

**'PLAN MELBOURNE' (METROPOLITAN PLANNING  
STRATEGY)**

**HERITAGE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA SUBMISSION**

**2 DECEMBER, 2013**



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

This submission is made by the Heritage Council of Victoria (the Heritage Council) in response to the Victorian Government's Metropolitan Planning Strategy 'Plan Melbourne' (the Strategy) as released in October 2013. It follows an earlier submission to the Ministerial Advisory Committee's Discussion Paper 'Melbourne, let's talk about the future', released for comment in October, 2012.

In that submission the Council stated:

*The Heritage Council also believes that it is imperative to retain, celebrate and build on the best of the past in planning for the future of metropolitan Melbourne. The Council is concerned that there is a risk that some of the proposals in the discussion paper, if carried through without appropriate attention to heritage conservation, may result in a loss of significant heritage fabric and, importantly, a loss of opportunities to create distinctive new places for the future community of Melbourne.*

### 1.2 The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council of Victoria is a Statutory Authority established under the provisions of the *Heritage Act 1995*. Under the provisions of Sec 8 of the Heritage Act, the Heritage Council is charged with a wide range of functions. Aside from those related to the management of the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) and the processes associated with that Act, the Heritage Council is also charged with the following:

*(a) to advise the Minister on the state of Victoria's cultural heritage resources and on any steps necessary to protect and conserve them;*

*(b) to promote public understanding of Victoria's cultural heritage and develop and conduct community information and education programs;*

.....

*(g) to advise government departments and agencies and municipal councils on matters relating to the protection and conservation of places and objects of cultural heritage significance;*

*(h) to advise the Minister administering the Planning and Environment Act 1987 on proposed amendments to planning schemes which may affect the protection or conservation of places and objects of cultural heritage significance;*

*(i) to liaise with other bodies responsible for matters relating to the protection, conservation, management and promotion of Victoria's cultural heritage;*

*(j) to initiate and undertake programs of research related to the identification, conservation or interpretation of Victoria's cultural heritage;*

Therefore, the role of the Heritage Council is far broader than dealing with matters pertaining to the VHR and for the purposes of this submission attention is directed to functions (a), (g), (h) and (i), which direct the Heritage Council to consider and advise on heritage policy generally, but particularly to advise the Minister for Planning on matters surrounding the management of planning schemes. The Heritage Council believes that the Strategy is fundamental to that function.

Therefore this submission directs its attention, not only to the specific references to heritage conservation in the Strategy, but to other matters where the identification, conservation or interpretation of Victoria's cultural heritage may be impacted.

## 2. GENERAL COMMENTS

### 2.1 The Strategy

The Victorian Government must be congratulated on completing this broad ranging strategy. The Heritage Council acknowledges the diverse development issues that have driven this document and accepts that guiding the future of Melbourne is an extremely complex task that requires vision and commitment.

The Strategy must be welcomed for its advocacy for greater urban densities, the prescription of a boundary for outer metropolitan expansion and its implicit recognition of the need for improved public transport and that existing neighbourhood structures need to be conserved, whilst creating new identities elsewhere. It appears to embrace a number of aspirations;

- Establishing local planning frameworks that see 'place making' as a critical focus.
- The need for a new urbanism embracing diverse housing choices, good street architecture and local services.
- The retention and development of good open space networks
- A desire to make the constituent parts of the city and metropolitan area memorable and recognisable.
- The need for Melburnians to understand the place that they identify with.

The breadth of the Strategy and its large number of Directions and Initiatives is daunting and the Heritage Council can only encourage a commitment to its implementation. Where relevant, the Heritage Council has used this submission to identify ways in which it might be able to assist with the Strategy's implementation. At the conclusion of this submission the Heritage Council has nominated future actions and directions which it proposes to pursue.

The following comments also draw on the statement at 1.1 above 'that it is imperative to retain, celebrate and build on the best of the past in planning for the future of metropolitan Melbourne and care should be taken to not lose opportunities to create distinctive new places for the future community of Melbourne'.

## 3. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

### 3.1 'Melbourne today' (p3)

The Heritage Council was disappointed that the description of Melbourne in 2013 failed to acknowledge its heritage assets. The closest that it comes to acknowledging Melbourne's important urban character is under the sub- heading 'Liveable neighbourhoods and suburbs' and even then the Strategy avoids acknowledging the important role that the historic environment plays in identifying Melbourne in both a national and international sense.

#### 3.2.1 'Melbourne in 2050' (p5)

Of greater concern is the failure of the document to acknowledge that in 2050 Melbourne will continue to celebrate its history, heritage and historic environment. This is despite key concepts of the Strategy (p7) including: Protecting the suburbs by delivering density in defined locations; Creating 20 minute neighbourhoods; and transitioning to a more sustainable city.

