

Planning Panels Victoria  
DELWP  
**Planning Panels Victoria**  
Planning | Department of Environment, Land,  
Water and Planning

221 Noble Street  
Newtown, 3220  
Geelong

**Re Greater Geelong Planning Scheme  
Amendment C422ggee  
Permanent Heritage Controls  
for 12-16 Kinsmead Street Waurin Ponds**

**13 September 2021**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

I have been invited to present a witness statement in support of an appropriate buffer around the Claremont Homestead.

**KEY POINTS OF WITNESS PRESENTATION:**

- **The importance of open spaces in the urban context**
- **The nature of biophilic design principles to wellbeing in the context of future development in urban environments**
- **Understanding borrowed landscape**
- **Personal experience in the restoration of a property in Geelong of the same age with particular consideration to the land area around it**
- **Specific experience of the restoration of heritage Norfolk Island pine trees of advanced age**

I include here a summary of my background relevant to the discussion of these points and the expertise I bring as well as the scanned signed statement affirming my understanding of the conditions required for on-line presentation to the panel

Yours sincerely

Dr Mary-Jane Walker

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## **MY BACKGROUND/ PERSPECTIVE**

I have been a Geelong resident for the last 12 years. My family and I moved here to restore and re-activate one of the city's most historic houses and gardens. My own background is cross disciplinary encompassing both a Ph.D. in the science of Genetics but also work as a professional artist, designer and founder of the Geelong based business The School of Lost Arts.

I am the co-founder of the Melbourne based marketing strategy consultancy, Circ Consulting and have also worked at the London Design Centre focusing on innovation implementation. I am one of the City of Greater Geelong Design Week Curatorial Team and on the Working Group for the UNESCO Cities of Design Subnetwork Meeting later this year. Up to this year, when the internal structure changed, I was also a member of the Audience and Engagement Committee of the Geelong Gallery.

My interest in the future of Geelong in the current context is particularly about creating the optimum urban ecosystem for the health and wellbeing of all residents and its sustainable future. There is enormous opportunity in this perspective on urban design with a greater emphasis on the importance of open and green space

This focus comes not only from my training as a biologist but also from my background as an artist and educator and in particular my understanding and research into the role of biophilic design. This is the international design movement that recognises our fundamental need to connect to nature and its use of key principles for the design of the urban environment.

For the past five years I have been promoting the importance of biophilic design, particularly for Geelong's future, through events together with the Live+Smart Lab at Deakin University and over 40 other key stakeholders, including hosting events during Geelong Design Week. I have conducted presentations to conferences, corporate partners and property and planning organisations. These events together have generated a large amount of buy-in from the community and successful international exposure for our city. They demonstrate to me the great desire that Geelong's residents and others have for this city to craft a unique future which embraces these ideas

## **MARY-JANE WALKER**

Doctor of Philosophy, Genetics, University of Edinburgh

Bachelor of Agricultural Science, University of Adelaide

Diploma of Arts (Studio Textiles), RMIT University

Certificate Fabric Printing and design, Riverina College of TAFE

*In giving my evidence, I confirm I:*

- *will be alone in the room from which I am giving evidence and will not make or receive any communication with another person while giving my evidence except with the express leave of the Panel;*
- *I will inform the Panel immediately should another person enter the room from which I am giving evidence;*
- *during breaks in evidence, when under cross-examination, I will not discuss my evidence with any other person, except with the leave of the Panel; and*
- *I will not have before me any document, other than my expert witness statement and documents referred to therein, or any other document which the Panel expressly permits me to view.*

Signed by:

Maylene Walker

Date:

13/9/21

PLANNING PANELS VICTORIA

**Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Amendment C422ggee**

**Interim Heritage Overlay HO2022**

**Subject Site:**

**Claremont Homestead**

**No. 12 – 16 Kinsmead Street**

**Waurin Ponds**

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

**DR MARY-JANE WALKER**

**THE SCHOOL OF LOST ARTS**

**12 OCTOBER 2021**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This submission is about highlighting the enormous opportunity that Claremont represents as a very rare commodity in the urban context. Principally this evidence seeks to support increasing the area of primary significance around the house. It also supports the submission by the City of Greater Geelong to retain the proposed Heritage overlay over the whole site.

