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Re: Maldon Design Guidelines Review

Dear Strategic Planning team,

Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on the Draft Maldon Design Guidelines. We commend Mount Alexander Shire Council for undertaking this review to ensure that any proposed changes conserve and respect the heritage character of Maldon.

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (National Trust) is the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy, representing 27,000 members across Victoria. As Victoria's premier heritage and conservation organisation, the National Trust has an interest in ensuring that a wide range of natural, cultural, social and Indigenous heritage values are protected and respected, contributing to strong, vibrant and prosperous communities.

The National Trust maintains a Heritage Register of Significant Places. In 1966 the National Trust declared Maldon Australia's first 'Notable Town' as it is regarded as a remarkably intact example of a gold-rush era town (File No. B2049). This declaration recognised the Maldon township and surrounding area for its historic, architectural, and social significance at the national level.

While we are generally supportive of the Draft Maldon Design Guidelines, this submission provides some comments for consideration as the document is finalised. We welcome further discussion and consultation regarding our points outlined below.

Future Work

We acknowledge that Council has outlined in the *Maldon Design Guidelines Background Paper* that further work is required to review Maldon's heritage. Specifically, we acknowledge that Council has identified the following actions:

- Review of the Significant Landscape Overlay Schedules 1 and 3
- Review and correction of Heritage Overlay mapping and schedule errors
- Review and update of local planning policy (e.g. Clause 22.02 Maldon)

- Review and update of Statements of Significance

We strongly urge Council to undertake these reviews as a matter of priority, as the guidelines are to be read in conjunction with the Mount Alexander Shire Council Planning Scheme. It is essential that the Planning Scheme reflects a comprehensive identification and documentation of Maldon's heritage significance to ensure the guidelines are used effectively and heritage significance is not adversely affected.

General Comments

Overall, we recommend that the language of the guidelines be strengthened to reduce ambiguity. For example, using the word "ensure" instead of "encourage".

We also recommend that the guidelines include a further section to guide proposed changes within the public realm, such as changes to public utilities and tree plantings. We understand that Council is currently undertaking the *Maldon Town Streetscape Plan and Design Standards*. We strongly recommend that this is developed in conjunction with a review of the design guidelines to ensure consistency of the design standards, and in conjunction with the broader heritage reviews detailed above.

Introduction

We support the statement that where alternative design changes and interventions are proposed, "the planning permit application should include a written explanation and photographic or illustrative material that shows how the objectives will be achieved" (p8). We encourage Council to make this statement stronger by also requesting applicants also demonstrate the decision-making and considerations given to alternative options to justify a proposed design change or intervention.

We strongly support the format and structure of the guidelines, specifically the consistent use of Context, Objectives, and Principles throughout. We support the decision to provide "Context" at the beginning of each section. This helps to frame Maldon's heritage significance and effectively highlights both the tangible and intangible values that must be considered prior to a planning permit application.

We particularly commend Mount Alexander Shire and Hansen for capturing the complexity of Maldon's historic urban landscape, including the "intangible" heritage values present in Maldon, and how they can be protected by appropriately managing a change. A good example of this is the context provided regarding fences on page 54.

We are supportive of the use of the guidelines as a tool for the application of identified objectives and principles.

Illustrated Guidelines

It should be clearly noted that the guidelines and examples used are not comprehensive, and that just because a specific situation is not described, discussed or otherwise covered, it does not mean that it is deemed to be outside the scope of these guidelines.

While we generally support the use of diagrams to visually convey and communicate best outcomes, they must be consistent and unambiguous or address one condition only. We have concerns, specifically in relation to alterations and additions, that the visual diagrams provided do not account for Maldon's topography and instead show level ground as a constant. This can lead to contradictions with the associated text. If dimensions are to be used in the visual diagrams they should be used across all illustrations in a consistent manner. Preference would be to adopt a system of relative measurables such as heights of new elements related to elements on the subject building or adjacent sites.

Statement of Local Significance and Architectural Styles

We support the detailed summary of the architectural domestic styles provided in the guidelines. This provides further context for the development of Maldon and communicates broadly the variety of materials and styles that contribute to Maldon's historic and architectural significance. We also suggest including a summary of Maldon's commercial buildings and retail spaces, as the aesthetic and historic significance of these buildings can be emphasised further through a detailed summary.

We also recommend that further images are provided to illustrate key styles and style indicators, with those style indicators clearly annotated. This is used effectively in the publication *Identifying Australian Architecture* by Richard Apperly et al, and would provide clarity to non-experts who are reading the document.

Conservation, Maintenance and Demolition

We support the objective requiring that "The condition of the building should be recorded prior to any action" (p20). Further explanation should be provided regarding the standard for this documentation, or if guidance will be provided for applicants. We also seek further clarification regarding how these records will be managed and if they will be made publicly accessible for the purpose of future research.

Archaeology, Ruins, Demolition and Recording

Further clarification should be provided regarding the definition of "ruin". This should also be added to the glossary. Care should be taken to ensure that property owners understand that places should not be allowed to deteriorate into a ruinous state, and that "demolition by neglect" is not acceptable. It may be useful to provide an example of a ruin, to provide further clarity on the types of places these guidelines apply to.

Alterations and Additions

While we support the need to acknowledge climate change as a threat to heritage places, the impacts of climate change are not necessarily the key driver of alterations and additions. We therefore recommend re-ordering the information in this section to begin with the text:

Significant adaptive changes may be required to retain the function and continued use of heritage places. Adaptive changes, including alterations and additions, present

creative opportunities for revealing and interpreting the history of the properties and conserving what is important about them. (p28)

The discussion about climate change in the first three sentences is general in nature, and could equally apply to guidelines regarding conservation, maintenance and demolition. We recommend including references to the impacts of climate change in both of these sections.

Disability Access

The provision of disability access to heritage buildings is important to sustaining historic uses, as well as sustaining communities (p34). While necessary and desirable, DDA compliance has the potential to have adverse heritage impacts on historic building, and design solutions can be contested. It may be helpful to provide further guidance, either in this document or as part of a separate practice note, which outlines good solutions to the provision of universal access, and guidance on what to avoid.

New Development – Residential

The following principle, on p42, is ambiguous and difficult to understand. Consideration should be given to rephrasing this, and possibly providing an example to explain it further.

The use of an existing, intrusive, non-contributory element as a model for new works could diminish the prominence of contributory elements to the heritage place.

New Development – Outbuildings

We commend the discussion of the importance of Maldon's natural and designed landscapes, and the need to retain the integrity of landscape settings and historic gardens (p45).

We recommend including an additional objective in this section:

To conserve and enhance the landscape and garden setting of the place.

Design Detail

We recommend strengthening the principle relating to significant trees on p52, and requiring the construction of new crossovers to comply with Australian Standard 4970-2009 Protection of Trees on Development Sites.

Conclusion

The National Trust congratulates Mount Alexander Shire Council for progressing this review of the Maldon Design Guidelines. As the National Trust's first "Notable Town", Maldon remains a remarkable historic urban landscape not only in Victoria, but in Australia. It is our hope that these new design guidelines will allow Maldon to continue to flourish as a historic town with contemporary relevance.

We look forward to further supporting the new Design Guidelines as part of a future Planning Scheme Amendment.

For any enquiries regarding this submission, please get in touch with this office on 9656 9818 or with me directly at felicity.watson@nattrust.com.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Watson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Felicity Watson
Executive Manager—Advocacy
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)