

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)
Bendigo & Region Branch
Submission on Greater Bendigo Council Draft Heritage Strategy

The Branch commends and thanks the City of Greater Bendigo for preparing the Draft Heritage Strategy that, “has been designed to outline the City’s heritage priorities over the next four years.” Engaging the community will further add to the work of the staff and broaden the actions already contained in the draft Strategy.

Greater Bendigo has not had a Heritage Strategy before; therefore, it is important that it presents a vision for Bendigo that not only protects all forms of our history and heritage but also looks to the future to inform the community on design principles so that new builds, current landscapes and artifacts are preserved to tell their story for future generations.

People love and cherish Bendigo’s historical places, its street and land scapes, its events and the stories that depict great endeavour that made it one of the richest cities in the world in the 19th century. It also has difficult stories of how First Nations Peoples were treated and dispossessed. It also includes a story of great immigration and how it grew from people coming here from all parts of the world who wanted a better life for themselves. The National Trust encourages, even urges the Council to reach out to all to develop the final Strategy. It is suggested that Council invite business including investors and real estate agents, architects, planners, financial institutions, heritage professionals, universities, interested organisations and community members to come together at an evening consultation session to discuss all heritage opportunities. Present through innovative speakers the opportunities that will come from the Strategy. What we do now to shape our city will have great consequences for the future.

Over the past five years, the Branch has been involved in a number of issues relating to heritage that the Trust would like to see identified and addressed in this Strategy.

They include ‘big picture’ issues such as: a Plan for Pall Mall which contains many buildings that are on both the State Heritage Register and protected under the Council’s Planning Scheme; Period residential properties being solely used for business; lack of development of heritage listed sites such as the Gillies complex and the protection of the Big Hill and Mandurang Valley landscape among others. There does not appear to be a vision for the future for well-designed new buildings to sit side by side with existing period sites and while the redevelopment of the Art Gallery costing over \$50 million came out of the blue, no consideration was given to repurpose an existing building in Pall Mall rather than a new extension in View St. Discussion of storage and exhibiting collections of Bendigo’s historical artifacts is mentioned but there are no plans or actions in the document to overcome the problem.

It appears that because the Strategy is in its early stages of development, it has a distinct feeling that “the current challenges which are faced around heritage conservation and management” do not have corresponding opportunities associated with them. In other words, many of the actions are administrative and quite inward looking. Of major concern is the limited vision for the outcomes that are listed and associated with each of the 4 parts in the Action Plan: Municipal Heritage Studies: A guide for Councils states the major issues to be considered. Point one appears not to be covered. ‘Council’s heritage Vision Statement- a short statement articulating Council’s commitment to heritage. In relation to the Strategy Action Plan- further columns could be added to include ‘Target date for completion’ and ‘Progress/outcome’ as suggested in the guide. Other actions could also be considered such as ‘Heritage award or recognition program’ Statutory protection of Council’s heritage assets’ ‘A main street program’ ‘Training sessions for staff, councillors and the community’

1. **Knowing our heritage** – Branch comment: the 7 actions seem to be the minimum requirements and standard procedures.
2. **Protecting our heritage** – Branch comment: as this should be a major part of the Strategy, the 3 actions listed do not represent a range of opportunities that are available to Council.
3. **Supporting our heritage** – Branch comment: again, these are low level actions, and internally focused.
4. **Promoting our heritage** – Branch comment: this will be most successful and sustained by solid heritage research, documentation and distribution through established and new networks.

The Bendigo Branch very much supports the statement below from the Strategy and through the monthly newsletter, History & Heritage, will be pleased to play a role in assisting broader engagement in the community about this significance of the Strategy and its potential positive outcomes.

“Achieving the actions will best be achieved through partnerships with different tiers of government, heritage industries, heritage groups and the community. Every person has a duty of care to protect heritage and to ensure that current and future generations have an opportunity to experience and enjoy it. The next steps are to engage with the broader community and interest groups to ensure the final document can support community expectations for heritage protection, management and promotion.” (page 5 of the Draft Strategy)

The Branch believes in the following value statements which could be considered in the development of this strategy.

What is a strategy? Strategic planning is a process in which an organisation’s leaders define their vision for the future and identify their organisation goals and objectives. The process includes establishing the sequence in which those goals should be realised so that the organisation can reach its stated vision.

What is vision? A vision statement is a written document that describes where an organisation is going and what it will look like when it gets there.

