter is the Australia ICOMOS charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance and provides the basis for most conservation work in Australia. (See Links)

The principles inherent in the Burra Charter are:

- There are places worth keeping because they enrich our lives “ by helping us understand the past; by contributing to the richness of the present environment; and because we expect them to be of value to future generations.

- The cultural significance of a place is embodied in its physical material (fabric), its setting and its contents; in its use; in the associated documents; and in its meaning to people through their use and associations with the place.

- The cultural significance of a place, and other issues affecting its future, are best understood by a methodical process of collecting and analysing information before making decisions.

- Keeping accurate records about decisions and changes to the place helps in its care, management and interpretation.

Although important heritage places may be identified and listed on national, state, territory and other registers, heritage values for a site may not have been identified or may be unclear or intangible until a development is proposed. It is therefore important to engage in a process of consultation with community and stakeholders at an early stage. Establish a methodical process for collecting and analysing information before making development decisions.

## What aspects of heritage are important?

Cultural or heritage significance provides a method of valuing places. Criteria such as aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations are most often used. Significance against one criterion is sufficient to make a place culturally significant although significance may occur across several criteria.

### **Aesthetic value**

A place may have aesthetic value because of the form, scale, colour, texture and material of the fabric; the smells and sounds associated the place and its use.

The Sydney Opera house is recognised on the World Heritage List for its aesthetic values.

### **Historic value**

A place may have historic value because it has influenced, or has been influenced by an historic figure, event, phase or activity. It may also have historic value as the site of an important event. Significance is greater where evidence remains intact. However, some events or associations are so important that the place retains significance independent of subsequent development.

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy is significant for its historical association with the fight for Aboriginal land rights.

### **Scientific value**

The scientific or research value of a place will depend upon the importance of the data involved, on its rarity, quality or representativeness, and on the degree to which the place may contribute further substantial information.

This grassland near Queanbeyan NSW is habitat for the endangered Aprasia or legless lizard.

## **Social value**

This embraces qualities for which a place has become a focus of spiritual, political, national or other cultural sentiment to a majority or minority group.

The seat was created by the Australian Natives Association which was active in promoting Australian values in the early part of the 20th century.

## **What if my site is on a heritage list?**

National, State and Territory and local governments have heritage lists or registers of places that have been identified as having heritage value. A heritage listing is not meant to burden the owner of the site.

Heritage identification and management processes are often integrated with land-use planning and are usually reflected in State or Local zoning plans. For a listed place the owner or developer may require approval from the approving heritage body before development can occur.

Councils carefully assess all development proposals to ensure the development does not detract from the cultural significance of the place. Most State and Territory Governments provide heritage advisory services.

## **How to manage heritage in your development**

The aim of heritage conservation is to retain the cultural significance of the place. Issues of cultural significance should be determined before consideration is given to heritage management.

Once significance is established ways of conserving the place can be worked out. The Commonwealth, States and Territories may use heritage controls such as Development Control Plans, Heritage Guidelines or Conservation Management Plans. These strategies focus on the future of the place and consider compatible uses that will protect cultural significance.

Choosing the use for a place within your development can have important effects on it and a compatible use is often essential to the survival of significance.

Strategies to protect cultural significance include preservation, restoration, reconstruction or adaptation.

## **Preservation**

Maintaining the fabric of the place in its existing state and retarding deterioration.

Cracked concrete at Old Parliament House is stabilised and made safe rather than being replaced.

## **Case Study - Wells Station Heritage Precinct**

At times there is not a clear distinction between the place and its setting. Although a place may have a legally

defined boundary it is likely to have some visible link beyond this boundary. In such a case the wider setting is important. Therefore, conservation often requires the preservation of an appropriate visual setting.

Views across a pastoral landscape within the identified heritage area of the Wells Station Heritage Precinct have cultural significance. The objective is to minimise the visual impact of houses in the new development that will be visible from a number of special places in the heritage precinct.

Advice is provided to block developers on appropriate design and the selection of materials, colours and landscaping which complements the beauty of the adjacent protected pastoral landscape without limiting the scope for creativity and individual expression.

See: *Don't Think Pink and Purple* brochure.

## **Restoration**

Returning the existing fabric of the place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing components without the introduction of new material.

The exterior of the Commonwealth Archives in Canberra has been restored to include disabled access.

## **Reconstruction**

Returning a place as nearly as possible to a known earlier state with the introduction of materials (new or old) into the fabric.

## **Case Study - Whitley Housing, ACT**

Canberra Avenue is zoned for medium density development. The architecturally significant Whitley houses are small and located on large blocks. The ACT Heritage Council, by identifying specific requirements and indicating an area, or envelope in which development can occur, enabled the developer to conserve the original buildings as well as undertake additional building work within the ACT codes.

## **Links**

Whitley Houses, Griffith and Braddon, ACT

Whitley Houses - ACT Heritage Council

## **Adaptation**

Is acceptable where the conservation of the place cannot otherwise be achieved and where the adaptation does not substantially detract from its cultural significance.

## **Case Study – ANZ Bank Building, ACT**

The ANZ Bank Building on the prominent corner of London Circuit and University Avenue near the ACT legal precinct had been unused for many years. The area had become drab and unkempt.

Through adaptive re-use as a pub, the original features of the ANZ Bank Building, including its original form, fabric, scale and setting have been managed in a manner appropriate to conserving its significance.

The Uni Pub has returned life and activity to its prominent location.

