



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.
239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

**Report on Survey
of Victorian Historical Societies**

**conducted by the RHSV
on behalf of the Heritage Council of Victoria
State of Heritage Review**

May 2019

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Introduction

The Heritage Council of Victoria is currently conducting a State of Heritage Review: Local Heritage Objectives, Scope and Deliverables. As part of that review, the Council sought to involve local historical societies and asked the RHSV for contacts for up to 50 societies to be asked to complete a questionnaire on their experience of local heritage issues.

The RHSV took the position that all of our member societies should have an equal chance to participate. In order to make that possible, we offered to administer the survey on behalf of the Heritage Council. Charles Sowerwine, as Chair of the RHSV Heritage Committee, worked with Cael J. Leskovec, Project Officer, Heritage Council of Victoria. We agreed on the conduct of the survey and kept in contact throughout the process.

RHSV Councillor Lucy Bracey took responsibility for administering the survey, which turned out to be a daunting task. She was aided by fellow RHSV Councillor Cathy Butcher and by RHSV Executive Officer Rosemary Cameron, who sent out the requests and reminders to participate and who channelled the many queries to the appropriate person. Crs Bracey and Butcher provided initial analysis and summaries of the responses. Dr Judith Smart of the Heritage Committee did careful and much appreciated editing. I have worked through all the responses, reworked the categorisations and added a number of responses. I take final responsibility for the report.

Charles Sowerwine, Chair,
Heritage Committee, RHSV,
24 May 2019.

The Survey Process

On 26 April, we sent out an email to the 315 member societies which operate in Victoria (there are 19 societies that have links to Victorian sites but do not operate on the ground within Victoria and we decided not to involve them in the survey, which focused on the experience of local heritage issues). The email was accompanied by a pdf of the State of Heritage Review terms of reference and gave a closing date of 16 May in order for us to be able to make a timely report to the Heritage Council.

On 6 May and again on 14 May we sent reminders. In the 14 May reminder, we also extended the closing date from 16 to 17 May because of a minor confusion over the closing date. Copies of the three emails are included as an appendix to this report.

Of the 315 societies whose participation we requested, 113 responded. A list of those which responded is found in Appendix 1 to this report. In a few instances, societies responded twice to ensure that we received the response and so our count fluctuated until we were able to collate all responses and eliminate duplications.

Several societies asked to submit their responses this week. Often they were held up by communications problems and the need to run responses through their committees.

Unfortunately, given the commitment we made to the Heritage Council to have the results in this week, we were unable to accommodate these requests.

We received many emails and comments of thanks for allowing historical societies to respond to this survey. There is a clearly a strong and passionate community within Victoria that care very much but also feel like their voices are not necessarily being heard or represented. Several suggestions were made for some additional, in-depth consultation around the heritage needs and wants of these communities.

General Impressions

The 113 responses are for the most part substantial and frank. They demonstrate that the local history community values heritage very highly. The open-ended nature of the questions and the overlapping nature of modes of heritage protection have led some societies to respond very broadly. As a result, several broad themes are apparent across responses to different survey questions.

These broad themes, while in some respects beyond the review's terms of reference, show that the overlaps between planning and heritage and between state and local spheres can blur the issues. Many societies cite development pressures overriding heritage values. Some point the finger at state agencies pushing development at the expense of heritage. Others complain about lack of support as well as lack of funding from the state or state agencies as well as about the inadequacy of local efforts.

Similarly, many local societies responded with cries of alarm about ageing populations, which may refer to the demographics of regional areas as well as to some historical societies and their ability to deal with the many heritage issues arising. Either way, it reflects a widespread feeling that preserving heritage depends too much on the efforts of local volunteers. They also fear that these efforts are under-utilised and undervalued.

Analysing Responses

We have summarised the range of responses to each question and pulled out a number of answers as key references. This is by no means an exhaustive report. Categorisation of the responses is difficult if not impossible because the open-ended questions led respondents to include more than one broken responses down into categories, we have rarely been able to quantify these categories. Instead, we have sought to give a wide selection of responses which suggest the tenor of others, trying to include a number of responses roughly parallel to the proportion of similar responses. We have emphasised responses that seem most relevant to the terms of reference. We have not altered or edited any responses, but we have standardised the formatting and occasionally removed obvious typos. As a policy decision, we have given each response in its totality and under each comment we have listed societies in strict alphabetical order. All the responses are in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet, listed by historical society and by question.

1. Are you aware of any local heritage initiatives, practices or approaches (e.g. studies, programmes, events etc.) that could be considered an example of best practice?

109 responses

31 respondents (28%) said that they were not aware of any local heritage initiatives, practices or approaches that could be considered examples of best practice. In addition, several responded that they were aware of some initiatives but outside their local community:

Hotham History Project

No, which is why Hotham History Project is working towards a new initiative entitled Melbourne Streets (www.melbournestreets.com.au), a community project to consolidate information from a wide variety of sources and make accessible online social and architectural street history which includes buildings, parks and monuments. This will be an ongoing project by volunteers. The aim is to be inclusive and encourage members of the community to be involved in protecting their heritage.

Southern Sherbrooke Historical Society

I wish. In our local area the system is flawed and useless for properly protecting anything

78 responses (72%) said they were aware of at least one best practice initiative. Many of the examples cited as best practice included local heritage studies (17 responses). Some very positive examples of heritage initiatives considered ‘best practice’ included three very affirmative references to Greater Shepparton from the Merrigum Historical Society, the Murchison & District Historical Society, and the Shepparton Heritage Centre:

Murchison & District Historical Society

Greater Shepparton City Council supports and promotes local heritage in the following ways: Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) consulted on heritage issues comprising reps. of Aboriginal Corporation, all local Historical Societies, Professional Heritage Advisor, community reps, Council admin. support staff. This committee drives the following programmes—Bi-annual public Heritage Lecture alternating with Bi-annual Cultural Heritage Awards, Annual Heritage Open Days currently over 2 days (47 venues), Master classes. Council conducts Annual Grants Program for heritage property improvements (\$85,000 available), employs Qualified Heritage Advisor 1.5 days/month for planning consultation & information sharing with HAC, has compiled municipal Heritage Study (1300 pages) available to all Council staff and HAC members, provides assistance when applying for listing of significant heritage places to VHR. Historical Societies are supported with on-going annual maintenance payments (currently \$2,500). Practical support and financial assistance is provided for improvements to Heritage Centres and Museums.

Shepparton Heritage Centre

As a voluntary community group, our activities reflect the time available to members. We are currently working with the Greater Shepparton City Council, and RiverLinks (whose role is supporting awareness of the Goulburn River and its environment) to produce interpretive signage along the (now filled in) original course of the Goulburn,

as it would have passed through Shepparton. This will cover the once active Port of Shepparton, the site of earliest European Settlement at McGuire's Punt, location of past and still preserved heritage buildings, etc. We have been given assistance at no cost by a local architect in preparing a site map, and received the support of Council staff at all stages. This might be considered 'Best Practice' in that it involves Council and Community in a historic initiative that, being located in a now public park, will flow through to locals and tourists alike.

Other responses cite specific programmes, restorations or studies:

Ballan Shire Historical Society

Repair and restoration of the Ballan old Courthouse built in 1872. Restoration by Working Heritage.

Moorabool Shire Council—West Moorabool Heritage Study by David Rowe.

Re-purposing of the old paper mills on the Barwon River at Fyansford, Geelong as commercially viable arts precinct, restaurant and winery.

Flinders District Historical Society

Flinders Pier Cargo Shed Interpretive Display; Oral history programs in conjunction with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Local History Network; Historical Signage.

Upper Murray Historical Society

Yes, the Oral History Project that resulted in a detailed study and permanent exhibition of the early Indigenous inhabitants of the Upper Murray region.

Others cite good relationships with the local council:

Eltham District Historical Society

Excellent working relationship between EDHS and Nillumbik Council
Support by Local Rotary group to enable EDHS to participate in annual Eltham Festival.

Ringwood & District Historical Society

Yes, our council (Maroondah City Council) has tendered for two studies—an updated heritage study of the shire and a special assessment looking at a Neighbourhood Character Area.

Others cite good heritage studies:

Hastings-Western Port Historical Society

Mornington Peninsula Shire commissioned Graeme Butler & Associates to do comprehensive heritage studies of places, buildings, trees etc. This included Hastings and District in Western Port. The reports formed the basis of guides as to future usage and protection as far as heritage is concerned.

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre

Mount Alexander Shire Thematic Heritage Study, 2016, was a great example of a shire-wide consultation on the topic of heritage and provides a valuable and comprehensive [overview].

Lilydale & District Historical Society

Soon to be ratified Lilydale Plan, which embraces our town's heritage as an asset. The council commissioned our society to do the history of public spaces from which we published a book and display. This led to an understanding of the how and why [of] our town today and the value of history

Other examples of 'best practice' include suggestions that best practice is in the past and that some catch-up may be required, especially with regard to heritage studies:

Avoca & District Historical Society Inc

The Shire of Avoca's 1994 Heritage Study by Wendy Jacobs & Karen Twigg. This needs revision to take account of developments during the past 25 years.

Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society

Local Council is slowly carrying out heritage surveys of the areas covered by the shire. It also convenes a local Heritage Advisory Committee, which is made up of local history and heritage groups and interested community members.

Benalla Historical Society

The City of Benalla conducted a Conservation Study that produced three volumes of data. (This was in 1992 and it is considered that we are overdue for a revision.)

Virtually all important historic buildings in Benalla have had a blue plaque attached, giving a short history of each building.

The research room at our museum is a "Place of Deposit" for important documents. There is also a fine collection of local newspapers and the process of digitization of these is ongoing. The Benalla Rural City Council retains a Heritage Advisor, we understand to be on a part time basis—or as required for a particular project.

Heidelberg Historical Society

The local council has commissioned heritage studies of the local area over a number of years, in particular during the 1980s (Heidelberg Conservation Study). We continue to use these (if nothing else, as a reminder of what was lost), and the maps in the Loder and Bayley study that show chronological change in land use have been particularly valuable

Still others find 'best practice' difficult:

Bendigo Historical Society

Bendigo National Trust assisting in research and preservation of local buildings such as the gasworks.

Last weekend in Bendigo Heritage Unwrapped a number of attractions were opened at low prices but such things are difficult for the society to plan and participate in when there are so many other demands on our time!

The rest of these responses were split between such things as the establishment of heritage centres and museums of local history, heritage grant programs, local heritage days/festivals or open days, heritage advisory groups, interpretation of historic places and protection of historic places, or cataloguing, digitising and publishing local history.

Some point to local initiatives they have organised:

Red Cliffs & District Historical Society

In preparation for our centenary the community is working through many heritage initiatives: we created a 'Peacewalk' along a channel reserve with interpretive signage recognising Armistice Day 1918 as the beginning of peace, which brought our settlement into existence; we are researching our 700 original soldier settlers to create a photographic Wall of Honour; and are planning street furniture, structures and paint code in an Art Deco/between Wars style reflecting the era of establishment.

2. What do you think are the strengths of the current system for local heritage?

98 responses

11 responding societies did not answer this question at all. Categorisation of the remaining 98 responses is difficult because of the diversity of responses, but, of the remainder, 35 responses (36%) emphasised local volunteers, 24 responses (24% of the total) were positive about their work within the municipal framework. The remaining 40% were either very qualified in finding positive aspects or frankly negative. This does not take into account the 11 societies that did not answer, which could be interpreted as a negative response.

