

The Socio Cultural Significance of Historic Guildford

SIGNIFICANCE OF GUILDFORD

1. Background

Guildford was one of the first three towns established as part of the Swan River Colony in 1829 (Perth and Fremantle also established at this time). It has been described by the National Trust of Australia (1984). and on the previous Register of the National Estate (1989) as,

..a rare and comparatively intact nineteenth century town within a relatively undisturbed topographical setting. The basic character and structure of the town remains as it has been since the period of railway development. It is relatively unimpaired from encroachment of the metropolitan Perth

The heritage significance of the historic town of Guildford has been long established with numerous studies and reports .See Guildford Conservation Policy (City of Swan 1992), National Trust of Australia (WA) (1984), Landscape and Town Assessments (1983), Federal Heritage Listing (1989). These are some of the many documents identifying Guildford as a ‘rare’ and ‘unique’ example of a comparatively intact C19 English village, in an Australian setting. The late Professor Gordon Stephenson recognized the significance of Guildford at a National level;

‘in a planning context, Guildford as a whole should be regarded as one of the most important towns of first settlement in Australia’.

The holistic concept of historic town, is a defining point in considering the significance of the place- Guildford. In these terms, the total town needs to be considered in terms of the interrelationship of the parts- that is: *the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.*

Specifically, the town of Guildford needs to be recognized as a unit in terms of the interrelationship of its urban form, landscape form, topographical setting and built form.

2. Interrelationship of Significant Features

a) Urban Form

Guildford remains a largely intact nineteenth century town with

*The town has been limited and defined by the Swan and Helena Rivers, these rivers determined settlement in an east- west pattern, on a ridge of high land.

*The town plan of 1829 has had *limited changes to its form and is still clearly discernable.* In contrast, other towns of the early Swan River Colony (Perth and Fremantle) with their expanded forms have experienced significant physical changes.

*A number of surviving elements of this original 1829 town plan, including *original 2 acre allotments that have high significance and rarity value and are unique remnants in a town of first settlement in WA and possibly unique at a National level.*

*The town plan was *inorganic in form* and imposed on a new settlement unlike later settlements. York, Toodyay, Greenough and Cossack were developed with some experience of the new environment. *This original town plan and form is still clearly discernable today.*

*The significance of the urban form derives from its original determination based on a *C19th British settlement model used in the US*. Grid plan street layout relating to compass points, central Church Square, provision for school, market place, commonages and government lands were provided. *The town retains most of these original features.*

**Openness of the town.* The spatial character of the town can be defined as open, maintaining vistas through to the floodplain from many points. These vistas were subject of a ministerial appeal in the 1990s that rejected a development for obscuring historic vistas. The railway whilst physically bisecting the town from 1882 has kept an open and spacious C19 character unique to the historic town. *The openness of the town is unique at a National Level in a town of first settlement*

**Setting and gardens contribute to the character of the place.* Properties bordering the floodplains have homes from a variety of periods and architectural styles, with the unifying element of large garden spaces. This has created a distinctive and rare urban pattern, unique at a national level for a town of first settlement.

* *the urban form was consolidated in 2 distinct periods-* pre railway (up to 1882) and post railway when urban pressures saw the subdivision of the 2 acre mid town blocks. The town is a unique C19th settlement in the metropolitan area, largely defined prior to 1890. *It is of a traditional village scale and form.*

The unique urban form is at risk because of lack of heritage recognition, lack of understanding, lack of protective mechanisms and pressures of contemporary urban development and development patterns.

b) Landscape Form.

Guildford's landscape form has been the subject of two studies. The National Trust (WA) Historic Gardens of Guildford, identified -private gardens detailing layers of landscape plantings over time The Hocking and Blackwell *Guildford Conservation Policy* (1987) identified existing street plantings at that time as part of Guildford's urban form. There has been no previous or contemporary study conducted on riverine flora and fauna, no comprehensive study of additional private gardens in Guildford and no historic assessment of Street Tree Plantings over time in the town. One study has been conducted on plantings in Stirling Square (Richards O. 1989.) The town of Guildford contains significant and rare examples of:

**remnant plantings on its floodplains* reflecting pre European settlement.

**plantings in private gardens* from early colonial settlement including significant and rare horticultural specimens.

**plantings together with built form* from a variety of historical periods. The combination of built and landscape form surviving together is rare in the Perth Metropolitan Area