What is consultation? Consultation is technically any activity that gives local people a voice and an opportunity to influence important decisions. It involves listening to and learning from local people before decisions are made or priorities are set.

The Strategy document could be more meaningful if these values are incorporated into its process and consequently its content.

Suggested recommendations from the National Trust

Knowing Our Heritage

- That Council continues its Heritage Studies during 2024-2028 but with more community education, consultation and participation.
- That Council immediately advocates for State Government funding to undertake the necessary Heritage Studies so that planning applications are not held up and the information is available to those involved.

Protecting Our Heritage

- That Council develop a Plan for Pall Mall by the end of 2024 which studies those buildings that require repurposing, ways to increase foot traffic and reduce vehicle numbers, and increase business activity in the precinct.
- That Council investigates their Local Laws in 2024 to include measures that will reduce ‘Demolition by Neglect’ of heritage properties throughout Greater Bendigo.
- That Council takes further steps to protect the Big Hill Range and Mandurang Valley Landscape in 2024 by taking steps to implement a Planning Scheme Amendment.

Supporting Our Heritage

- Council explores ways in 2024 to retain residential occupancy in heritage buildings in and around CBDs and hospital precincts.
- That Council reaffirm its support of the 'The World Heritage Bid for the Victorian Goldfields' in partnership with other local Councils and the State and Federal Governments so it is completed by 2027 in this Strategy.
- That Council progress actions in the Strategy that are related to the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme to amendment stage during 2024-2028.

Promoting Our Heritage

- Over the next four years Council publish a six-monthly Strategy Bulletin describing the action taken and progress in relation to this Strategy.
- That Council convene a consultation session early in 2024 before the Strategy is finalised engaging a range of stakeholders and the community and for it to invite speakers to contribute to the discussion.
- Actively promote the City's Heritage Design Guidelines over the period of the Strategy.

Background to suggested actions

A Plan for Pall Mall

View Point, Pall Mall & McCrae St is one of the finest precincts of 19th century buildings in Australia. The branch continues to build awareness of the magnificent architectural buildings in this precinct. It is concerned that some of these buildings are currently vacant and others will become vacant without a future planned use. They include the Former Bendigo Post Office, the Former Bendigo Law Courts and Allan's Walk and the Bendigo Mining Exchange. There are over twenty buildings and sites listed on the State Heritage Register in this Precinct. It is dominated by motor vehicles rather than pedestrians which deters it from becoming a much-celebrated location. Governments and businesses need increased foot traffic to provide much needed incentives for them to invest in the Precinct. It is encouraging to see the TAFE College having success seeking alternative uses for the Bendigo School of Mines Buildings but there is much restoration work needed in these buildings which cannot be ignored.

Consideration could also be given to the redevelopment of the Bendigo Art Gallery \$50 million spend by refurbishing a building such as the three levels of the Former Bendigo Post Office in Pall Mall using the Council's successful strategy that transformed View St in the 1990's.

Reclaim Prime Residential Land and Protect Period Homes

The Branch agrees that previous Council decisions have driven residents from living in or close to the CBD, in particular, the wave of residential properties that have been taken over solely for business use. (City Centre Plan) Market forces will not be sufficient to counteract this trend. "While much of the discussion is around facilitating medium scale mixed use buildings in the core parts of the City Centre, there are also opportunities for larger families to live in the precinct south of Short Street through to Myrtle Street. This area has a strong residential heritage-built form. Around half of the homes are currently used as offices, primarily by small scale professional services, where they have been able to be their own landlord. As these businesses grow, or the value of the property increases, it would be desirable for them to move into commercial accommodation closer to the core of the City Centre. This provides an opportunity to invest in returning these properties to a residential use. This protects the character of the area as a relatively intact heritage precinct and helps introduce more greenery into the city (as car parking on these parcels gets returned to garden space)." (City Centre Plan.)

Food sales (12%) have grown quickly in the CBD while retail sales have declined. The City centre is now more focused on food and entertainment, which often suits heritage buildings, and with on line shopping growing, it is now more urgent to relocate small commercial enterprises into the very centre by refurbishing under-utilised buildings. It will be important to strata title these commercial

sites so that small business have ownership of their sites, a practice that has been demonstrated by their purchase of residential properties to locate their enterprise. The transfer of many period residential premises to business not only applies to the Bendigo CBD but to many other precincts around all CBDs and hospitals. Planning action is needed to return these properties to residential use and relocate businesses into the CBDs.

