



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

2nd May 2019

Professor Timothy J Entwisle
Director and Chief Executive
Private Bag 2000
Birdwood Avenue
SOUTH YARRA VIC 3141

Re: Melbourne Gardens Master Plan 2019-2039

Dear Professor Entwisle,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comment on the Master Plan, which represents an important step forward in the treatment of the Gardens and their place in the now registered Domain.

I write on behalf of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV), the peak body representing 343 community historical societies throughout the state. The RHSV has been active on history and heritage issues since its formation in 1909. The RHSV Heritage Committee is accountable to RHSV Council and has specific responsibility for preparing submissions and liaising with other relevant heritage bodies concerning the uses and preservation of heritage-protected buildings and sites.

We commend the Royal Botanical Gardens of Victoria for the exciting vision implicit in the Master Plan and for making it available for comment. There is much which builds on the past legacy but extends it further with very innovative ideas. Our response is limited to one of those legacies: the Observatory grounds and the buildings encompassed there.

The Master Plan recites the history and custodianship of the Observatory and the other buildings of 19th Century scientific endeavour on that site, but appears to treat the grounds as though they are free of any heritage encumbrance. The site and buildings have both Commonwealth and VHR listing. Not only the buildings, but the instruments they contained are on the VHR and the Commonwealth Heritage Register. The Observatory has its own distinct history and we submit that the Master Plan should reflect that history.

Given that the Master Plan defines what the RBGV hopes to achieve over the next 20 years, we would like to have read that the full potential of the Observatory site is also embraced.

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We are thus concerned at the suggestion of the Master Plan that the treatment of the Observatory site should not be a 'contemporary interpretation of the historic Guilfoyle style',. This treed landscape was mostly the work of Mueller (p22-23) and the proposed Master Plan layout would not be respectful of this important aspect of the Observatory site's heritage.

We are also concerned at the proposed incursion into the Observatory site of the children's garden. We submit that the Observatory fence should be retained and reinstated to help define the Observatory (which is a site of national significance) in its own space, and to separate the Observatory landscape from the surrounding Domain Parklands and Birdwood Avenue. We believe that to suggest that the Observatory landscape will read as an 'extension of the Domain Parklands' misrepresents the heritage significance of the Observatory and should not be pursued.

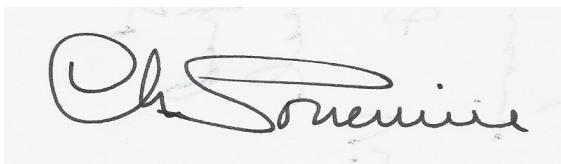
We would hope that there could be a commitment to the restoration of the Great Melbourne Telescope, the North Equatorial Telescope and where possible other buildings and their instruments. We understand this could include the return of the Transit Telescope, now held in the Museum of Victoria's Store, to the East Transit Room, thus permitting the story to be told of its pivotal role in establishing accurate timekeeping for Colonial Melbourne. It would seem axiomatic that if the buildings and the instruments they once contained are separately listed, they should be together.

We believe that like the Herbarium, these purpose built structures, properly interpreted, can lead to an understanding of Victoria's desire in the 1860s to be a significant contributor to scientific knowledge and that they can act as pointers to contemporary science in their respective fields.

The curtilage of those buildings requires sensitivity in planning if they are to be read as something distinct and commanding of visitor interest in their own right. This awareness is not apparent from our reading. The Master Plan assumes a continuity between Gardens and the Observatory site including an extension of the Children's Garden into this site. We believe that the integrity of the Observatory site should be maintained and the differing character of the two sites should be maintained. To that end, we suggest that the existing fences should be retained.

Thank you for considering our submission.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ch Sowerwine', is centered on a light grey rectangular background.

(Emeritus Professor) Charles Sowerwine,
Chair, Heritage Committee, RHSV.