



Burwood and District Historical Society Inc.

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Heritage Enquiry Productivity Commission
P.O. Box 80
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Re: Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places
Issues Paper - May 2005.

Burwood is a suburban community with 28,000 residents located approximately 10km west of Sydney's CBD. It is well served by public transport, both rail and bus. Burwood has a substantial retail core with a large Westfields shopping centre, a smaller shopping mall and a thriving retail shopping strip. It is bounded on the north by Parramatta Road, with several other arterial roads bisecting the area.

Burwood contains a substantial built heritage of Victorian, Federation and Interwar architecture, predominantly single-storey. It contains some of Sydney's best Federation streetscapes, highlighted by the National Estate listed Appian Way precinct, Sydney's (if not Australia's) finest Federation street. There are over 30 National Estate listed items in Burwood as well as hundreds of other items and areas that are of local and state significance.

Burwood's heritage is highly valued by local residents. Qualitative survey work done by Burwood Council showed a strong interest in heritage preservation. The word heritage was consequently incorporated into Burwood Council's letterhead and branding. Despite this, Council's stewardship of heritage has been poor. Heritage items have been demolished under delegated authority; there is no heritage committee, no heritage incentives program and little community education. Council has refused to review a heritage study (now nearly 20 years old) and has pushed ahead with attempting to rezone areas of the town centre which will inevitably lead to a conflict with conservation zonings.

Of even greater concern are various press reports relating to Parramatta Road, including the Sydney Morning Herald 23/5/05 (attached) which suggest that the state government is planning 21,000 extra dwellings and 20,000 more jobs in Burwood. To put this in perspective, this would lead to more than doubling the council area's population. The impact of such a proposal on the heritage of the area, not to mention residential amenity, beggars belief. It is back-of-the-envelope planning of the worst kind. We are gravely concerned that a wholesale demolition of Burwood's built fabric would result from this proposal.

The Burwood Historical Society acknowledges that a major city like Sydney must grow and change. The built environment that we have inherited is the result of exactly these processes, over the course of the last 200 years. However change must be managed so that Sydney remains a good and attractive place to live. Additionally, the best of the old should be kept, keeping a tangible link with history.

Burwood, like many older parts of our major cities, has established infrastructure that can, and should, be better utilised. Sensitively sited new development, which provides good amenity, while not impacting adversely on nearby residents would be welcome. Green Square, the redevelopment of a run-down area of factories in Zetland is a good example of how this can be achieved.

The owners of heritage listed single-storey housing must be protected from inappropriate development nearby. 21,000 extra dwellings (more than will be built at the Green Square) squeezed into an area of Burwood already fully built will inevitably lead to a degradation of amenity. Some will profit, while others will suffer.

How Heritage Protection needs to be promoted

Local Government needs much greater assistance from both state and federal levels of government, as they are the level of government which looks after the vast majority of heritage listed sites. Greater financial assistance is needed so that appropriate staff can be employed to assist with heritage promotion and restoration and adaptive reuse advice. Heritage funding assistance to local government should be either 1) start-up funding to establish a good heritage system within a local government area (to fund local heritage advisors and preparation of heritage planning instruments or 2) continuing funding assistance directed to councils which have good heritage management systems in place. Councils which do not have good heritage management systems should not be eligible for funding assistance except in the “start up” category. It should also not be possible for Councils, due to political pressure, to fail to list items which are significant.

There also is a need for assistance to owners of heritage properties, such as taxation concessions related to money spent on restoration.

There should also be assistance for networking between the different people involved in heritage conservation: historical societies, governments and developers. There is a need for community feeling about heritage issues to be communicated to developers much earlier in the development assessment process. There should be minimum standards for such circumstances, such as demolition of heritage properties. Additional funding for Council staff to receive education in these matters would benefit the community by providing a standard, and minimising misunderstanding and conflict.

The Burwood Historical Society’s experience has been inconsistent management of heritage at local government level - large numbers of heritage items and conservation areas have been listed in Burwood, with substantial assistance from the historical society, yet, as referred to earlier, the Council has allowed demolition of heritage items under delegated authority. What we are recommending to prevent this happening, is that there should be a standard approach where demolition of a heritage item should not ever be allowed, for any reason, without a full assessment of the significance and condition of the property, and also a proposal for new development on the site being submitted at the same time.

Federal government authorities also need to take more responsibility in disposal of sites. The former Burwood Post Office building has been treated atrociously since sale by Australia Post. It is a landmark building with a significant clock tower, which the owner has not maintained, and has an inappropriate use, which has damaged part of the building's ground floor façade and the interior. Conservation Management Plans for such items should have been done, which considered appropriate new uses, prior to the sale of such sites. Australia is now littered with such landmark post offices that are not being looked after properly. This is an area where tax concessions for money spent on restoration would help enormously.

The Society hopes that the inquiry will identify the real needs in the community in relation to heritage, and acts to provide the assistance needed to protect Australia's heritage in a consistent manner.

J. Johnson, C. Gray, and C. Kemp
Members, Executive Committee