

Redfern/Eveleigh railway history under grave threat



3801 engine, in January 2007

The Trust has argued for the identification of North Eveleigh in Redfern, Sydney, as a railway heritage precinct for over two decades. During this time a series of changes have progressively altered and constrained this potential. Although the conversion of the carriage workshops to house a performing arts space may be an acceptable adaptive reuse of one building in isolation, it ignores the heritage significance of the building (except architecturally) and it greatly limits the ability of the rest of the site to be used for rail purposes. Future planning by the Redfern-Waterloo Authority for the North Eveleigh precinct will further limit any opportunities for the conservation of rail heritage.

While there may be attractive short-term financial benefits with the redevelopment of North Eveleigh for residential and commercial purposes,

the long-term management of rail heritage in NSW is placed at jeopardy through an inappropriate, virtually inaccessible location, lack of fundamental facilities and insufficient support to the potentially large volunteer rail heritage community.

The present approach to rail heritage in NSW negates virtually all the interstate and international tourism opportunities that exist in the rail heritage sphere. These would be fundamental in ensuring that rail heritage is not a drain on the public purse. The loss of these opportunities means that the conservation of this popular and significant transport technology will remain problematic and costly. Such short-sighted public sector planning is disappointing and, in our opinion, does not reflect the desires of the public at large.

We support the Friends of Eveleigh's nomination of Eveleigh's Large Erecting Shop, its contents, including the 3801 steam engine and carriages (now removed from the building), and the connection to the main rail line for listing on the National Heritage List.

The Trust is also deeply concerned about the disposal by Railcorp of historic rolling stock and the present condition of the 3801. Despite government assurances, this highly significant item of rail heritage is not under cover, and is currently in a state of disrepair.



3801 engine, at Thirlmere Loco in May 2008

where to for NSW planning & heritage? (continued from cover)

It is instructive that the virtues of Perth are being extolled. It is built on a flat plain of sand, excellent geography for the use of standard design codes but very different from the varied, often steep geography of much of coastal NSW. With standard codes, distances from the boundaries of standard-sized land parcels determine the location of buildings. The natural or built context is of no concern. If the context were a concern then discretionary design decisions may have to be made. Codes facilitate standard products being placed on the ground without the need for location-specific design, or designers for that matter. Wherever possible private certifiers, appointed and paid by builders, will measure distances and calculate densities, but not exercise design judgments.

Chris Johnson, the former Government Architect in charge of preparing the standard codes, made a virtue of lack of contextual concern when he refuted concerns over the 'one size fits all' model (SMH 9/6/08):

'While the code will standardise setbacks for ... different lot sizes and housing types it will not influence design character. Houses can be totally different looking in Bega, Balmain or Bathurst. Houses can have a sloping roof or a flat roof, a metal roof or a tile roof, or any other material.... The code will encourage innovation as long as the neighbours' amenity is protected.'

Exactly! With one size fits all everywhere will look exactly the same as everywhere else in its collection of diverse project homes, each shouting, 'Look at me!'. Like Perth. Standard codes are conservative because standard setback and height controls, rather than contextual design, are used to achieve a minimum amenity. Land that could otherwise be used may be wasted because the code has to work without needing to know what will be built next door. But, under the current planning system, standard codes have the advantage over contextual controls. The penalty for contextual design, which relates building to building or building to natural environment, is a development application, with its complex, unreformed procedures and discretionary decisions. A standard product that fits the be-anywhere template and code is preferable.

Heritage Controls

It is not proposed to apply standard codes to heritage areas or items. It is proposed to constrain the number of areas and items. The original reason for bringing in

heritage listing was to apply demolition control over 'the things we want to keep'.

The trouble with any listing system is that those items not on the list are presumed not to be things we want to keep. Quite rightly, there is always pressure for more items to be added to the list. No wonder the development industry seeks closure of the lists.

Heritage controls also require restoration. In a heritage conservation area (HCA), while the actual buildings are not listed for preservation, development has to fit the particular context of the area. This is why the standard codes will not apply. Ideally, instead of using 'heritage' as the rationale for contextual control, urban design objectives would be preferable, which may include restoration of the street and overall form and detailing of the original buildings. The trouble is that areas that are not really 'heritage' may seek contextual controls, and contextual controls are contrary to the use of standard codes.

While areas like Ku-ring-gai attempt to use HCA zoning to obtain contextual urban design, the Department of Planning seems determined to close the list on HCAs. As the Kibble Report on Heritage said:

'Conservation areas should only be designated ... where there are clear heritage values associated with them. Areas with high amenity or other distinguishing characteristics worthy of retention, but not historically significant, should be dealt with through Character Statements.' (Report of Independent Expert Panel, Review of the Heritage Act 1977, Dec 2007.)

'Character Statements' refer to place formatted controls with locality zones that start with a specific objective in the form of a 'desired character statement', rather than a land use zoning objective, such as, 'The objective of a detached house zone is to encourage detached houses'. Place zones can have a specific land use table, with design controls encouraging a wide mix of context-related activities, whether it be heritage, or a particular natural environment. Place zoning encourages good design. Unfortunately, place zoning is not 'good planning' so far as the Department of Planning is concerned. Warringah Council is presently rewriting its place formatted plan to conform to standard statewide zoning and plans that separate land uses.

Under the current regime, the Kibble 'character statements', unfortunately, are no alternative to conservation zoning.

- John Mant