**street and public garden plantings* dating back to the mid C19 and some prior this period .

**plantings demonstrate early lifestyle and horticultural practices* of the European settlers in the C19 and early C20.

Current practices endangering the historic landscape include:

- *State Government authorities clearing, spraying and mowing the floodplains are leading to monocultures of E.rudis trees and loss of vegetation and habitat.
- * Bitumen bike trails and full public access to foreshores results in mature vegetation being deemed ‘at risk’ and removed
- *Local Government’s lack of knowledge of historic landscape features is leading to loss of significant streetscapes and their plantings (eg Swan Street and James Street plantings).
- *Many private home owners are unaware of the age, scarcity and historic significance of plantings on their properties.
- *Following fashion, fads (eg. iceberg roses, plane and jacaranda trees) and fear of litigation,(removing logs and mowing of floodplain) determine many plantings and land management practices, without due regard to sustainability and historic significance.

The unique planting forms and patterns are endangered by lack of recorded information, lack of recognition, lack of appropriate protection and fashion and trends in modern plantings.

c) Topographical Setting

The unique riverine setting of the Town has defined and limited development. The town was created on the east- west spine ridge of high land that runs the length of this peninsula area.

Until recently, development pressures had largely bypassed Guildford and only in more recent years has there been interest in filling the reserve areas. The Water Corp – Floodway Studies and Act have further assisted to preserve the uniqueness of the setting. Small local areas of filling have modified some of the towns topography from early days, this was necessary to develop riverine roadways in the inorganic 1829 town plan that was superimposed on the town.

The topography may be defined as significant because:

- *The town is sited at the confluence of the Swan and Helena Rivers, which gave rise to its significance as *an inland port town and commercial centre*.
- *The town of Guildford is both *limited and defined* by its riverine boundaries.
- *The natural boundaries gave rise to the *Town Plan, which has varied little in form and area since first settlement*
- * The *floodplains form 50% of the total land* area and are relatively unchanged since first settlement i.e. they have rarity and scarcity value
- *The town is effectively *an island* with development occurring on the east-west land ridge of high land. (The eastern neck of this peninsula land would break during winter floods in the pre railway period).
- * The total land form of the town has been *relatively undisturbed* since first settlement in 1829.
- * the rich alluvial soils arising from this location gave Guildford *advantage in early horticultural pursuits and provided the raison d’etre for settlement at this site*

- * Natural supplies of *water as springs and underground streams* facilitated settlement, horticultural, irrigation practices and water supply..
- * *alluvial clays gave rise to a local brick making industry that provided a more permanent form built structure* that did not exist in many early settlements and has resulted in the survival of a significant number of buildings from the mid to late C19.
- * the topographical setting determined *land use, siting of buildings and the nature of industries.*

Practices endangering the uniqueness of the C19 topography include;

- *land filling in the 100 year floodplain (eg. Welbourne Cottage site).
- * Development in the Floodway (eg Fairholme quadruplexes).

There is a need to recognize the uniqueness of the topography of the Guildford and its floodplains at all levels of government

d) Built Form

The town has a scarce and noted stock of mid C19 buildings with rare examples of buildings from the 1840s. Some significant building stock has been identified in the Guildford Conservation Policy of 1992. At that time it was noted that half the building stock of the town was constructed up to 1930 and three quarters of those were built prior to World War 1

The large proportion of these early buildings represent a major growth period in the history of Guildford and makes the historic town comparatively unique in relation to other historic areas in the (WA) metropolitan area.

(Guildford Conservation Policy 1992 p12)

Other significant features of the built form in Guildford include;

- * the *predominantly single residential pattern* and character of early town (only 2 semi detached buildings were constructed in the 1890s) prior to 1980.
- * the *predominantly single storey* nature of the residences in the town (only 7 dwellings were constructed as 2 story prior to 1980)There are no pre 1930s buildings of 2 storey form in the side streets developed in the 1880s.
- * Hotels circa *1850 -1915 were predominantly 2 storey* in form and located on major transport routes (Rose and Crown, Devenish Inn, Guildford Hotel, Woodbridge Hotel). They were highly visible and have landmark status
- **the majority of C19 and early C20 shops were single storey*, however, in the old town centre there existed 3 two storey shops and one ware house. 2 two storey shop/ residences were erected opposite the railway station, in James Street circa 1910 .
- *The *blend of C19 and early C20 building styles* give the town a distinctive and unique character.
- *The character of the C19 and early C20 building stock is partly derived from the predominant *use of local clay and early brick firing techniques* that gave rise to the distinctive red/gold tones of the bricks.

