

ABBOTSFORD CONVENT FOUNDATION

BOARD STATEMENT ON MAPPING THE FUTURE

The Story So Far

Rapid progress has been made since the Victorian Government gave the Abbotsford Convent precinct as a gift to the people of Victoria in 2004. Buildings that have been restored are now fully occupied and there are regular events, markets and activities with 10,000 people visiting the site weekly. The vision remains one of a diverse arts, cultural and learning precinct with public access.

The Convent operates within the bounds of a Development and Operation Deed signed with the State Government, heritage guidelines, a Master Plan and Planning Scheme Amendment that incorporates the Master Plan. The Master Plan was last updated in 2006.

It is time to consider the next five years, build on the success of the early years, learn from these years and continue the improvement of the physical infrastructure. There continue to be many challenges, but they are different to challenges of early restoration, financial viability and persuading doubters that the idea would work. It clearly has worked, exceeding most expectations, but one can't be complacent and there is much to do.

2010 - 2015

The ACF Board has met with and listened to comments from tenants, funders, heritage advisers, lawyers, architects, other professional advisers, local residents, Convent visitors, staff, volunteers and representatives from the City of Yarra, State government and Federal government.

Apart from accepting that the next five years will be very different to the first five years the Board accepts that the Convent will need to adapt to changing circumstances and will always be a 'work-in-progress'. What is clear is the need to have structures, processes and policies that provide a solid foundation for managing change and dealing with competing demands. From the Board's discussions these fall into five broad areas; the master plan, leasing and tenancy, stakeholder input, funding for new development and, governance and administration.

Master Plan

The increased use of the precinct, including the Collingwood Children's' Farm, has raised issues of public risk, traffic management, parking, relationships with local residents and integration with the surrounding community and the mix of pedestrian, bike and vehicular traffic.

Apart from this overarching issue, there are specific design challenges within the Convent. Discussions have commenced with the commercial tenants in the Annex in relation to universal access, weatherproofing to expand their commercial opportunities, connecting the Annex to the Community Store and ensuring that this point of arrival is all that it can be and retains its heritage integrity.

A walkway between the east and west of the site through Sacred Heart is important to opening up the industrial wing and attracting ateliers and artists to Sacred Heart once restored.

A new Board advisory committee, Design, Architecture, Landscape & Garden Committee (DALAG), has been established to focus on these and other design matters as part of the review of the Master Plan.

Leasing & Tenancy

Leasing issues have recently given rise to correspondence, media articles and public campaigns. It is clear that there needs to be a well understood policy framework, full briefing of new tenants and a very clear process for dealing with the end of leases and non-compliance with lease conditions. The Board responded in detail to a letter written on behalf of tenants by Arnold Salinas (Convent Bakery), which was followed by an open meeting with tenants and the formation of Working Parties to address the matters raised. When the Working Parties have completed their work an ongoing Tenant & Site Development Committee chaired by the Deputy Chair of the Board will be formed, providing the opportunity to discuss matters directly with Board and feed into the future planning process.

Stakeholder Input

At the request of some stakeholders the Board has agreed to hold an open stakeholder forum later in the year at which it will outline plans for the future, discuss matters that people wish to raise and report on the previous year. Should there be a need to hold a broad based forum mid-year the Board has decided that it will hold a second around April/May 2011. Given that tenants will have their own consultative forum through the Tenant & Site Development Committee, holding the second forum will depend on the level of interest and whether this structure is considered to be the most appropriate way to engage with and encourage input from such diverse stakeholders.

Funding for New Development

The Development and Operations Deed with the State Government prevents the ACF from borrowing. Sewerage and water infrastructure is in need of upgrading and will require capital investment to progressively restore. Raising the funds for maintenance, infrastructure and restoration is a high priority. Without further capital investment new development will be difficult and potentially could stall. The Board will continue to foster its close relationship with philanthropic trusts, reopen negotiations with both State and Commonwealth Governments once the election outcomes are known and restructure the administration to give higher priority to this task.

Governance & Administration

ACF publishes an annual report and puts its full set of audited financial statements on the website. In addition in 2010 the Board has decided to also hold a broadly based stakeholder meeting. All documents related to the above working groups, committees and the future planning process will also be placed on the website for easy access and to keep all stakeholders informed.

In order to meet the challenges outlined above the Board will strengthen and restructure the administration. A Chief Operating Officer will be appointed to manage day to day operations, leasing, governance and finances. The CEO, Maggie Maguire, will oversee and have increased responsibilities for future development, events, external stakeholder management, government relations and funding.

Implementation

The developments and changes outlined in this statement take effect immediately. Some, such as DALAG and the tenant Working Groups, are already under way. The administrative changes will come into effect once a Chief Operating Officer has been recruited.



Hayden Raysmith

Chairman

9 August 2010