

Huskisson Heritage Association Inc.

Submission to Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement: *Shoalhaven 2040 – Our Local Strategic Planning Statement*.

Preamble:

Many of our members will have views relating to this document as a whole, but this submission confines itself to matters relating to history and heritage.

The introductory section 'About this document' includes the provision for: *Enhancing our heritage, landscapes, and the character of neighbourhoods*, while the index lists at Section 5 *Celebrating culture and heritage*. The 'Our vision' statement (p. 15) lists aboriginal culture, natural environment and heritage places as three separate things. We contend that these are all 'heritage' in the broad sense of the term.

Throughout this document there is a tendency to assume that the nature and feel of places has already been set in concrete and that heritage places are specific to just a few localities. For example, 2: Great Places, Planning Priority 3: *Protecting and Enhancing Neighbourhoods* (p. 28), notes that:

the Shoalhaven's neighbourhoods are rich in diversity, from the larger regional centres of Nowra and Ulladulla, to the charming heritage towns, vibrant tourist destinations, and relaxed villages along our coastline. Each of these places are highly valued by our communities and offer something unique to the region through their distinct character and lifestyle.

Read in conjunction with many other SCC publications it is clear that the 'charming heritage towns' are places like Berry, Kangaroo Valley and Milton, while the 'vibrant tourist destinations' includes Huskisson.

This exclusive focus on Berry, Kangaroo Valley and Milton appears to have been laid down as the locale for the Shoalhaven's heritage several decades ago and remains as a cover for validating the destruction of heritage places in other places. We contend that heritage includes much more than 'charming' places, and we contest the tendency of the SCC to argue that in many places heritage is dispensable. All places have a history and all places tell past stories. An example of how this tendency to trade -off places for other places is contained in the heritage report commissioned by Stephen Bartlett in relation to his proposal to develop the former Holy Trinity Church site in Hawke Street, Huskisson. This refers to the following:

When the current LEP was being formulated, Council officers have advised (email dated 29 June 2108 to Wayne Smith) that Council had written to the Department of Planning in August 2006 with the following general and specific justifications for deleting the subject property from a future heritage list:.

Council considers that either there is sufficient and adequate representations of similar items retained in the draft plan...

The 'adequate representations' were cited as a Victorian Gothic Carpenter Style relocated church, 175 Jacobs Drive, Sussex Inlet and a Victorian Gothic Revival Style church, Milton. [GBA Heritage, 'Heritage Management Strategy', 12 August 2018.]

Aside from the obvious fact that the Milton church is not 'carpenter Gothic' in style, the fact that there are designated heritage churches in Sussex Inlet and at Milton is entirely irrelevant to the heritage of Huskisson - or to Cambewarra or St George's Basin or Nowra or anywhere else in the LGA. We acknowledge that in built up urban and suburban LGAs there may be an argument for 'rationing' and ranking types of building and places in this way, but when the LGA contains disparate towns, villages and places with separate histories, this does not make any sense.

Huskisson in particular....

The introductory section *About Shoalhaven* characterizes the 49 towns and villages in the Shoalhaven LGA with Huskisson-Vincentia being pigeon- holed as a 'major urban area' (p.8). Hold it right there.

Huskisson is an old village and Vincentia's built form primarily dates from after the 1960s construction of the first vehicular bridge on Elizabeth Drive across the Moona Moona Creek. Prior to this there was a footbridge only. These two places are adjacent, but the Moona Moona Creek is a divide between two separate and very different places in terms of their history and heritage. Vincentia is undoubtedly a major growth area, but the ongoing determination of the SCC to lump Huskisson in with it fails to understand the most rudimentary history and heritage of the area.

The origins of the village of Huskisson in the fishing and timber getting economies of the late nineteenth century provide the underpinnings of its unique heritage. These heritage values are evidenced at the Jervis Bay Maritime Museum and in the fabric of many of its domestic buildings. However, the Huskisson Heritage Association understands that the SCC has consistently worked to under-value the heritage of Huskisson, most notably through the notorious so-called 'purge' of heritage listed places in Huskisson from the Draft LEP 2005. Most regrettable is the excising of the Holy Trinity church site between Hawke and Currambene Streets.

This is not the place to rehearse all the complex arguments about this site, currently designated under the DCP for commercial development of the intensity permitted on Owe Street, the main street. The HHA contends that the currently proposed development of this site will not only destroy significant heritage but will close off on a significant urban design opportunity. Huskisson is currently witnessing more intense commercial and residential development that could hugely benefit from retaining this land's undoubted heritage character as 'public'/village green/ town square space with new but compatible land uses (wedding venue, arts, Indigenous cultural centre, whatever).

We reiterate that 'heritage' does not necessarily mean 'charming' and the fact that the heritage of Huskisson is timber and fibro, working class and simple does not make it any the less 'heritage'. The 2040 document talks about maintaining the 'feel' and 'character' of places. We note that some of the most committed and long term residents of Huskisson (and possibly other places) have managed to keep their streets free of curbing and guttering because they understand this heritage. They should be commended for this.

There are specific heritage places that need to be retained and, in some cases, re-interpreted for current uses, but there is also the opportunity to maintain an overall heritage ambience that retains the simplicity of seaside village atmosphere. Currently even skyscrapers in major cities are starting to utilize materials such as timber cladding, so why is Huskisson being defaced by concrete blocks of apartments and commercial buildings that do not even give a cursory nod to the heritage of the place?

The document in general:

Caring for heritage is not incompatible with many of the aims for developing the Shoalhaven outlined in this document.

1 Managing Growth: Planning Priority 1 Providing homes to meet needs and lifestyles (p. 22) states that:

New homes need to be accessible and adaptable. They also need to be durable and resilient to Shoalhaven's climate. Appropriately designed and constructed homes help with heating and cooling, reducing energy needs and emissions and lowering household bills.