Residential and commercial land on medium to large allotments, are potentially at risk through owner neglect. This is particularly apparent in the City of Swan and Mundaring (see photos of Belle View Homestead and Lynwood), once properties become structurally damaged (fire or neglect), repair costs can be used to manoeuvre ‘developmental rights’ or provide a reason for demolition.

The City of Swan has used the Conservation Policy as a discretionary guide; as a result, over 4% of the buildings of 1930's and prior have demolished over the past 4 years.(This has included buildings listed as of high significance).

Property owners in Guildford are subject to additional cost burdens for conservation or development work through

- a) cost of the heritage advisers comment
- b) legal costs for the City's lawyer to place a caveat on properties under the high noise contours of the aircraft flight path.

There is a need for the Heritage Act to investigate punitive measures for neglect or damage to significant properties and for additional positive measures at State and Local Government levels to encourage identification, conservation and maintenance.

3. Identification and Protection of the Historic Town and Individual Places

The historic Town of Guildford has a number of Legislative and other mechanisms set up to protect it., The Guildford Conservation Policy and Design Guidelines, these are adopted under Town Planning Scheme 17. At a State level, 29 individual places fall under the jurisdiction of the State Heritage Act. Non Legislative mechanisms that recognize the historic Town and places include: City of Swan the Municipal Inventory, The National Trust of Australia (WA) classification of the town and local places, The Federal Heritage Inventory (previously list) also recognized the town and a number of precincts and places. Numerous studies including: Survey of Historic Buildings in the Shire of Swan (1975) Guildford –A Study of its Unique Character (1981) Guildford Townscape and Conservation Policy (1987) and many others, whilst identifying the total significance of the place, have been unable *to secure State recognition and protection of the town*. Further, all of the studies guidelines and policies have been unable *to prevent demolition of significant places and landscapes nor prevent the erection of buildings that damage the integrity of the streetscapes*.

a) Municipal Inventory.

Under section 45 of the 1990 Heritage Act, local governments are required to maintain an inventory of heritage places- the Municipal Inventory. The Municipal Inventory (MI) for the City of Swan (including Guildford) was closed as result of a Council resolution in 11.10.2000. Unfortunately, the MI is used as an inadequate planning tool, to flag buildings of significance. In some circumstances, Council has chosen to remove buildings listed on the MI as of highest level of significance. The MI in City of Swan had its listed buildings transferred to the new Heritage List- this list is similarly incomplete and has reduced in number since 2000, with buildings removed at the owners request or through demolition. Whilst the MI was not planned as tool for protecting buildings of heritage significance, it was part of a process to flag the presence of such buildings. The City of Swan's MI, fails as a planning tool and as part of a meaningful heritage process.

b) Conservation Policy

The Conservation Policy has provided an excellent tool for formulating policies. It is a tool that needs further updating to incorporate more detailed comment on landscape, and urban form (spatial settings). Unfortunately it has been treated by Council as a discretionary guide and this has resulted in developments (including demolitions) that have adversely affected the town's character and uniqueness.

c) Design Guidelines

The City of Swan has had 4 Design Guidelines since 1988. Each document developed guidance in accordance with the planning policies and community

awareness of the time. The success of the current Design Guidelines is being questioned by the community for permitting Residential Development and infill, of a density and form that is felt to undermine the integrity of the town. New commercial development opposite the Guildford Hotel, does not reflect the form or scale of C19 built form. Many new buildings have failed to acknowledge the scale and form of adjacent and historic built form and have damaged the integrity of side streets of small human scale.

d) Town Planning Scheme 17

The Town Planning Scheme gives statutory recognition to the Heritage List.

e) State Heritage Act- Heritage Listings

Protection and identification of properties under the State Heritage Act is seriously compromised in the City of Swan. The local government authority has failed to maintain and up date its Heritage List/Municipal Inventory. The City of Swan has failed to adhere to this requirement since 2000.

