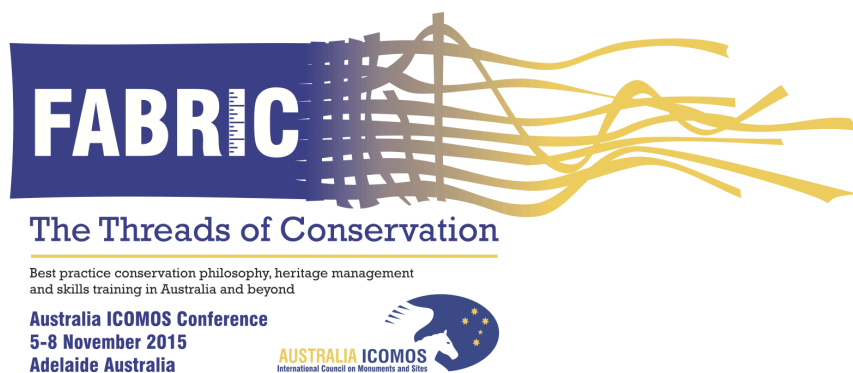# The warp and weft of a community - weaving together the threads of local heritage

Louise Honman

Proceedings of:

The warp and weft of a community - weaving together the threads of local heritage

Case studies in undertaking heritage strategies

Introduction

Many aspects of cultural heritage are acknowledged and nurtured at the local government level. This is also the place where people and heritage come together, or perhaps cross paths on different sides of the planning counter. As a result of Heritage Victoria's program to encourage all municipalities in the state of Victoria to undertake heritage strategies; this paper examines how this approach has been undertaken, what has been achieved and what we have learnt for the future.

What is a Heritage Strategy?

The completion and implementation of a heritage strategy has been a general requirement to assist local government to more effectively resource their role with Victoria's heritage places over the last five years. Heritage strategies are promoted as a means to understanding the particular needs and priorities of local government and to linking funding for heritage. A heritage strategy is also used as a means to identify opportunities in ways that can benefit communities and local economies. (Heritage Victoria 2012)

A heritage strategy is also designed to assist local government to better meet their heritage obligations as set out in the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the State Planning Policy Framework and the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006. A Heritage Strategy generally includes actions that address the identification, protection, management and/or promotion of a municipality's heritage.

The background to Heritage Strategies is based on the Victorian planning system that is to:

- Conserve and enhance those buildings, areas and other places which are of scientific, aesthetic, architectural or historical interest, or otherwise of special cultural value and to:

- Identify, assess and document places of natural and cultural heritage significance as a basis for their inclusion in the planning scheme (Planning and Environment Act 1987, S4 (1) (d)).

- Encourage appropriate development that respects places with identified heritage values and creates a worthy legacy for future generations (State Planning Policy Framework, Cl. 15.03-1).

What has been achieved?

Of the 79 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria, 17 have produced heritage strategies and at least one other has a draft strategy completed. This includes five urban LGAs, seven peri-urban and five rural or regional. (Heritage Victoria, pers.comm. 27 July 2015)

Heritage Victoria provides a template to make the task easier for Councils, especially those in rural and regional areas who are often seriously under-resourced for this type of work. The template provides a checklist or stock-take of what is known about local heritage places, collections and objects. The kind of studies, management plans and general documentation of heritage is noted, along with whether there is a Heritage Advisor, a Heritage Committee or other indicators of heritage activity (Heritage Victoria 2012). Achievements, opportunities and challenges are noted, followed by an action plan with resourcing, dates and monitoring of project outcomes. Celebrating achievements is also a key part of the strategy, so it is not only focused on the work to be done.

As part of the development of a strategy, consultation with all Council departments and Councillors is encouraged in order to develop a strong buy-in to the process and outcomes. External stakeholder engagement is an optional extra but is indicated as a way of fostering external support for the Strategy.

Councils generally adopt one of two ways of completing their strategy, either by completing the template with some internal consultation (Latrobe 2013, Warrnambool, 2011), or by undertaking more extensive consultation both internally and externally. The strategies where Councils had undertaken a great deal of buy-in in their development tended to be adopted by their Councils and form part of their suite of strategies joining environment, arts and culture, housing or transport (Yarra 2014, Mount Alexander 2012, Banyule 2013).

Occasionally a hybrid approach to consultation is undertaken involving external consultation through the appointment of a reference group that provides local knowledge and expert content on the particular area or heritage issues. (Melbourne 2013).

Internal consultation across Council can provide some key insights for staff that may not realise that their job description involved anything to do with heritage. For example records management staff at Mount Alexander realised that their knowledge can assist in the documentation of various heritage places (Mount Alexander 2012).

