



Willunga Main Street Project

Post Implementation Review & Critique

Friends of Willunga Basin

May 2018

Introduction

The Willunga High Street upgrade project is all but complete.

It has been a long process, in which the Willunga community has sought to be closely involved. Unfortunately that desire has not translated into imagined outcomes. Rather, there is a sense in some sections of the community that the project has failed to deliver as it might and should have done, both in its conception and in its implementation.

Willunga is sometimes referred to as a place of 'soft edges' – timbered and weathered, with streets often not kerbed and buildings often tucked away. In its older areas, it might be called discrete.

As against this, the High Street upgrade might be called indiscrete, not the least because of its many sharp edges, which are quite at odds with the heritage country town character. There are sharp edges in the diamond cut slate footpath inserts and the awkward pedestrian pathways, in the walling at the main corner and the timber steps opposite the Recreation Park, and in the faceted seating and crookedly-mounted rubbish bins.

Beyond this, the kerb-side protrusions cause frustration and the art work is a mystery, while safe crossing facilities for pedestrians can be counter-intuitive, particularly between the Recreation Park and the Farmers Market .

In all, it feels as if the project has imposed rather than insinuated itself on the town. As a result, it is suggested that there is a need for a degree of rectification.

For this reason, and in the interests of providing an opportunity for all concerned to reflect on what has happened, the Friends of Willunga Basin have prepared this post-project critique. It:

- sets the project in context, to touch base with the 'back story';
- makes comment on the pre-project consultation process;
- provides a design critique;
- makes observations on the management of the project; and
- suggests some rectification actions that would assist in ameliorating certain shortcomings.

Its purpose is to allow all stakeholders – within both Council and community - to acknowledge and to learn from the experience.

Context & Design Brief

The Main Street project has taken place in the context of its setting in the centre of Willunga – a heritage place, based on its having been founded in 1839. This heritage status is one of the key elements of the town's identity and attraction.

The City of Onkaparinga Development Plan (at page 51) recognizes the **Willunga - Historic Conservation Area**, of which the Main Street is a part. To quote:

The desired character of this area highlights remnant buildings and patterns of development that reflect the rural origins of the town and its early evolution ...

The historic character of development will derive from the retention of State and Local heritage places, other properties and features possessing historic character such as bridges, stone kerbs and gutters, hitching posts and fences, patterns in township development including landscaping and separation distances between buildings, street patterning, allotment sizes and frontages, remnant vegetation (especially large gum trees), street trees, public spaces and the clustering of alike land uses within various sections of the township.

Relevant Objectives of the Development Plan include (at page 50):

- 1 *The conservation of areas of historical significance.*
- 2 *Development that promotes, conserves and enhances the cultural significance and historic character of identified places and areas.*
- 3 *Development that complements the historic significance of the area.*
- 4 *The retention and conservation of places such as land, buildings, structures and landscape elements that contribute positively to the historic character of the area.*
- 5 *Development that contributes to desired character.*

Consistent with this, the project brief for the Willunga Main Street project:

.... [sought] to ... enhance and promote historical features through way finding and interpretation, integrate community based public art elements and bespoke street furniture within the streetscape and maintain a slate theme in High Street.
(http://onkaparingacity.com/onka/council/community_engagement/community_engagement_status_board/willunga_main_street_project.jsp)

All of these words should underpin the presentation of the public realm. Given this context, a 'less is more' approach would have been most appropriate. Rather, the solution which has emerged arguably neither complements the historic significance of the area nor contributes to desired character. This is the most disappointing aspect of all that has occurred.

Community Input

The Willunga community took a strong interest in this project over an extended period. It was as a result of community input that the very scope of the project changed so significantly from start to finish.

As part of this process of and hunger for engagement, a Willunga Main Street Reference Group, comprising representatives of all key interest groups in the town, was spontaneously formed. It sought to have input on a range of design matters but, for reasons never fully understood, many members of the committee were left feeling excluded from the conversation by Council on all matters except those relating to the selection of trees. It is acknowledged that the Reference Group prepared a substantial report on a suitable palette of trees for the project. This present review does not engage the outcome of the tree species selection, focusing rather on landscape design only, being that aspect of the project to which community input was seemingly so strenuously resisted.

Close examination of the material provided by the community to the Council, both through its Project Manager and to the design company, shows that it addresses many if not all of the matters noted in the accompanying design critique. The community has a full appreciation of the history and aesthetics of Willunga, which Council did not seem to pick up on, or take best advantage of.

