PROTECTING YOUR HISTORIC STREETSCAPES

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The following is intended as a guide to home owners who believe their streetscape or area is under threat from demolition or unsympathetic development. The National Trust is extensively involved in negotiations with local councils to safeguard our heritage.

PART 1: ASSESSING THE SITUATION

1. Is your streetscape historic?

There are many different kinds of historic streetscapes, such as shopping strips or civic precincts, but by far the most common in Victoria is residential. They include streets or areas where the house/buildings are:

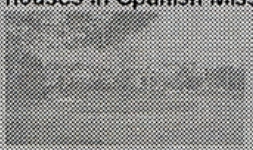
- all the same period
- all the same type, e.g. detached houses, or terraces
- part of an unusual or special road layout, e.g. St. Vincent Place, South Melbourne; The Eyrie Estate, Heidelberg
- part of specially developed estate, all by one designer/ builder, e.g. Old Colonists retirement homes, Rushall Crescent, North Fitzroy; State Bank duplex houses, Garden City, Port Melbourne; Lempriere Avenue 'Bungalow Court', North Caulfield and Lyddiard Street West, Ballarat.



Bailey Avenue, Ripponlea: This street was accepted for consideration for heritage protection by the Council with the assistance of residents

But most commonly historic residential areas include a mix of periods and types, within a limited range, are generally intact, visually cohesive and identifiable as a distinct precinct. For example:

- Golf Links Estate, Camberwell. Includes 1920s bungalows, 1920s and 1930s houses in Spanish Mission, Old English, and their styles, and all with similar level of detail, setback and scale.
- South Drummond Street, Carlton. Includes terraces and mansion houses from the 1860s to the 1890s, and is notable for the individual quality and grand scale of the buildings.



Golf Links Estate, Camberwell: Recognised as probably the best interwar suburban area in Melbourne.

2. When is a streetscape not historic?

Some areas have a proportion of historic houses, but there is nothing special about them. They may have:

- a high proportion of modern development/alterations
- be from a wide variety of periods, and therefore clashing styles or proportions
- mixed with industrial development
- not strong visually or historically cohesive

Most often, they are simply:

- no more visually or historically cohesive than many other areas
- not a large enough number of properties to be considered a distinct precinct

3. *What are the threats?*

The main threat is of course demolition, which is closely followed by replacement with unsympathetic development. There is also the threat of unsympathetic alterations, which can greatly degrade whole streetscapes. They include:

- large extensions, especially upwards and visible from the street
- carports in the front garden, high front fences (even if they are 'Victorian Style') or;

incorrect restoration e.g. a Victorian picket fence on a 1930s bungalow, or a 1920s colour scheme (i.e. cream & green) on a Victorian house



'Infill' Wattle Valley Road, Canterbury. This neo-Georgian townhouse is an example of unsympathetic development

PART 2: ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

It is important to understand that the best form of protection is through listing of your street by your local council as a heritage area. This means that demolitions are generally prohibited, and you have the right to object to any demolitions or alterations. The following steps are a guide to protection of your historic area by your local Council.

1. *Look up the local Heritage Studies*

All inner suburban, middle suburban and major country towns have done a Heritage Study of their Municipality (also sometimes referred to as a Conservation Study or Heritage Management Plan). These studies identify areas considered to be of heritage significance, and worthy of conservation, and are generally recommended for protection under a Heritage Overlay (HO). Once a property is covered by a Heritage Overlay a planning permit is required from the local council for any alterations to a property.

As the extent of heritage controls may vary between heritage places it is important to contact the local council to identify relevant controls affecting your property. The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) provides detailed information on Heritage Overlays at http://www.dse.vic.gov.au

2. *Find out whether the study has been adopted*

Unfortunately some municipalities have not fully adopted their heritage studies, particularly in regional Victoria.

3. *If your street is listed and the study adopted*

No building may be demolished or altered without a permit. This must be advertised on the site, and you have the right to object to any such proposal. Objections can be lodged through writing a letter to Council stating your concern about the proposal. This could include statements such as:

- 'The house is an excellent example of the period and is important for its contribution to this historic precinct and therefore should not



Wattle Valley Road, Canterbury. A charming area with a mix of Victorian and Edwardian houses & cottages. Recommended for protection in the 1991 study, it was only listed in 1998 at the behest of many residents

be demolished';
- 'The proposed carport is right on the street, obscuring views of the house and streetscape';
- 'The first floor addition would be out of place in a street of single storey heritage homes'

4. *If your street is listed but the study not adopted*

This is most likely because of resident objection or perceived resident objection in the past. Many homeowners do not want to be 'told what to do', and do not want restrictions placed on their homes. With the rise of new construction, especially medium density, it is now equally apparent that many homeowners do not want the house next door demolished, and neo-Georgian units put up in its place. The best way to get your street listed is to ensure that a majority of owners in the area agree. You may also need to educate homeowners as to the restrictions involved.



Landale Road, Toorak: An area recommended for protection but not accepted. A 1920's 'French Maisonette' was recently demolished

5. *What does listing mean?*

It does not mean that the 'Council won't let me touch anything', but it does mean that demolition would usually not be allowed. It also means that:

- you would need a permit from the Council for any alterations to the front of the house
- correct restoration, such as external paint colours and fences, is encouraged
- major alterations such as large first floor additions visible from the front, and carports in the front garden would be discouraged
- you may need to wait for a few weeks for the permit
- for minor works, such as like for like repairs and general maintenance, a permit may generally not be required however always check with the Council beforehand as early advice is the best way to ensure no inappropriate work is undertaken.

6. *If your street is not listed*

Find out whether your street was considered by the author of the study but rejected for lack of time or research you can also:

- conduct some research to establish dates of the houses, whether there was a single architect or developer or whether a notable historic figure was associated with the street
- compare your street to other similar streets in the municipality to see if yours is better or more interesting , or at least as interesting as other streets
- enlist the support of as many home owners in the street as possible

If you achieve positive results for all the above, Council should consider your case.

7. *If your street is not considered worthy of listing*

Even if the street is somewhat historic and residents approve of listing, the Council's Heritage Advisor or Council itself, may not agree that it is important enough to be

listed as a conservation zone. In this case your street is probably worth listing as a character area. This means that:

- demolition is not prohibited, but new development must respect the character of the street
- this is likely to be interpreted as architectural style, rather than setbacks and bulk, therefore new developments would be permitted to be somewhat larger (i.e. two storeys in a single storey area), and further forward than the existing, in order to encourage high density developments.

However only some Councils have done Urban Character studies, and their status within planning is uncertain.

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