

**STATEMENT REGARDING REDEVELOPMENT
OF THE LAND ASSOCIATED WITH THE
FORMER KEW COTTAGES, PRINCESS STREET,
KEW - HERITAGE CONSIDERATIONS**

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Amendment to the Boroondara Planning Scheme

Former Kew Cottages
Princess Street, Kew

Introduction

Commission

This statement was commissioned by the Urban and Regional Land Corporation on behalf of the Department of Human Services. It reviews the cultural heritage significance of the former Kew Cottages site, and comments upon the potential impact of the proposed amendment to the planning scheme (to rezone the land residential) and the associated indicative residential development with regard to the cultural heritage of the site.

Site

The subject site is situated in Princess Street, Kew, around 6km from the central business district. The site covers about 27 hectares and slopes to the north towards the Yarra River. It is bounded Wills Street to the south, Princess Street to the east, Willsmere Apartments and Yarra Bend Park to the west and Hutchinson Drive to the north.

The precinct in which this land is located is predominantly residential in character, although the Yarra Bend Park is nearby. The wider surrounding area features several golf courses, schools and small local parks.

The site currently includes accommodation units and cottages, recreational and activity buildings, roads, landscape elements and memorials.

The site is now subject to a PUZ3 - Public Use Zone 3 - Health and Community Use provision. A planning permit is required to subdivide land and to construct a building or any other works not specified in Section 2 of Clause 36.01-1 of the Boroondara Planning Scheme.

Sources of Information

This report draws on a previous conservation management plan on the Kew Cottages site prepared by my office for the Urban and Regional Land Corporation on behalf of the Department of Human Services in September 2002. The report also draws on the relevant sections of the City of Boroondara Planning Scheme.

The proposed amendment

The proposed Amendment is intended to facilitate the residential development and use of the Former Kew Cottages Site in Princess Street, Kew.

With regard to heritage considerations, two constraints on the development of the site have been identified. These are, firstly, the buildings that have been identified as being of heritage value and secondly, the various significant trees and other landscape elements which have also been identified as being of cultural and natural heritage significance.

A Conservation Management Plan has been prepared for the site (Bryce Raworth Pty Ltd in association with John Patrick, Landscape Architects, 'Kew Cottages Conservation Management Plan', 2002), and that document has formed the basis for the discussion below.

Summary of report

- The urban design framework provided as the basis of this amendment seeks to retain those buildings which have been identified as being of high significance to the cultural heritage of the site and of high integrity. These buildings comprise the Retreat/Chapel and the STAD building. In addition to these the existing recreation facilities will also be retained.
- The proposal includes the retention of socially and culturally significant elements related to the history of the site including various memorials and an aboriginal scar tree.
- In addition, the existing tree lined avenues and paths have been identified as contributing to the cultural heritage value of the site and will be retained.
- The original axial entrance dating from the earliest period of development of the site will be reinstated/reinterpreted as a modern axis.
- The works described above will ensure that the most important aspects of the cultural heritage of the site as determined by the Conservation Management Plan will be retained and/or enhanced, and that an appropriate balance is struck between conservation and development objectives within the site.

Current status with regard to heritage listings

Victorian Heritage Council

No part of the former Kew Cottages Site is currently included on the Victorian Heritage Register, and it is not considered likely that any building within the site would be nominated for registration.

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

The former Kew Cottages Site is not classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria). However one tree, a Bishop Pine (*pinus muricata*) is registered.

No statutory requirements follow from Trust classification, but the Trust should be considered a consultative body with respect to future changes at the place.

City of Boroondara

None of the former Kew Cottages buildings, trees or sites are currently included within any heritage overlay area. However, the Council is currently compiling a register of significant trees and the Bishop Pine (*pinus muricata*) will be recorded upon completion of that register.

The Kew Cottages Site was in the former City of Kew Urban Conservation Area 2. This category deals with those sites in which the conservation of the landscape or in which the landscape is the dominant feature.¹

At this stage it is anticipated that a heritage overlay will be applied to the two buildings identified for retention within the site, and that items of heritage interest in general will also be recognised in the development overlay.

Australian Heritage Commission

The former Kew Cottages has not been nominated to the Register of the National Estate under the provision of the Australian Heritage Act 1975. No specific statutory requirements follow from registration, although the Australian Heritage Commission might be considered a consultative body with respect to future changes to the site.