35 responses (36%) commented that it is 'local people with local knowledge' who are the strength of the current system. These responses refer positively to the participation of community organisations, the active role for local historical societies and their enthusiastic volunteers:

Essendon Historical Society

The current system allows the voluntary involvement of local people. This creates interest, ownership and participation in local history by the community. The means to tap into the knowledge of those who were born and bred in the area is a strength.

Leongatha Historical Society

The shire overlay protects public buildings. We have a fine streetscape that is protected under the overlay.

Sandringham & District Historical Society

The strengths of the local system are the few volunteers who donate many hours of their time to ensure history is preserved.

24 responses (24% of the total) cited positive experiences with active Councils and effective processes (one was the Murchison & District Historical Society, which made similar comments under question 1):

Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society

That it is largely invested in local government. When it is done well, the community contribution is listened to, heard and respected. The local history knowledge in the community is respected and used. An understanding that heritage contributes to a sense of place and is part of the wellbeing of community.

Wonthaggi & District Historical Society

We have a close association with local communities and the Bass Coast Council. The society runs community historical events on a regular basis as well visiting local schools. For example, Seniors Week involvement, the annual dinner which has a local historical theme as well as being the 'go to place' for family and historical research.

Occasionally the positive experiences seems a matter of hope rather than of practice:

Benalla Migrant Camp

The potential for community driven campaigns when local Government is not supportive due to cost.

Hastings-Western Port Historical Society

Mornington Peninsula Shire recognises and values that its area is one of Melbourne's greatest assets, characterised by unique townships, highly valued green wedge land areas of national and international conservation significance and featuring around 10% of Victoria's coastline. One of the strengths is the watchfulness of members of each historical society regarding historic houses, areas and trees who alert necessary authorities when these are in danger of being pulled down or having inappropriate development. Sadly, sometimes in spite of this, the building or historic place is demolished, especially when sadly the Planning Minister intervenes over Council decisions.

Hotham History Project

The fact that Councils are continuing to conduct heritage studies to identify their heritage and that there are heritage overlays which provide some protection.

Inverleigh Historical Society

Not strong, but our Shire is obliged to refer to heritage overlay in planning and permits. Unfortunately the shire with 56 settlements does not have a corporate knowledge of history of places. Data base of heritage places is online.

Malmsbury Historical Society

The system works well IF relevant landowners and Council staff are sympathetic to heritage in the first place

Malvern Historical Society

There is evidence that councils are attempting to identify buildings and neighbourhoods of interest but this needs to be extended and occur within shorter timeframes. Some evidence that Councils respect their own local history but this relies on current councillors' attitudes, and council staff attitudes, and outside influences including developers.

Wandong History Group

We do have in place a heritage study, this was only achieved after much pressure was put on council by our group. This has been adopted into the local planning scheme and should work [—] if impacting on local heritage occurs the planning scheme should be triggered.

Yarrawonga Mulwala Historical Society

The protection for heritage sites provided by Heritage Victoria. The partial protection provided by Local Government Heritage Overlays.

Some responses refer to the very existence of the heritage protection framework itself as its strength. They comment on the protection for heritage sites provided by Heritage Victoria,

the partial protection provided by Local Government Heritage Overlays, the benefit of active Council Heritage Committees and the value of local heritage studies:

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre Inc.

The listing of valued places on Heritage Register (VHR) and Heritage Inventory, The development of municipal heritage overlays, underpinned by local heritage studies and thematic history. Another strength is the existence of the Victorian Collections website and its associated seminars.

Many of the other responses expressed frustration at a lack of collaboration or consultation. Some were frankly despairing.

Carlton Community History Group

I notice that you refer to 'heritage' and not to 'heritage protection'. Is it significant that the latter expression does not appear anywhere in these questions? If you were to ask me about the strengths of the current system of heritage protection, I would say that I think it is not strong enough. The current system of Heritage Overlays etc does not appear to be particularly effective in protecting heritage buildings. Here in Carlton we have the painful example of the Corkman Hotel that was demolished in 2016. It was at that time covered by a HO and a Design and Development Overlay (DDO) which were (and remain) completely ineffective as far as we can see. After a bit of initial public and official outrage, the developers of the Corkman site now have permission to put up their multi-storey apartment block, as they originally intended—and the supposedly protected gold-rush era hotel is gone forever.

Erica and District Historical Society

Heritage protection has proven locally to be a BIG fail. It can be overturned so why have it?

Euroa Historical and Geneological Society

We do not believe that there is a functioning system for local heritage.

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.

On the surface one would say that the opportunity for individuals and organisations to have input, and the availability of local knowledge would be worthwhile. However, it has been the experience of Maldon locals that these options generally turn out to be of limited value, and input is often ignored. It seems that community consultation is a box to be ticked rather than something to be learned from.

Moe & District Historical Society

The only one I can think of is the ability to register a building etc. But even that may not provide ongoing protection

Richmond and Burnley Historical Society

There are none with regard to Yarra Municipality. Yarra's heritage controls are recognised as being weak in comparison with those in other LGAs.

Sale Historical Society

Past practice of studies to inform overlays was commendable but should have been mandatory across the state. Now there is no or little funding for such work so there is a great deal of disparity in local protection.

Upper Murray Historical Society

Fail to see any strengths, as there isn't really a 'system' at all.

Yackandandah and District Historical Society

Very little. The Heritage Advisory Committee, a sub-committee of Indigo Shire, was dismantled some years ago and is not replaced. One annual small grants program run by local govt is a community based grants program. Indigo Shire does not assist with grant writing nor inform of grants available. No community museum networks exist in Indigo Shire despite our frequent requests. Current formal request for increased assistance for Yackandandah has to date been un-acknowledged. Notional assistance through the Manager of the Burke Museum does not exist

A number of responses commented that some of the strengths could be extended across the state including:

- Councils to employ Heritage Advisors with suitable qualifications and knowledge of the planning system (Buninyong & District Historical Society)
- Historical Speeches Program (Yarrambat Historical Society Inc.)
- Awards by City of Shepparton (Tatura and District Historical Society)
- Forums for information sharing between heritage groups. Financial support for Historical Societies (Murchison & District Historical Society Inc.)

3. What do you think are the weaknesses of the current system for local heritage?

111 responses

There were many suggestions concerning the weaknesses of the current system for local heritage. Some respondents provided comprehensive reports which are hard to categorise because they cover so many issues. This one lengthy response will have to stand for a number which overflow with thoughts about the problems.

Coburg Historical Society

- Professional urban planners as well as the public have little idea how the State and local heritage protection fit together, the processes in obtaining a Heritage Victoria permit and opportunities to object. The Heritage Victoria webpage does not explicitly outline this either.
- VCAT members, Council planners, residents and Councillors have varying knowledge and understanding of heritage matters.
- Enforcement of decisions by Heritage Victoria and the Heritage Council seem to be badly impacted by a lack of funding, and the enforcement possibility and process is not well known and process of the public notifying Heritage Victoria of suspected breaches is unclear.
- The public notification of planning permits for state-registered buildings and structures is limited to one issue of a Melbourne daily newspaper (not local newspaper) and the Heritage Victoria website. This is inadequate. The 2-week time limit to respond is also too short. There is also no necessity for the State Heritage body or Local Governments to publicise or notify interested heritage groups or nearby residents that there is a state heritage permit application. Resident and community group objections to Heritage Victoria permits do not result in their notification of any appeal to the decision.
- Public notification for planning permits impacting buildings and structures within local heritage overlays only has to go to residents living opposite or adjacent to the heritage site, and local active History Societies are only made aware of the applications if advertising boards are displayed on the site and seen by members, or if members continuously look at the list of Municipal planning permit applications on line and check each site for a heritage overlay, or a neighbour of a heritage building or structure contacts their local Historical Society for help. Many Local Historical Society members are unfamiliar with the planning permit system and objecting to such and as objections are required within 2 weeks, it may be too short a timeframe for committee of management consideration and decisions.
- Councils often rely on Statutory Planning Officers who have variable knowledge, and interest in heritage matters, to carry out heritage planning permit assessments. The guidelines of assessment followed are discretionary and assessments are dependent on the experience and knowledge of the planner and vary with the planner.
- Developers can employ, use and pay for heritage advisors as witnesses at Heritage Council reviews and VCAT and their cost is a tax deduction whereas Local Governments, residents and Historical Societies have to use their own

funds to hire expert witnesses in heritage planning permit reviews appeals or go without and their fees are not tax deductible.

- Very few significance trees and gardens in our Municipality are covered by a heritage overlay.
- Councils employing Heritage Advisors only allocate funds to employ them for one day per week or less and there is insufficient time to do a site visit and write comments and recommendations on every planning permit application in a Local Heritage overlay referred to them. The Heritage Advisor's advice can also be ignored or altered by the Statutory Planner.
- Heritage Advisors are reluctant or ignore invitations to be guest speakers at Historical Society meetings and so interaction and partnering between them is limited.
- Lack of any financial help for people living in heritage buildings they have to upkeep although they may live on low incomes and have limited assets.

The majority of these responses concerning weaknesses of the present system can, however, be broken down. The biggest category concerns failures of local government to protect heritage (and occasionally, as from Bendigo below, the RHSV comes in for a serve too!):

Apollo Bay & District Historical Society

There is no overall management system for local heritage. To my knowledge the last heritage study in our local government area was 2003 with a review in 2005. There seems to be nothing in place to review and report on the recommendations made by this study.

Information on existing places with a heritage overlay is not easily accessible to the general public.

Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society Inc.

The significant burden placed on local councils to manage this important area of heritage preservation.

The money provided to conduct heritage studies is insufficient and then the process is painfully slow.

Shires are not implementing suitable incentives and deterrents to protect (in local By-Laws) and preserve identified heritage sites and structures. Not enough is done to assist them with this task.

Very little attention given to the prevention of the demolition of heritage structures by neglect.

Ballan Shire Historical Society Inc.

Councils are hamstrung dealing with cases of "demolition by neglect".

Benalla Historical Society

The planning scheme Heritage Overlay is there for advice only and appears to have no "teeth". It is considered that it is too easy for unscrupulous people to ignore the overlay, to the detriment of the town.

Within the Society's museum, there are very clear restraints with regard to storage and volunteers' time. Other restraints are the funding required to conserve items; and the building itself, which is partly very old; and the ageing of volunteers.

It is considered that the length of time required to get action from State authorities for new heritage applications needs change.

Bendigo Historical Society

The Council tries hard to push Heritage but it in the end is a mish mash of attractions telling individual stories (Chinese and central Deborah and RSL great) but no museum with the story of Bendigo, and BHS has a fairly limited opportunity to display in the oldest cottage in Bendigo—damp, dark. Heritage overlays etc.

Thus the thrilling and fascinating story of Bendigo's history is not told to the amazement of tourists and the total dismay of many residents. It often feels that the Heritage voice in Bendigo is a voice in the wilderness.

The society attempts to organise walks, tours, etc., but it feels difficult to enlighten people of what a gem Bendigo is and the stories to be told.

Perhaps more RHSV help to the regions?

Most of the society's effort is in cataloguing its collection, which is a massive task

Buninyong and District Historical Society

Local government planning reports often ignore heritage, or make arguments to put economic development ahead of protecting heritage sites.

Flinders District Historical Society

Lack of funding for Heritage Studies at the municipal level; coordination of IT programs and equipment; lack of training opportunities for volunteers.

Friends of Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park Inc.

In Nillumbik the system is disconnected from the Local Historical Societies. The 1 heritage officer and 1 part-time external consultant have only met with the Combined Historical Societies Group on one occasion in the last 20 years. Heritage decisions are taken by the above officers directed by other council officers. There is no Transparency and Governance (what Governance?). [But note the positive response of the Eltham District Historical Society in Question 1.]