Under the present Heritage Act in WA, the role of HCWA is limited to the registration of individual sites or precincts (of similar characteristics) on its Register.. Currently the Town of Guildford has 29 Listings on the State Register, 27 Buildings and 2 sites (Spring Reserve and Stirling Square). An examination of ownership of State Heritage Listed buildings/ sites shows:- State Government 5, local government 7, privately owned 13 and Church 4.

Two sites only are listed in Guildford. and these fall under the control of Local Government. Historic landscapes and plantings are under represented in these listings. The extent of protected and recognized historic built form is also limited. *The character of the historic town encompasses the juxta position of landscape, topography, built and urban form in overlapping layers of history. Classification of 29 individual items does little to protect the town or recognize the nature of its historical significance*

It appears necessary to review the principles of the Conservation Policy and Guidelines to ensure they protect the historic town not just individual elements in isolation.

It is essential to expand the Heritage Act to include the Historic Towns, a concept beyond the 'precinct', which covers areas of similar character. At present the National Trust of Australia (WA) has 4 historic towns listed, Guildford, York, Toodyay and Cossack. It is important to State and National Heritage to protect these unique towns and to give this need high legislative priority. It is not possible to conserve the town of Guildford (or other historic towns in WA) with the present legislative framework Historic Towns need an holistic approach to planning , protection and conservation.

4. Current Issues .

a) State Land Ownership

The State Government is probably the largest landholder in the town of Guildford, with properties including roads and reserves, river foreshores, school and hostels. As a result, planning and decisions fall under the jurisdiction of a multitude of government departments and agencies (eg. MRWA, DOH, Swan River Trust, DPI, Dept Education etc). Planning is frequently disparate and without regard for the historic nature of the town, or an awareness of landscape, indigenous and/ or European sites and heritage issues. Most government Departments have no knowledge of the historic town and its significance. *The heritage values of Guildford are frequently lost in the multiplicity of government agencies with varied responsibilities including strategic planning.*

i) Guildford Ferry Landing Site.

This site has had its integrity significantly and possibly irreparably damaged since the construction of the Oxygenation Plant and recent sewerage works. Sited on the floodplain, adjacent to the Guildford Road Bridge, the site remained intact and a landscape entry to the historic town. The ferry landing site was quite unique in that it provided continual access from the Bassendean (West Guildford) embankment from 1834 to 1882 - until the construction of the road bridge. The land area has been severely degraded with large quantities of sand and road base deposited onsite, without full consultation with the local Circle of Aboriginal Elders(Aboriginal Heritage Act)or with due regard to the old ferry landing site of 1834 and adjacent vegetation. *Development of historic sites require their identification and an appropriate management strategy, that is available to the general public ,Local, State and Federal Government agencies*

ii) Fairholme & Welbourne's Cottage Site

Disability Services have extended their residential hostels on the Fairholme site in Market Street, to a density greater than surrounding residences. It must be noted the community have not objected to the presence of the hostel but to the disregard of the guidelines for infill development, the filling of the floodway and destruction of the urban form of an original 2 acre allotment. Further, there is now an Outline Development Plan (ODP) for the Fairholme/ Welbourne sites recommending a new street and subdivision pattern contrary to the principles of the Conservation Policy. This land has recently been zoned Residential Development, part of it was previously zoned Parks and Recreation. *Government agencies need to show by example, the will to protect historic places in accordance with the conservation plan and the will to protect the unique rare elements of the historic town.*

iii) Railway Reserves

Similarly, the proposal for two-storey development on railway land is inconsistent with Conservation Policy which requires the principles of setback, scale, form to be consistent with surrounding residential areas. Two storey development was an exception in Guildford, (there are 6 surviving two storey homes from the C19- early 20th. There is one two-storey home of this period in this section of the town, (N.W. of the line) and 1 such home in the SW. There are only 4 two storey shops and 4 hotels from this period in the total town. The proposed development will destroy the openness and unchanged character of James Street with its vistas to Victoria Street and Swan River; it will also dramatically alter the single storey form of historic Guildford. Guildford is critically short of parking within the town. Adequate parking facilities are

necessary for the positive development of tourism and business and to prevent loss of amenity in residential side streets

The presence of large groups of housing or shops, a typical to the C19 and early C20 form, will affect the integrity of the town fabric and essential single storey pattern. The loss of railway parking and failure to consider the alternatives (eg. for community parking), is a serious strategic oversight.

iv) Floodplain

The floodplain area is comprised of ;*The Flood way* - an hydrologically developed line, in which any fill may adversely affect up stream areas in time of flood.