Description and history of the place

This extract is drawn with some editing from the conservation management plan on the Kew Cottages site prepared by this office for the URLC in September 2002.

Background

The Victorian government first built an asylum at Yarra Bend in 1848. Yarra Bend had three cells and a dormitory for women and seven or eight cells and a dormitory for men,² but was not capable of meeting the high demand for services. The construction of Asylums at Ararat and Beechworth in 1867 did relieve pressure somewhat in regional areas, but Yarra Bend remained the only asylum within the metropolitan area.³

The Kew Asylum

A special Board of Enquiry had suggested the construction of another asylum as early as 1854⁴ but difficulties with expenditure, funding and the quality of construction delayed the project until 1868.⁵ The Kew Asylum (also called Willsmere Hospital) opened in 1872. It was designed in a barrack style based on existing English asylum plans, such as Colney Hatch (1851) and Hanwell (1831).⁶ It was designed by the Chief Architect for the PWD, George William Vivian⁷ and built by Samuel Amess⁸.

By the time of its completion the barrack style model was considered obsolete and Willsmere was strongly criticised.⁹ Nonetheless, the accommodation was badly needed (it was designed for 600).¹⁰ By 1879 there were 1000 people housed at the hospital. The Victorian Branch of the British Medical Association found the asylum a 'disgrace to the community'.

The Development of Kew Cottages

In 1872 a report had suggested the construction of a separate institution for children and special schools for their instruction.¹¹ At this time there were nearly 600 children housed in various institutions in Victoria (including Willsmere). An enquiry recommended that a cottage style institution be erected next to Kew for children.¹² Construction began in 1885¹³ and Kew Cottages opened in 1887.¹⁴

The cottage style format was preferred for the treatment of the mentally handicapped over a prison or barrack style form (such as Willsmere).¹⁵ It was acknowledged that mentally handicapped children benefited from specialist facilities where they could receive the training and supervision that they required.¹⁶ Kew Cottages was the first government initiative for mentally handicapped children and was praised as an excellent example of such an institution and was also commended for the work being done there.¹⁷

Kew Cottages – Early Years

The first buildings housed about sixty children in three cottages, (two for boys and one for girls) each equipped with its own kitchen.¹⁸ The buildings were erected by the PWD and the grounds were gradually levelled and laid out in gardens by 'institutional labour'.¹⁹ Later the gardens were maintained and extended by Hugh Linaker, landscape gardener to the State Lunacy Department. Baron Ferdinand Von Meuller, keeper of the Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, supplied the first trees and plants used to landscape the site.²⁰ Linaker also retained several River Red Gums on the site.²¹

In 1888 another cottage was added for girls and two more cottages were added in 1891. A school was established in 1887²² which taught children 'words and figures' through object lessons, some gymnastics for physical training and aspects of hygiene.²³ More cottages were built in the 1890s and more trade and occupational training activities were introduced.²⁴ The inspiration for these advanced methods may have come from the programs of the English Asylums Royal Albert and Earlswood.²⁵

The economic depression of the 1890s and the admission of more and more children resulted in overcrowding, understaffing and under supply of goods. During the 1890s depression the government reduced funding to the cottages. No funds for the improvement of the institution became available until 1918²⁶ when the kitchen was reconstructed and an additional modern ward and new dining room were built.²⁷

In 1922 the conditions at the cottages were described as having 'the appearance of ruins long since abandoned'. Adverse findings by a Royal Commission²⁸ did bring about some improvement including a sewerage system, a new male block and a recreational room for girls. A new wing was built in 1928 for the older girls as well as a new nursery. Covered ways, a new dormitory for the older boys, and a new dining area were also constructed. The kitchen was renovated a hot water system and electricity were installed. Despite the extensive renovations (which cost £42 000), accommodation was still insufficient²⁹ and by the 1930s the wards were once again crowded and understaffed.³⁰ Accommodation for nursing staff also remained a problem and was not addressed until 1953 when a nurses' home was finally built.³¹ Despite occasional attempts to remedy the situation at Kew little improvement occurred until the creation of the Mental Hygiene Authority (MHA) in 1952.³²

Kew Cottages – After 1952

The creation of the MHA began a new era in the history of the cottages. Dr E Cunningham Dax was the first chairman of the MHA and instigated improvements in the operation and condition of the cottages: cottages were thoroughly cleaned; children were given new clothes; occupational activities were introduced; and the standards of hygiene and cleanliness were improved. Some buildings were renovated and repaired.³³

Dr Dax lobbied parliamentarians, ministers and community organisations to raise awareness of conditions at the institution. A rebuilding program was instituted to replace Army huts used to accommodate increased numbers of patients during WWII (the huts remained in place until after the 1960s).³⁴ Modern plumbing was added to old wards, new kitchens were built and old cottages renovated. In July 1953, an occupational therapy cottage was provided by the Lions Club at a cost of £13 000.³⁵ Nonetheless, few cottages were renovated, and many children still lived in poor conditions.

