

An International Conference to explore approaches to the preservation of urban built heritage, with a focus on Melbourne

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A Walk on the Wild Side: built heritage – its legacy, its management and its future

The city and suburban streetscapes we value have much to do with the built heritage of our public spaces and places. This paper explores the consequences and effects on our built heritage and the adequacy of our current legislative framework to deal with the emerging and continuing pressures on heritage places. In the context of this conference, I have asked myself: 'What is the future for our built heritage which has as its backdrop the drivers of change for human settlement patterns and economies?' Perhaps the answer lies in part with matters other than our built heritage – matters that have more to do with place making in the public realm. The 'walk on the wild side' encompasses the consequences for urban form and social cohesion of failing to addressing the significant population changes that are upon us.

This global trend of urbanisation is inexorable and will have a profound effect on how we manage built heritage. More locally, work undertaken by id Consulting modelled on the Australian Bureau of Statistics information demonstrates that the current population of Australia of about 24 million (2014) has increased at a higher rate over the past decade than during any other in recent decades.¹ The work identifies three growth markets, two of which have received little attention in discussions about the future of the nation and its cities.² The three age groups are:

- The 55-70;
- Early to late 20s; and
- Infants under 4 years.

The id Consulting document also shows that both migration and fertility rates have increased over the past decade.³ id Consulting interpret these changes as follows:

- There was a 'structural break' in the population dynamics of the country at the turn of the millennium.
- Changes in fertility and migration over the past decade have gone some way to balancing the baby boomers in Australia's population profile.
- Two population peaks follow the baby boomers surge, approximately 30 years apart, these are not simply generational 'echoes' but largely driven by recent changes to migration.

These changes mean that:

- Strategies based on data modelling pre 2006-2007 are outdated and unlikely to reflect the changing conditions identified by id Consulting.
- The 'three growth markets' fuel a need for increased housing and more diverse choice. Together with the baby boomers retiring, there is significant growth "in people moving through their peak-earning years, as well as considerable growth in school-aged children".⁴

¹ Deacon, M., *Three growth markets in Australia. A demographic analysis*, id Consulting, May 2014.

² See the graph entitled 'Figure 9. Population growth by age, 2001-2011' in *Three growth markets in Australia. A demographic analysis*, id Consulting, May 2014, p. 8.

³ 'Figure 4. Australian fertility rate and number of births, 1976-2013', *Three growth markets in Australia. A demographic analysis*, id Consulting, May 2014, p. 5 and 'Figure 6. Net overseas migration, 1976 to 2013', *Three growth markets in Australia. A demographic analysis*, id Consulting, May 2014, p. 6.

⁴ Deacon, M., *Three growth markets in Australia. A demographic analysis*, id Consulting, May 2014, p. 3.

Heritage Places do not exist in a vacuum in terms of city dynamics

Melbourne is not immune to these population increases and changed demographic drivers. This Government's answer to managing the physical impacts of population growth and structural shifts in the economy for Melbourne is described in the planning document *Plan Melbourne – Metropolitan Planning Strategy – May 2014*. Melbourne's current population of about 4.3 million is estimated to grow by another 3.4 million people by around 2051 to be a city of about 7.7 million people.⁵ Cities are complex organisms and the management of heritage assets are but one of the many elements city managers must address. However, perhaps the most fundamental urban policy relates to the provision of housing. Our city form and the built heritage that is valued were products of 19th and early 20th century urban dynamics – the 21st century urban pressures are now very different. The challenge for planners and heritage practitioners is to win gains from these new dynamics and new development to ensure that our built heritage continues to be valued.

Plan Melbourne and its implementation in the areas of housing and heritage lets both policy areas down

At best, *Plan Melbourne* offers only three short-term initiatives for the protection of Melbourne's heritage:

1. The creation of "new guidelines for communities and local governments to rename sections of larger suburbs to enhance local sense of community, improve navigability and recognise local heritage".⁶ The Geographic Place Names Panel already has this responsibility and administers such existing guidelines.
2. The second initiative that *Plan Melbourne* advances for heritage management is to; "investigate the potential of transferable development rights."⁷ That old problem always raises problems of decision-making transparency. It would be preferable to pursue this idea via the tax system, as is done with tax incentives in the USA.
3. The third initiative is to "review and modernise the *Victorian Heritage Act 1995* to achieve a stronger focus on proactive heritage identification and preservation".⁸ Vaguely worded, and in any case the Act already has that focus.

In concise terms, *Plan Melbourne*, offers nothing to heritage management in the 21st century.

In terms of initiatives, *Plan Melbourne* notes increasing demand for housing diversity and choice. It proposes meeting this demand through a 20 minute neighbourhood concept (Figure 1), whereby people have safe and convenient access to the goods and services they need for daily life within 20 minutes of where they live, travelling by foot, bicycle or public transport. Medium density housing in well serviced middle-ring suburbs remains the preferred choice for many existing residents. The 20 minute neighbourhood concept will, however, likely lead to further housing development pressures in 19th century strip shopping centres that are zoned Mixed Use or Commercial and which are richly endowed with urban services.

One possible solution

Perhaps the single greatest benefit for Melbourne's built heritage that can be won from Plan Melbourne's housing policies is the delivery of public domain improvements. Simple initiatives such as a broadly based program of the installation of street trees can transform the setting not just of valued heritage streetscapes but also of wider urban areas. Statutory tools already exist by way of a Development Contributions Overlay that could be administered by

⁵ *Plan Melbourne*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2014, p. 5.

⁶ 'Direction 4.7 Respect our heritage as we build for the Future', *Plan Melbourne*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2014, p. 131.

⁷ 'Direction 4.7 Respect our heritage as we build for the Future', *Plan Melbourne*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2014, p. 131.

⁸ 'Direction 4.7 Respect our heritage as we build for the Future', *Plan Melbourne*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2014, p. 131.

the new Metropolitan Planning Authority in partnership with local governments. A specific street tree levy per new apartment or dwelling, even in those zones where limited residential density increases are envisaged could greatly assist in making these streets inviting and pleasing. Streets graced with trees tell a story of built heritage that is valued and continues to be adaptively reused and reimagined. We may all walk on the wild side but at least it will be under dappled light and the cooling effect of street trees.