

# Point Cook Homestead and Stables



Image: Parks Victoria



DTP VicPlan web map

## The place

**Point Cook Homestead is a single-storey, largely bluestone house built in stages from about 1857 for pastoralist Thomas Chirnside. It is surrounded by a large garden. A semi-detached weatherboard wing of the house may be an earlier structure dating from 1849. Substantial bluestone stables were erected before 1861 and are part of a complex of buildings on the site.**

The site was purchased by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works in 1978 and it now forms part of the larger Point Cook Coastal Park managed by Parks Victoria.



## Location

Point Cook, City of Wyndham

## Traditional Owners

Bunurong People

## Main Impacts



Sea levels **rising** by around **24 CM**



**Longer** fire seasons, with up to **double** the number of high fire danger days

## Type

19<sup>th</sup> century coastal complex, comprising:

- o bluestone and timber structures with metal roofs
- o historical garden with trees, plants and landscaping.

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Front elevation of the homestead. (Image: Heritage Victoria)



## Heritage significance

Point Cook Homestead and Stables is significant as one of the earliest pastoral homestead complexes in Victoria, and for its association with the Chirnside family, who were notable figures in the pastoral incursion into rural Victoria. The garden and parkland surrounding the homestead are significant as an enclosed landscape that provides a clearly defined setting for the building complex. The homestead also has archaeological importance for remnants of early built elements and landscaping, including a jetty.

## Climate change impacts

The site is in a low-lying coastal area that is predicted to be inundated by storm surges and flooding within the next 50 years. Severe storm activity, including severe winds, is also predicted to be more frequent and more intense, posing a risk of physical damage to the unused buildings and plantings.

Higher daily temperatures in summer, longer drought periods and a greater risk of bushfires and grassfires are also predicted.

## Site vulnerability and heritage impacts

As a relatively isolated place surrounded by an extensive area of native grassland close to the bay, the Point Cook Homestead and Stables site is vulnerable

to both inundation due to sea-level rise and grassfires resulting from higher summer temperatures.

Inundation of the place from sea-level rise will affect the homestead, surrounding buildings and cultural plantings, and is also likely to result in the loss of archaeological remains. Increased airborne and soil salinity associated with sea-level rise, rising groundwater and storm surges will cause salt decay, which is a severe risk to the bluestone and mortar of the homestead and stable buildings.

Other climate change impacts relate to the aging timber sections of the homestead which are vulnerable both to fire and to an intensified wet-dry cycle. Increased drying, cracking, waterlogging, fungal rot and insect attack of timber can affect the structural integrity of the building and may require an increase in maintenance and repairs.

Trees on the property will be extremely vulnerable to damage or death because of the increased risk of fire, increased temperatures and heatwaves, and the effects of increased soil salinity and reduced water availability. Dying vegetation is also more vulnerable to fire and high winds.

Structures in poor repair will also be more vulnerable to wind impacts, as roofs may blow off, particularly where fixings and sheeting are corroded by the salt environment. There will also be a greater likelihood of structural damage



View of stable building. (Image: Parks Victoria)

to the heritage buildings due to tree falls and wind-borne debris.

Its relative isolation and lack of use put the Point Cook Homestead and Stables at greater risk in a changing climate. It also limits the scope of operational monitoring of the place and the financial capacity for implementing resilience measures.

## Current management for climate resilience

The site is unoccupied and there is no active use, and a management plan has not yet been prepared. The site is inspected daily by Parks Victoria rangers, and fuel loads are maintained regularly to limit the possibility of grassfires.

Climate change policies have been developed for the broader Point Cook area, but are mostly reactive in response to storms and bushfires. They also prioritise biodiversity issues and have limited focus on the impacts of climate change on cultural heritage, including asset and place management.

## Potential strategies for building resilience

Although inundation might be prevented by substantial engineering works, this is likely to be expensive and would not mitigate the impacts of increased airborne and soil salinity on the site.

Because of the predicted inundation within the next 50 years, loss and degradation may be unavoidable. In the long-term, radical options for managing

the site may need to be considered, such as:

- introducing drought-resistant and salt-tolerant plants found at local wetland environments, such as nearby Cheetham Wetlands
- embracing and carefully recording the managed decay as a conservation strategy
- relocating the entire complex to a site that will not be inundated, following a detailed archaeological investigation of the site.

There is also scope for shorter term proactive management and planning for the effects of climate change. For example:

- ensuring the site is visited and not neglected; greater visitation and visibility will help generate public awareness of the place's vulnerability
- undertaking necessary maintenance and repairs to ensure the building remains weathertight
- cleaning out rainwater systems, paying particular attention to gutters and rainwater heads, and collecting and storing water for firefighting

- monitoring the condition of timberwork and metalwork and ensuring painting is kept up to protect vulnerable surfaces (timber, iron and steel) from damp, salt-laden air
- maintaining trees in windbreaks around buildings and replacing dead or senescent trees to ensure the homestead complex remains protected from winds
- maintaining healthy vegetation in the coastal and intertidal zone to minimise erosion
- maintaining a defensible space around buildings for fire protection while maintaining the landscape setting
- developing a heritage action plan for the site to enable more strategic climate resilience planning and management actions for the entire site and its significant elements. This could include a reassessment of the values associated with the place and the development of heritage guidelines that explore options for preservation, tolerance for change, documentation, and long-term management and interpretation.



Some remnant fabric of the jetty has been lost in recent decades. The following images show the jetty in 1951 (left), 2011 (middle) and 2020 (right). Remnant archaeological remains are especially vulnerable to storm surges and sea-level rise. (Images: DTP VicPlan web map)