In December 1957 130 parents met to discuss the idea of forming a Parents Association to pressure the Government and the community to accept responsibility and make changes at the cottages. Kew Cottages Parents Association was then formed.³⁶

The new brick wards were built in 1958 and housed about sixty in each. The designs for the wards were based on designs Dr Dax had seen in Holland.³⁷ Four new 'H' shaped 'Dax' wards were constructed on the site. The Geiger Playhouse (used for public meetings, concerts, recreation and Kinder classes) was built by donation in 1960.³⁸ Later that year five new double wards were opened. These housed a total of 272 residents and represent the final abandonment of the cottage model of accommodation. Other buildings including nursing accommodation³⁹, a kitchen, store and canteen and seven new accommodation units. All of the original cottages had been either replaced or renovated by 1963.⁴⁰ A new gymnasium was completed in 1966.

The Annual Report of 1968 had several criticisms of the situation at the cottages including: insufficient medical staff; heavy workloads associated with aged care patients; and inadequate facilities. The W P O'Shea Research Unit was opened in 1969 for psychotherapeutic activities.⁴¹

In 1973 a campaign was started with the support of the *Age* newspaper to focus public attention on the cottages. Despite all of the reforms and rebuilding completed under Dr Dax's leadership, more funding was needed to complete the building projects required. There were over 500 children on the urgent waiting list at this time.⁴² The target for the appeal was \$150 000, but over \$2.5 million was finally collected. By the end of 1976, four buildings designed by the architects Peddle Thorp and De Preu and built by Jennings Industries Ltd had been completed.⁴³ These comprise: the Age/Geiger Building; the Perkin Building; the Hamer Building; and the Smorgon Building.⁴⁴ They were used to provide special education programs for the children and staffed by the Education Department.⁴⁵

The concept of deinstitutionalisation was introduced at the end of the 1960s but was not instigated until the late 1980s. The Ten Year Plan for Services Redevelopment (1987) in Victoria recommended the dismantling of all institutions in seven to ten years, relocation of all 2765 residents into rented accommodation or home board and the sale of institution sites.⁴⁶

Kew Cottages – The Last Decade

The cottages began to wind down in the early 1990s.⁴⁷ but conditions continued to decline in the early 1990s due to continued cost cutting and understaffing. In 1996 a fire broke out in unit 31, killing 9 residents.⁴⁸ The subsequent coronial inquiry found, in October 1997, that the State of Victoria contributed to the deaths of the 9 residents. The State of Victoria had acknowledged to the Inquiry a number of deficiencies operating in the systems at KRS. Subsequently a major upgrade occurred which covered fire detection and prevention systems, training and evacuation procedures.⁴⁹

Since 1997 significant developments have occurred to improve the quality and reduce the overcrowding. These include additional funding for day programs, the refurbishment of four of the 'H' Shaped Dax units which accommodated 128 residents in 1998, the relocation of over 90 residents to small residential units in the community between 1997 and 2000.

On 4 May 2001 the Government announced its plans to close Kew Cottages (now known as Kew Residential Services) within 6 to 10 years. This is in accord with the Government's policy of relocating clients to homes and small residential units in the community.⁵⁰

Assessment of significance

This extract is drawn with some editing from the conservation management plan on the Kew Cottages site prepared by this office for the URLC in September 2002

Kew Cottages was first developed in 1887 as a separate children's facility within the earlier Kew Lunatic Asylum and is of social and historical significance at a local level. With regard to fabric, the primary significance of the site relates to those buildings constructed in accordance with the original cottage model derived from overseas examples such as Colney Hatch, Middlesex, England, including the former school building (Parents retreat/chapel) and the former dormitory (STAD building).

