

# Conservation of Historic Heritage Places Public Inquiry

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**Submission from Maitland City Council**  
**PO Box 220**  
**Maitland**  
**2320**

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As with many local government organisations, Maitland Council plays a leading role in the protection and promotion of heritage in the local region. The success of Council's efforts in heritage management is considered to be of key importance to the future of the City. The Maitland Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 1993 contains 6 heritage conservation areas and 238 individual heritage items.

In considering the key operational areas of Council with respect to heritage management, it is useful to refer to the broad terms of reference of the NSW Heritage Advisory Service Program, which are outlined below. Heritage Advisors are required to provide a report on these criteria to the NSW Heritage Office on an annual basis.

***Education:***

*Measures taken to provide appropriate education to council staff and councillors in heritage matters.*

***Management:***

- a) The existence of a heritage committee to the council;*
- b) The existence of a comprehensive heritage survey of all of the heritage items in its area;*
- c) The number of heritage items listed under the council local environmental plan;*
- d) The use of other specific planning instruments such as development control plans to guide conservation of heritage items in the LGA.*

**Promotion:**

- a) *The general promotion of heritage values to the community by various media formats;*
- b) *The existence of local heritage fund to encourage owners to undertake conservation work;*
- c) *The existence of other measures designed as incentives for heritage conservation;*
- d) *The establishment/maintenance/enhancement of heritage trails;*
- e) *The active pursuit of heritage tourism.*

**Monitoring**

- a) *Specific measures taken to address any shortcomings in Councils heritage management;*
- b) *Achievement and losses in heritage throughout the year;*
- c) *What specific advisory and other support provided to owners of heritage items;*
- d) *Specific support provided to a heritage committee.*

Some of the opportunities and difficulties presented in addressing the above, in the context of the heads of consideration under this enquiry, are commented on below.

An overriding consideration is that the ability to *effectively* address many of these matters will often be dependant on available resources both within Council and the Community, in addition to access to funding streams.

**Main pressures on the Conservation of historic heritage places**

- Lack of incentives for property owners to undertake major restoration and adaptive reuse projects;
- Impacts of commercialization which can lead to the loss of authenticity of individual items and areas;
- Lack of funding at a local level in particular for private owners;
- Insufficient identification and protection of places of Aboriginal cultural significance, and lack of resources to establish Aboriginal Heritage programs;
- Lack of resources to support local archival and history projects.

**The economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of the conservation of historic heritage places in Australia**

- Heritage of the City used as a drawcard to launch community events reinforcing connections to place;
- Reuse of structures, and protection of places of natural significance leading to requirements for plans of management;

- Significant costs to local Council in the care and responsible management of Council owned heritage buildings, sites and infrastructure;
- Positive improvements in the responsible care for areas leading to increased community pride in an area;
- Opportunities for the aesthetic improvement of urban environments.

**Current relative roles and contributions to the conservation of historic heritage places of the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments, heritage owners (private, corporate and government), community groups and any other relevant stakeholders**

- Maitland Council is responsible for the majority of heritage management issues within the City, however available resources are limited which means that areas that should be receiving attention, are not. Valuable educational and promotional projects are constrained where Council is necessarily focused on development issues as a core function, and the management of its own heritage properties.
- The funding availability for items of significance is limited. In Maitland, \$15 000 is available annually to be distributed across the Local Government Area. This only provides for minor works, with major projects not able to be meaningfully assisted. Property owners often seek assistance through other avenues (cooperate sponsorship etc), however in cases known to Council, there has been little success.

**The positive and/or negative impacts of regulatory, taxation and institutional arrangements on the conservation of historic heritage places, and other impediments and incentives that affect outcomes**

- Major pressures on new land releases on areas of landscape significance. Significance of settings are often not adequately protected, and expanded curtilages are often not specifically identified in planning instruments leaving sites vulnerable to the impact of urban expansion.

**Emerging technological, economic, demographic, environmental and social trends that offer potential new approaches to the conservation of historic heritage places**

- Greater website/database development assistance for local Councils and libraries would be of benefit - an example of a useful initiative is the Directory and Report of New South Wales public library local history collections and local history digitising, currently under development through the State Library of NSW. This provides the first ever comprehensive audit of the local history collections held in the public libraries of New South Wales which will hopefully lead to greater access to information;
- Traditionally, there is a very narrow view of heritage (limited to built environment). A greater appreciation of wider cultural heritage values could be promoted to engage a broader section of the community;

## **Possible policy and programme approaches for managing the conservation of Australia's historic heritage places and competing objectives and interests**

- Management of heritage should engender a sense of self respect within a community. Local Council's are often a facilitators in this process, and further analysis of the communities needs and opinions could be promoted. Economic solutions to whole town approaches can breath new life into heritage structures, but care needs to be taken to ensure that commercialization does not lead to loss of authenticity.
- There is overlap in heritage industries - ie museums /technology/ conservation/social and cultural programs/museums/theatres. Integrating projects across industry `borders' can lead to engaging a greater proportion of the community;
- Cross-departmental government funding could benefit the continued preservation of buildings; ie Funding to assist community run programs given precedence where works to conserve a building or place are proposed.
- Access to specialist heritage related tertiary training for practitioners in regional areas - ie online/by correspondence;
- The preservation of rural timber buildings is a major issue. Wide reaching professional risk assessments may be beneficial in combat the forces of degradation relating to materials and other mitigating factors with financial support provided to property owners to undertake works.
- Within the Maitland City Centre, the majority of verandahs - being cohesive streetscape elements - were removed in the 1920's and 1930's which had a dramatic effect of the streetscape. Given that the reinstatements of verandahs is now up to the owners who foot the cost for reinstatement, this can be stumbling block where the reinstatement of a verandah does not normally increase profit - but does provide for the improved enjoyment of the urban environment. New incentives could be developed.
- It is important to cater for individual interpretations of heritage, which will change over time, and which will be dependant on a persons individual personal and cultural background. Heritage interpretation programs which reflect this will benefit and be of interest to a broader section of the community.
- There could be benefits in providing for stronger networks within regional areas - pool areas in which research/projects to be undertaken. There are likely to be too many pressures to undertake such projects at present for local heritage managers, so additional resources would be required. The Flanders region in Belgium has set up an innovative program in this respect (as attached)