Hastings-Western Port Historical Society Inc.

Lack of proper communication. There have been times when homes have been demolished and historic trees have been cut down quickly to the regret of the general public and in spite of receiving heritage protection. Communication needs to be increased to avoid this happening in the future.

Linton and District Historical Society

Even though heritage precincts were identified as a result of this study, little else has happened to protect the town's built heritage. There has been no active publicising of the need for protection, no promotion of it except by the Historical Society. Our Society tried unsuccessfully to get the 1874 Mechanics Institute & Library building put on the Victorian Heritage Register some years ago. The rules for inclusion were ridiculously narrow & it was devastating to sit through a hearing where the Heritage Council employees (supposedly fellow historians) argued against our submission. So our unique little Library sits deteriorating, unable to access the necessary funding for restoration that we might have been able to get if it had managed to get on the register.

Mansfield Historical Society

To the best of my knowledge and research, the Mansfield Shire Council does not have an official heritage plan. This is a serious weakness that a local Government body does not have official acknowledgement of the Shire's history. MAV should make it an obligatory qualification for membership (backed up by state membership and practice) that a heritage plan be an accountable factor in each LGA's business plan.

Merrigum Historical Society

There are wide differences in the level of commitment to heritage by municipal authorities across the state, with much non-commitment, and often little understanding.

- Some Councils have no heritage advisor, and the time fractions for most are laughable.
- Councillors (at least in the country) are often local business people, and see conflict between heritage and progress/development, privileging the latter, unless they are persuaded of opportunities for tourism and increased visitor numbers (and re the latter, sport has the advantage in the eyes of such Councillors and is preferred).
- Understanding by local Councillors of heritage processes, particularly the notion of significance and the various types of significance, is often lacking.
- Councillors often have no commitment to heritage and think it peripheral, or just for wusses. When the Greater Shepparton Heritage Study IIC (2016–2017) was initially presented to Councillors, one (then the Mayor) mockingly asked why the old peach trees on his orchard were not included.
- Local people, particularly in the country and including many members of historical societies, don't understand the heritage system, and are wary of heritage protection as intruding on a person's property rights. When I was researching place histories for Greater Shepparton's Heritage Study IIC, a foremost member of one of the historical societies, who had been no help in locating important local heritage buildings, confessed that he didn't want to 'dob people in', as they'd get at him after church.
- There is a dearth of grants available for protection, conservation and upkeep for places/objects with local heritage significance.

Kinglake Historical Society

Murrindindi shire was one of the very last to do a Heritage Study, which omitted many things and was to be updated but has not been.

Wyuna History Group Inc.

Our Local Shire (rural) has a lot of historical sites in the town where the Shire Council is based, which seem to receive all the attention and funding. However, the Shire is not interested in buildings of historical significance in the smaller townships within the shire, and seems quite happy/determined to let these buildings deteriorate to the point of condemnation. It is hard to get local shires employees to recognise anything outside of their own immediate towns, or influence budget spending on heritage sites in the greater shire area.

Perhaps the most consistent theme in these complaints has to do with inadequacies of heritage studies or the failure to carry them out or update them. Quite a few made this the main point of their response:

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre Inc.

Municipal heritage studies are patchy and out of date. Not every town or village has been the subject of a heritage study, and not every valued property was identified by the heritage consultants.

Much heritage vigilance is dependent upon a 'switched on' (alert) heritage professional being locally available at local government level.

Newstead & District Historical Society

Outdated heritage studies without substantial statements of significance for heritage areas of buildings. There is very limited community consultation at the government level where some councils have let their advisory committees go into recess. Where public/community consultation was undertaken, that input wasn't taken seriously, as well as community members were not given the opportunity to talk directly with consultants undertaking strategic planning projects, even when the community members have voluminous amounts of well researched material that could add to the project. Outdated local government areas heritage strategies, which have not been updated for many years. There also needs to be clarification of the various levels of heritage protection and the thresholds needed to be met to meet each particular level of heritage. This then leads to the question of how many heritage items of a particular type get listed at each of these levels of heritage protection—as in does one particular site get listed over another that misses out on the protection that it needs, even though both meet the threshold of listing?

A sub-category concerns complaints about the inadequacy of heritage advisors. A number of regional historical societies complain about advisors who are not locally based and appear to ignore local knowledge. Again, one example can stand for several that raise this point:

Red Cliffs & District Historical Society

The heritage advisor to Mildura Rural City Council [MRCC] is employed as a consultant and is based in Sydney, flying in on an infrequent basis. He is not local and there appears to be differences in understanding, value and appreciation of local history.

Another sub-category concerns the ability of developers to use the system to their advantage. Again, this not unsurprisingly is a complaint that comes mainly from suburban historical societies:

Carlton Community History Group

Developers with the funds to hire top legal assistance are too often able to have heritage protections on a building over-ridden. Community groups do not have the resources to match their ability to mount a case. And once a precedent is set by one approved project, other developers can use it to strengthen their case, and more such developments follow.

A further sub-category is VCAT, which appears in a number of the kinds of responses cited above and occasionally on its own, as in this example:

Malvern Historical Society

Decisions/Overrulings by VCAT have led to a negative attitude by individuals and local communities.

Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society

VCAT system: over reliance on discretionary rather than mandatory controls. Loosely worded local heritage policy.

The resources of the development community relative to the resources of the preservation/conservation community in fighting planning battles, making submissions etc.

Privileging growth over preservation in planning

Similarly, the weakness of Heritage Overlays is a thread through many of these responses, often combined with complaints about VCAT, but it also appears on its own:

Balwyn Historical Society

Easy to overturn and ignore. Far too many valid heritage overlay applications are ignored, it is far too easy to overturn a heritage overlay and get rid of a building. The whole system is clunky, time consuming and leaves far too many gaps.

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.

Heritage planning controls are not prescriptive enough to provide planners, developers and the community with knowledge about how an application will be assessed. At present interpretation of policy is up to individual planners and this results in contradictory outcomes; and when Councillors are called upon to vote on a planning application anything can happen.

VCAT issues. The disconnect between planning policy and what happens on the ground is further exacerbated by the moving goal posts; that is planning policy is developed on the fly by VCAT. Everything can be appealed now and Local Government Authorities have lost control of their patch.

VCAT decisions are made de novo with little or no regard for the history of a site or its context, this leads to inconsistent results which are to be viewed as unjust to applicants (either past or present depending on which way the case goes).

Any trip to VCAT is a gamble, and this is not the way to deliver good planning outcomes. VCAT is determining planning policy on the fly, which in turn encourages potentially inappropriate appeals, wastes resources, and infuriates and frustrates the community. Developers are geared to appeal decisions and can factor in associated costs, while escalating costs often discourage objectors from trying to protect local heritage places.

Out of date heritage study and design guideline documents; they don't meet current standards, are difficult to interpret, unclear in their intent, or hard to use etc., and these issues are used as an excuse to pay them less heed or disregard them entirely. Examples; Maldon Conservation Study (1977) and Maldon Design Guidelines (1998). There isn't a clear understanding of significance; how it applies to places (and objects) and what that should mean in terms of protection.

Community aspirations for the protection of heritage places are not being heeded; new developments are being allowed to freeload off the existing amenity provided by built heritage which has been preserved and restored by others.

Ringwood & District Historical Society

The HO program is not worth the paper it is written on. At any stage, the owner of any heritage place can knock down their asset, without Council approval. As well, there is no local legislation to enforce penalties on the violation to a heritage asset.

Some complaints, especially from the Melbourne suburbs, concern state protection issues or issues with the state overriding locals. In many of these responses, both the state and local authorities come in for criticism (e.g. Benalla Migrant Camp, below), while in others (e.g. Box Hill Historical Society, below) the relations with local government are nevertheless good.

Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc.

Massive backlog in approval of Heritage Applications

Benalla Migrant Camp Inc.

There are a number:

The process of applying for heritage listing is very involved and costly. Despite a powerful people-driven campaign our council said no to a local heritage overlay, because of cost. This, in our opinion, put our subsequent State Heritage Listing application in a disadvantaged position, which we had no control over.

There do not appear to be many staff on the ground at Heritage Victoria to properly assess and assist with applications. We waited over 18 months for our application even to be considered. The delay put the site in peril of ongoing unsympathetic development.

After a successful listing, there is no further framework on how to progress. When Council remains uncooperative, and owns the site, they can and in Benalla's case, DO obstruct the heritage management of the site.

Box Hill Historical Society

Political interference in due process, where wealthy land owners lobby Councillors to reject recommendations of expert Panel. And where the Planning Minister can withdraw a heritage overlay put in place by his own department, as Minister Wynne did in the case of the Burvale Hotel. It had previously been listed as being of possible State significance, and was strongly recommended for local protection by an expert Panel, but the Minister withdrew the overlay.

Local real estate agents claiming huge loss of value of properties if they are placed in a heritage overlay, and owners using those claims to influence Councillors to reject an overlay, even though an independent panel has recommended it.

Castlemaine Historical Society Inc.

Heritage studies are out of date. There is no Heritage Victoria Advisor to impart information when a property owner requires help. If HV supply a Heritage Adviser for local councils, there is only a limited time commitment, due to the time constraints of those officers. Local government staff are not always available, or work part time. The council do not have another officer to answer questions when that officer is

unavailable. The council do not advise their rate payers of any staff changes, which means the public do not know who to contact when they need advice.

Essendon Historical Society

The recording and protection of local heritage is reliant on volunteer labour, and this is often only a few people. Also sometimes good intentions are not supported or matched with expertise or knowledge.

The protection of each heritage building needs to be formalised and the task assigned with appropriate resourcing to State or local government.

The VCAT tribunal has too much power and overrules local governments in their efforts to protect heritage. Beautiful homes being bulldozed, suburbs losing their attractive, historic features.

There is not a systematic approach to recording existing local history. This is especially important in established areas, which are now facing enormous development projects and the associated demolition of heritage properties.

Heidelberg Historical Society

Demolition can occur without any prior notification. For example, Ivanhoe residents were appalled when 'Awaba' was demolished suddenly and without any notification. Shopping centres are particularly at risk. Heritage protection seems to be swept aside when there is substantial money at stake. There is often a mismatch between State Govt desire for higher density development, and the maintenance of the 'feel' of a shopping centre, particularly those that encapsulate a period in time e.g. Eaglemont Shopping Centre, or The Mall.

Often buildings have protection, but the gardens surrounding them do not. The emphasis on the building itself, without consideration of the landscape and sightlines around a significant building, opens the door to inappropriate development.

Horsham Historical Society Inc.

State Government should have forced the Horsham Rural City Council to complete the heritage study 10 years ago.

Murchison & District Historical Society Inc.

Despite best efforts, LGA decisions on heritage protection are often over-ruled by state bodies.

Sandringham & District Historical Society Inc.

The weaknesses in the system include but are not limited to:

- there is no requirement for local councils to use an independent planning panel to decide whether recommendations from a heritage study to introduce Heritage Overlays, be implemented into the planning scheme.
- not many places are protected with an HO in the City of Bayside compared with other Melbourne suburbs.
- very few post-1940s places are protected in Bayside although there is a good study by Simon Reeves called the City of Bayside Inter War and Post War Heritage Study commissioned by Bayside Council.
- Too much focus on the stories of the heritage places (which do not protect them) at the expense of planning controls, which do protect them.

- The Planning Minister can and does override local communities and councils. This power was brought in by the Kennett Government and has been retained by all State Governments since.

Upper Murray Historical Society Inc.

