

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**THE CULTURAL AND HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TUGGERANONG
HOMESTEAD AND ITS SITE**

**A REPORT BY
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, HERITAGE
AND
ENVIRONMENT**

DECEMBER 1992

Committee Members

Mr M Moore

Ms A Ellis

Mr L Westende

Secretary

Bill Symington

TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 29 October the committee resolved to inquire into and report on:

The cultural and heritage significance of the Tuggeranong homestead, its associated buildings and environs to ascertain:

1. the site boundaries necessary to maintain the historical context of the heritage area;
2. the extent and means by which the cultural and heritage integrity of the site should be shielded from adjacent existing and planned urban development; and
3. the benefit to, and the implications for, the community in maintaining the homestead and environs as a site of cultural and heritage significance.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Committee members had, for some time, been aware that the Tuggeranong homestead complex was under consideration for further development and that a number of Tuggeranong residents were anxious to know what the Government had in mind for the area. One community group in particular, namely the Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH), had voiced concern that land forming the homestead complex would, if built upon, significantly detract from its value as an historical site.

1.2 The MOTH and other community based representations indicated to the committee that the basis for their concerns needed to be established. The committee considered that the most effective way to do this would be by a public airing of both the concerns and the Government's intentions with regard to the site. Hence this inquiry.

1.3 In the short time available for the inquiry, 33 submissions were received and 16 witnesses gave evidence at a public hearing on 27 November. Details of submissions and witnesses are in appendices 1 and 2. The committee inspected the homestead and the site. It took particular note of the homestead and outbuildings in relation to the whole of the site, the surrounding suburbs and site boundaries, the scope for and likely visual impact of proposed housing developments in relation to the homestead and the means by which these could be screened.

1.4 At the outset, the committee expresses appreciation to the Tuggeranong community and its representatives, the ACT Conservation Council, Departmental officers, the ACT Heritage Council and the Tuggeranong homestead lessees for their cooperation in ensuring the committee was fully informed on the issues. The committee pays particular tribute to the Tuggeranong community residents for their communal spirit and dedication in seeking to preserve a community asset for the benefit of all in the community.

1.5 This inquiry illustrates how concerns can develop in the community and achieve a momentum when it is clear that reasonable compromises by both sides can achieve an amenity of substantial broader benefit to the whole of Canberra as well as to the Tuggeranong community. A number of submissions to the committee for or against limited development of the site were characterised by the lack of any supportive argument for the positions taken. As a consequence the committee had little scope to assess the merits of these submissions. Similarly, the committee had difficulty in accepting at face value unsubstantiated claims about Aboriginal burial sites and the remnants of pioneer cottages being located within the current boundaries of the property.

1.6 More importantly, however, the inquiry revealed a degree of misunderstanding as to what can be achieved by a sympathetic professional approach to conserving and maintaining the integrity of historical sites and preparing these and their surrounds for broader community use.

1.7 On 16 November the Minister For The Environment, Land and Planning released a conservation study report on the Tuggeranong homestead prepared by the consultants Freeman, Collett and Partners. The Freeman report canvasses most of the issues before the committee and the committee refers the Assembly to that report for its detailed description of the history and cultural associations of the Tuggeranong property, the physical state of the heritage buildings and curtilage and the work necessary to restore these to an appropriate condition.

1.8 The Freeman report also identifies features of the site which have particular heritage significance and beyond this suggests several development zones which might accommodate housing, a hotel/motel, convention centre, arts, crafts and cultural activities or a combination of these. While the Freeman report was a resource document for the committee during the inquiry and was especially valuable in that it pulled together the history of the site, the results of earlier studies of the site and indicated options for its future use, the committee benefited from other material relevant to the issues and from the detailed submissions and evidence it received.

1.9 As the history of the homestead and site are well documented and now generally known, the committee has confined this report to an assessment of the principal issues relating to the preservation of the area and its boundaries.