Consultation workshops in Whittlesea brought together departments that sometimes have little opportunity to work together, despite the fact that they might both be managing the same place. For example in Whittlesea, Indigenous liaison officers at Whittlesea found they could connect with different areas of Council through joint management of the Plenty Gorge Park.

The usefulness of cross department engagement cannot be overestimated as it tends to take heritage out of the planning sphere and give it another dimension elsewhere within Council.

During development of the heritage strategy at Yarra, an inner urban municipality, a workshop session encouraged people to think broadly about heritage. A developer and an architect/urban artist presented thought provoking ideas about expressing the heritage of Yarra though utilising redundant resources in creative ways and through public art (Victoria Street gateway project 2014)

Victoria Street Gateway Richmond, a public art installation celebrating the Vietnamese heritage of the area , City of Yarra with Gregory Burgess Architects and Thomas Berrill Landscape Design 2011. (Source: yarracity.vic.gov.au/services/Infrastructure/victoria-street-gateway-project, accessed 14 September 2015)

At Mount Alexander a consultation session with Shire Councillors proved to be useful as the heritage strategy was subsequently adopted with an enhanced understanding of what it meant; and a new heritage officer position was provided. Boroondara has taken the preparation of a heritage strategy much further than its original intent; and is using the opportunity to undertake a very detailed heritage action plan. This is far more than was intended as an

outcome, but useful in a municipality with high expectations and adequate resources (Boroondara 2012). Mornington Peninsula used their strategy as an adjunct to a Planning Scheme Amendment in order to gauge community support (Mornington Peninsula 2013). Even without specific community consultation, the process of undertaking a heritage strategy in Moonee Valley has provided useful benefits in providing a comprehensive heritage checklist with detailed resourcing considerations. (Moonee Valley 2014)

What's in a Heritage Strategy?

Most strategies reviewed, apart from two give strong contextual weight to the three Victorian Acts, the *Planning and Environment Act*, 1987, the *Heritage Act*, 1995 and the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*, 2006. These give the statutory framework for local and state heritage protection in Victoria. However in the state context there is in no equivalent natural heritage protection Act.

Giving proper attention to natural heritage is often quite difficult and most heritage strategies define natural heritage outside their scope. Nillumbik, a peri-urban municipality, wrestles with the complexity of the natural/cultural divide and recognises its importance, but eventually calls it outside the scope of the strategy. This is despite the strong natural heritage of the municipality and the growing pains of a landscape undergoing change through metropolitan growth. (Nillumbik 2011) It is to Banyule's credit that they have picked up natural heritage as a key theme in their Strategy and adopt their own approach to structure and content.

Although natural heritage is identified within the vision statements of a number of municipalities, Nillumbik, Banyule and Melbourne address issues of natural heritage at length.

An example of the integration of natural and cultural heritage is the recent listing of Rockbank, a farm complex within the City of Whittlesea located in a peri-urban area. The citation was immeasurably improved through the Environment Officer noting that the farm contained the rocky knolls that are a biodiversity hotspot in the grasslands to the north west of Melbourne. (HERMES 28800) And in an atypical example, geo-heritage was quite remarkably given weight in a recent heritage listing of Hanging Rock but is generally ignored. (Context 2014:3-4).

Most strategies acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and make significant efforts to include actions that strengthen the recognition of Aboriginal heritage. Municipalities are generally strong in identifying the need to improve and build upon knowledge of and protection for Aboriginal heritage.

Melton, Warrnambool and Glenelg do not specifically address Aboriginal cultural heritage; whilst Casey, a peri-urban and growth area municipality uniquely identifies pre-settlement Aboriginal heritage as requiring significant work. (Casey 2001)

Most heritage strategies are resourced and promoted by planning departments. This department often has the closest involvement with heritage, mainly through the implementation of the planning scheme and in the identification of strategic planning projects. For some municipalities heritage is well aligned with economic development, the arts or tourism with the Goldfields region of Victoria is a good example. This provides heritage with a broader base to work from and potentially more support and resources. However these allegiances often arise from the notion that heritage is a resource to be marketed. Therefore heritage can be an asset with a measurable monetary value through tourism or increased

property prices for example. Heritage is often linked most strongly with areas where the value of investment in property is high. (Warrnambool, pers. comm. 9 September 2015).

Cultural heritage aligned with tourism, arts and culture and economic development. Castlemaine Market symbolises this for the Goldfields region of central Victoria (Source: Getty images, www.imageinsight.com.au)

Heritage strategies generally make the briefest mention of intangible heritage generally in relation to Aboriginal heritage and without much detail about what this might entail. Intangible heritage may often be part of a non-dominant culture where expressions in tangible form are subtle or require special levels of understanding. For a dominant culture there is simply more to 'see' and therefore more to 'manage'. The City of Whittlesea gives intangible heritage equal status with its more tangible expressions of trees, landscapes and buildings. (Whittlesea 2013) It is interesting to observe that the heritage strategy is promoted and project managed through their arts and culture area rather than the planning department.