It also agrees that “The look of the City Centre today is distinctive and memorable.” (p 8 City Centre Plan) And it needs to remain so. It encourages people to live, visit and recreate in Bendigo. The opening up of the Bendigo Creek as an off-road trail will further entice people to populate close to the CBD.

The **Bendigo 2015 Integrated Transport & Land Use Strategy** illustrates where further housing could be constructed. “Bendigo’s main north-south ‘spine’ – from Huntly in the north to Kangaroo Flat in the south, incorporates major activity centres, including: the city centre, most of the urban area’s retail floor space, 16 schools, our two main hospitals and most of our employment. About 35% of urban Bendigo’s population lives along that spine. Transport along this corridor includes the full suite of travel options: road, rail, bus and off-road walking-cycling paths. Some parts in the north of this corridor along the Bendigo Creek have potential for developing urban agriculture. The city centre and immediate surrounds remain a key destination (rather than primarily supporting through-traffic). It accommodates many of the city’s major employers and 47% of all Greater Bendigo’s jobs. This concentration will grow further with the expansion of the Bendigo Hospital. Freight, manufacturing, agricultural product processing, La Trobe University and major retail centres represent employment concentrations outside the city centre.” And further “Housing development in Greater Bendigo continues to be dominated by the industry’s delivery of conventional land and house packages to suit growing families. However, the proportion of smaller households is growing (55% of all households now comprise only one or two persons) – the result of an ageing population and changing household types. The trend is towards smaller families and single or couple households without dependents.”

Priority needs to be given to using prime residential land, for example, provide incentives for car sale yards along High St to relocate, and build well designed one and two-bedroom apartments rather than demolishing period homes and commercial buildings in and around the CBD. This will be an important action to be listed in the Heritage Strategy to compliment the above ITLUS Strategy already adopted by Council.

World Heritage Bid for Victorian Goldfields.

Bendigo could find itself to be a rarity on the world stage if the central Victorian Goldfields is declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Bendigo Advertiser reported last month. Bendigo’s Mayor, Cr Andrea Metcalf said ‘we are a creative City of Gastronomy and having a World Heritage listing in the same area would be a rarity.’ The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for Australia’s Victorian Goldfields states that it is “the most extensive, coherent and best-surviving goldrush landscape, anywhere...” One of the criteria proposed for justification for the World Heritage inscription is - be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

Work started on this project in 1988 and is now expected to be completed in 2027 during the period of the Heritage Strategy. It is recommended that a key action in the Strategy incorporate an ‘Action Statement on the World Heritage Bid.’

Heritage Studies

The City has a statutory responsibility under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to recognise and protect heritage places using the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme. The Branch strongly supports Council to continue to undertake Heritage Studies and to update Studies which have become redundant. It urges Council to vigorously advocate to the State Government that it provides

funding to undertake these studies so that potential heritage sites are protected and property owners understand their responsibility towards that property.

Conserving Collections of History & Heritage Artifacts

While the Cardamone Report in 2017 illustrated the need for Council to better support community Artifacts Collections, the Council itself says “The City’s large number of civic objects and collections is an identified gap.” Council owns many significant artefacts such as the collections at the Central Deborah Gold Mine and the Tramways Museum. The Branch suggests that many organisations could say that their history and historical artifacts also presents an identified gap. It is recommended that there be an action statement to bring people together to unify work on these gaps.

Demolition by Neglect

At its May Council meeting in June 2022 the Greater Bendigo Council decided not to take a lead role to incorporate new State Government legislation into its planning scheme to better protect heritage listed properties but it was contacting the State Government about it. The Branch has not heard back from Council on this matter. The Council is also encouraged to work closely with Heritage Victoria on matters such as the sites as Sampson’s Cottage, that while on the Victorian Heritage Register and also protected in the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme, has fallen into disrepair.

Over the past two years the Branch has been requesting Greater Bendigo Council to intervene where a heritage property is left unsecured and is falling into a state of disrepair. The state government enacted new legislation to give councils more power to protect such properties but the council obtained legal advice which indicated the legislation was only a deterrent and did not give them more power to intervene. The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) commissioned the Muratore Report in 2013 on Demolition by Neglect to explore the issue and policy on places in the heritage overlay. The report aims to produce a model methodology and policies for local governments to deal with locally significant properties threatened by neglect. A key recommendation from this report urged local councils to enact and strengthen their Local Amenity Laws – Enact & Strengthen across all municipalities to govern maintenance of derelict or dilapidated buildings, including maintenance criteria. Combine with greater enforcement powers and sufficient penalties to provide a disincentive.