2. THE ISSUES

2.1 The principal issues arising during the inquiry were:

- the basis for retention and preservation of the homestead and associated buildings
- whether all or part of the site should be retained and conserved consistent with its heritage associations
- what community and commercial facilities would be appropriate for the site
- whether, and to what extent, there should be residential housing on the site

2.2 The committee found unanimous agreement for retention of the homestead and the outbuildings identified as being of cultural and heritage significance.

2.3 The homestead site is identified by the Australian Heritage Commission as an historic site and is on the register of the National Estate. It is classified by the National Trust of the ACT, and is also listed in the National Capital Development Commission sites of significance¹. The Heritage Council of the ACT advised the committee that it is preparing a citation for the homestead and environs as a proposal for inclusion in the interim Heritage Places Register.²

2.4 There was some discussion as to whether the homestead and outbuildings should be restored to a condition reflecting their associations with the grazing industry in the mid to late 19th century but no definitive views were put to the committee on this aspect. Opinions centred upon community use of the buildings in situ, albeit with restoration to habitable standard. There was also a strongly held view that the association of CEW (Charles) Bean, the Australian official war historian, with the property ought to be recognised.

2.5 With the notable exception of the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra, which would accept a Charles Bean associated commercial activity but stated strong reservations about any other commercialisation of the site, commercial development in one form or another was supported by most respondents. Apart from specific proposals put to the committee by the current lessee on a confidential basis, and broad indications given in the Freeman report, community submissions and witnesses put forward very general proposals ranging from specialised housing and accommodation to non residential developments with tourism advantages.

¹ Transcript, p3

² Submission no 29, p1

2.6 The main differences before the committee concerned the actual area of the site to be retained as a heritage precinct. Arguments were put for total preservation of the existing site from any residential development, and others accepted that limited residential development was feasible in the context of preserving the heritage character of the area.

3. THE HOMESTEAD AND OUTBUILDINGS

Homestead

3.1 The homestead and outbuildings represent some eight phases of settlement of the property which have witnessed substantial changes to the homestead structure and the demolition and construction of farm buildings from 1835 to the present. It is noteworthy that the homestead was extensively altered in 1908 and underwent radical change in 1949–50. The question arises as to whether the homestead should be returned to its pre-1949 condition. Given the structural alterations made in 1949, this could be an expensive task depending upon the extent of restoration.³ In this event, further questions arise as to whether the homestead should be taken back further than the 1908 changes. It was put to the committee that the scale and intensity of restoration would be dependant upon the intended use of the building.

3.2 The committee observes that the building is currently used as a residence and that it appears to be sound, serviceable and comfortable. Indeed, for those unfamiliar with the homestead building it is surprising to find that it presents as an ordinary cream brick farm house such as would have been built post 1950 in many rural areas of Australia.

3.3 Notwithstanding this, the committee discerned an implicit view that the heritage integrity of the homestead is prejudiced by the 1949 alterations in that these disguise the progression of construction styles and techniques prior to that time. However, it would not be unreasonable to take the view that the 1949 alterations to the homestead were part of a continuing process of change to a building which retains little apparent evidence of its form before 1908. It could be argued that the 1949 alterations are representative of building styles and techniques in vogue some 40 years ago, a time span of some significance in itself when related to Canberra's built heritage. For example, inner areas of Canberra built in the 1930s and 40s are important heritage landmarks.

3.4 The committee retains an open mind as to whether the homestead should be restored to a pre-1949 condition. However, it proffers the view that many Canberrans and other Australians would probably have little difficulty in associating the homestead as it presently exists with its rural antecedents. Indeed, community representations to the committee have focused on retention of the homestead and have not generally sought to make a distinction between the building in its present form and how it would have appeared pre-1949.

³ Transcript, p10

Outbuildings

3.5 In many respects the outbuildings reflect the cultural atmosphere of the homestead site because of their direct association with rural activities. Thus, the barn which appears to have survived largely intact from the 1841 period, the pise construction maids quarters, the school room and the dual seat toilet dating from the 1858–1916 period and even the 1920's shearing shed and 1949 meat house are evocative of the history and life of remote rural communities at those times. Most of these structures are sound and could be restored at reasonable cost.

