

Town Hall Gardens and Environs, Ballarat East

Conservation
Management Plan -
Summary Document



April 2021

The Gardens

The City of Ballarat is proud to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country which includes Ballarat today, the Wadawurrung and the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples, and pays respect to all Elders, past, present and emerging, as well as Elders from other communities who reside here today. They hold the memories, traditions, culture and hope of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around Australia.

Introduction

The site of the former Ballarat East Town Hall and Gardens is historically and culturally significant and continues to inspire a sense of community belonging and unity for its significant role as the civic heart of the former municipality of Ballarat East.

Overlaid onto the relic mining landscape the site was developed into a civic precinct, and the Gardens were an integral component of shaping a desirable civic identity for the municipality, with key buildings – the Town Hall, Police Court, Free Library and Fire Station – among them.

While the integrity of the Gardens has been compromised by the loss of the Town Hall and the addition of new buildings and landscape elements, they retain many original and early features including mature trees, a boundary fence, gateway and gates, some pathway layout and remnants of the sculpted landform.

There are ongoing feelings of loss for the Town Hall and strong feelings of attachment to the remnant Gardens. While considerable momentum has been achieved in recent times in activating Barkly Square and creating a vibrant community hub, the Gardens and other external spaces remain underutilised.

Investment is needed to build on this momentum and support the community's aspiration to re-establish a civic heart in Ballarat East and create a valued community asset for present and future generations.

Town Hall Gardens Ballarat East, c1880s



(Source: State Library Victoria: J.H.Harvey Collection)

Our Community's Aspiration for the Precinct

A beautiful green space in the heart of Ballarat East that connects people and place.

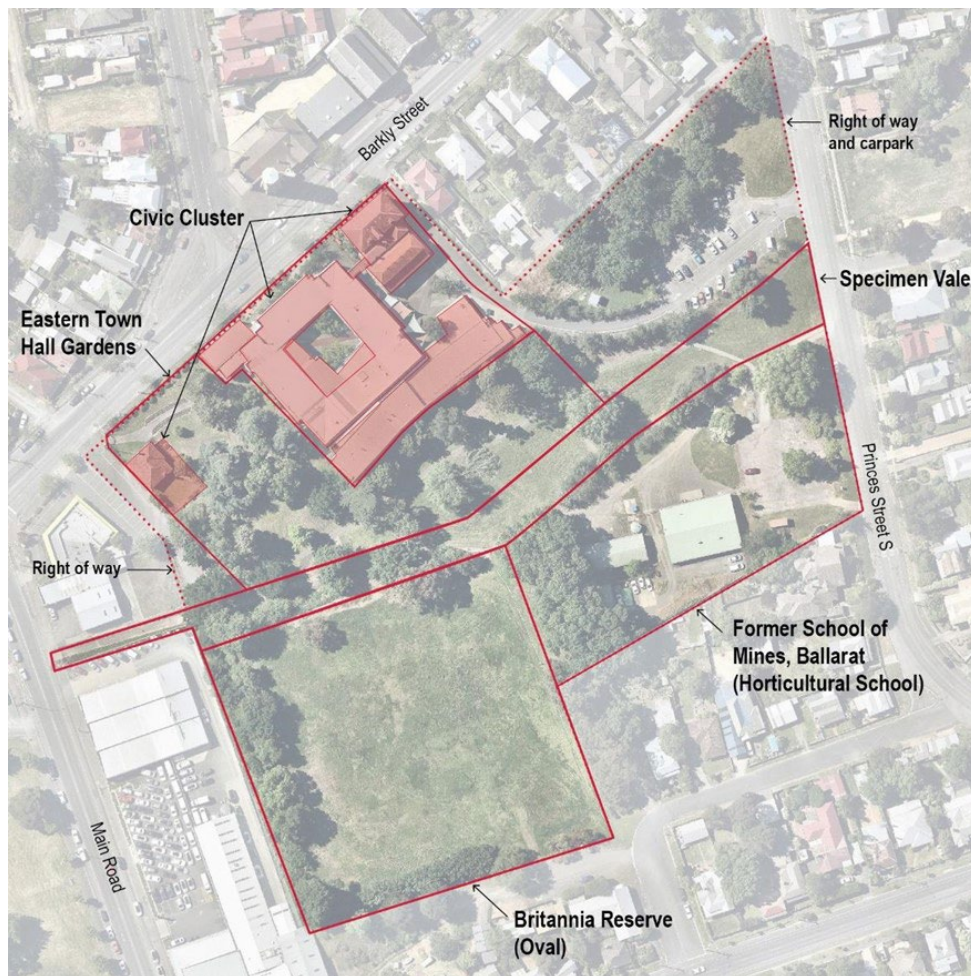
A place that inspires a strong sense of civic pride and identity and celebrates its rich history.

A welcoming place that brings people together and encourages connectedness and unity.

A vibrant and thriving community and learning hub and fosters creativity and innovation.