Click here [https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/DemolitionbyNeglect_ReneeMuratore_for NTAV Sept 2013.pdf](https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/DemolitionbyNeglect_ReneeMuratore_for_NTAV_Sept_2013.pdf) to read the full report. Council does have Community Local Laws which could be strengthened to protect properties with a heritage overlay. Existing Law: Dangerous or unsightly land. Unless otherwise permitted by a permit issued pursuant to the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme, an owner or occupier of land must ensure that the land in the opinion of an Authorised Officer:- (a) does not constitute a danger to health or property, (b) does not constitute a fire hazard, (c) is not unsightly or detrimental to and does not adversely affect the general amenity of the adjoining land or the neighbourhood by the appearance of (including but not limited to):- (i) stored unregistered motor vehicles; (ii) machinery or any parts thereof; (iii) scrap metal; (iv) second hand timber and or building materials; (v) waste paper; (vi) rags; (vii) bottles; (viii) soil or similar materials; (ix) overgrown vegetation. (d) is not used in any manner that may cause a nuisance or become detrimental to the amenity of the immediate area. PENALTY: Five penalty units, and one penalty unit for each day after a finding of guilt by any Court during which the breach continues.

It does not make much sense that Council spends large sums of money on studies to put heritage protection on properties then does little to protect them. The Branch suggests it is not a sound investment. It needs to do the heritage studies, monitor the condition of the heritage sites and then enforce protection, like other Councils, (City of Greater Geelong) by measures that could be inserted into their Local Law.

It is recommended that an action statement on ‘Demolition by Neglect’ be included in the Strategy.

The Big Hill Range/Mandurang Valley Landscape

The Council has spent years attempting to protect this sensitive landscape but has not informed the community of its intentions to act on its studies. What are Council's intentions for protection and how is it negotiating with the State Government to overcome obstacles for the protection to be incorporated into the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme?

Our Community learning through the Process

It was somewhat of a bit of a surprise that the branch was only contacted once the draft document was written. It puts the community in a very difficult position as it can portray interested community members as only criticising what has already been written. I hope the Council is open to alternative views. People in industry, the education sector, planners and architects, heritage professionals, history & heritage organisations, along with members of the community rarely come together to discuss important heritage issues. At this time the Council has an opportunity to facilitate such an event. Further, strategically, it would be prudent for Council to initiate a half yearly Heritage Bulletin. The National Trust is keen to be involved but, in many cases, for example the 'Significant Tree Register' the branch was not aware it had been started and completed in 2020. The process is as important as the issue and by being involved the community can learn and contribute to these very important issues. Council needs to be more actively promoting its Heritage Design Guidelines. Unsuitable works either with or without a permit are occurring to the long-term detriment of the fabric and appearance of properties under heritage overlays. (e.g., cement render on brick buildings)

"Historic buildings are likely to define a city"

"Greater Bendigo City Council's Senior Strategic Planner in 2015, Trevor Budge, wrote a paper titled 'Great Small Cities of the World'. It said- "In a survey commissioned by the planning and design firm Sasaki Associates, 1000 urbanites in San Francisco, Chicago, Austin, New York, Boston and Washington DC were asked what they love most about their cities. Among the answers 24% said historic places and landmarks; 21% said cultural offerings; 17% said parks and public spaces; 15% said 'the people'; and 10% said they liked the architecture. Buildings can be the symbol of a city; the New York Empire State, the Paris Eiffel Tower and the Sydney Opera House are three high recognition or iconic buildings that in one sense define their city. What makes a city building iconic? In the same survey some 36% said the historic nature of the building, while 30% said "great architecture" and another 24% said a building's "unique design." A majority, 57% will stop and look at an historic building, while just 19% will do the same for a modern one. There is a lesson here for small cities. Historic buildings are much more likely to define a city."

Why do people value Bendigo? In the quest for enhanced health and wellbeing, citizens are demanding more pedestrian friendly spaces. There are many great squares and public spaces around the world. Could Pall Mall become one of them?

On behalf of National Trust Members and Supporters
Bendigo & Region Branch.