3.6 The committee was advised by the Heritage Council that as a collective the buildings are important as a group because they are very important components of a homestead, but that taken in isolation the individual significance of each structure is not very high.⁴ In this context, the committee sees value in retaining the several phase 7 buildings dating from the 1920s through to the 1950s including both the old and the new shearing sheds. The latter shed which is in very sound condition is a prominent visual reminder in the National Capital of the importance to the national economy of the wool industry.

Community and Commercial Use of the Buildings

3.7 The committee noted support from the Tuggeranong Community Arts Association for redevelopment of existing buildings to provide facilities for arts, crafts and various recreational pursuits and as a cultural focus for communities within the Tuggeranong valley. The Association suggested that studio and workshop facilities be available for lease to local craft workers at low cost.⁵

3.8 Community support for other commercial development of the site was evident. The MOTH group recognised that funding for preservation and restoration of the homestead and site might have to be derived from other than Government sources and indicated that non residential, income producing, development could be considered, possibly linked to tourism.⁶ The Tuggeranong Community Arts Association suggested motel type units/cabins and bunkhouse/dormitory facilities for visiting groups including schools.⁷

3.9 The current lessee, Anderson Holdings Pty Ltd, advised the committee that it is not likely the homestead could become self financing as a purely heritage and cultural centre, asserting that if such a course was attempted, either standards of maintenance or public access would be limited by shortage of resources. The company suggested that its Federation Square facility at Gold Creek is an example of a modern development in harmony with adjacent heritage buildings,⁸ although the committee noted the Conservation Council's less than enthusiastic view about Federation Square.⁹

⁴ Transcript, p27

⁵ Submission no 18, p4

⁶ Submission no 17, p6

⁷ Submission no 18, p5

3.10 In evidence to the committee, Government representatives made it clear that the Government is committed to not compromising the heritage values of the homestead and environs, but was nevertheless concerned about the ongoing burden of restoring and managing the facility. It was put to the committee that the Government envisaged that the site could include a range of commercial activities which would be complimentary to the restoration of the significant heritage elements at the site.¹⁰

A Charles Bean Memorial

3.11 It is well documented but not generally well known that from 1919 to 1924, CEW Bean and his team occupied the homestead for the purpose of writing the official history of Australia's participation in the First World War.¹¹ The committee was reminded of this historical and cultural link with the property by the Conservation Council and by the MOTH group.¹² Both bodies strongly supported the establishment of a "Bean Study Centre" at the homestead as a repository for Bean's manuscripts, works and diaries for scholarly research and use by schools and other visitors. MOTH suggested that low cost accommodation for students could be established in conjunction with a Bean Study Centre.¹³

3.12 The committee sees considerable merit in the proposed Bean Study Centre and regards it as a practical and innovative means of commemorating this eminent Australian as well as providing a realistic basis for the continued use of the homestead. The committee recognises the need for support from the Australian War Memorial for the establishment of such a centre.

Recommendations

3.13 The committee recommends that the Government

- (a) assess the heritage significance of the homestead building in its present (ie post 1949) state and determine what period of its history should be represented by the building;
- (b) decide the basis for management of the homestead, and outbuildings including:
 - (i) provision for appropriate commercial, cultural and community based activities, if any, for the buildings

⁸ Submission no 12, p4

⁹ Transcript, p54

¹⁰ Transcript, p4

¹¹ Dr CEW (Charles) Bean was appointed Australian official war correspondent upon the outbreak of the 1914–18 war and was appointed the official war historian by the Federal Government in 1919. He was awarded an honorary doctorate in letters from Melbourne University in 1931.

¹² Transcript, pp49–51, 87–88

¹³ Transcript, p87

- (ii) restoration of outbuildings and the maintenance of the homestead at an appropriate standard
- (c) subject to (a) above, approve such structural alterations to the building as to establish it in harmony with the period of ACT history it is to represent;
- (d) examine, in consultation with the Federal Government, the feasibility of establishing a "Charles Bean Memorial Study Centre" within the homestead or its precincts; and
- (e) provide that any other commercial buildings which are approved adjacent to the homestead site be in harmony with the heritage character of the homestead and its site.