For many, it is a matter of regret that the community's attempts to engage with Council, and to influence design outcomes for the better, were ultimately rebuffed and baffling that Council voted against having community input other than the trees.

Ironically, Council appears to have a view that it has undertaken one of the deepest dives into community consultation that it has ever attempted – whereas the community response seems to be that Council listened but did not hear.

It must be a matter of concern to Council that its efforts have produced a result that has so dissatisfied a large portion of the community.

Design Outcome

Dr. Gavin Malone, a local resident and FOWB Committee member with heritage and urban design expertise¹, has prepared a design critique of the completed project, which is included as Attachment 1.

His comments can be summarized as follows:

- the design outcome is Post-modern in character and collides with the historic character of Willunga. Disparate and disconnected from place, it is completely at odds with and severely erodes the heritage character of Willunga;
- the design does not take design cues from the existing historic forms and is not compatible with building and streetscape character. It is out of scale and proportion with existing forms. It competes for and clutters any pre-existing visual interest.
- the design attempts to create a character of its own, not integrate with or complement the existing built and natural environments. It is design for design's sake, and displays no cohesive purpose in integrating with, or adding to, heritage character.
- the design is visually busy, with many different elements, and doesn't allow a calm approach to a 'quiet' town. It has no cohesive visual patina; and
- where it references historic detailing, it is a parody.

Unfortunately, much of the damage has now been done and cannot realistically be undone. Time will soften some elements of the new look, but the basic template for the next decade or two is now in place.

Nonetheless, it may be possible to ameliorate some of the more obvious shortcomings so as to soften adverse effects.

Project Management

Robin Schliebs, a local resident and FOWB Committee member with significant project management expertise, has prepared comments on the delivery of the project.

He has identified a number of fundamental issues in its management and planning, including that:

- the project should arguably have been undertaken in 2 stages - along one side of the street first and then along the other side of the street;

¹ Gavin holds an Honours Degree in Visual Arts and a Doctorate in Cultural Geography and was also inaugural Secretary of the South Australian Heritage Committee 1978-81. He taught *Landscape Narratives* in the School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design, Adelaide University and has contributed to several major urban design projects in Adelaide including the Victoria Square-Tarndanyangga Regeneration and the Riverbank Precinct Redevelopment. He has been a jurist in the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects annual awards.

- the project plan caused ongoing traffic and parking restrictions which seriously impacted on local businesses and the community for an extended period;
- the \$2.8 million project was scheduled to be completed at the end of August 2017 and was NOT fully completed for the 'Official Launch' on 25 November, at which time it was 12 weeks late – noting that it is still not complete in mid-May 2018;
- given the significant delays and community disruptions there were clearly shortcomings in both project planning and risk management; and
- the delayed completion date is likely to have increased the project cost, and the final project cost should be determined in relation to its approved initial budget cost.

This apparent failure to adopt proper and/or best Project Management practices is a major concern given that project management and delivery is a primary business of the Council. Qualified and experienced management is a pre-requisite for effective and timely delivery of capital projects, and it behoves Council to consider how this aspect of its performance can be improved and whether its project management resources need to be bolstered to prevent a repetition.

Recommendations

In order to correct the inadequacies, it is suggested that Council:

- come back and finish the job as soon as possible; and
- meet with the Main Street Reference Group, possibly with the design company, firstly to discuss immediate modifications to Main Street and, secondly, to undertake a post-project review of the broader issues of how the project was managed and why the consultation process did not deliver for the community as expected.

Suggestions for amelioration include:

- removal of all dolomite footpath strips and replace with bitumen – and, where strips are close together, remove and replace section to reduce the number of patches;
- adding timber boughs or similar to car parking timber sleepers as per existing example to make them visible to motorists, to soften the harshness and to add visual interest;
- growing vines and creepers on incongruous post and wire fences to disguise them;
- removing planting beds adjacent vehicle parking kerbing and replacing them with something suitable; and
- adding 2 or 3 large scale (locally sourced) slate slab features, as per the National Trust directional sign, to better reflect Willunga's slate heritage and provide greater and more appropriate visual interest.

Attachment 1; Comment on Design Elements

Planter Beds and Drainage Channels

Random use of shapes for planter beds

Curved gutter form in some places, linear and angular in others

Mismatch between slate floor (substantial) and sides (light weight and small/bitsy)

Vertical slate is 'tile like' and more suitable for the domestic than public space

Horizontal slate 'crazy pave' pattern is out of context, more domestic patio or driveway than urban infrastructure (particularly in slate heritage area)

Inconsistent patterns of floor between various sections





(Has softened with age)
Planting adjacent kerb where car parking possible makes passenger access difficult and plants will be trampled



Angular planter beds, footpaths and walling on main corner are out of context and visually confusing. Takes away useful space in the park.