This site can be developed in a way that not only enhances the spatial setting of the historic house but also creates a very special place which can still be developed sensitively and thereby enhance not only the heritage and amenity of the whole area but add considerably to its value for prospective subdivision purchasers.

This is about recognising that the open space around the house has value in itself not just as another block to be covered with as many house sites as possible.

The submission will cover this topic with the following key points:

### **KEY POINTS OF WITNESS PRESENTATION:**

- **A comparative example in the restoration of a property in Geelong of the same age with particular consideration to the land area around it**
- **Specific experience of the restoration of heritage Norfolk Island pine trees of advanced age**
- **The importance of open spaces in the urban context**
- **The nature of biophilic design principles to wellbeing in the context of future development in urban environments**
- **Understanding borrowed landscape**

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## **QUALIFICATIONS**

Doctor of Philosophy, Genetics, University of Edinburgh

Bachelor of Agricultural Science, University of Adelaide

Diploma of Arts (Studio Textiles), RMIT University

## COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE

Twelve years ago, we moved to Geelong to restore a similar property to Claremont. It too offered several different restoration or development opportunities.

This house, Chesterfield, was built in 1854 and is of local significance. It had a Heritage overlay which did not prevent re-development. It was in a poor state of repair after many years of neglect and inappropriate additions under successive owners. It was sited in approximately one acre of land which was in a similar state of poor condition and had three 30-metre-tall Norfolk Island pines in the front garden. These are visible in one of the images below. They were also assessed in an independent arborist's report to be likely to die.

## BEFORE



## AFTER



Today the restored house sits in its appropriate spatial setting and the Norfolk Island pines, after a great deal of remedial work developed by myself together with ongoing arborists support, are strong and healthy.

As in Claremont they are an iconic part of the house's historic setting and as such are an important part of the spatial setting and need to be retained. I am not an arborist; however, my inspection of the Claremont Norfolk Island pine indicates to me a healthy tree. These trees can live up to 400 years in their native habitat and close to that elsewhere. They are generally very stable trees.

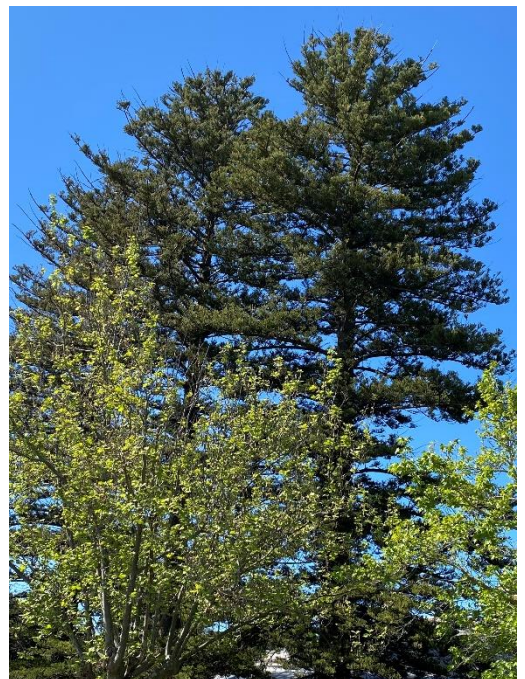
Our trees date from the age of our house so are approaching 170 years old. Our trees, like many similar ones are known and loved by people around the town. On the occasion of an open garden event, attended by over 450 people in two days it was interesting to see how many residents came to see the trees and their comments on how much the trees were valued by them as they saw them from around Geelong.



**TREES IN 2009**



**TREES IN 2021**



## **BIOPHILIC DESIGN**

For some years The School of Lost Arts has been promoting the importance of urban greening, the need for nature in the urban context and the enormous economic opportunity for Geelong if it were to embrace these ideas in the form of Biophilic Design.

Biophilia means literally the love of life, a term originally made popular by the biologist E.O. Wilson in the 1980s. Since then, interest in this concept and its application to how we live has grown enormously with extensive studies around the world to have proven its vital importance to our mental and physical health.

Biophilic Design is a worldwide design movement that is being driven both by our increasing urbanisation and the needs for human wellbeing in the face of climate change. The City of Greater Geelong has committed \$50,000 in this year's budget to look at Geelong becoming a biophilic city.