4. BOUNDARIES APPROPRIATE TO THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

4.1 The Tuggeranong site of some 31 hectares is confined within a roughly triangular shape bounded by Ashley and Johnson Drives and the realigned Tuggeranong Creek as shown in Figure 1¹⁴. The creek is essentially a concrete storm water drain and, like the traffic overpasses at each end of the property and the heavily trafficked Drives, is an unsympathetic visual intrusion on the site. It is surrounded by the suburbs of Isabella Plains, Richardson and Calwell and is distinctive, apart from its obvious association with a once much larger grazing property, as a major green belt in the Tuggeranong area.

4.2 From on site inspection, the committee noted:

- (a) that the surrounding suburbs dominate outward views from the homestead area and are a visual intrusion on the site especially from the east, south and north;
- (b) the area to the north west of the site beyond the line of pine trees is not visible from the homestead area because of a slight rise in the land and due to tree cover;
- (c) the site boundaries are unnatural, reflecting planning convenience resulting from suburban development, roads and creek realignment; and
- (d) that as a consequence, the total site does not have a clear functional relationship to the homestead area and associated farm buildings.

4.3 Looking outward from the homestead area the observer is struck by the fact that existing tree cover, though relatively sparse, provides a particularly effective screen to the north west. To the north, the closer part of the suburb of Richardson is partly shielded from view by willows, pines and other exotic species lining the old Tuggeranong Creek watercourse.