The site retains little early building stock and the legibility of remnant early fabric has generally been diminished by unsympathetic additions and by degradation of setting through the construction of later buildings. Later buildings are generic institutional care facilities of a relatively common type and are consequently of relatively minor cultural heritage significance.

A number of buildings, identified as being of potential cultural heritage significance, were assessed as part of the Conservation Management Plan. The results of that assessment are summarised as follows:

| Number | Building Name | Significance/ integrity | Recommendation |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Unit 9 | High/low | Retain and restore original fabric if possible |
| 2 | Unit 10 | High/low | Retain and restore original fabric if possible |
| 3 | Unit 11 | Low/low | Retain or demolish |
| 4 | House/Hostel | Low/low | Retain or demolish |
| 5 | Retreat/Chapel | High/high | Retain |
| 6 | STAD building | High/high | Retain |
| 7 | Perkin Art Centre | Low/high | Retain or demolish |
| 8 | Old Gymnasium | Low/low | Retain or demolish |
| 9 | Age/Geiger Building | Low/low | Retain or demolish |

The site retains three roadways with mature avenues of trees, which date from the early development of the site and a number of other notable specimens, which add to the significance of the place.

A number of landscape elements, identified as being of potential cultural heritage significance, were assessed as part of the Conservation Management Plan. While not all are deemed to be significant, they are cited below for completeness of record. The results of that assessment are summarised as follows:

| Number | Landscape element | Significance/ integrity | Recommendation |
|--------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Lower drive | High/high | Retain avenues (replant as required) |
| 11 | Main drive | High/high | Retain avenues (replant as required) |
| 12 | Boundary Road | High/high | Retain avenues (replant as required) and wall |
| 13 | Central garden | High/high | Retain specimen trees (refer Appendix B) |
| 14 | Sculpture | Low/high | Retain or relocate |
| 15 | Residents memorial | Low/high | Retain or relocate |
| 16 | 1996 fire memorial | Low/high | Retain or relocate |
| 17 | Site of Units 30 & 31 | High/nil | Refer 15 above |
| 18 | Tennis courts | Low/low | May be retained or removed as required |
| 19 | River redgums | High/high | Retain |
| 20 | Scarred Tree | High/low | Retain or relocate |
| 21 | Bishops Pine | High/high | Retain |
| 22 | Holly leaved cherry | High/high | Retain |
| 23 | Southwest garden | Low | Retain selected plants (refer Appendix B) |

The proposed urban design framework

In my view the majority of buildings on the site are of limited heritage significance at a local level due in no small part to their low integrity.

While retention and restoration of as many of these buildings as possible would be laudable, the only buildings with a strong case for retention and restoration on the basis of their remnant significance are the former school building (Parents retreat/chapel) and the former dormitory (STAD building). These two buildings are shown as being retained and restored within an appropriate landscaped context in the proposed urban design framework, and it is proposed that they will become subject to two individual heritage overlays with a curtilage to each building extending 3m from the exterior walls. A limited curtilage seems appropriate given that the buildings are to be located within a landscaped environment, rather than a development zone.

Beyond this, while other buildings are not specifically identified for retention, the proposed urban design framework does not preclude their retention should an appropriate and sustainable adaptive reuse be identified.

Moreover, this site gains much of its significance from aspects of cultural heritage other than buildings, most notably the fine stands of trees, and some key individual specimens, and a variety of other elements including sculpture and memoria that reflect the social history of the site. In this context, aspects of the site and current proposal that need to be taken into account include:

- the limited extent and nature of the local significance of the majority of buildings on the site, and the low level of built form integrity due to substantial modifications undertaken to all buildings during the 1960s;
- the scheme's commitment to the following as key concepts:
 1. protection of landscape elements of cultural significance,
 2. recognition of the amenity and neighbourhood character provided by the significant stands of mature trees along the avenues
 3. protection of other cultural heritage components, including indigenous heritage,
 4. recognition of the axial nature of the main avenue in ordering the site.
- the proposed provision of large areas of public open space for local residents and those on the former Kew Cottages site allowing linkage to Yarra Bend Park and maintaining the public use aspect of the site. This also ensures that the valued urban character identified in the 1988 Kew Conservation Study is maintained;
- the proposed retention of the northern orientation of buildings on the site and;
- the interpretation of the 'village square' concept associated with the original cottages (as seen and approached from the south) through retention of two key heritage buildings within the major public open space or 'spine' of the site.