The reliance on Local Government initiation, and the lack of funding for them to apply it to relevant projects that are worthy of preservation and highlighted by the Upper Murray Historical Society.

No community engagement to discuss relevant heritage items, particularly when owned by government departments.

Yackandandah and District Historical Society

Action, knowledge, communication, staff reliability, even rhetoric is thin on the ground. Despite being called the Historic Towns Shire, heritage is seldom mentioned within the current focus on development, tourism and local consultations. Movement of council staff, and changes of structures are difficult to work with.

Yarrawonga Mulwala Historical Society Inc.

The unreasonable delays in considering sites for protection. An application for listing of Yarrawonga's weighbridge which was the 4th steel weighbridge built for Victorian Railways and their first 'Cart weighbridge', has been in 'the pipeline' since 2015.

Correspondence on the matter remains unanswered. In the meantime the site is subject to vandalism. An answer in the affirmative or negative would enable our Society to take action.

Local Government Heritage Overlays give some protection unless it is they who wish to demolish the heritage building.

An important concern was ageing organisations, lack of volunteers and volunteer burn-out; some societies, especially in regional areas, feel that they are the only source of knowledge or protection for local heritage and that heritage will not be protected once they are gone.

Harrietville Historical Society

Ageing of volunteers and lack of effective programs and support to engage younger people especially children and the changing demographics and population mix that has little connection to existing local heritage.

Nillumbik Shire Council on behalf of 13 local history groups

Ageing population. Limited succession planning. Limited knowledge of some local history groups to properly understand heritage practice and implications. Lack of understanding of heritage and planning regulations, their context/rationale and implications.

Wangaratta Historical Society

There are so few volunteers, most elderly, not really computer literate and getting burnt out. Difficulty of recruiting new volunteers. It's just assumed they will continue with few resources that are held together with tape and blue tack. Local government have few resources to contribute to local heritage.

Some responses are cries of despair:

Avoca & District Historical Society Inc.

The main weakness is that there appears to be no "current system".

Friends of Will Will Rook Pioneer Cemetery Inc.

Major weakness is the government does not seem to take our heritage seriously. Far too much has been lost.

There was a distinct impression that the heritage protections in place were not offering any reassurance of actual protection for local heritage, that the current system did not recognise/protect the surrounding environment or the intangible 'feel' of a place and that the financial value of the site would trump heritage protection.

Balwyn Historical Society

Easy to overturn and ignore. Far too many valid heritage overlay applications are ignored, it is far too easy to overturn a heritage overlay and get rid of a building. The whole system is clunky, time consuming and leaves far too many gaps.

4. What opportunities do you think exist to improve the current system for local heritage?

99 responses

Responses to this question were broad ranging. Generally, they are the obverse of responses to question 3.

23 responses called for increased funding:

Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society Inc.

Greater support and funding provided to the local governments/local history/heritage organisations to:

- carryout heritage studies
- establish and support Heritage Advisory Committees
- implement necessary changes to By-Laws to protect identified sites/structures
- run local Heritage festivals
- support the establishment of local heritage tourism
- develop sustainable communities that re-purpose heritage structures and sites rather than demolish.

Flinders District Historical Society

Expanded local history grant programs; Improved information sharing and systems coordination; Training programs for volunteers.

Friends of the Collins Settlement

Re-introduction by the State Government of financially assisting Councils to employ services of a Heritage Advisor.

Inverleigh Historical Society

Money. Why can't some of the pokie money be redirected from sport to history maintenance?

Victoria-wide signage scheme for easier recognition of significant places.
Continued work on updating the heritage data base.

Education for councillors and shire staff about the concept of heritage and knowledge of how this relates to each town and area within the shire would be invaluable. It could enable councillors to resist developers calling for close settlement in areas which have a village heritage and a farming and natural heritage. It could prevent them investing a large amount of money in streetscape planning that does not address the heritage of the community.

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.

Allocate much more State Government funding to heritage: be it updating the inaccurate information in State and Local Government databases (for example, overlay mapping errors), heritage studies, heritage advisory services, grants or loan schemes, interpretation, education or whatever. Everyone reaps the benefits of heritage conservation; heritage is after all a public good.

Merrigum Historical Society

Some well-advertised and publicised state government grants for the protection and conservation of local heritage places: the Living Heritage grants are fine, but don't help conserve locally listed places.

Possibly a statewide program of grants, based on municipalities, with the aim of publicising the range of local heritage places. Bega (NSW) Shire's online and printed publication 'Hidden Heritage: 101 Hidden Places Revealed' is a great example. (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qDjPvH7vsnnh-lv54ueZ_X56ATh9RDOn/view).

I'm sure there are many others, but I have run out of time.

Newstead & District Historical Society

Funding of the revision and updating of heritage studies to include statements of significance for all historic buildings, places, precincts and items. Also funding for additional heritage advisory and related services along with assistance for restoration projects. The Living Heritage Grants Program needs to have further funding to provide more opportunities for local communities to apply for much needed money for restoration projects. There is a drawback with this program that local government prioritises their list of heritage buildings, that they apply for funding via this program and this does not necessarily align with local community aspirations or to the detriment of some buildings missing out on much needed works and left in an unsafe manner. There also needs to be support for local government to have heritage advisory committees as a normal part of heritage protection and help raise the community understanding of heritage.

Numurkah & District Historical Society

More information about the current system for local heritage needs to be supplied to our society to be able to answer this question. A brief response, however, is that grants for small volunteer organisations such as our Historical Society would enable us for instance to run special events, create more publications, purchase equipment to enhance and preserve our collection, and to display it using improved technology. We do not seem to attract grants very easily and they could enhance our work if we were able to have some grant money allocated. Otherwise, it is up to our society to fundraise in order to undertake any of the work which we set out in our goals.

Many respondents ask, in various forms, for a state mechanism to ensure that local heritage studies are completed and applied (such responses often overlap with requests for funding):

Benalla Migrant Camp Inc.

Whether there are Conservation Management Plans for key sites and how these plans are implemented needs to become part of resident satisfaction surveys for council services. Local Government needs to undergo a review covering cultural heritage and how they manage it.

Box Hill Historical Society

Federal and/or State funding for Councils to undertake detailed heritage studies, and for owners, such as volunteer run groups, to restore or maintain the buildings.

Currently it is only buildings/sites that are of national significance that can apply for Federal funding, yet most are of either local or State significance.

Donation reform, as in NSW, where developers cannot give money to political candidates, whether at the LG, State or Federal level.

Castlemaine Historical Society Inc.

There needs to be more information available in the public domain. The public needs to be informed of what the various overlays mean. Information could be disseminated by the local press, through historical societies and heritage organisations. As overlays, or regulations are updated or changed, the public needs to be advised.

Coburg Historical Society

The identification and conservation of Victorian heritage significant buildings and structures should be of primary importance in planning and development in our state and this should be stated in our Planning Schemes. Conversely breaches of planning heritage laws and regulations should attract very heavy fines.

A well-resourced, wide-reaching and sustained built fabric heritage importance information campaign.

Glen Eira Historical Society

More regular heritage assessments to be completed by local council, i.e. every 5–10 years, not 20 years plus, which has been the case in Glen Eira and has led to the loss of many heritage buildings.

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre Inc.

There should be a routine (say every three years) public display/audit of the municipal heritage overlay. Standard curatorial practice in museums is a periodical audit of the collection ... this practice could be extended to an audit of a community's heritage properties against the municipal overlay.

Horsham Historical Society Inc.

The full study of the Horsham Rural City should be completed to save what little is left.

Kinglake Historical Society

Updating the Murrindindi Shire Heritage report and better consultation with the community

Lilydale & District Historical Society.

Have a complete review of the existing heritage overlays to protect our precious heritage. Last major review was in the 1970s.

Wandong History Group Inc.

That council have a more robust system for ensuring local heritage is maintained, that sales of buildings within the heritage areas are monitored for possible changes and that planning permits are sought for all work where a building is listed within the planning scheme. Also our group and other like ours within the shire be consulted on a more regular basis, most of the council employees do not have the same appreciation of the heritage or realize the importance of the area they are dealing with.

Other societies make similar suggestions but single out reform of VCAT and/or penalties for developers:

Eltham District Historical Society

Increase penalties relative to potential profits by developers.

Hotham History Project

Give heritage a higher priority in the planning system hierarchy.

There is a widespread perception within the community that VCAT decisions are biased against heritage and in favour of developers. This needs to be rectified if communities are going to have faith in the current system for local heritage.

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.

Reform VCAT to ensure it is limited to reviewing decisions rather than setting policy. Mandate prescriptive controls for places of high-level significance, with clear decision criteria.

Require a heritage impact statement for development work on properties under Heritage Overlay.

Malvern Historical Society

More transparency needed. More publicity of what is going before VCAT, at Council level. More transparency with what private planners are doing at Council and State level. More public sharing of outcomes so that the individuals, neighbourhoods, suburbs, whole of Victoria senses of community are built up. Local communities lack a sense that they can trust VCAT.

Several societies called for improvement of the Victorian Heritage Database and some societies suggested its consolidation to cover both state and local heritage. In some cases this was the only or main preoccupation:

Sandringham & District Historical Society Inc.

A dramatic improvement in the VHD so that the search function works a lot better and all heritage places in all councils are included, instead of the ad hoc approach.

In a number of other cases, consolidation of the Victorian Heritage Database was one of a number of preoccupations:

Malmsbury Historical Society

- South Australia has a single heritage website that shows all State and Local heritage in one place with detailed information. Can Victoria have the same?
- A system is needed which supports and encourages local history, instead of seeing it as somehow separate from State history. We need history to help us understand our heritage sites, but too much funding, academic writing, and assessment of significance is about supporting "big" State issues, but many people identify with a locality rather than the whole state. The lack of detailed local studies helps to undermine the importance of local communities and their heritage.
- Historical Societies are often asked to support a Council's moves to add sites to an overlay, but such groups can be underfunded, under resourced, or have inadequate skills to generate the type of work required, or alternatively they are ignored and the resulting significance assessments are a poor reflection of the real world. A

well-funded scheme to improve the skills on heritage research and ensure resources are available would help. Making sure Councils comply with the Public Records Act and ensure old archives are lodged with the PROV for public access is a vital step.

- Update the VHR with statements of significance that include why these sites are important to our State AND to the local community. Make it clear that we are moving away from celebrating the "minority" that were "great and good" and now acknowledging that it takes all of us (past and present) to make a great State.
- Councils choose which heritage professionals will be engaged to undertake studies. The locals have no say in the matter but often have to live with the consequences of the results of such studies, especially when under-funding also results in under-researching.

A number of societies sought greater involvement in local planning and heritage:

Colac & District Historical Society

A community advisory committee including local historical societies who know something of the history of the area. Planning departments tend to hide behind the recommendations of heritage officers, are inflexible, and will not provide advice until a planning application is lodged and paid for.

A number of societies singled out the problem of heritage consultants, sometimes singly and more often in conjunction with funding (see above):

Balwyn Historical Society

Streamline the system, ensure that heritage consultants employed by local councils know their job and do it well and make powerful arguments for heritage.

One society suggested:

Springvale & District Historical Society Inc.

More consultation with the ethnic community by getting them involved in any facet of the council.

5. What do you think are the future threats to the current system for local heritage?

111 responses

This question elicited a large number of strong responses concerning future threats. Many of these also cited weaknesses in the current system. To a large extent, this question elicited similar responses to that of weaknesses (Question 3). The most common response is lack of support from local councils. Next come lack of funding on the one hand and ageing volunteer population on the other, each cited in at least 17 responses. Funding, however, underpins at least as many others, implicitly if not explicitly.