Established communities may have places to connect with, however emerging communities may not necessarily have these strong connections to places. For emerging communities

heritage may be about the traditions of other places, without a visible mark on their adopted

landscape. Whittlesea's engagement with emerging communities therefore includes a wholly

different set of objectives including ways of supporting the continuation of cultural practices

and traditions and allowing others the opportunity to celebrate and learn from them. A

particular heritage event based around the notion of bread as a basis for all cultures, and a

coming together of different nationalities to bake and sample different breads, has become a

celebration of heritage.

City of Whittlesea's Well Bread Festival 2014, an annual event in the City's cultural heritage program that

brings communities together around the central place of bread in our lives. (Source:

www.considerthesauce.net/2014/08/27/very-well-bread, accessed 16 September 2015)

Some observations

Heritage strategies are tested at the implementation stage where their goals and actions

become realities. In discussion with several different municipalities that have been

implementing their strategies, some key findings emerge.

There may be some benefits in thinking regionally rather than locally, linking Local Government Areas across shared histories or activities. The Goldfields region in Victoria shares a gold mining history, and may benefit in collaboration across municipal boundaries to have a set of co-ordinated strategies around this theme. As an example, heritage advisors across the Goldfields region meet regularly to discuss issues of general interest that cross local government boundaries. Peri-urban growth areas may benefit in pooling ideas around their particular heritage issues of heritage places becoming increasingly isolated, redundant and stripped of their settings as a result of land sub-division in growth areas.

Heritage farmhouse interpretative shelter at Epping North, City of Whittlesea. In this new housing estate the shell of a heritage place provides a barbecue and an interpretative panel. The frame of the house has been completely replaced with a steel structure. (Source: Context 2014)

If external consultants are involved in preparing heritage strategies, it is important that there is a great deal of consultation around the actions proposed so that these are workable, achievable and able to be resourced. This part of a heritage strategy requires a great deal of inside knowledge of skills, experience and resourcing within Council. There is also a balance

required between actions that may be too general and therefore need further definition before being able to be implemented; and those that are too specific and may easily become redundant through changed circumstances.

It is important that a heritage strategy has a 'champion' at a sufficiently high level of management. Without a high level of support at Director level within a Council structure, heritage strategies can struggle for their place in a crowded agenda. With Council rate capping coming into play in 2016, budget deficits for many Councils are likely to be even more acute than they are now, particularly in some rural areas. Heritage is unlikely to be top of the agenda when there are so many other pressing budgetary demands.

Where heritage strategies have been very useful is in obtaining resources and funding for heritage projects. Without a comprehensive strategy is it almost impossible to be part of the budget bidding process. Without being included in the budget bids it is impossible to have resources allocated. Glenelg's heritage strategy has allowed strategic heritage planning projects to proceed with little need to get Council support for Amendments as the justification for this work is written into the Heritage Strategy (Glenelg pers. comm. 9 September 2015).

Heritage strategies are useful tools for working on collaborative projects across different Council departments. Without a document of this type it is hard to engage one part of Council with another; particularly if one department believes heritage is not on their agenda, nor their responsibility. Mount Alexander Shire has used their strategy to increase collaboration of heritage projects across their Local Economy department, increasing heritage exposure and networking possibilities (Mount Alexander, pers. comm. 9 September 2015).

A common action within heritage strategies is to recommend training for staff, recognising that there is few planning staff with knowledge of cultural heritage and how it is managed at the local level.

The requirement to complete conservation management plans for every heritage asset owned by Council has proved to be an important recommendation in any strategy. Allocating small amounts each year to undertake these plans can provide much needed cross-department direction. (Mount Alexander, pers. comm. 9 September 2015)

Whilst there may be a need for heritage planning projects to be quite specific to fill gaps in the strategic planning area, other aspects of cultural heritage might be identified by broader goals that may be implemented by either Council or the community or a partnership. Implementation may be defined or left deliberately open. If a goal is to work closer with a local Aboriginal group in understanding more about their cultural heritage, then leaving the means to achieve this open may be the best approach.

Of great importance is the level of engagement with heritage that communities have. Typically an urban municipality might have a very engaged community, particularly if a great deal of physical change is happening around them. Yarra had a high level of involvement in the recent development of their heritage strategy (Yarra 2014). Whittlesea struggled to maintain momentum with their strategy following an initial interest by a number of locally based heritage groups (Whittlesea 2013). Boroondara is engaged in a co-ordinated program of catch up strategic work as well as providing quick responses to demolition applications from a watch list, all part of the detailed set of planning requirements set out in their heritage strategy.