Study Area

The study area comprises different parcels of land and buildings that have separate and intersecting land use histories and relationships. The different parts are interconnected with a large proportion now publicly accessible.



(Source: Nearmap with Context Overlay)

- Components have been defined according to the predominant historical themes and land use histories they represent
- BGT Jobs & Training leases and manages the cluster of buildings at 25-39 Barkly Street which includes the former Ballarat Girls' High School building, the Ballarat Secondary College Building and the former Ballarat East Free Library

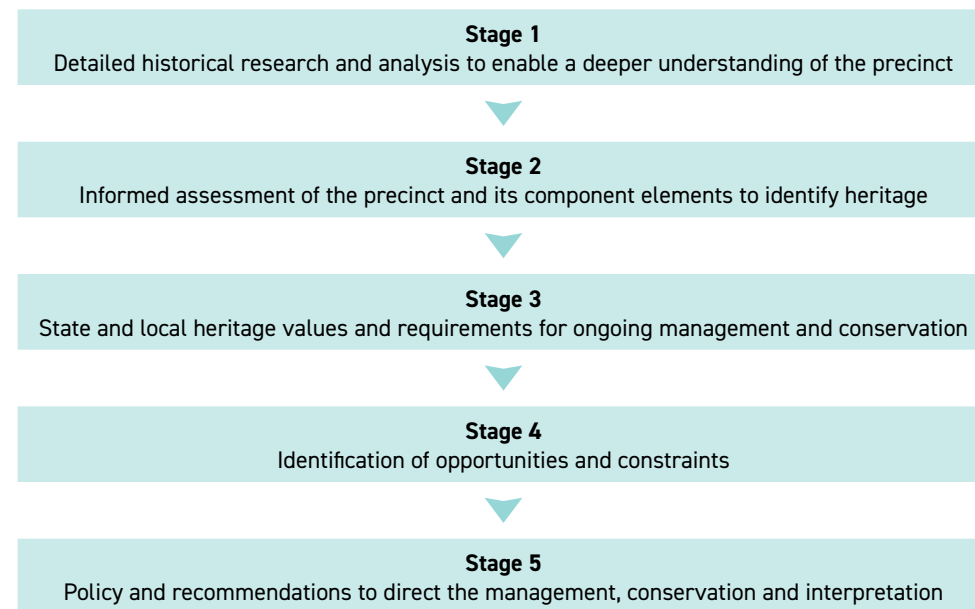
A Plan to Re-Energise this Valued Community Asset

Conservation Management Plan (The Plan)

The Plan expresses aspirations for the precinct and outlines opportunities and constraints, providing a practical document to guide forward planning and actions. It aims to enable a deeper understanding of the precinct's significance and heritage values, provides guidance on policy to direct the conservation and management of the heritage values, and provides a framework for future landscape works aimed at enhancing the precinct and telling the stories to increase awareness, enhance understanding and enrich the visitor experience.

The Plan has been prepared by Context and draws on community engagement undertaken for the Ballarat East Local Area Plan (2019) and Imagine Ballarat East. It builds on a body of existing research and documentation including the Former Ballarat East Town Hall Gardens Heritage Assessment (June 2018).

Key Elements of the Plan



History of the Precinct

The precinct has historically been a place of change that has responded to functional requirements, community needs and changing expectations over time. The geology and underlying landforms are important factors that have influenced its land use history.

The Plan seeks to understand the story of the precinct from a range of different perspectives. It traces the activity and events that have contributed to the evolution of the physical form and character which contribute to the precinct's heritage and cultural values.

Historical themes

A number of historical themes have been identified that relate to the precinct's key uses which are a valuable tool in determining its significance.

Sketch of the Town Hall Gardens, c1881-90



(Source: Central Highlands Regional Library)



Wadawurrung Country
50,000+ years

The Wadawurrung people occupied the thickly forested and rich volcanic landscape.



Mining landscape
1851+

Post European settlement, the precinct, together with the wider Ballarat East area, was the site of significant gold mining activity. This led to the degradation of the landscape.



Civic Precinct
1862-63

The early development of Ballarat East as a municipality with a separate political and social identity to Ballarat West involved the development of key buildings including the Town Hall, Police Court, Free Library and Fire Station.



Town Hall Gardens
1863+

The design and layout of the grand Gardens reflected the influence of 19th Century British ideals of society – ordered, self-improving and prosperous – and played an important role in the development of civic identity and the rehabilitation of the mining landscape.



Community & educational precinct
20th & 21st Centuries

The introduction of a range of educational, library and community services contributed to significant community use and activity.

Significance of the Precinct

The precinct is recognised as having significant heritage and cultural values. These include tangible attributes such as the layout, design and natural landscape elements, and intangible attributes such as the experiences, use and community connections.