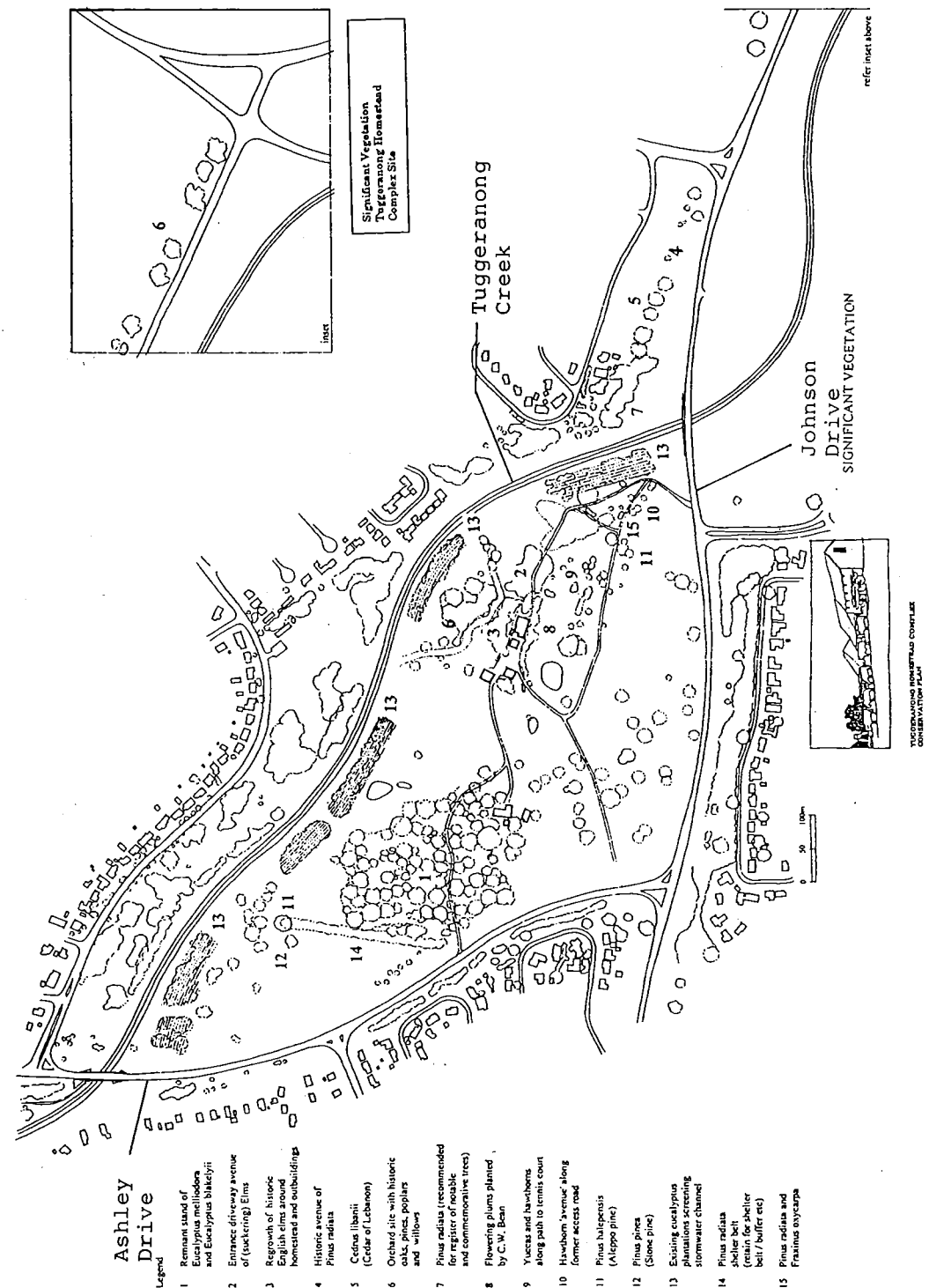
Boundary Considerations

4.4 While the Tuggeranong community groups strongly supported retention of the present site boundaries, the focus of their argument lay with the homestead area itself and the committee was given little in the way of hard evidence to justify why some other boundaries would not be as effective in preserving the intrinsic heritage value of the Tuggeranong property in terms of its former glory.

4.5 The committee observes that the present boundaries result from planning circumstances and that the actual area enclosed by these boundaries would not appear to be essential in itself for preserving the heritage associations of the homestead. The committee considers that it is not unrealistic to believe that the heritage character of the homestead site could be

¹⁴ Freeman Collett & Partners, October 1992, Tuggeranong Homestead Complex Conservation Plan, Vol 2

FIGURE 1



preserved within a tighter boundary. Clearly, the heritage character of the site as a large grazing property cannot be recreated and, for reasons already stated, the question arises as to whether the present boundaries are an unbalanced representation of past rural associations. Taken to its ultimate, it could be argued that the surrounding suburbs should not have been developed in the first place.

4.6 It is another question to argue, as the Conservation Council did, that there has been inadequate assessment of the heritage significance of the site in terms of its flora and fauna.¹⁵ The committee considers that the importance of this particular habitat should be assessed having regard to the changed character of the land since early settlement, the amount of land which should be preserved and the use to which it will be put.

4.7 The area of primary historic and heritage significance is clearly that area much closer to the homestead and the outbuildings and the committee considers that, on balance, the case for pulling the boundaries closer to the homestead area are compelling.

4.8 It was put to the committee by the Heritage Council that the line of pine trees marked in Figure 1 is the historical western boundary of the property. The Council indicated that it had to be acknowledged that the (suburban) change to the south meant that a boundary compromise had to be made involving paths through any development on the boundary.¹⁶

Use of the Area

4.9 The site outside of the homestead and certain approach areas presently supports about 30 horses on agistment. There is also some horse stabling. There is no other obvious use of the area for grazing with no evidence of pasture improvement.

4.10 Beyond the homestead, the site is an uninviting place for general recreation and community use such as bushwalking. It is unmown and heavily infested with the noxious weed Patterson's curse as well as large clumps of feral plants including hawthorn. Contrary to some assertions, the site, apart from the homestead and outbuildings, conveys little of a rural flavour. If anything, it evinces an aura typical of the semi-rural areas close to Australian cities. From observation and anecdotal evidence committee members believe the site harbours an unusually large snake population.