Concern about the lack of support from local councils is common and explicit. These responses are only a few of those that complain about their local government:

Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society Inc.

The main problem appears to be that the local government (shire) has limited capacity and funds—yet is responsible for the vast majority of the heritage sites/structure (those with only local significance).

Benalla Historical Society

The make-up of the City Council can be a threat if the councillors or council officers have little or no interest in the local heritage. As councils change personnel, this situation can change dramatically, either for the better or, as often as not, for the worse.

Lilydale & District Historical Society

Properties which should be protected aren't because council doesn't want to spend money on proper heritage overlays.

Romsey & Lancefield Districts Historical Society Inc.

Local councils who apply heritage overlays in an *ad hoc* manner. Council departments who do not liaise. Councils who use heritage consultants who do not undertake heritage assessments adequately.

Sometimes this concern is expressed in terms of specific local issues. An interesting variation is the preservation of industrial assets:

Moe & District Historical Society

Difficulty of defending heritage issues in the community where there is limited support and or knowledge. Lack of understanding of what constitutes heritage—what do you do with a defunct power station that has an important history but would cost millions to remove asbestos and maintain as a heritage building?

Several societies complained of lack of support for heritage outside the region's major town:

Red Cliffs & District Historical Society

Lack of understanding and support from MRCC. While Mildura was developed by the Chaffey brothers from the 1880s and has a Victorian Heritage focus, Red Cliffs was developed much later in the 1920s and needs a different focus. MRCC is Mildura Centric and we fear our differences will not be recognised or supported.

Development and agricultural change has altered the landscape dramatically in the last decade and consequently much of our history is lost. We can only be hopeful that MRCC planning and vision includes consultation with our town groups and acceptance by their Heritage advisor of our different and unique history and era.

Wyuna History Group Inc.

Unwillingness of rural Shires to look outside their main towns, despite their obligation to provide service to all citizens and communities within the shire. Lack of funding. Lack of willingness to investigate alternative options of heritage preservation—e.g. working with other organisations (CFA, etc).

A variation on this theme suggests that historical societies and councils are not working effectively together because of lack of council recognition of the societies' potential contributions:

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre Inc.

There is little or no recognition of the role of local history groups in maintaining vigilance. Groups that are RHSV affiliates should have some official status as a participant in the permit processes.

Lack of communication by Shire officials to Heritage Groups will provide opportunities for decisions of expedience rather than fully informed decisions by the local authority. Municipal councillors are not always fully informed on heritage. We feel that the concept of 'neighbourhood character' has never been fully developed or enforced, yet it is a critical value in the locality.

Horsham Historical Society Inc.

Development in regional towns is a threat as there is no heritage overlay.

Another variation suggests concern about the control developers may exercise over local councils:

Balwyn Historical Society

Developers. developers, developers! Investors and house holders with no appreciation of heritage, no sense of history.

Carlton Community History Group

The fact that in most cases there is more money to be made by demolishing or facading a heritage building, and for example building apartments, than by retaining or renovating it. The only countering force to this commercial pressure is community sentiment, manifested by local groups who are vocal enough, well organised enough, and politically skilful enough to have an impact on elected officials (and through them also on the officials in their departments). When it comes down to basics, the only countering force to developers set on making money is the power of a concerned

citizenry to demonstrate to elected decision-makers that not protecting the heritage that people value is politically risky and could result in them losing office. Commercial power has to be met by the political power of concerned citizens.

Hastings-Western Port Historical Society Inc.

Developers look for properties to build structures that, when sold, will increase profits for them. They are quite professional and have high profile promotional strategies. Often people do not place on their profiles when standing for public office like a Councillor or politician their view and values regarding local heritage. There should be more transparency.

Hotham History Project Inc.

Increased development is putting additional pressure on heritage controls, which are often in urgent need of revision and updating. Councils have limited resources to commission new heritage studies especially as some owners and developers delay the already lengthy planning scheme amendment process.

Ringwood & District Historical Society

Massive threats, especially in our city of Ringwood, where development has destroyed the majority of heritage places.

Wandong History Group Inc.

The rush to urbanise local areas is already affecting the local heritage of our area, development pressure is causing the local council to ignore heritage matters or downplay them in the rush to build over areas that have not been properly investigated.

Lack of state government support or indeed harmful intervention by state agencies is an equally common complaint:

Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc.

Cutting of staff in State Departments

Bunyong and District Historical Society

As with last answer, greatest threat to Ballarat's intact architectural heritage is permitting high rise buildings above the current heights of no more than three stories. Biggest threat is in fact the State Government being able to over-ride local planning scheme for State government developments—e.g. Hospital, new GovHub building in Mair Street, which is five stories. I also think that Heritage Victoria poses a threat in its reluctance to take into consideration surrounding heritage precincts and how they will be impacted by a development. We had the dreadful example of Heritage Victoria finding no objection to a five-storey apartment development at the Ballarat Railway Station, which will change the whole streetscape of the surrounding residential area.

Linton and District Historical Society

Lack of community awareness. The Heritage Council's narrow guidelines & their focus on city heritage rather than knowledge of heritage issues in the countryside.

In several cases, lack of support is cited without regard to level of government:

Queenscliffe Historical Museum

Fundamentally, a statewide lack of Government support/encouragement.

Lack of support is often cited in conjunction with inadequate funding/staff in heritage protection:

Ballan Shire Historical Society Inc.

Lack of experienced, well-qualified Heritage Advisors who are employed by Councils. Councils are beset on all sides and need a Heritage Advisor to support them and help them hold the line in retaining a community's story/stories and heritage.

The problem of VCAT and its perceived ability to override heritage protection is another frequent complaint:

Glen Eira Historical Society

Grass roots groups protesting high rise developments in heritage areas need to obtain large sums of money to go up against developers at VCAT. People usually don't want to pay or can't afford to and also don't have the time. It's hard for the average person to compete against multi-nationals.

Malvern Historical Society

Format of present VCAT. More transparency needed. More publicity of what is going before VCAT, at local and council level. More public sharing of outcomes. Local communities lack a sense that they can trust VCAT. Councils not having enough of a degree of autonomy with planning in regard to heritage.

City of Moorabbin Historical Society

It is very expensive and time consuming to contest propositions by large developers and multinational organisations at VCAT. Hence many significant properties are lost for future generations to experience and be inspired.

Sebastopol Historical Society Inc.

VCAT appeals easily overrule heritage overlays and protective planning decisions.

Often in responses, many of the factors discussed above are cited together in the one response:

Castlemaine Historical Society Inc.

Upkeep of properties, whether privately owned, state or nationally owned, is a burden. Properties are often under threat by neglect. A major issue in city or rural areas is development. DDOs are becoming a vital issue. Heritage overlays are being undermined by the pressing need for development. When there is an issue, it can be taken to VCAT, [a process] which imposes a financial burden on councils or property owners.

Coburg Historical Society

Presently heritage is not considered of upmost importance in the Statutory Planning assessment process. This could get worse if tertiary planning courses do not address this and state and local governments do not value heritage buildings and or assign appropriate funding and resources to it. Statutory Planners know little about heritage matters and are not encouraged to learn and it is not a mandatory part of their planning courses. VCAT members sometimes do not know much about heritage and do not consider it as important as the owner/developer's potential economic loss in their decisions. This should be changed which would require an amendment to the planning and heritage laws.

- If economic loss to an owner/developer continues to be more important than the heritage of a building or structure, more of our heritage fabric will be lost.
- Where Councils employ Heritage Advisors, some know little about the history of the municipality, or Melbourne or Victorian history, as they are heritage architects and not historians.
- Continuing lack of funding for the State Heritage Council and Heritage Victoria.
- Planning Minister (who facilitates development) continues to be the Heritage Victoria (who conserves and protects heritage built form) Minister, which can be an unacceptable conflict of interest.
- Historical society members generally remain ignorant of and uninterested in heritage building protection and conservation.

Sandringham & District Historical Society Inc.

- a. Vulnerability of local councillors dependent on local votes for their position, resulting in, e.g., making heritage status voluntary for owners.
- b. Ignorance, generally, about mid-century and modern architecture.
- c. The heritage precincts are being aggressively eroded by ignoring the importance of the 'setting', and allowing precincts to be dominated by modern buildings of any design or height so long as it cannot be mistaken for a heritage place. This approach assumes the latter issue is more important than the setting—e.g. allowing 4–5 storeys just a few metres behind places in precincts of single and two storey heights.
- d. The Heritage Overlay needs to have mandatory height controls available as a planning tool and not rely on DDOs providing this tool.
- e. Heritage advisors are being appointed by local councils who have little or no training in architecture, design, architectural history, building construction history, or building. There are horticulturists, landscape architects, planners and archaeologists assessing planning applications for works to historic buildings, all over the State. This lack of expertise and quality control has accelerated since the State Government stopped subsidising the local councils heritage advisory services and Heritage Victoria lost funding for the coordinator. There is no quality control of who is appointed and their qualifications and experience, and the community are receiving contradictory advice, especially when the advisor is changed.

One society cited the problem of climate change:

Apollo Bay & District Historical Society

Allowing over-development of land. Lack of understanding of the impact of climate change on parts of the coast and countryside. This is a particular threat to the Great Ocean Road.

Finally, several responses cited the uncertain future of volunteer societies, a problem often linked to other issues as above. This was most commonly phrased as lack of young people or ageing population:

Colbinabbin & District Historical Society

Dying population

Essendon Historical Society

The number of people agreeing to do voluntary work appears to be diminishing. It is difficult to obtain office bearers in historical societies. The costs of protecting heritage are increasing. Compliance and legal costs have increased. Developers are better resourced than historical societies! Governments are too slow to act when heritage is under threat. Penalties are too low for breaches of the law.

VCAT overrules local decisions re properties and building projects.

<p>6. Do you have any comments about the interaction between the heritage system at the State and local government levels?</p>

106 responses

Once again, responses to this question overlap with those to the previous questions, especially weaknesses, opportunities for improvement and future threats. The responses varied from comments that the interaction within the heritage system between state and local government seemed *ad hoc*, poorly communicated and slow. The responses are almost unanimous in arguing, at times forcefully, that state and local heritage don't work well together and are, at times, even at odds with each other.

Before passing on to the flood tide of negative responses, it is therefore worthwhile to cite one positive response to this question:

Friends of the Collins Settlement

The state body of Heritage Victoria is a great resource body with excellent heritage credentials. Local Government has proven itself to nurture and appreciate the heritage values of its domain.

The remainder of the analysis of this question is necessarily devoted to negative responses, which constitute the overwhelming majority, beginning with the most general:

Apollo Bay & District Historical Society

There is no forward planning or consensus between roles and responsibilities of both governments (plus Federal Government) on any sort of heritage system. This particularly impacts on funding allocations.

Separate heritage listings by both local and state government are not consistent, which can impact on planning decisions.

Essendon Historical Society

The interaction appears to be *ad hoc*. The State government has the upper hand and local government decisions are overruled.

If the State Govt has appointed a historical society as the Committee of Management of a property on Crown Land, then the local government has no responsibility and does not provide financial support unless a special arrangement (e.g. licence) can be negotiated. Hence it is left to the volunteer society to finance and maintain the building even if it is on the State Heritage list—this even includes payment of insurance!

There has been little communication between DELWP (Crown Lands Dept) and our Committee of Management about the courthouse building prior to the fire. We are very grateful that the State Govt. through Heritage Victoria has provided the finance to restore the building.

