

Submission from Gary Vines, Industrial Archeologist

By way of introduction, I am an historian, industrial archaeologist and heritage consultant with over 30 years' experience in Victoria and interstate heritage. My knowledge of the Brunswick Brickworks goes back to the late 1980s when I was researching and recording industrial heritage in Melbourne's north and west with Melbourne's Living Museum. This included projects funded by the former Department of Planning and Environment, as part of thematic heritage assessments, and comprised the first comprehensive assessments of the significance of industrial heritage in the state. Having worked in government, Community and commercial heritage roles, I understand the issues involved in dealing with complex industrial sites and am familiar with both the constraints and opportunities within the commercial development applications.

I absolutely object to the plan to demolish the Brunswick Brickworks brick press building and engine house, to replace them with flats and a commercial building.

If this is approved it will be another con - the developers got the site for a song, made millions on densely packed apartments that fail all good planning and wouldn't have been permitted if not for the promise of conservation outcomes, were given concessions all the way, left the place to the vandals and weather until they can argue it is beyond repair and then get incremental permits until pretty much nothing of the original fabric is preserved. The supposed heritage centre will end up being a couple of signs in the midst of commercial rentals. The Heritage impact statement pretty much says the heritage is stuffed so why bother.

The Brickworks is the most important element of Melbourne's industrial heritage and the most prominent historical place related to the boom period and Marvellous Melbourne. I said when the developers got hold of this site and promised all sorts of conservation and preservation that it was a con, and that they were just trying to get as much developable area and profit out of it as they could. This is just a more legal version of the Carlton Inn. Demolition by neglect and persistence.

If the structural and contamination problems are real, make them put the figures to deal with them on the table, and compare these with the profits from all the previous development approvals on the site. The concessions in the past were that they could demolish other building, rebuild the kilns for selling off, turn almost all the site into residential and commercial development, and in return, a small part would be repaired, conserved and interpreted to the public. Now even this will be sacrificed under this plan.

If the owners had spent any money on maintenance and repair on the site in the last 20 years, they could have prevented deterioration and progressively dealt with structural problems.

I would like to make the further point that despite the Heritage Impact Statement claiming the building is too dilapidated and contaminated to retain, there is in fact, no actual evidence to back this up. Nowhere in any of the contamination and engineering reports do they state that the building cannot be repaired and made safe, only that this work needs to be carried out. In fact the supporting documents suggest there is evidence to support a case for prosecuting the owners for failing to properly maintain the buildings and allowing them to deteriorate. A clear case of demolition by neglect.

Yes the building needs repair and remediation, and some additional investigation following stabilisation with support scaffolding. The owners should have obtained advice and costings about how these works should be done, rather than try and use incomplete assessments to argue for demolition. Also, if they go on to claim that the cost of repair and remediation is too great, they should be forced to provide independent quotes for the work that is required in order to retain the

buildings, and the financials for the entire development (i.e. how much has been earned in sales, cost of development, profit, etc.) for all the previous development that has occurred. Their initial argument for being allowed to develop the site beyond what the planning scheme and State and municipal planning policies allowed, was that the profit from the development (including on the sites of historic buildings including the demolished kiln, gate house and others) would fund not just retention of the remaining structures, but their restoration, interpretation, a museum and community access. None of this has happened apart from repair to fabric as part of its conversion to private residences, and a few bits of machinery placed around the site with no contextualisation.

The argument that a small interpretive display is sufficient to mitigate the loss of buildings of primary significance, which are crucial to the understanding of the place is entirely false and disingenuous, particularly in that it comes from a former representative of ICOMOS, which states in its Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites and Interpretation Practice Note (November 2013) that 'It is not acceptable to use interpretation as an alternative to the physical conservation of a place'. Instead 'Interpretation is part of a holistic package of best practice conservation management measures'.

Finally, if the developer's need for profit is put ahead of the community's need to preserve its heritage on this site, it will be a depressing precedent for all other remaining industrial heritage in the state, including the only other remaining brick works at Box Hill. It will also be rewarding a developer for failing to meet their original planning approvals, as the past promises have consistently been broken, and the company has failed to undertake even the most basic maintenance and repair unless under extreme duress from Heritage Victoria.

The permit should not be granted. It will only put more profit into the private companies hand and give nothing back to the community and do nothing to preserve our heritage.

Brunswick Brickworks is one of the most significant industrial heritage sites in Victoria, and if this cannot be saved, nothing can.

Regards

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