

Submission from the Mitcham Historical Society Inc

In response to the question of including a development assessment pathway to allow for demolition of a building in a Character Area (and Historic Area) only once a replacement building has been approved, the Society's view is that at the very least, strengthened demolition controls should be put in place in these areas. The best possible outcomes would see them elevated to Historic Area status and the definition of demolition controls strengthened.

Community members see demolition controls as a means of stopping demolitions, but also believe that the reality of pressure from developers is likely to see such refusals occur only infrequently.

Further, the community believes that demolition controls in their current format, at best only slow down demolition, rather than prevent it.

The community is cynical in its view of planning processes and will need to see some significant alterations before this view changes. Many in the community believe that we should not be destroying good housing stock in established areas with evident character simply to allow the construction of houses that do not reflect the character of an area, and which are, also, very often energy inefficient.

Additionally, it is too easy for developers to buy homes, demolish them and then sit back for years, waiting for the land to appreciate. The Society notes several instances in the Mitcham Local Government Area, for example, and immediately adjacent to where our members live where this has occurred.

Not allowing demolition – regardless of any additional protections provided by the age of a building – until plans and approvals are in place would encourage developers to make housing available for rent. The State, indeed the nation, is in the midst of the worst housing crisis the country has seen, simply because for a long time housing has been seen as an investment for a privileged few. The planning system should aim to make the provision of housing for all its primary aim, rather than doing all it can to ensure that the “rights” of developers are prioritised over the rights of the majority of the population. Our planning system should be cognisant of the costs and impacts of planning decisions as much as it is cognisant of the economic costs.

The Society supports the elevation of Character Areas to Historic Areas. The Society understands that the process of adding items through a Code Amendment involves consultation being made on the existing list in its entirety plus the proposed additions. There is an apparent reluctance to do this because of an understandable concern that the protections already in place on buildings may be lost during the consultation process on the proposed new additions.

It is interesting that, State Heritage Places, Local Heritage Places and Local Representative Buildings embody just 3% of our total building stock. Prior to the introduction of the new Planning and Design Code, the Urban Development Institute of Australia (SA) (UDIA) pushed

back hard against even this small amount of our built stock being protected. Their claim was that development would be stifled by such protection.

It is difficult to see how protecting – and some would say the protections for some of these buildings are all but non-existent – some 3% of building stock could stifle development. Had the views of development industry lobby groups such as the UDIA (SA) prevailed, only 1% of our built stock would have been covered by these protections.

Protecting – sometimes very weakly – only 3% of built stock is hardly ambitious. Given that we are facing significant climate change, much of which results from over-consumption of resources, we should aim to protect, re-imagine and adaptively re-use as many as possible of our old buildings. The embedded energy in them is significant and we owe it to future generations - to our children and to our grandchildren – to ensure that we value the energy they contain and use it as respectfully as possible. Heritage is our inheritance - what the past has conceded to us, what we value in the present and what we choose to preserve for future generations.

Every time we demolish buildings, it is the environment of future generations that we are destroying. We earnestly believe that we must fulfil our responsibilities to future generations. The Society supports absolutely demolition controls and would be pleased to support and participate in, further public consultation on the issue.

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