4.11 These factors raise the question as to whether the site is fulfilling a community need in its present form. The committee considers there is a clear potential for the site to be used to greater community effect, and notes suggestions by the Tuggeranong Community Arts Association for recreational parkland, a lake, playgrounds and an equestrian centre.¹⁷ The MOTH group advised the committee that an attractive parkland setting would suggest

¹⁵ Submission no 31, p3

¹⁶ Transcript, p23

¹⁷ Submission no 18, p4

tourism potential and referred to the property as providing a first hand experience of what an historic rural property looked like and how it worked.¹⁸ These proposals, including the working farm concept would all involve development of the site to some degree and, in the process, compromise heritage elements to some extent.

4.12 The committee notes that previous proposals nominated possible core and associated uses for the site including a national equestrian centre, museum and displays, cluster and medium density housing, agriculture college, golf course and district park.¹⁹ While the committee has a strong attraction to the area becoming a district park, enlightened planning should allow the site to be developed for public access in a wide range of community recreational uses in sympathy as far as possible with the heritage character of the area. For example, where appropriate, land set aside in Section 790, Calwell, for other community facilities could be redirected to part of this site.

Residential Development

4.13 Draft proposals before the Government provide for some 300 residential units to be built on the site over the next two financial years. The proposal is indicated graphically in the site plan in Figure 2²⁰ which is taken from the Freeman report.

4.14 The Conservation Council advised the committee that it was not satisfied that a full cost/benefits analysis had been made of the housing proposal and that there were concerns about the oversupply of houses in the ACT.²¹ While it acknowledges this concern the committee must emphasise that it is not competent in the context of this inquiry to make assessments about housing demand which is a matter for commercial judgement. A further concern raised by the Council, and which the committee shares, is the effect on local fauna of pets, and specifically cats, brought into the area by householders.²² The committee notes that this is a problem throughout the ACT and the issue of legislative control of domestic cats during the nocturnal hours when they are most likely to make their depredations on local wildlife warrants further investigation.

¹⁸ Submission no 17, pp5-6,

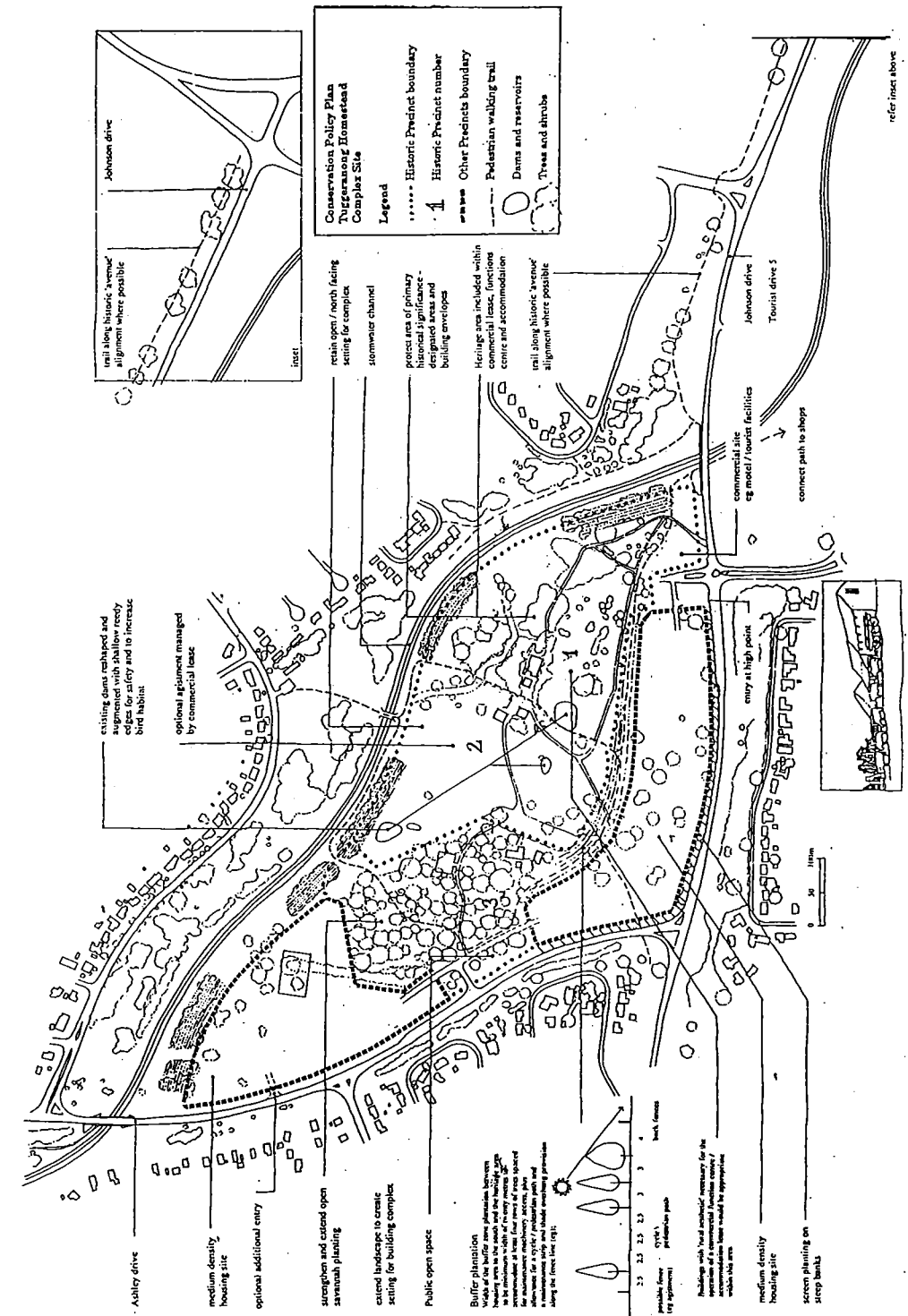
¹⁹ Freeman Collett & Partners, op cit, p2

