

Conservation of Historical Heritage Places

Firstly I would like to say, that I think that people who own heritage property, although they own it privately, they are really only keepers of it for their lifetimes. Hence strategies need to be in place to assist these people to maintain the property to the best level possible to ensure that the property lasts for the greatest number of years for the greatest public benefit.

As the owner of a regional heritage listed property, I would like to offer the following as some of the issues I have had to face as an owner:

<p>1. <i>The main pressures on the conservation of historic heritage places</i></p>

As I see it there are 3 major pressures:

- Economic from competing development
- Increasing age of properties
- Cost of upkeep for private individuals

Economic pressure from competing development

It seems that there is a finite area of land that is seen as favourable for further development by big business and this "development" is not always in the interest of the heritage items

In my instance, I bought my property in December 1997. I have a strong commitment to ensure that these buildings (an old school and teacher's residence) are kept in good condition and I spent the major part of my savings restoring the buildings and the ground and I see this as an ongoing project for the rest of my life and my family have shown keen interest in continuing to do this after my death. There is a farm between myself and Boral Quarry.

However, this quarry has now been designated as having state significance and I find my property is now part of their buffer zone. Boral have also bought the property opposite me and I know would welcome my neighbours and my property as part of their stable.' This would then mean the property would revert to being a rental property and would soon fall back to the level of neglect it was in when I bought it.

As property owners we need to feel we have a level of "protection" against the intrusion of big business. (I find it sad to read in the paper how many "accidental" fires there have been, especially in Sydney, in heritage buildings that developers have wanted for other purposes. The fierce competition for prime property sites does no bode well for the ongoing protection of heritage buildings.)

If the government is really serious about ongoing heritage protection, every DA at any level that impinges on an historic site has to be looked at with this ongoing protection of the heritage property in mind (and make decisions based on this perspective rather than solely what is good for big business).

It seems that the government (or councils) can insist on certain architects, materials, methods of development but then expect the owner to fully finance this. I am not a wealthy person (this was my personal project after retrenchment) and I found it hard that my local council would not offer positive advice - I asked them to tell me what they would allow me to do and their response was you get the architect to draw it up and then we will look at this offering and tell you what you can and can't do. Surely it would have been more cost effective to have had a list of requirements I could share with the architect and save a lot of to-and-froing! I even had to submit a plan of my proposed garden for approval, then the council allows the land opposite me to be developed as a sand quarry.

Increasing age of properties

Every year each of these listed properties gets older and shows further signs of their age. This means continuous upkeep and cost for the owner. If the owner is on a limited income then there is a finite and often limited amount that is then available for the ongoing upkeep of the property.

If there is a major requirement, required maintenance can become an impossible financial burden. Maybe the government could provide low interest loans for the ongoing maintenance of these properties.

For people with natural heritage on their properties, this concern especially applies. For instance, my whole property (two acres) is heritage listed. There are two enormous Moreton Bay figs on the property. I estimate that each of these trees to be well over 100 years old and the one at the front of the property is about 35 metres high. As the owner of this property I am responsible for this tree's health and the safety of people and vehicles (coming onto the property) from falling branches. **I think it would be appropriate if each local council arborist took responsibility of these trees and care of other natural heritage - and this should be at the local council's expense.**

Cost of upkeep for private individuals

There is an emotional as well as financial cost - the emotional cost relates to knowing that something needs to be done and no longer having the level of finances to do the appropriate level of work. I am a senior citizen of the generation of women who either did not have superannuation available or who were not particularly encouraged to provide for their senior years. Silly us, we still believed in marriage vows until it was too late!

The outcome is that I spent most of my money doing all the initial work to get the whole property to its present standard (I have been here seven and a half years) and I know a time will come when I will have to face the emotional choice of how to spend my limited

income and this need will increase as my physical ability to climb ladders, sand, French polish and paint is reduced.

Would it be feasible to have a system whereby long term unemployed people (who are appropriately vetted and mutually accepted - ie owner of worker: worker wanting to do tasks) could be given "credit hours" to help do some of this more physical work. In return for this work, maybe the owner has to allow certain groups to visit the property for a comparable number of hours. Example, presently I allow the following groups to visit my property at no cost: Garden Clubs, 3 Health and community groups run by the local council - developmentally delayed men, developmentally delayed women and an early onset Alzheimers group, several local retirement villages and local historical society. Under my proposed scheme, I would be allowed a determined number of hours of "community help" in lieu of the time I have these community groups and for the provision of refreshments for them. This would allow the property to be maintained (and I am sure I am not the only older owner who faces this dilemma) and community groups to see a property they are probably curious about, and at the same time it allows some unemployed person (or persons) to learn some of the upkeep skills that may also help them in their own lives to be more caring of their own, and community, property.