Different gutter crossing (plastic grate) and mulch (crushed slate) introduced at Aldinga Road



Footpaths

Shapes

Random changes from curved linear path edges of uniform width to straight/angular edge is unnecessary and confusing (Alma Hotel)



(This area has now been used as a planter bed)

.Angular steps at market area are totally out of character and a post-modern intrusion



Crossing at main corner is visually confusing. Sight barrier of trees in median strip unnecessary for both vehicle drivers and pedestrians. Even more confusing for international visitors with reverse traffic direction.



Random step out of path disturbs linear perspective of main street, creates unnecessary garden bed and takes away car parking potential.



Slate Inserts

Strips across footpath disturb the linear perspective of Main Street and the long distance casual view

Creates a long 'zebra crossing' effect

Slate strips too bitsy as well as labour intensive and expensive. Geometric shape is more of a roofing pattern rather than a paving pattern and therefore counter intuitive. The angle cut has not grounding/context

Slate paving is traditionally substantial, not bitsy and decorative



Random placement of slate strips in relation to existing built forms confusing (photo work in progress)



Random change from strips at right angle to built forms to angular



Paving

Willunga Hotel (Middle Pub) footpath is brick paving, while the opposite side of the road is bitumen

Pavers on the flat used on one side of the street, pavers on edge used on the other side

Surface patterns contradict, do not complement existing (e.g. in the market area)



Slate Walling

Slate walling is sometimes constructed of small/thin pieces of slate, bitsy and labour intensive

The private (?) slate wall adjacent Old Bush Inn is more substantial and reflective of Willunga slate walling.

The historic drainage channel gives indicator of robust nature of slate walling



Street Furniture

Bins are too large and imposing, while the cut-outs have no design context and are unnecessary (Postmodern - inner urban). No provision for recycling.

Bin positions awkward Maintenance of lower veranda post not possible in the example below. Conflict of character adjacent the Court House.



Timber seats, cut outs have no design context and are unnecessary (Postmodern - inner urban)

Timber seats are not readily seen at night and present a trip hazard



Bicycle lock-up columns, dark colored, almost invisible in the dark. Reports of pedestrians walking into them at night.

Public Art - Sculpture

The multi-unit approach diminished the potential for a signature and memorable statement about Willunga.

The 'indigenous flora and fauna' theme is generic and making a kangaroo and koala of slate has no real statement about this place, particularly as koalas are not indigenous to the Mount Lofty Ranges. Public art theme is stated to be 'indigenous flora and fauna' but the koala was found only in the lower south east pre-settlement (DENR, n.d). It is an introduced native species from the eastern states (like Lemon Scented Gums).



(Protruding metal leaves have apparently been rounded)
The whale marooned in a planting bed is completely out of place and will soon be lost as vegetation grows. Placement has no context



Other (random) Elements

Pattern of timber fence posts has no design or historical context

Split post and wire fence is of a rural nature, not a township. Township would be cut/machined post

Outcome is neither one thing or another

Wire not robust or visually strong enough, already damaged in sections and difficult to see and hazardous for cyclists or pedestrians (who could fall 'through' and get trapped or garrotted)



Use of 100mm cobbles in road has created another (expensive) design element that lacks cohesion. Why use them?



The timber sleeper wheel stoppers an awkward protrusion and not usually associated with a main street car parking structure. Sleepers are clumsy and will age ungracefully



Detailing & Defects

Clumsy bitumen edging to some property boundaries



Unresolved boundary edges. Change in paving level has left several unresolved vertical edges. 'No-man's land' in front of some domestic premises. Given the \$3m budget for the project, the resolution of these eye-sores with the property owner would have been logical



Slate tiles in drainage channels already broken/fallen off in some areas



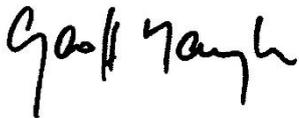
Concern that vertical slate tiles may delaminate over time, no protective capping

Concluding Comment

A heritage place is not 'stuck in time' and, as is often said, it is not living in the past but living with the past. While some of the Post-modern design elements may have worked as a minor element of an overall design more compatible with the heritage character of the area, it is the totality of these elements that works against the heritage character.

Reference

Department of Environment and Natural Resources, n.d. *Koalas – past and present* Fact Sheet



Geoff Hayter
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