Many cities around the world are now committing to becoming Biophilic cities, including Singapore, Wellington New Zealand and Freemantle most locally.

When we think about changing the way we live in cities, the idea of biophilic design takes this innate love and harnesses it to create better homes, suburbs, workplaces and schools.

Living in an urban 21<sup>st</sup> century environment does not have to mean being cut off from nature and all it has to teach us. Other cities around the world are crafting a different future, both more biophilic and more sustainable in the way they are designing their built environment.

## **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CLAREMONT**

When we look at a site like Claremont it represents a golden opportunity to create a really special place for now and future generations. Such sites are very rare in the middle of suburbs. Biophilic design is not anti-development but rather champions how design can contribute to human health and shows how the right development can add enormous value. It is supported by strong economic indicators

Biophilic buildings attract higher rental prices, 3% per square foot or 7% in effective rents, selling at prices 16% higher. They also show increased salability and livability (Cabanek, A, Zingoni de Baro, ME & Newman, P 2020, 'Biophilic streets: a design framework for creating multiple urban benefits', Sustainable Earth, vol. 3, no. 1.)

In addition, larger blocks with increased greenery reduce the Urban Heat Island effect, improve stormwater retention and improve air quality. Suburbs with more trees and open spaces also show reduced crime rates. All of this is supported by in depth international research and longitudinal studies.

Specifically, in the case of Claremont and the City of Greater Geelong's submission to extend the interim overlay, it would mean supporting the City of Greater Geelong's overall proposed heritage overlay. It would also mean extending the red line on the proposed overlay, that is the area of primary significance, further out from the buildings.

This would allow an appropriate spatial setting for the buildings. A guide distance would be suggested at a minimum of ten metres out from all buildings. This suggested increased area of primary significance which includes the suggested expanded area for an appropriate spatial setting is indicated by the blue line of the map image provided in the National Trust submission.

The point here is that at Claremont there is a unique opportunity to set this historic house in its appropriate spatial setting to aid the overall design of the space as well as the heritage value of the total land and property. It would also mean the development of fewer larger blocks. With the site covered by the recommended Heritage overlay, this would encourage appropriate development and would attract the subdivision buyers' premium for the reasons suggested. This is especially true post Covid as potential buyers are seeking better lifestyle properties with larger gardens and are prepared to pay a higher price for them.

#### **BENEFITS TO THE SUBURB AND CONCEPT OF BORROWED LANDSCAPE**

The benefits of retaining a larger area of primary significance and appropriately developing the land with fewer buildings and larger blocks extend to the surrounding residents and suburb. There is a great deal of evidence for the benefit of what is termed 'borrowed landscape'. An idea which is very ancient and has its origins in the Chinese term *Shakkei* and the Japanese term *Ikedori*.

What it means is that the presence of the open space around Claremont and the tall Norfolk Island pine is an important part of the local residents' appreciation of their area. This is also because of the heritage value of Norfolk Island pines as of great heritage value at such properties. Some of this recognition of borrowed landscape is subconscious but is known and understood to confer great health benefits. This is also supported by the large number of submissions which I understand support the heritage protection of the site.

This is also part of a growing appreciation of the need for more open space, significant trees and greenery in urban areas

In May of 2021, the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning in conjunction with the Centre for Public Health at the Queen's University of Belfast, was awarded \$1.2 million in funding by the Australian and UK governments towards research on the impact of urban design on health.

In another study the importance of even single significant trees such as the Claremont Norfolk Island pine is identified. This understanding has only grown in recent years.

*'The age of veteran trees often inspires awe in people and provides a link between the past, present and future. Woodlands, and individual trees, are seen as representing nature,*

*particularly in the urban environment.'*

Greenspace Design for Health and Well-being report by Aileen Shackell and Robin Walter for the National Health Service of Scotland 2012

## **CONCLUSION**

Claremont is a special place and as such its history and the area of land around it offers a wonderful opportunity to create a highly desirable addition to the existing suburb. This opportunity however hangs in the balance, and once gone can never be regained.

An appropriate spatial setting for the house and sensitive development of the surrounding land will not reduce the economic benefit to the new owner but rather enhance it. It will also provide the chance to make a huge difference today and leave a lasting legacy for future generations

Dr Mary-Jane Walker

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