This is also despite the clear messages from consultation that:

- 'People would like to see the unique character of their neighbourhoods preserved';
- 'Melbourne in 2050 will be inclusive and accepting of change';
- 'Community engagement will be central to decision making'; and

- **'Melbourne's uniqueness will have been nurtured and we will have protected what is best about our city' (our emphasis).**

The Heritage Council believes that these messages need to be appropriately acknowledged in any vision for metropolitan Melbourne.

Over a period of 40 years Melburnians have passionately argued for the conservation of the best parts of the city and its suburbs. These arguments have not denied the further development of the city and certainly have not prevented change. Melbourne over that period has undergone dramatic change, but with a concern that the past be acknowledged and the best places be retained. The Heritage Council believes that this will continue to be the case and a vision which denies the inherent conservation philosophy will fail to meet the objectives of the strategy that follows it.

### 3.3 The nexus between environmental sustainability and heritage conservation.

It has become something of a tradition to separate environmental issues and heritage issues, as if there is a distinctive separateness between people and nature. In the context of the Strategy this is a strange notion as the whole construct of environmental values is built around the actions of people. Cultural heritage values are, needless to say the result of human actions and in the context of a document such as this it may be more sensible to see both the environment and cultural heritage as part of our heritage.

The nexus between sustainability and heritage conservation has not been made out. Better use of existing assets in the Strategy is focussed solely on infrastructure. Existing buildings (including heritage assets) have embodied energy and in this way, heritage has a part to play in environmental resilience.

### 3.4 The role of heritage in planning

The acknowledgement of the history of a place and the identification of the tangible and intangible elements valued by communities (that is, its 'heritage') are fundamental to the planning of those places. This has been demonstrated over a long period, not only in Victoria, but throughout the world.

The heritage of Melbourne is more than a series of dots on maps, or indeed, places listed on registers. To understand the landscape and urban form of Melbourne requires an understanding of the history, including the physical and social conditions that created the place, and indeed what is valued by communities today – both local and visitors. The Heritage Council believes that the implementation of this Strategy will require such understanding of the various places subject to detailed planning.

Melbourne's heritage should not be characterised as only nineteenth and early twentieth century public buildings, mansions and terrace houses. Within the central city area there has been a desire to identify and acknowledge the importance of quite modern structures and precincts, whilst in the suburbs, local governments have been keen to identify places, streetscapes, gardens, parks, historic precincts and urban forms from a variety of historical periods.

The Heritage Council believes that the identification of the heritage of a place goes a long way toward understanding the important character of the place and what communities value. Indeed the two things are almost the same. This should be embedded in actions and initiatives as the Strategy moves into the implementation phase. For example by ensuring that local and precinct area planning brings communities and practitioners together to understand the themes, stories and associations with a place and builds this into place-making and design.

#### 4. Specific directions and initiatives

The role of history and heritage attracts very limited reference, despite its importance to the people of Melbourne. By and large it is limited to Direction 4.7 'Respect our Heritage as we Build for the Future' (p.113, 115). However, it is acknowledged that there are other references which require the Heritage Council's comment.

Rather than being singled out as a separate, unique consideration The Heritage Council believes that heritage values need to be understood as intrinsic to what makes Melbourne unique, and essential to good planning of the urban area.

The following comments relate to the specific initiatives outlined under Direction.4.7.

##### 4.1 Initiative 4.7.1

###### 'Value heritage when managing growth and change'

The Heritage Council supports the proposal that the Department of Transport Planning and Local Infrastructure (Department) work with local governments to enhance and improve heritage planning and assessment. However, this can only be achieved through the provision of real assistance in the form of funds to undertake the necessary assessments and provide assistance to owners.

The heritage advisory services supported by the Department (Heritage Victoria) have been a long-running and effective mechanism for ensuring that property owners are linked to decision making in local government. It should be continued and expanded to ensure that all local councils are able to provide a high quality service.

The proposal that the Heritage Act be reviewed is welcomed; however the mechanisms by which the Act may be modernised to provide a greater focus on proactive identification and preservation are unclear to the Heritage Council. The Heritage Council looks forward to the opportunity to provide feedback when consulted about proposed changes and is willing to participate and advise on any review.

##### 4.2 Initiative 4.7.3

###### 'Create incentives for heritage conservation'

The Heritage Council welcomes the commitment to investigate new incentives which would promote the conservation of places of heritage importance.

It notes the interest in examining opportunities for the transfer of development rights. This mechanism has been used to a limited extent in Melbourne in the past, but a further examination in the light of current planning policies and mechanisms would be useful.

