

DTI:Planning Review

From: BRIDGET Kimber [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 17 August 2022 4:40 PM
To: DTI:Planning Review
Subject: A case study for the review of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 and the Planning and Design Code

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

The Minister for Planning, Hon. Nick Champion MP, and Expert Panel: Kate, Andrew, John and Lisa

I am writing to offer up a case study that I think may be of interest for your review of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 and the Planning and Design Code. I believe it will highlight some of the current constraints, and bring issues to light through a lived example – specifically in regard to the development of regional and heritage properties. While the case study below is my personal experience, I am more concerned for the impact of the current planning process on the wider region and state.

- - -

The Station is a state heritage listed property operating as a BnB in the old Kapunda Railway Station. We purchased the property in late 2020 and have transformed it into luxury group accommodation. We are delighted that after our first year we are receiving consistent bookings and are achieving our targets both for business performance and future bookings. Late in 2021 we commenced 'phase 2' of our business plan which included further development of the property (courtyard & swimming pool), and expansion of our offer to include events. Our passion to host events is not focussed on a financial gain, but rather a desire to build the reputation of The Station... Kapunda... and the Light Region as a premium destination.

With measured amounts of enthusiasm and ignorance we applied for a liquor licence to enable us to host events such as intimate weddings, long lunches, and exhibitions. However, our application was curtailed by the Light Regional Council on the basis that The Station is zoned for BnB accommodation and not as a function centre. A change in land use was recommended and we commenced the process with high expectations, after all, The Station was purpose built to have 100's of people coming and going each day – it is on an acre block - with a 1000m² car park – in amongst predominantly commercial and light industrial land – with no direct neighbours - and the walls are 3 feet thick. While we assumed there would be some hoops to jump through... the response that we received from the planning and building departments was such that we were unable to progress with the application for the following reasons:

Consultant overload: we were advised to engage a suite of consultants – at significant cost – to prove the suitability of the property for change in land use including a planning consultant, a traffic engineer, and an acoustic engineer. Further consultants were recommended for the building process. While I appreciate the professionalism and experience that consultants bring, I believe that there is a level of common sense that could apply to this property given its history, its location, and its construction.

Building code: It was not until well into the process that we discovered that changing the land use would trigger the building code. The Station was built in 1860. It was not built with accessibility nor sustainability in mind. While we are very prepared to meet standards where we can, there are some that simply cannot be met. For example, the staircase is too narrow, too steep and with too many treads to meet existing standards. To achieve compliance would require a new staircase to be built in a different location and forgo other rooms within the building. Additionally, some doorways and passages are too narrow to meet accessibility requirements. To resolve this would require substantial works, and in some cases simply cannot be achieved.

Heritage: The works required would have a significant impact on the heritage nature of the building such as changing internal layouts and external entrances. Our transformation motto for the development to date has been very clear: “remove anything that is neither original nor essential and let the building speak for itself”. By bringing the building ‘up to code’, the true heritage of the building would be lost.

Value: If The Station was an hour out of Melbourne or Sydney it would be worth millions of dollars... but it is not, and real estate in Kapunda is relatively cheap. However, the investment to meet the planning and building requirements is the same in any location – if not greater in regional areas. As a percentage of the value of property in Kapunda – or other regional locations – it just doesn’t make economic sense to spend the money as it is unlikely to be recouped.

Amenity: Lastly, but certainly not least, is the limitation that the current planning process puts on private investment in amenities that are needed. Enabling The Station to host events would provide a venue for celebrations that the town simply does not have. By hosting events for 30, 50, 100 guests we would be exposing that many people to the region and creating premium perceptions for future reference and investment. By bringing more people to Kapunda there would be greater economic benefit - more accommodation filled, more money spent in local stores, and greater word of mouth to drive further visitation.

The Light Regional Council has an articulated vision of “Respecting the past, partnering with our community, and sustainably creating our future” however, I just can’t see how the current planning process enables the behaviours required to secure partnerships and create the future. In an environment that needs private investment to support public infrastructure and projects, it is critical that the planning process is an enabler for development – and not a deterrent. However, in my experience the hoops to jump through were just too great, and I can only imagine that this is the same for multiple people in multiple locations state wide.

If you would like to discuss further – or indeed if you can find the time to come out to Kapunda to ‘live’ the experience, then please don’t hesitate to contact me. I am best reached via my mobile - [REDACTED], or email - [REDACTED]

BK BRIDGET KIMBER

[REDACTED]  bridgetkimber.com

Bringing a passion for insight and innovation to drive business success