These attributes reflect the natural, land use and social history, from 50,000+ years of Wadawurrung Country, to the transient nature of life on the gold diggings in the 1850s that resulted in ad hoc street and land patterns, to the introduction of symbols of civic order of European society in the 1860s, to the introduction of educational and community services in the 20th Century, as well as the impact of industrial activity and efforts to control the flow of water along the waterways throughout time.

Illustrated Australian News Sunday November 5, 1892

"...The Ballarat East Town Hall is erected upon an elevated site in Barkly Street, overlooking a handsome garden, which is carefully looked after and which really, looks like an oasis in the desert..."

The Ballarat Star Thursday April 25, 1895

"...While known to many lovers of flowers, the extent and excellence of the Ballarat East gardens is overlooked by those who otherwise would find an unfailing source of delight and admiration..."

Ballarat East Town Hall and Gardens

These are significant for the key role they played in the development of civic identity and as a venue for significant civic events including visits by royalty and dignitaries representing many countries.



Reception for His Excellency the Governor of Victoria, Lord Hopetoun and his wife, Lady Hopetoun, 1890
(Source: State Library Victoria)

The Gardens

The remnant Gardens are significant for the key role they played in the development of civic identity and represented Ballarat's proud association with horticulture and as a 'City of Gardens'.



(Source: Unknown)

Significant Trees

Remnant mature trees have horticultural significance for their association with notable figures in the early history of horticulture in Victoria.



The Spanish Fir trees flanking the original Town Hall steps are listed by the National Trust.

Australasian 1875

"...These gardens are probably the best-kept public gardens in the colony. Though small in extent they contain a collection of the best trees and shrubs in cultivation..."

Former Free Library

The former Free Library is significant for its architectural, historical and social values and as the last remaining early public building associated with the Borough of Ballarat East.



Former Free Library, Barkley Street 1867-8

The Ballarat Star Monday February 6, 1893

"...A visit to the Town Hall gardens will repay any lover of horticulture, and it is a wonder that more people do not make themselves acquainted with what may justly be claimed as one of the chief beauty spots in Ballarat..."

Opportunities

The heritage and cultural values of the precinct give rise to opportunities and constraints. The most fundamental opportunity is to ensure that the values are conserved and managed with authenticity and integrity for present and future generations. The Plan identifies opportunities to enhance the design cohesion and amenity of the former Town Hall Gardens and environs and to increase awareness and understanding of the significance of the precinct.

These opportunities are grouped under the following seven themes:

Improve management

- 1.1 Establish a collaborative and integrated approach to management to ensure the best possible use and maintenance of existing structures and spaces and to encourage public use of the wider precinct.
- 1.2 Consider environmental and climate factors when designing future plantings to achieve a more sustainable landscape.

Celebrate the precinct's significance

- 2.1 Council, Barkly Square tenants and local community members work together to ensure the precinct's heritage and cultural values are acknowledged and celebrated.

Increase collaboration

- 3.1 Increase opportunities for collaboration among Barkly Square tenancies to help achieve a coordinated program of community events, to cross-promote services and resources, and to increase opportunities in training, employment and community services.

Sustain community and cultural connections

- 4.1 Encourage and support community events, programs and other initiatives to bring together diverse communities and strengthen social connectedness, belonging and unity.
- 4.2 Encourage environmentally sustainable development.

Improve and enrich the visitor experience

- 5.1 Activate the site by developing a program of cultural events, interpretation and promotion to create memorable visitor experiences that lead to increased visitor numbers and help strengthen Ballarat's visitor economy.

Improve access and amenity

- 6.1 Improve existing facilities and introduce new facilities to encourage and welcome visitors.

Strengthen advocacy

- 7.1 Pursue and support funding opportunities to enhance the precinct.

Policy

Policy will form an important part of the framework that guides decisions about the management and conservation of the heritage values and future landscape works. Decision-making processes will incorporate heritage conservation principles as well as statutory obligations.

Future works to enhance the precinct and tell the stories

Planning: actions to support the management of the heritage values of the precinct

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| 1.1 | Research into Aboriginal connections: identify the potential impact of any future works on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. |
| 1.2 | Archaeological investigation: identify key site features and elements. |
| 1.3 | Landscape planning: develop landscape plans to conserve and enhance identified heritage values. |
| 1.4 | Assessment of trees: assess mature trees to determine appropriate management plans and to identify significant trees for nomination in the City of Ballarat's Exceptional Tree Register. |
| 1.5 | Management planning: develop management plans to ensure the appropriate conservation of significant trees and vegetation in areas of high heritage value. |

Landscape: actions to support the conservation of the heritage values of the precinct

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| 2.1 | Landscape improvement: undertake design, planting and restoration works to conserve and enhance remnant features, restore the external spaces, improve the internal courtyard and improve active transport links within Ballarat East. |
| 2.2 | Site interpretation: introduce landscape design and signage that tell stories of the heritage and cultural significance of the site to increase awareness and enhance understanding and enhance the visitor experience. |
| 2.3 | Visitor facilities: introduce seating and spaces for events to improve access and amenity. |



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