Conclusion

Resourcing heritage is likely to be an even greater challenge in the future than it has been in the past. Heritage strategies may become even more important tools in the competition for scarce resources. One of the important ways in which this is likely to be most successful is in collaboration across different areas of Council and government agencies. Without collaboration and finding common ground, heritage risks being sidelined.

There are opportunities to evolve and interpret how heritage strategies are written and delivered that are specific to local areas. Whilst the heritage strategies are sometimes a case of 'filling out the template' in order to be eligible for continued heritage funding; the benefits of consulting with communities more broadly and of having a strong 'buy in' by Councils; has been amply demonstrated.

The difference between heritage strategies is not so much a result of the geography and identity of the local government areas, but of the level of engagement of their communities. Differences between communities that are emerging and may have not yet developed connections with a place, and with established communities who may have strong attachments. However this may also be expressed in a preference for the intangible over tangible heritage.

The rather arbitrary administrative boundaries of Local Government Areas may inhibit a broader scale of thinking about cultural heritage across a region. The heritage strategies already completed tend to be heavily influenced by each Council's historical engagement with their own heritage issues. Whilst many types of Council have adopted a minimum standard approach, others have incorporated considerable diversity into their strategies through responding to their own particular identities and issues.

There is no doubt that heritage strategies undertaken by municipalities in Victoria over the last five years have provided some focus to cultural heritage. The development of a heritage strategy is a useful way to reflect on the nature of cultural identity and what it means. The difference across urban, peri-urban and rural areas is less important than the level of engagement of the communities with their heritage.

Bibliography

Context, 2014, Hanging Rock VHR Assessment, prepared for the Hanging Rock Action Group

Context, 2014, City of Whittlesea Heritage Study, vol.3, prepared for the City of Whittlesea

Municipal Heritage Strategies Guide, 2012 Heritage Victoria, Department of Planning and

      Community Development

Victorian Planning and Environment Act, 1987

Victorian Heritage Act, 1995

Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act, 2006

Heritage strategies reviewed:

Banyule City Council, 2013, Heritage Strategy, banyule.vic.gov.au/files/7bd52d4e-ba98-

      4bbe-9016-a20e00ef5e5a/Banyule-Heritage-Strategy.pdf

Brimbank Heritage Strategy, 2013, brimbank.vic.gov.au/files/48c62f35-c894-4304-9854-

      a20c00dca79c/Final_heritage_strategy_5_June_2013.pdf

City of Casey, 2001, Heritage Strategy, casey.vic.gov.au/council/policies-strategies/g-

      i/heritage-strategy

City of Melbourne, 2013, Heritage Strategy,

      melbourne.vic.gov.au/BuildingandPlanning/Planning/heritageplanning/Documents/Heri

      tage_Strategy_2013.pdf

City of Warrnambool, 2011, Warrnambool Heritage Strategy,

      warrnambool.vic.gov.au/sites/warrnambool.vic.gov.au/files/documents/council/plans_st

      rategies/Warrnambool_Heritage_Strategy_2011.pdf

City of Yarra, Yarra Heritage Strategy, 2014-2018, yarracity.vic.gov.au/planning--

      building/Heritage/yarra-heritage-strategy/

Latrobe Heritage Strategy, 2013, latrobe.vic.gov.au/files/daf94ebe-1e04-4bd4-a8d6-

      a31000a58b6f/Heritage_Strategy_Draft_September_2013.doc

Melton City Council, 2013, Heritage Strategy,

melton.vic.gov.au/Services/Building_planning_transport/Strategic_planning/Studiesstra

tegiesguidelines/Heritage_Strategy

Macedon Ranges Shire Council, Macedon Ranges Heritage Strategy 2014-2018,

mrsc.vic.gov.au/files/cb636b29-de0b-42be-a6c0-a37000a60391/HERITAGE-

STRATEGY-2014-2018-updated-re-June-14-resolution.pdf

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, 2013, Heritage Place Owners Survey Results,

mornpen.vic.gov.au/Building_Planning/Heritage/Municipal_Heritage_Strategy

Moonee Valley Heritage Strategy, 2011, mvcc.vic.gov.au/planning-and-

building/heritage/heritage-strategy.aspx

Mount Alexander Shire Council and Mount Alexander Shire Heritage Advisory Committee,

Heritage Strategy 2012-2016,

mountalexander.vic.gov.au/Page/page.asp?Page_Id=1704&h=1

Shire of Glenelg, 2014, Heritage Strategy,

glenelg.vic.gov.au/files/Web_site_Adopted_Heritage_Strategy_2014-2015.pdf

Shire of Nillumbik, 2011, Heritage Strategy, Identifying and conserving Nillumbik's Cultural

Heritage, nillumbik.vic.gov.au/files/f25cd8c0-d76c-4d80-8bdd-

9f8200ae0a0d/Heritage_Strategy_ADOPTED_SEPTEMBER_2011_2.pdf

Acknowledgements