See: ACT Heritage Council case study

## Key Issues

### Benefits

Heritage is a community, local, state and national asset. Community attitudes to heritage are generally supportive. In a 2005 survey of perceptions of heritage-related benefits 80% of the respondents regarded historic houses in their area as an important part of the area's character and identity, 92% thought that heritage was part of Australia's identity, 79% thought their life was richer for having the opportunity to visit or see heritage, and 93% thought that it is important to protect heritage places even though they may never visit them. (Productivity Commission 2005)

Most governments give free advice on heritage issues. The objective of most heritage controls is not to prevent development but to ensure that the cultural significance of the place is not harmed.

Sympathetic conservation and development can provide a valuable point-of-difference to your development and have the benefit of enhancing place-making and a sense of community as well as increasing the desirability of the locality and increasing property values.

An example is the 1960s ANZ Bank on London Circuit Canberra. After adaptation that has maintained the heritage values of the architecture it has become the Uni Pub and brought activity to a previously quiet corner of the city.

### Risks

The primary objective is to conserve and manage cultural significance. Unless good records are kept and a long-term strategy of management is understood and implemented, cultural significance can be compromised.

It is necessary to identify those to be responsible for subsequent conservation and management decisions, for day-to-day management of the place, and for security and regular maintenance for the place.

### Savings

Incorporating heritage places in a development brings the benefit of protecting values which might otherwise be lost. Good conservation, which in principle favours minimal change, can often involve less expense than other courses of action.

### Costs

Like any thorough and careful planning, conserving and managing cultural heritage takes time and money. Although there may be issues managing short-term economic returns on property, costs should be balanced against long term values and returns, especially social sustainability, educational and tourism opportunities.

Choosing a compatible use or continuing an existing use for a place can minimise costs.

## **Barriers**

Some developers see heritage conservation as a constraint. However, with careful planning, appropriate design and conservation management, heritage can be an opportunity. The challenge to the developer is to maintain cultural significance while meeting the requirement to gain an economic return from the site.

Some jurisdictions offer incentives to developers to conserve and manage heritage. Others have bonuses or compensatory mechanisms where the theoretical development potential can be sold and used elsewhere, such as increased density on an adjacent site.

## **Benchmarks**

The International Council of Monuments and Sites, ICOMOS, is an international organisation linked to UNESCO that brings together people concerned with the conservation and study of places of cultural significance. The Burra Charter is the Australia ICOMOS charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance and the 1999 version provides the basis for conservation philosophy in Australia.

## **Development phase actions**

### **Feasibility**

- At the beginning of the project you should check World, National, Commonwealth, State and Territory heritage lists or registers as well as local lists held by organisations such as the National Trust, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, RAIA, and the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, AILA.

- Heritage value may reside in the material fabric, such as in a building, road, fences, tree groups, vista, etc, or in a particular character or feature. Information from registers and lists can help determine the heritage values that may exist at the site.

- Consider the site's underlying zoning and the impact that the proposed development may have on heritage values and fabric. Alternative development options may allow the cultural significance of the site to be conserved more effectively. Many councils and heritage agencies can provide advice.

- Check support that may be available. Some jurisdictions provide incentives, bonuses, grants or other compensatory mechanisms.

- Everything should be conducted in a logical order, including managing demands for economic returns on property.

## **Planning**

- Consult with people who use the place.
- Understand the cultural significance of the place.
- If available, seek heritage advice.
- Integrate the cultural significance of the place into the planning of the site.
- Determine which uses are compatible.
- Identify the curtilage required to protect heritage values.
- Consider alternative development options to allow the heritage significance of the place to be conserved more effectively.
- Separate issues of management from actions that need to be taken.
- The Development Application will require approval by the relevant authority.

## **Design**

- Cultural significance should guide decisions.
- Secure the place and make it safe. Do as much as necessary, as little as possible.
- Avoid disconnecting heritage place as a result of layers of development and subdivision.
- Balance heritage significance and development character.
- If the cultural significance of a place relates to its visual attributes such as form, scale, colour, texture and materials, its setting is of special importance. The care of the place sometimes involves action outside the curtilage of the place.

## **Construction**

Significance should guide decisions. Anything removed including contents, fixtures and objects should be recorded and protected and preferably kept at the place. Keep a photographic record as well.

Implementation should be undertaken by people with appropriate knowledge and skills and competent direction and supervision should be ongoing.

Demolition, unapproved development or damaging activities that reduce the heritage value of a heritage place are serious offences and attract penalties.

## **Lot Creation**

The best conservation often involves the least work and can be inexpensive. Do as much as necessary to care for the place and to make it useable, but as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained.

## **Completion**

Owners are required to take "reasonable care" of heritage places. As with any place it is in the owner's interest to do ongoing maintenance and repair work to protect the value of the place and to avoid expensive remedial work.

Keep records of all heritage related works.

## Links

- [National Trust of Australia](#)
- [Royal Australian Institute of Architects](#)
- [Australian Institute of Landscape Architects](#)
- [Planning Institute of Australia](#)
- [Australian Capital Territory - Heritage Council](#)
- [New South Wales - Heritage Branch](#)
- [Northern Territory - Heritage](#)
- [Queensland - Cultural Heritage](#)
- [South Australia - Heritage](#)
- [Tasmania - Heritage Tasmania](#)
- [Victoria - Heritage Victoria](#)
- [Western Australia - Heritage Council](#)
- [Commonwealth Heritage](#)
- [National Heritage](#)
- [World Heritage](#)

## References

Productivity Commission 2005, *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places* Draft Report, December.

## Link to Content

- <http://yourdevelopment.org/factsheet/view/id/44>