The Flood Fringe- this is riverine land falls beyond the floodway and under many Town Planning Schemes may be developed.

The One Hundred Year Flood Line- this land includes floodway and flood fringe and is an area subject to high (100 year) inundations.

The Guildford Conservation Policy identifies the 100 year Flood Line as the point where *NO Development* should occur as it infringes on the historic floodplain area, an area that has been subject to limited change since first settlement

Currently the floodplain is managed by a variety of agencies: The Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI), the Department for Conservation and Environment (DCE), the Swan River Trust (SRT), Local Government and lease holders. The complexity of ownership leads to further confusions and at times quite in appropriate management strategies and loss and damage to significant sites. Examples of recent damage include the Ferry Landing Site, loss of adjacent plantings, loss of topographical features (near old mill site) loss of vegetation and most importantly loss of habitat (echidnas were seen in Guildford up to 3 years ago before the extensive DPI mowing, spraying and levelling of riverine areas). See attached photographs.

A cohesive and comprehensive management strategy for the floodplains and in particular Guildford's floodplains with its historic sites must be developed with appropriate expertise.

b) Local Government

Guildford is unlikely to have adequate protection as an historic town at local government level. This has been clearly demonstrated over the years. The policies and measures to protect the town are available, however, lack of knowledge or will at officer and Council level have failed and continue to fail to protect this National Treasure. Decisions are made with reference to an inadequate MI, and frequently on the basis of an individual decision not an holistic approach- *the tyranny of small decisions and the need to compromise leads to a an ongoing loss of heritage fabric.* Guildford Ward has but one Councillor out of the 13 that are represented on the City of Swan. Electors from Guildford town form a minority of in this ward. It is possible /probable that Guildford ward ay be collapsed under another ward given current government pressures to reduce Councillor numbers.

Historic Guildford is unlikely to receive the necessary heritage protection in such a large Municipality as the City of Swan with many divergent interest group and pressures to make decisions in isolation.

5. Future Protection

- *The Historic town needs to be recognized at State level, ultimately through changes to the Heritage Act. However, in the interim period it would seem desirable for the town of Guildford to be listed as a total precinct.*
- *Need for a cohesive approach to planning for historic towns.*

The State Government remains a significant landowner within Guildford, however, departments have a piecemeal approach to planning in the town without adequate advice, restriction or regard to the historic form eg. planning of transport corridors has ignored local issues (need for parking) and the open character of the C 19th form, in favour of a metropolitan strategy. The listing of Guildford on the HCWA Register would result in a more informed and coordinated approach to development in the town and the greatest protection to the historic fabric.
- * Need for a coordinated and informed strategy at State Government level to planning and work in historic town., however its actions are neither promoting the conservation of the total town nor are they setting a necessary example.*
- * Heritage planning and protection is not working at a municipal level for historic Guildford.* The loss of building stock, erosion of the landscape and fabric and developments that adversely affect s historic streetscapes and town, are evidence of the need to review current practices and look for new mechanisms to protect the historic town of Guildford.
- * Need for a coordinating body for Heritage Towns .* To ensure future protection of the limited number of recognized heritage towns, there needs to be investigation into how best establish a mechanism for their conservation. One possibility may be establishing a State level coordinating body to advise on future and ongoing planning. New decisions and changes to urban form, topography, built and landscape form would be overseen by such a body, working in an informed advisory role. This body would not handle day to day running such as roads, infrastructure, rubbish collection. An informed advisory group would provide a consistent and holistic approach to conservation in historic towns.

Summary of Key Points

Guildford is a National Treasure and a significant piece of Western Australia heritage.

There is a need to adequately protect and recognize the town of Guildford and significant elements in it, at Local, State and National levels.

The historic town is not afforded adequate heritage identification and protection under existing policies based at Local Government level- the leading to a continuing erosion of the fabric.

The whole town has a value that cannot be realized through the recognition of some parts.

The Heritage Act must be reviewed to encompass Heritage Towns.

There is a need to review the Conservation Policy and ensure Local and State Governments pay due regard to these principles

To achieve best protection of Historic Towns it is recommended that an holistic approach to used- perhaps developing a tier of review at State level