Flinders District Historical Society

Interaction is most evident through the Planning Scheme and the operation of Heritage Overlays. There is urgent need for the completion of the Mornington Peninsula Heritage Review as a basis for the assessment of listed places [that are the]

subject of planning applications. This review has been in progress for years and appears to languish for funding commitment from Council and the State sources.

Hotham History Project

Heritage protection is still dependent on the attitude to heritage of the Minister for Planning at the time. Developers often design projects over a certain size so that they bypass local councils and go direct to the minister for approval.

Katandra and District History Group Inc.

Each local government municipality should have a Heritage Adviser State funded and available for free community access each week. This person also would be available to guide Council staff and provide planning expertise in a timely manner and have the ability to travel out to consult and inspect places when required. This professional would be an excellent resource to guide and provide advice to local Historical groups and societies.

Greater Shepparton City Council has a Heritage Advisory Committee with several roles including advising Council on cultural heritage and conservation matters across the municipality and making recommendations about further work required to conserve, identify, document and promote Greater Shepparton's cultural heritage. Each of the ten local Historical Groups and Societies have a member on this Committee. This is a means of linking each Historical Group into a Committee, which has knowledge and awareness about wider issues than in a small local area. Greater Shepparton Council is currently developing a Heritage Strategy for the next five years, in collaboration with the Heritage Advisory Committee, and aim to undertake some scoping studies which will involve engagement with the historical groups in the municipality, and as an outcome provide resources and support capacity building for them.

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.

Insufficient weight is given to local considerations, and/or local planning officers have insufficient expertise to interpret, review and formulate appropriate planning policy.

Planning permits for work on VHR places may not take into account local guidelines, and it is unclear which agency is in charge of ensuring work meets permit conditions. Where possible VCAT's role should be restricted to reviewing cases, with issues to be resolved referred back to local Councils.

Sale Historical Society

Existence of local overlays and underfunding/understaffing of State authority means places on Heritage Overlays are given reduced priority for assessment for inclusion on State Register. This is fine in theory, but because of lack of uniformity across different Local Government Authorities, it means the system does not provide equal protection across the state. It also means places of potential state significance are not eligible for Heritage Funding (only available for State-listed places).

Sebastopol Historical Society Inc.

Local Government heritage measures are superficial, local Council will not take responsibility for a major heritage site. There has been no interaction at any level (with regard to) that I am aware of, disgusting and counter productive.

Several complaints about lack of interaction between state and local government focused on the state, some explicitly on instrumentalities, including the Heritage Council, Heritage Victoria, the Ministry of Planning or VicRoads:

Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc.

Yes. We put in a VicSmart application to the Bayside Council Planning Department for approval to do repairs to the top of the hitching post. The top of the historic wooden post was severely burnt by the use of the top by Marine Hotel patrons as an ash tray for their cigarettes. The Council delayed our application by weeks because the Council saw that the hitching post was listed on the website of the Victorian Heritage Council and maintained that we had to go through them which was not the case at all. (See above, and <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/64565>)

Benalla Migrant Camp Inc.

Yes our local Council does not talk Heritage Victoria up, to say the least. Heritage Victoria would do better if every local government had to appoint one heritage champion Councillor who would be approachable by both them, and the community. No-one is in that space at the moment, and this should be changed to improve the system.

Berwick Pakenham Historical Society

The state Heritage does not always assist the local area—e.g. if there is a similar building elsewhere in the state the state heritage will not list the building to save it. Pakenham Scout Hall was in danger of being demolished, but Heritage Victoria would not list it. It is still there but I don't know if the threat still exists.

Box Hill Historical Society

State government introduced rate capping on Councils several years ago; this severely reduces the chance of future heritage studies being funded by LG, so State government must supply the funds. An increase in fines for offenders is overdue.

Colac & District Historical Society

The State departments are seen to often totally ignore heritage if they want something done. We have a current example of this with VicRoads.

Council officers use State regulation to justify their decision when a local compromise could be a better solution.

Harrieville Historical Society

No because we're not seeing a great deal of evidence of it here ... but we are tiny. We are seeing some branches of government actively working against heritage because they are privileging tourism and economics over heritage and engagement values. Always a tricky balance.

Horsham Historical Society

The State has not funded the stages of the heritage overlay, [thus] allowing Horsham Rural City Council to allow development despite heritage values.

Knox Historical Society

Local government is under pressure from state governments to process sales quickly. Little consultation. Hard cases go to VCAT. Councils sit too long so the tribunal or Member makes decision.

Malmsbury Historical Society

While a ranking system is essential, the way in which Local heritage is seen as second-best, and has a separate online-presence to the VHR, does little to improve the understanding of the two key levels of heritage significance.

Merrigum Historical Society

HC and HV seem to look down on local heritage, to value it much less than State listed places. As was memorably written in a NSW heritage document:
'Local heritage makes the greatest contribution to forming our living historic environment, more so than the small number of outstanding items of state, national or world significance. Greater than the sum of its parts, the varied collection of local heritage in an area enriches its character and gives identity to a neighbourhood, region or town in a way that cannot be reproduced. Local heritage is often what makes an area distinctive in the long term, even if the heritage features were once in a neglected state or considered unremarkable ...'

(Heritage Council of NSW, Levels of Heritage Significance, 2008)

City of Moorabbin Historical Society

If a significant site has been assessed and then rejected for the State Heritage register, Local Council must be made to protect it with a local heritage overlay.

Sandringham & District Historical Society Inc.

- a. Tends to set state versus local governments when an application is made to the state.
- b. Dangerous delay of about 2 years when an application made to state.
- c. Heritage Victoria has little experience about how precincts are formed and how to manage them, yet they make decisions about single sites in their control but within a local government precinct. This is unfair to most of the owners who may be told something completely different by the local council than the owner of the State Registered site.

Wangaratta Historical Society

They don't seem to work together very well from my viewpoint. State seems to trickle a little money to the local government area at election time. If more could come regularly for planned preservation projects rather than an ad hoc basis it would work better.

Some of the responses focusing on state instrumentalities betray uncertainty about the hierarchies involved:

Coburg Historical Society

The interaction between the heritage system at the State and local government levels is not well understood by planning or architecture professionals as well as the public, including local Historical Society members. Traditionally in planning if there was state registration as well as LG overlay on a building/structure, Heritage Victoria

would have jurisdiction and a Local Government was asked to comment and a planning officer could send (not must send) a comment sometimes with feedback from a Council Heritage Advisor but not from the Councillors.

The interaction between the heritage system at State and local government levels is very confusing for residents and Historical Society members. Who has control and what is protected by whom, when State-registered buildings or structures are within a larger local area heritage overlay?

Heritage Victoria should be working more closely with local councils to ensure heritage protection and advise them on heritage obligations. The Heritage Act explicitly states that the Heritage Council has a role in advising local councils but we have not seen any evidence of this occurring with Moreland City Council.

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre Inc.

The status of a Heritage Victoria Permit or Permit Exemption vis-a-vis the status of a Municipal permit for the same works is a bit of a mystery. Does the HV permit override council's?

Other complaints focused more on local government, sometimes highlighting specific problems such as staffing or calling on the state to put greater demands on local government in regard to heritage:

Newstead & District Historical Society

There are issues with how the various heritage frameworks are implemented at both a state and local government level. This is partly due to the rapid turnover of planning staff at a local government level where you may start dealing with one person and they move onto another position (usually at another government area) and then you have to start again with another person with valuable time being lost. There also needs to be a streamlined process in the implementation of heritage studies from the start of the project through to implementation of a planning scheme amendment.

Richmond and Burnley Historical Society

The system currently is not consistent and allows for a wide range of discretion in heritage outcomes across LGAs. Some Municipalities have stronger heritage controls than others, despite having similar heritage assets in their respective Municipalities. There needs to be a standardised set of parameters and expectations laid down by HV, so that each Municipality's documentation is comparable in content and extent.

Wandong History Group Inc.

While the local council as the implementer of the local laws and heritage have some understanding of the requirements around heritage, the gap between understanding and action appears to be great.

Some societies expressed the feeling that they were underutilised and under-appreciated as sources of local knowledge and advocates for local heritage:

Gisborne & Mount Macedon Districts Historical Society Inc

The communication for the most recent heritage study in the Macedon Ranges was extremely poor, we were advised that our society had to give free access to Rate Books that were then held by our Society. No other information or photographs were

sought from our collection, because the consultants were not willing to pay a research and copying fee for access to our collection.

Lilydale & District Historical Society

When listing our Cave Hill property on the state register the council and society worked side by side to get the application through. Societies are an under-utilized resource, which our council is loathe to use.

7. Do you have any suggestions as to how the community understanding of the State and local heritage systems could be improved?

89 responses

Over half of the responses (48) commented on the need for better information and communication of the heritage system particularly on how various responsibilities interact. Most agreed that better information and communication were necessary to promote the preservation of heritage.

The most frequent suggestions concerned educating the community on their rights to be consulted in the planning process and promoting and supporting community history/heritage groups/organisations:

Coburg Historical Society

Mandate local governments to list heritage permits for state-registered buildings and structures and those in local heritage overlays in their local newspaper pages or advertise to those living nearby as well as interested local groups like Historical Societies,

Provide heritage training for VCAT members, Local Government statutory planners and consultants as well as the public (including local Historical Society members) via free workshops. Run ads in the media, on trams/trains about the importance of heritage buildings to Melbourne for tourism, and state government to give more education and financial support to organisations educating the public on history and developing their appreciation of our history. Provide knowledgeable, accomplished public speakers on the topic of the value of heritage buildings and how to protect and conserve heritage buildings as guest speakers at RHSV, and local Historical Societies as well as in other Melbourne forums.

History Monash Inc.

It might sound crazy but a regular spot on 774 or 3RRR would work to get your message out. Also perhaps a local history conference every 3 years of all the societies.

Hotham History Project Inc.

More and better education provided to residents in urban conservation areas about the importance and value of heritage e.g. an updated version of the excellent City of Melbourne publication: "Urban Conservation Areas: Guidelines for Owners", which was distributed to residents throughout the Melbourne municipality in the 1980s. Also an online version.

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.

The community needs to be regularly reminded about heritage, what it is, and the many reasons why it is important to preserve it. Develop clear, respectful channels of communication between State and Local Government departments, and local heritage advocates and organisations to ensure information can be effectively disseminated at the community level. Suggested activities include region/place specific roadshows, local heritage award schemes, general visible support from government for the benefits of heritage, development of appropriate online presence. It seems that no-one wants to utter the 'H' word.

Malvern Historical Society

More respect at all levels of Government and VCAT for the place of local history and what makes a local neighbourhood and a local community, so that the planned developments are appropriate.

Newstead & District Historical Society

Community awareness programs to help generate interest in the benefits of heritage. This could take the form of talks, information sessions, excursions etc., similar to the annual heritage festival that the National Trust run or the Open House program like the 'Melbourne Open House' program that is run so that people can see how heritage buildings can play a part in modern living.

Many of the responses suggested the use of a variety of tools, including social media and media training to achieve greater awareness and understanding of the heritage systems:

Benalla Migrant Camp Inc.

Social media campaign. Training/Local Heritage Leadership Programs. Liaising better with community bodies which are already engaged with saving cultural heritage—history groups. Initiating a local government review involving whole of town heritage maps, an articulated heritage vision.

Castlemaine Historical Society Inc.

Council could disseminate information annually in rate notices for each property, identifying if the property has local significance, state of national significance. Stating which listing a property has, or under which overlay it is protected. A flow chart to indicate the process for enquires, or planning applications would assist in clarity of information. Details of what planning application is required, and if more than one, in what order they need to be obtained.