The Heritage Council also believes that there may be options for providing assistance through the Heritage Act's provisions for rate and land tax relief, or alternatively through the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1989* which can enable rebates, concessions or deferral of local council rates. The Heritage Council must also point to the *Incentives for Heritage Protection Handbook* (<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/date/assets/pdf/file/0006/44475/Incentives-for-Heritage-Protection-Handbook.pdf>) a document prepared by the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand (HCOANZ) which guides governments and local governments to opportunities for assisting heritage conservation.

The Heritage Council offers its assistance and would be happy to participate in any further review of incentive mechanisms in Victoria.

### **4.3 Initiative 4.7.4**

#### **'Encourage place names that honour local identity and history'**

**This is a fine aim, but should not be seen as an alternative to acknowledging history through keeping places of importance nor interpreting the rich stories of places more completely. The naming of a place might serve as a reminder of its past, but cannot act as a substitute for its presence.**



## **5. HERITAGE OPPORTUNITIES ELSEWHERE IN THE STRATEGY.**

### **5.1 Initiative 1.1.1**

#### **'Establish a new Metropolitan Melbourne Structure Plan'**

Map 8 (p24) shows the basis for a broad Metropolitan Melbourne Structure Plan.

In developing this plan there is an opportunity to make a solid statement as to how the structure plan will respond to, protect and enhance what makes Melbourne distinctive. Throughout the Strategy there is reference to Melbourne's distinctive identity. The Heritage Council believes that this should be more explicitly enunciated in the Strategy. In this way the multitude of directions and initiatives can be implemented in the context of a clear understanding of what makes Melbourne distinctive.

The Heritage Council points out that as part of the preparation of the previous strategy, Melbourne 2030, a statement of significance for Melbourne was prepared. This could form the basis of a new Distinctive Melbourne Statement.

### **5.2 Initiative 1.5.5**

#### **'Plan and facilitate private sector investment opportunities in Melbourne and rural and regional Victoria'**

The Heritage Council finds that this initiative fails to appropriately recognise the importance of cultural heritage sites in promoting identity and self awareness and, in turn making Melbourne an attractive place for tourists to visit. It is true that Melbourne is a distinctive Australian destination and that the tourism experience is supported by a vibrant city that is filled with shops, restaurants, bars and cafes in wide boulevards and intimate laneways. It would, however, have been appropriate to identify what makes Melbourne distinctive, other than its eating and drinking venues.

The only reference to heritage under this initiative relates to seeking opportunities for short term accommodation and tourism services when developing or renewing heritage sites (such as Flinders Street Station). The Heritage Council believes that this is a simplistic view of the value of heritage sites and places to Melbourne's heritage and suggests that actions associated with this initiative adopt a more sophisticated view of the role of history and heritage in promoting tourism.

Consideration only needs to be given to the way in which Melbourne's heritage sites and places are used as sets for iconic Australian films and television series. These images act as major advertisements for the city and help establish its attraction to tourists, both from overseas and interstate.

The Heritage Council believes that opportunities for high quality cultural tourism in rural and regional Victoria are under-valued and not pursued. In particular, the stories and opportunities associated with Victoria's rich gold heritage or maritime heritage should be developed in ways which will attract much greater visitation. Any actions that can be taken to identify these opportunities and support their development must be supported.

It is important that any government support be focussed on targeted and high quality products which will be seen as 'must visit' options for tourists.

### 5.3 Initiative 1.6.1

**'Identify new urban renewal sites around the existing train network based on transit oriented development principles'**

The Heritage Council has published industrial heritage case studies that could inform some urban renewal projects.

### 5.4 Direction 4.1

**'Create a city of 20 minute neighbourhoods'**

This concept is one of the most innovative opportunities in the Strategy and draws on the success of Melbourne's inner suburbs in creating an urban environment which in turn produces 'Most Liveable City' plaudits.

The vibrancy of the inner suburbs and their success as neighbourhoods has a great deal to do with their retention of historic character and what Melburnians see as important.

The success of the 20-minute city idea will rely on a lot more than the establishment of cafes. As with the existing inner areas it means providing people with access to food shopping, and services such as banks, pharmacies, medical centres, post offices, schools, etc.

Any analysis of the structure of the inner suburbs will show that the retention of old fabric has provided plenty of opportunities for the continued provision of these services alongside numerous cafes, bars and restaurants. Any initiatives directed at establishing new 20-minute centres should be careful to look at the importance of existing fabric, services and institutions along with the social attachment to places and institutions in the relevant communities.

The UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape methodologies as currently being trialled in Ballarat could provide a model whereby this analysis could be completed. The development of new and innovative ways of undertaking identification (for example; the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape methodology) offer opportunities to link the valued aspects of Melbourne to planning, place-making and economic development.

### 5.5 Initiative 4.2.2

**'Protect Melbourne' s neighbourhoods centres, including provision for mandatory controls'**

The intention of this direction seems laudable. However, care needs to be taken with the imposition of mandatory controls (e.g. height and neighbourhood character). The text identifies how communities and local councils have used heritage controls to assist with the protection of important characteristics of a neighbourhood. The Heritage Council believes that these discretionary controls are often sufficient to protect this character and, at the same time, enable redevelopment of less significant sites and elements of the neighbourhood. Whilst height controls could be a useful supplement to Heritage Overlay controls, care needs to be taken as to where and what mandatory height controls would be imposed as such controls could deny quite reasonable and sympathetic developments.

### 5.6 Initiative 4.8.1

**'Promote urban design excellence'**

The Heritage Council commends the proposal to expand the role of the Victorian Design Review Panel to enable the review of significant projects affecting places on the Victorian Heritage Register. It is understood that such reviews have already been undertaken following referral of projects to the panel by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria.

The Heritage Council does, however question the current capacity and expertise of the Panel to complete these reviews and suggests that the Panel should supplement its membership to include members with acknowledged heritage expertise.

**5.7 Initiative 4.6.1  
'Prepare a distinctive Melbourne policy'**

The Heritage Council supports this direction, but must take the opportunity to point out that a piece of work completed in 2001 (*Protecting Heritage in a Changing Melbourne; Technical Report 10; Planning Melbourne for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*) provides a valuable basis for defining the heritage significance of Melbourne and what should be acknowledged in any Distinctive Melbourne policy. The Statement of Significance for Melbourne presented in that report is particularly pertinent to this exercise and should be considered.

## 6. PROPOSED FUTURE ACTION BY HERITAGE COUNCIL

### 6.1 Further discussion

As indicated in the Introduction above, the Heritage Council is anxious to assist in the implementation of 'Plan Melbourne' and will immediately seek to meet with the Metropolitan Planning Authority to discuss ways in which it can assist it in developing detailed policies and strategies.

### 6.2 A heritage charter

It is the Heritage Council's view that the implementation of the Strategy would greatly benefit from the promulgation of a Heritage Charter for Victoria. Like the Urban Design Charter it could make a statement about what is heritage (a definition which seems to have largely been missed in the Strategy), summarise its value to Victorians and outline approaches to ensuring that this heritage is acknowledged and cared for.

The foundation ideas underpinning 'Victoria's Heritage: Strengthening our Communities', launched in July 2006 provide a useful starting point for the development of such a charter:

- Heritage is the heart of community identity
- Victoria's heritage is both cultural and natural
- Victoria's heritage reflects the rich multicultural diversity of the State.
- Understanding the heritage values of a place or object is part of making good decisions about that place or object.
- Our heritage is more than just places; it is also the objects, collections, records, stories, the traditions and the special local characteristics that build community pride, create opportunities for cultural enrichment and attract visitors and tourists
- Heritage protection systems for places, objects and collections need to be comprehensive, administered consistently and easy to use for all Victorians.
- Today's creations may be tomorrow's heritage.
- Government alone cannot sustain our heritage. Everyone has a responsibility.
- Partnerships between governments, community and business are an important mechanism to deliver heritage services, programs and funding.
- Education and training are vital to the future of heritage
- Just as our environment sustains life and our culture, so too our communities and our heritage sustain the human spirit.

The Heritage Council would be pleased to undertake or assist in the development of such a charter.

### 6.3 Prepare a distinctive Melbourne policy

The Heritage Council believes that it is in a good position to assist in the development of this policy and refers to its comments at 5.6 above.

### 6.4 The Heritage Overlay

The Heritage Council has also noted the intention of the Government to undertake a review of the overlay provisions in planning schemes and will be seeking opportunities to participate in that review, particularly as it relates to the Heritage Overlay.

The Heritage Overlay provisions of the Victorian Planning Provisions (VPPs) are fundamental to the protection of heritage sites and precincts across Victoria and whilst their design is obviously open to modification it will be important that the principles underpinning them are retained.

**It should also be noted that in 2007 an Advisory Committee constituted through Planning Panels Victoria undertook a comprehensive review of heritage provisions in planning schemes (*Review of Heritage Provisions in Planning Schemes; Advisory Committee Report; August, 2007*) and made a large number of recommendations. The Heritage Council believes that any further review of the Heritage Overlay provisions should consider the above 2007 review.**