When these issues are taken into account, it is apparent that the proposed urban design framework makes provision for the retention and reuse of the majority of heritage elements on the site, even though only a small number of buildings are being retained. This does not seem inappropriate in the context of a site in which landscape character and social history play a major role in establishing the cultural significance of the place. On this basis the response to heritage issues embodied in the urban design framework is considered, balanced and appropriate.



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Notes

- 1 Pru Sanderson Design Pty Ltd. *Kew: City of Kew Urban Conservation Study*. Volume 1, May 1988, p.3/16.
- 2 Frances O'Neill and Delia Taylor. *Psychiatric Institutions in the Mont Park Area: A Heritage Assessment*. Heritage Management Branch Department of Planning and Development, 1995, p.5.
- 3 O'Neill and Taylor. *Op cit*, p.5.
- 4 Arthur Lloyd. *Payment By Results: Kew Cottages' First 100 Years 1887 – 1987*. Kew Cottages & St Nicholas Parents Association Inc., East Burwood 1987. p.3.
- 5 Graeme Tuer. *Kew Lunatic Asylum*. Historical Research Essay, Held at the University of Melbourne Architecture Library, p.8.
- 6 O'Neill and Taylor. *Op cit*, p.5-6.
- 7 Tuer. *Op cit*, p.6.
- 8 Tuer. *Op cit*, p.9.
- 9 Tuer. *Op cit*, p.6.
- 10 Tuer. *Op cit*, p.11.
- 11 This reference refers to Dr Paley's annual report of 1872 on Kew Asylum.
- 12 Lloyd. *Op cit*, p.4.
- 13 Tuer. *Op cit*, p.7.
- 14 O'Neill and Taylor. *Op cit*, p.8.
- 15 *Ibid*, p.6.
- 16 Sir Frederic Bateman. *The Idiot: His Place in Creation, and His Claims on Society*. 2nd ed. Jarrold & Sons, London, 1897. p.19.
- 17 Tuer. *Op cit*, p.7, and Lloyd. *Op cit*, p.5.
- 18 Lloyd. *Op cit*, p.5.
- 19 C. R. D. Brothers. *Early Victorian Psychiatry 1835 – 1905: An account of the care of the mentally ill in Victoria, from the time of first settlement to the beginning of the present century*. Government Printer, Melbourne, 1961, p.153.
- 20 Pitt. *Op cit*, p.151.
- 21 From typescript information on Linaker supplied by John Hawker, Heritage Victoria.
- 22 Brothers. *Op cit*, p.153.
- 23 *Ibid*, p.146.
- 24 Brothers. *Op cit*, p.153.
- 25 Pitt. *Op cit*, p.146.
- 26 Lloyd. *Op cit*, p.7 – 8.
- 27 *Ibid*, p.11.
- 28 *Ibid*, p.12.
- 29 *Ibid*, p.13.
- 30 *Ibid*, p.13.
- 31 *Ibid*, p.20.
- 32 E. Cunningham Dax. *Asylum to Community: The Development of the Mental Hygiene Service in Victoria Australia*. F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1961. p.19.
- 33 Lloyd. *Op cit*, p.20.
- 34 Pitt. *Op cit*, p.149.
- 35 Lloyd. *Op cit*, p.25.
- 36 *Ibid*, p.105.

- 37 Pitt. Op cit. p.150. The shape of the wards were designed so that the nurse's could supervise the from a single position in the centre of the 'H' shape. From this point the gardens, day rooms, bathroom, toilets and dormitories would be visible. E. Cunningham Dax. Op cit. p.28.
- 38 Lloyd. Op cit. p.27.
- 39 Some staff at the cottages stayed in houses in Wills Street. These houses were government owned and backed on to the cottages, providing quick access for on call staff to the Kew complex - Pitt. Op cit. p.157.
- 40 Lloyd. Op cit. p.30.
- 41 Ibid. p.33.
- 42 Ibid. pp.36 – 37.
- 43 Ibid. p.38.
- 44 Ibid. p.41.
- 45 Ibid. p.42.
- 46 Ibid. pp.50 -51
- 47 Ibid. p.114. and The Age. 'Kew Cottages home to cuts, complaints and deaths' April 10 1996. p.2.
- 48 Age. 'Kew inferno kills 9' April 9 1996 p.1.
- 49 From information provided by John Leatherland of DHS, 23 May, 2002.
- 50 Ibid.