There is nothing in this statement to compete with building in ways that reflect traditional built forms and ambience of leafy streets, fibro cottages and iron roofs. Efficient insulation and passive heating/cooling along with fire resistant features does not preclude building forms that respect and develop on the traditional fibro and /or timber constructions that are a trademark of a place like Huskisson. Bicycle paths, for example, were not a feature of the built form historically, but they enhance and compliment the traditional pace of life.

2 Great Places: Planning Priority 3 Protecting & Enhancing Neighbourhoods (p. 28) discusses once again the 'charming heritage towns' (p. 28) with CA 3.1 referring to 'special character planning controls to guide infill development in Berry, Kangaroo Valley and Milton.' Why is this denied other places? In the case of Huskisson there are some excellent examples of this type of development – e.g. the three new town houses on Bowen Street that reflect and respect the old single dwelling that was previously on the site. It also has too many examples of unsympathetic developments. It is not appropriate to single out specific buildings, but everyone knows them. These places are visually intrusive on the landscape and they consistently elicit negative responses from both residents and tourists who are not attracted to the place because of them, but because of the seaside village atmosphere. The desire to develop Huskisson as a 'gateway' tourist place is acknowledged, but this does not excuse inappropriate design controls.

3 Growing the Economy: Planning Priority 8 Promoting a responsible visitor economy (p.40)

Current opportunities are provided, with action A8.4 being to 'facilitate appropriate tourism uses on Aboriginal owned land. Later, in the final section Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting this is reiterated citing 'new planning controls to facilitate the development of land owned by Local Aboriginal Land Councils. (p. 65)

These statements refer to a specific need for updating planning controls, but HHA does not understand why the document fails to recommend that Indigenous cultural tourism should be mainstream and high profile. The ancient and ongoing Aboriginal presence is part of the heritage of everyone in the Shoalhaven. Wherever this is promoted elsewhere it successfully promotes tourism in general.

4. Protecting and adapting to the environment: *Planning Priority 11 Protecting the environment* states that the 'Shoalhaven is blessed with a stunning natural environment supporting a significant biodiversity resource. It is home to many significant wetlands, coastal lakes and lagoons, marine areas, more than 100 beaches and large tracts of bushland, ... our environment is fragile ... etc.

This is our natural heritage. This is not an area of expertise for the HHA, but the Association does note that at present there is not even a tree inventory for urban places in the LGA. With control over tree management undermined by the 45 degree rule it is of great concern that there is no record of tree numbers, types or location of urban trees. This is a land use that needs to be documented. More intense development inevitably challenges the urban canopy and without keeping the record, the history of these precious resources can be manipulated and diminished over time.

5. Celebrating culture and heritage: *Planning Priority 14 Heritage items and places* (p. 58)

'The notion of heritage significance is dynamic and changes over time.' It is important for us [SCC] to continue to work with our local communities to identify new opportunities.' These are fine sounding words with no substance. The preceding paragraph stated that way back in 1995-1998:

Council commissioned a Citywide heritage assessment of the thematic history of Shoalhaven, resulting in a comprehensive inventory of heritage buildings, sites and landscape items of cultural significance. The Shoalhaven Heritage Study provided the basis for the inclusion of a large number of these heritage items and places into our planning controls to recognize their significance and ensure their preservation in the future planning and development decisions.

The document does not mention the 'purge' of heritage items and places, most particularly in Huskisson that removed many places from the Draft LEP of 2006. Indeed, the HHA was formed to address this issue in relation to the former Holy Trinity Church site which we believe, as did the 1990s Freeman study cited here, is of the utmost heritage significance.

The claim to 'continue to work with our local communities' sounds fine, but the Huskisson Heritage Association notes that it has never been formally consulted or communicated with by the SCC, although from time to time individual officers have provided unofficial advice. THE LALCs have expressed similar concerns about lack of consultation.

Comments on the Actions provided at A4.1 A4.2 and A4.3

We note the limited focus of Action' A14.1 to *establish a Heritage Design Advisory Service to provide expert advice and guidance on development involving or in proximity to heritage items and place*. While this is necessary, it is also necessary to provide advice and context for developments in general to ensure the ongoing character of many valued places.

In order for the SCC 'to work with our local communities' we believe it would at the very least be necessary to **employ a heritage planner**. As far as the HHA has been able to ascertain, there is no particular expertise in this area used by the Council except for occasional consultants on a very part-time basis. Such a position would not only provide heritage advice to residents concerning heritage properties and developments in relation to heritage properties or curtilage but would also provide guidance on all types of developments.

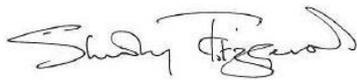
Further we would suggest an appropriately constituted community panel of professional heritage practitioners (planners/architects/ historians) to advise on specific and strategic issues concerning heritage places and to increase heritage understanding.

A14.2: Council will update the European Heritage Study to inform a review of the list of heritage items and places.

This is commendable but what about Indigenous heritage? We note that there is a real and problematic disconnect between European heritage, under the auspices of the NSW Heritage legislation, and organized into state and local significance, and Indigenous heritage which is assessed as a separate issue and determined by archaeological study etc. The notion of shared heritage and cultural contact history falls between these two stools and urgently needs attention.

A14.3: Council will develop a heritage interpretation program for selected settlements. How will the selection be made? We fear it may be based on 'charming'. We hope for a more nuanced understanding of heritage issues.

Yours sincerely



Dr Shirley Fitzgerald

Historian & President, Huskisson Heritage Association



Joanne Warren

Public Officer, Huskisson Heritage Association

PO Box 51 Huskisson 2540

Phone: 0402 754 576