Flinders District Historical Society

Use of media programs to popularise local history and the actions being taken to record and conserve heritage places. Where appropriate increase community access and interpretation at heritage places. Better publications in the media on explaining the objectives and operation of the various layers of heritage management.

Historical Society of Mooroopna Inc.

More local signage to display stories of buildings and sites.

Wangaratta Historical Society

If planned projects could be published the community would be able to follow these on a blog or Facebook and become involved in the story, they would then have a vested interest. Stories have been told by Culture Victoria e.g. Marianne Gibson Quilt and been very successful. The people behind Daniel Andrews' Twitter Feed are really funny, emulate them and people would have a very good understanding very quickly.

A number of responses from the country commented that face-to-face engagement would be most effective in fostering better understanding:

Glenthompson Historical Group Inc.

More face-to-face interactions with Heritage groups to help them to understand what is being done by State & Local Government as well as what is available to Heritage groups and how to go about accessing what is available.

There was also a sense that educating the community would require ensuring that the community understood the weaknesses of the system so that it could then address changes needed to strengthen it:

Carlton Community History Group

What needs to be improved is community understanding of the weaknesses of the current heritage protection system. There is a wide-spread assumption being made by many that having a Heritage Overlay or other protection on it means that a building or an area is safe, when this is clearly not the case as so many recent examples have demonstrated. Community awareness of the weaknesses of the current protections might lead to some political pressure to have them strengthened.

A number of responses commented on the need to support and make use of local historical societies/history groups in any educational campaign:

Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society Inc.

Greater support/training given to community history/heritage associations/groups with objectives focused on preserving and protecting local heritage. How they all work and complement each other. Maybe some workshops would be useful.

Katandra and District History Group Inc.

In Greater Shepparton, through the Heritage Advisory Committee in collaboration with Council, the community have an understanding of local heritage systems by participating in the Heritage Open Days, the Cultural Heritage Awards, the Bruce Wilson Memorial Heritage Lecture, and the Heritage Grants.

By having a representative from the local historical societies and museums on the Heritage Advisory Committee, information about local heritage systems are fed back to the individual societies and museums by their representatives, who have the role to raise any queries at the monthly meetings.

State heritage systems need some pamphlets, online as well as paper based for those not computer literate, about its operation and involvement. Clarification about its role—funding, professional advice, training and education, rewards for excellence etc. What can the State contribute to assist local historical groups, societies and museums?

Malmsbury Historical Society

Support Historical Societies and Schools to help educate the public on history and heritage, especially at a local level with examples they can actually see and touch.

Support locals to run heritage festivals.

Using digital media to integrate historical information and statements of significance into tour guides, podcasts etc.

Maybe use National Library of Australia's TROVE website to upload all local council heritage studies in digital form for all to read?

Yackandandah and District Historical Society

Greater support and advocacy from within the local structures. Greater support for the Heritage Advisors where they exist, including increased times, accessibility and respect.

A number of responses suggested improvements to the content and access of current Council and government information and websites:

Buninyong and District Historical Society

Make council websites easy to navigate so that community can find heritage information—location of heritage precincts, heritage overlays etc.

Glen Eira Historical Society

The National Trust developed an excellent resource for heritage advocacy which could be promoted more.

Some responses called for clarification of the division of responsibilities:

Avoca & District Historical Society Inc.

Better consultation between State and Local Heritage "Systems", with outcomes of that consultation expressed in "plain English" rather than bureaucratic gobbledegook.

8. Do you have any other comments you wish to make about the current system for local heritage in Victoria?

104 responses

There was, as one would expect, a wide variety of issues raised in response to this open question.

A number of societies used this question to sum up their sentiment, usually negative, sometimes coupled with suggestions for action:

Avoca & District Historical Society Inc.

What system? We support the stance taken by the RHSV regarding the need for these matters to be discussed state-wide, rather than seeking the opinions of a select group.

Box Hill Historical Society

Boycott Murdoch's News media which has a habit of running negative stories about local government and its plans to protect certain buildings, stirring up residents who have little understanding of the process.

Essendon Historical Society

There are lots of good people involved in the local history area, but major work needed to improve communication and policy development across the levels of government, whilst still retaining the involvement of the voluntary workforce.

Linton & District Historical Society

I strongly believe that there is not enough heritage protection generally, particularly in rural Victoria, and a lack of money available to preserve heritage. Heritage buildings & places are altered, & in some cases destroyed, with impunity. Local efforts to preserve & enhance heritage are expensive & it is extremely difficult to get funds to do this. Large grants are only achievable if places are on the Victorian Heritage Register, & it is virtually impossible to get on the Register due to narrow criteria.

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.

In summary, the system often doesn't work on the ground. People are becoming disillusioned and thoroughly tired of the fight. Case by case action is neither effective nor sustainable as a long-term heritage protection strategy.

Merrigum Historical Society

The Heritage Council and Heritage Victoria possibly need to regain some of their old collective passion for the heritage they are charged to protect for all, remembering the past battles fought to gain our current system.

Rochester Historical & Pioneer Society

If there is not an improvement in the current system a lot of Victoria's Heritage will be LOST.

Several societies, in summing up their sentiment, returned to the question of local government problems with heritage issues and/or with the society's relationship with local government:

Benalla Migrant Camp Inc.

The current system dis-empowers community driven campaigns where a significant site is on Council land. We feel frustrated here in Benalla, where our group has fought a losing battle to better manage/save the former Benalla Migrant Camp and nothing happens because Council has other priorities and little interest in heritage (particularly migrant heritage). Seven years wear down the most energetic community heritage campaigners, prepared to chip in money and volunteer labour. I feel particularly in rural Victoria one cannot afford to lose this community engagement asset, and solely rely on Councils with a poor track record of heritage conservation.

Geelong Museum Association Inc.

Heritage has a low profile.

Having a Council with minimal interest in heritage and the funding of maintenance of existing heritage buildings, there needs to be more effort by councils to preserve what they have.

Some developers allow heritage buildings to decay until they get a sympathetic hearing for a development proposal.

Red Cliffs & District Historical Society

No, we are not currently well informed as the last Heritage Study for our area was completed in 1988 [Andrew Ward]. If we are represented on the Reference Group planned by MRCC we will be better informed and be able to identify some of our local heritage fixtures and sites for respect and preservation.

Yarrowonga Mulwala Historical Society

At this time a number of Yarrowonga's heritage sites are under threat from outside our community. The Local Government, based in another town, wishes to demolish the Community Hall, and, in its place, impose a modernistic building onto the iconic art deco Yarrowonga Shire Hall. At the same time they are resisting requests to negotiate with the State Government to try to obtain title to the abandoned 1880s school site which also contains heritage buildings and WW1 memorial trees. In addition the NSW and Victorian road authorities have announced that the iconic traffic bridge across Lake Mulwala will be demolished when a new bridge is built.

Local community members who care about these matters are understandably despondent because these decisions are made without taking into account the heritage values of these sites.

Some societies, in summing up their situation, outlined broad problems and proposals:

Yackandandah and District Historical Society

The current system badly needs strength, consistency overall, better funding and increased advocacy. I have read the report written by MAVic and Kitty Owens. It paints a picture of very inconsistent management of local heritage, and mostly leaves out those multitude of small organisations who are not council owned, and operate under a great variety of ownerships and responsibilities. These small museums hold a wealth of the community and social history of our state. Their overall support systems

are all outside local and state governments and yet they hold so much of the treasured stories and history, many of them in historic buildings which are not council owned. They carry a huge responsibility for keeping and telling our history, with very little support except their own commitment. The financial burden alone on them is immense. Given long term volunteerism is threatened by increasing age, they are very vulnerable. Greater local and state commitment to these organisations is a desperate need.

Many societies, though fewer than were pessimistic, cited hopeful or at least possible pathways:

Apollo Bay & District Historical Society

Recognition of the importance of preserving and protecting local cultural heritage through funding allocated to local public projects and support for private owners of heritage property.

Bendigo Historical Society

We all know Heritage is a major tourist drawcard. recognition of this resulting in action by working more closely to preserve Heritage and making it enticing, not only saves and respects our history but entertains and educates all who visit, instilling pride and beautifying our towns. Thank you.

Birchip Historical Society

Publicity and consultation and seminars etc held in country not in big regional centres only.

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre Inc.

We valued the visit of the full Heritage Council of Victoria to our district last year. These visits are good practice because, in this forum local pre-occupations and concerns can surface well before the bureaucracy identifies the potential threats, impact or, conversely, the now-to-be-valued heritage aspects of a locality.

Inverleigh Historical Society

Fun event circuit in regional areas. Work with schools. Video competitions with topic of celebrating local heritage. Maintenance and conservation that doesn't cost a fortune. Small history collections are under threat.

Mansfield Historical Society

How about a TV ad to explain what the Royal Historical Society of Victoria does, what services it provides, why it is important, how it engages the public to be "Historically Aware" and how it is the people who make and contribute to history. Publicity on radio and print media - as well as TV - in both larger and regional population centres - another side of the "think globally, act locally" strategy. How does our LGA promote active heritage participation to the 50% of its ratepayers who live in Melbourne and choose our area for "Lifestyle" reasons

Middle Park History Group

Continue to support local heritage societies with community grants to work at the grassroots level. Improve planning that supports heritage but provides for appropriate and innovative development.

Newstead & District Historical Society

There is a lack of enforcement from both state and local government in relation to heritage protection of properties that are covered by a heritage overlay when planning permits are applied for and granted, as well as infringements with non compliance with the planning permit conditions. Also there is a lack of enforcement of 'demolition by neglect' in relation to buildings that are on the state heritage register, especially in the country areas

Romsey & Lancefield Districts Historical Society Inc.

Our Society is a member of a Heritage Council. All the local Historical Societies in our local Council area are members and we meet monthly. Not sure whether this could/should be put in place in other areas.

Sale Historical Society

There has been a move to include heritage as a more significant and core consideration in overall Planning processes. This ethos should be more widely adopted at both state and local levels. Greater funding for studies, heritage staff/advisors and to develop improved education material is critical.

Sandringham & District Historical Society Inc.

Increase government funding to improve the systems that protect our heritage.
Decrease the VCAT fee for community actions to protect our heritage.
Make the permit process for HV listed sites as democratic as local government listed sites. Provide a process for the community to object and to appeal.

A number of responses commented on the fact that in cases of heritage studies or reports, outside professionals were brought in and there was not enough consultation with local experts so as a result, local communities feel misrepresented:

Gisborne & Mount Macedon Districts Historical Society Inc.

It is important that accurate studies are made and submitted to the State, for better protection of our built environment and this can only be achieved, if those with the local knowledge are used, rather than feathering the nests of outside consultants who do not have that knowledge and are not willing to support local historical groups, by paying them a fee for service provided.

Hotham History Project

The system has become the domain of heritage professionals and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the layperson to become involved.
There should be greater recognition and interaction with local subject matter experts within the community.

Lilydale & District Historical Society

Heritage is seen by many councils as a luxury we must show them what we have today was created by our past. We need to explain that to officers many of whom are only at the councils for 3 to 5 years.

St John Ambulance Historical Society

The importance of history and heritage is overwhelmed by the priority of business considerations in almost all organisations. After retirement the staff begin to understand the importance of heritage, by which time they no longer have positions of power to prevent the loss of important historical material. The education process for senior executives needs to begin before retirement.

One theme was the need for some sort of automatic trigger or state control for heritage protection to be considered:

Buninyong and District Historical Society

All properties built before 1870 should be automatically protected, so that any developer has to argue the case for demolition of a building.