2. The economic, social and environmental benefits and cost of the conservation of historic heritage places in Australia.
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As more properties are placed under heritage orders there needs to be very clear guidelines outlined so that people know what responsibilities they are going to have as owners of heritage buildings or property. These guidelines needs to be provided by a government body and must be given to any person contemplating purchase.

It is a big burden for an individual to undertake, as at present it just seems that owners are told what they can and can do (whether it is in the owners interest or benefit) and it begins to feel that one does not own a property but an endless expenditure.

As soon as a modest property is heritage listed it loses sale value because few people are prepared to accept the financial burden for caring for something that, in effect, is really not totally their own (ie. they are regulated as to what they can do). I see the benefits in having regulations but there has to be some tradeoff or benefit to the owner also to keep the property in appropriate condition.

If it had not been for the Green Bans and the activism of Jack Munday, Sydney would have few heritage buildings let standing. Fashions and fads are in buildings as well as clothing and without clear guidelines (enforceable rules) and a body that has "teeth" we as a nation could again face the pressures to get rid of our old buildings that people faced in the 1970s. Big business or individuals are not always ethical in their drive for the almighty dollar. Maybe it is only as we get older (and think about the world in which our

grandchildren will live) that the importance of nature and heritage becomes a real priority.

3. The current relative roles and contributions to the conservation of historic heritage places of governments, heritage owners, community groups and any other stakeholders.

It seems that at present we have a Heritage Council but it can only act in an advisory role. In the perfect world where ethics were maintained, then this would be appropriate. However, increasingly the mighty dollar is seen as god of all and thus if a heritage listing is going to reduce the value of a property and impose external rules, then the owner will try to avoid this listing even though the property may have distinctive and valuable features. There needs to be some system that is fair to the existing owners if their property, or an item on their property, is to be listed.

Governments may need to look at the purchase of more properties at a good market value, the leasing these to “keepers” - people who have a love of heritage that can pay a nominal rent to live in the property, but are required and bound to do very specific tasks to maintain the property in lieu of higher rent.

Maybe also councils need to allow greater use of privately owned heritage properties to allow the owner to finance maintenance and upkeep. There could also be some tax relief on income gained from this “additional use” that can then be shown to be channelled into the upkeep of the heritage property.

4. 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.

As mentioned previously, the positive impacts of regulatory requirements are that they minimise inappropriate changes to a listed property, but the negative is that the owner has the feeling that they are just a "cash cow" that has to do some regulatory bidding at their private expense and lose the feeling that it is their "own" property.

I think there needs to be a tax arrangement where the property can have a wider use available than would normally be allowed in the particular council area, and providing that the income earned from this use can be shown to be totally channelled back into repairs, upkeep and appropriate levels of insurance for the heritage property - then this money should be tax free. This means that if the owners do much of the work themselves they are eligible for an hourly rate from this specific income.

We need to have extremely high fines for owners whose properties "happen to burn down" when there is a DA requiring their demolition.

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

I think it is important for all owners of heritage property or items to be kept updated with what is available and how this may be of benefit to owners.

And please, don't expect us all to have internet connections (or charge us more for information to be sent by other methods). Not all of us have the money to be connected to the internet!

6. Possible policy and program approaches for managing the conservation of heritage places and competing objectives and interests.

As mentioned previously, I feel that the greatest competition for heritage sites will be from developers who wish to build multistoried properties where the heritage item stands. The government must be responsible for the purchase of certain prime heritage properties and sites that will face ongoing pressure from developers. This is especially relevant in the cities where available land is at a premium, but also as the population is concentrating further and further from the cities, more pressures will be placed on properties that are now more "fringe rural" but that are finding themselves closer to the urban sprawl. This area needs a government program of selection and purchase at a good market value to encourage sale (rather than accident).

Increasingly there will need to be more government assistance, probably through tax relief to encourage people to keep and maintain heritage properties. This requires an appropriate government policy to provide assistance for owners through some type of financial relief.

The use of unemployed people as "helpers" at heritage properties and the recognition that this is legitimate but unpaid work also needs to be the basis of a new policy.

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