Friends of Will Will Rook Pioneer Cemetery Inc.

There is not a lot of protection for our built and natural environment. It is almost impossible to get any one to reply to enquiries. I believe there must be an active minister and all local governments must adhere to stricter rules when it comes to issuing permits for demolition. Government must take seriously the rapid destruction of our heritage before it can only be viewed by pictures in a library.

Myrtleford & District Historical Society Inc.

More frequent assessment and revision of heritage listings by local government would raise the profile of our heritage.

Some responses used this question to put forward examples of other systems of heritage protection (as Malmsbury Historical Society cited the South Australian example under Question 4, above). This example raised the English model in conjunction with several other issues raised in other submissions:

Richmond and Burnley Historical Society

- a) By using the model from Historic England, who have created identification and mapping templates that can be freely accessed and utilized by members of the public. The public then complete a comprehensive property-by-property survey and submit the information to the H.E. body. This frees up H.E. resources, but at the same time gives responsibility to the public to identify and curate – through hands-on public education and involvement - the heritage resources in any given area.
- b) There needs to be a local “Heritage At Risk” register which feeds to an overarching State Register. This register could be populated by contributions from the public (perhaps via a simple survey questionnaire, entitled “My favourite old place”) and would comprise documentation on places or objects which have not been as yet placed on the VHR, or given local contributory / individually significant status, but which are liked by citizens for whatever reason and therefore could be considered potentially important, considering the rate at which historic fabric is being lost to newer developments. The register could also include details of places that are vacant or abandoned and not properly secured to prevent illicit access. As time goes by, these places deemed “At Risk” would become more important to cultural heritage, due to other places having been lost.
- c) There needs to be a heritage-specific division of professionals such as architects, engineers and consultants who ONLY work with heritage places, and not be

conflicted with performing functions of newer development designs. This would go some way to ensuring that existing heritage fabric retention is given comparable weight to modern development proposals. These professionals could be called upon to work collaboratively with designers of newer projects where heritage fabric is located, in order to incorporate all the heritage fabric rather than sacrificing the old for the new.

d) The lack of 'lost skills and trades' education. By not continuing, educating and supporting hands-on skills and trades of the past, the artisans do not proceed to higher levels of expertise. The expertise and specialist skills they may have attained are then lost, so that heritage fabric cannot be faithfully repaired or restored if needed. By dumbing down of these skills, the intactness, integrity and condition of fabric is put in jeopardy long term, often with resultant application to remove a place from the VHR, or remove its individually-significant/contributory status at the local level, once the built form becomes too expensive to maintain in good condition (unless artisans are bought in from overseas or interstate), derelict or perceived as dangerous – demolition by neglect.

One society cited its own good fortune as an example of the support that should normally be given:

Queenscliffe Historical Museum

The Queenscliffe Historical Museum, after more than a decade-long campaign to improve our crowded and outdated building, is about to undergo a major, \$5.75M upgrade. This project will combine the Library, the Visitor Information Centre and ourselves under one roof and with shared basic amenities. We welcome this long-overdue development, which heralds a new appreciation of the services we offer, from all levels of government, viz. Local, State and Federal. This at last, is the level of support to which all Heritage agencies should aspire.

One society suggested support for the RHSV:

Murchison & District Historical Society

RHSV could do with much more State Gov. support as this is a successful vehicle to provide support for local heritage, particularly at regional level.

One society raised the issue of archaeological investigation:

Buninyong and District Historical Society

I forgot to say this yesterday; the importance of determining the archeological significance of sites. Every planning approval should require that works should stop if any artefacts are found on a site.

Another society argued that heritage was irrelevant to historical societies:

Ballan Shire Historical Society Inc.

This questionnaire has been sent to Historical societies, whereas National Trust Branches would have been appropriate recipients as they are more closely involved in 'heritage' matters as such. Most Historical Societies are not involved, unlike the Trust, in physical conservation of sites. The terms 'history' and 'heritage' are being confused.

Several, however, argued that historical societies should take more interest in heritage:

Friends of Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park Inc

Heritage (physical infrastructure and stories) is being attacked by developers and conversely swooned over by Historical Societies. HS should be more involved and should know the process Planning Applications take to be more involved in protecting our Heritage.

One society used this question to contest the survey's methodology:

Kilmore Historical Society Inc.

This is not an effective survey. It is difficult to appreciate what is wanted. It would have been better to interview a sample set of historical societies.

Appendix 1: Responding Historical Societies

Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc., The
 Apollo Bay & District Historical Society
 Arapiles Historical Society
 Australian Lamplighters Guild
 Australian Lebanese Historical Society of Victoria
 Australian Society of Magicians
 Avoca & District Historical Society Inc.

Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society Inc.
 Ballan Shire Historical Society Inc.
 Balwyn Historical Society
 Benalla Historical Society
 Benalla Migrant Camp Inc.
 Bendigo Historical Society Inc.
 Berwick Pakenham Historical Society
 Birchip Historical Society Inc.
 Box Hill Historical Society
 Buninyong and District Historical Society

Carlton Community History Group
 Castlemaine Historical Society Inc.
 City of South Perth Historical Society Inc.
 Coburg Historical Society
 Colac & District Historical Society
 Colbinabbin & District Historical Society

Derrinallum & Lismore Community Association Inc. History Group
 Dookie and District Historical Society Inc.
 Echuca Historical Society Inc.
 Eltham District Historical Society
 Erica and District Historical Society Inc.
 Essendon Historical Society
 Euroa Historical & Genealogical Society

Flinders District Historical Society
 Friends of Cornish Hill
 Friends of Gallipoli
 Friends of Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park Inc.
 Friends of the Collins Settlement
 Friends of Will Will Rook Pioneer Cemetery Inc.

Geelong Maritime Museum
 Geelong Museum Association Inc.
 Gisborne & Mount Macedon Districts Historical Society Inc.
 Glen Eira Historical Society
 Glenthompson Historical Group Inc.
 Goldfields Historical & Arts Society Inc.

Harcourt Valley Heritage & Tourist Centre Inc.
 Harrietville Historical Society
 Hastings-Western Port Historical Society Inc.
 Heathcote McIvor Historical Society Inc.
 Heidelberg Historical Society
 Historical Society of Mooroopna Inc.
 History Monash Inc.
 Horsham Historical Society Inc.
 Hotham History Project Inc.

Inverleigh Historical Society

Katandra and District History Group Inc.
 Keilor Historical Society Inc.
 Kerang Historical History Inc.
 Kiewa Valley Historical Society
 Kilmore Historical Society Inc.
 Kinglake Historical Society
 Knox Historical Society

Learmonth and District Historical Society Inc.
 Leongatha Historical Society
 Lilydale & District Historical Society
 Linton and District Historical Society

Maldon Museum & Archives Association Inc.
 Malmsbury Historical Society
 Malvern Historical Society
 Mansfield Historical Society
 Marysville & District Historical Society
 Merrigum Historical Society
 Middle Park History Group
 Moe & District Historical Society
 Monbulk Historical Society
 Moorabbin Historical Society, City of
 Mt Dandenong & District Historical Society
 Murchison & District Historical Society Inc.
 Myrtleford & District Historical Society Inc.

Navarre Historical Society Inc.
 Newstead & District Historical Society
 Nillumbik Shire Council on behalf of 13 local history groups
 Numurkah & District Historical Society

Orbost & District Historical Society

Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society
 Pyramid Hill & District Historical Society

Queenscliffe Historical Museum, The

Red Cliffs & District Historical Society
 Richmond and Burnley Historical Society
 Ringwood & District Historical Society
 Rochester Historical & Pioneer Society
 Romsey & Lancefield Districts Historical Society Inc.

Sale Historical Society
 Sandringham & District Historical Society Inc.
 Sebastopol Historical Society Inc.
 Shepparton Heritage Centre Inc.
 Southern Sherbrooke Historical Society
 Springvale & District Historical Society Inc.
 St John Ambulance Historical Society
 Stawell Historical Society
 Swan Hill Genealogical & Historical Society

Tatura and District Historical Society

Uniting Church Historical Society, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
 Upper Murray Historical Society Inc.

Wandong History Group Inc.
 Wangaratta Historical Society
 Warracknabeal & District Historical Society
 Wonthaggi & District Historical Society
 Woomelang and District Historical Society
 Wyuna History Group Inc.

Yackandandah and District Historical Society Inc.
 Yarrambat Historical Society Inc.
 Yarrawonga Mulwala Historical Society Inc.

Appendix 2: Initial Request and Reminders

From: "c.sowerwine" <c.sowerwine@gmail.com>

Date: 26 April 2019 at 21:36:50 AEST

Dear Society [insert name of society],

The Heritage Council of Victoria asked the RHSV to provide the names of some historical societies interested in filling out their survey on local heritage arrangements. They wanted only a limited number of respondents. We believed that as many societies as possible should respond. We therefore offered to conduct the survey on behalf of the Council.

The poll concerns the Council's State of Heritage Review: Local Heritage. I enclose the Terms of Reference (below) for your interest.

The poll is an online survey, but it consists of five questions which require written answers. You are free either to entrust the survey to one member or to do it as a group. The link to the survey is : <https://forms.gle/jskdmoEDbNEEX4U77>.

As you may have noted from *History News*, the current state of local heritage protection is poor, to say the least, and we think it extremely important that member societies make their views known to the Heritage Council.

The Heritage Council require responses within a fortnight. I ask that you respond no later than close of business, Wednesday, 16 May.

Thank you for your participation.

With best wishes,

(Emeritus Professor) Charles Sowerwine,
Chair, Heritage Committee,
Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

ATTACHMENT:

Terms of Reference

From: "c.sowerwine" <c.sowerwine@gmail.com>

Date: 6 May 2019 at 15:11:35 AEST

Dear Society [insert name of society],

Last Monday, we sent out a request that member societies reply to a survey on local heritage we are conducting for the Heritage Council of Victoria as part of their review of local heritage arrangements.

Already, 23 societies have replied. I want to thank those societies and the many volunteers who helped formulate the responses. It's great you were so quick off the mark.

That leaves 323 societies that have not yet responded. I want to ask those societies to make a special effort to complete the survey. Remember that we have promised the Heritage Council that we will close the survey at 5 pm, Wednesday 16 May and provide the results to them as soon as we can after that. So we do need your responses by that date.

This is an opportunity to help improve policy on heritage in local areas, something we all care about deeply. This is a chance for us to make a difference.

I append the original email. If you have any technical queries, please consult my colleague Lucy Bracey <lucy.bracey@gmail.com>. If you have any queries about content, please write me at <c.sowerwine@gmail.com>.

Best wishes

Charles Sowerwine

From: "c.sowerwine" <c.sowerwine@gmail.com>

Date: 14 May 2019 at 14:29:03 AEST

Dear Society [insert name of society],

Our survey on local heritage, conducted for the Heritage Council's Review of local government arrangements for heritage, is progressing well. At last count, 62 societies had responded. Congratulations and thanks to those societies. We've enjoyed your thoughtful responses and I'm sure they will help the Heritage Council shape recommendations to the Minister.

If you have not yet been able to respond, there's still time. Because I mistakenly put the due date as 'Wednesday 17 May'—some of you have pointed out that Wednesday is the 16th; the 17th is Thursday—we've extended the deadline to 5 pm on Thursday 17 May.

For your convenience here's the link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeiQQWeq53m5wjwTIZESYHBe9QH-kBQAk5AwZR7huq7HligLA/viewform?usp=sf_link

All best wishes

Charles Sowerwine,
Chair, Heritage Committee