²⁰ Freeman Collett & Partners, op cit

²¹ Submission no 31, p5

²² ibid, p5

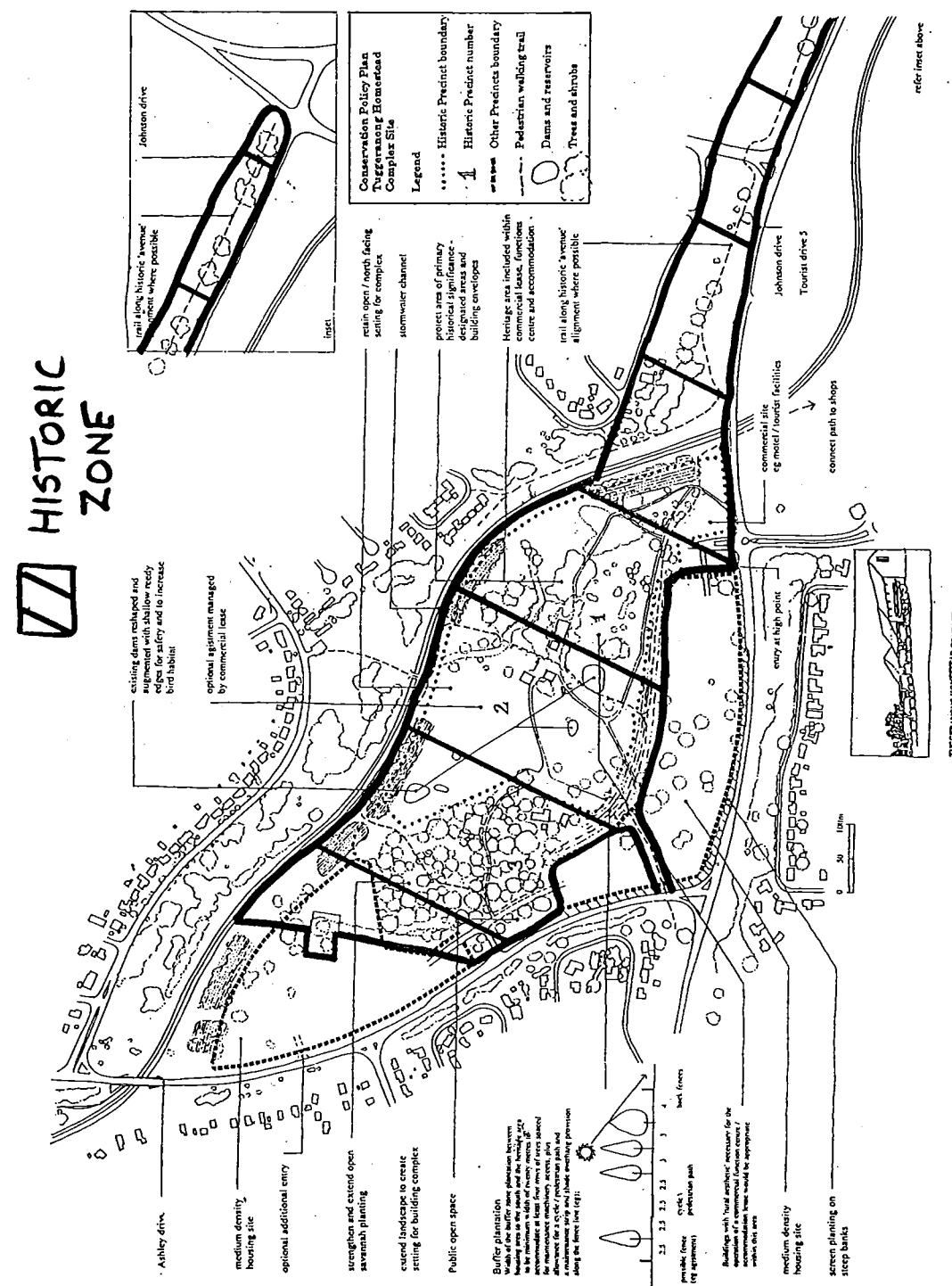
FIGURE 2



4.18 If there is to be residential development along parts of the southern boundary of the site, the committee considers that a belt of eucalypt and other native trees and plants should be planted against the edge of the development. The buffer plantation should be of such depth as to screen the development when looking outwards from the homestead area. Should this development not proceed, the committee proposes that the buffer plantation serve the same purpose by being positioned along the Ashley and Johnson Drive boundaries of the site.

25 Submission no 29

**HISTORIC
ZONE**



4.19 The committee also proposes that the existing irregular buffer plantation of eucalypts along the Tuggeranong Creek realignment be augmented and made continuous along this boundary of the site.

Recommendations

4.20 The committee recommends that the Government:

- (a) assess the heritage significance of the Tuggeranong site flora and fauna having regard to changes in the land use since early European settlement, the desirable area of habitat and proposed land usage;
- (b) establish the western boundary of the heritage area on the western side of the line of pine trees identified on the plan in Figure 1 of this report;
- (c) in consultation with the Heritage Council establish the southern boundary of the site closer to the homestead area to allow for any future residential development along the present Ashley and Johnson Drive boundaries;
- (d) in consultation with the Heritage Council develop community and public access proposals for the site including, where appropriate, the redirection from Section 790, Calwell, of land set aside for other community facilities, the proposals to include a district park; and
- (e) establish buffer plantations of eucalypts and other native trees and shrubs to an appropriate depth along the southern and northern boundaries of the site.

Michael Moore MLA

Presiding Member

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

- 1. Mrs S Wheeler
- 2. Mrs D Vanthoff
- 3. Mr & Mrs A Copp
- 4. Mr & Mrs R Cruikshank
- 5. Mr G Guttridge
- 6. Ms J Long
- 7. Dr I H Brunskill
- 8. Mr R Jack
- 9. Ms J Armstrong
- 10. Ms D Kaiser
- 11. Tuggeranong Community Council
- 12. Anderson Holdings Pty Ltd
- 13. Miss S Curley
- 14. F R Bonsey, D R Oram, J A Oram and N D Oram
- 15. Ms E Kennedy
- 16. Ms J West, Mr G West, Ms C West, Mr D West, Ms T West & Ms K West
- 17. Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH)
- 18. Tuggeranong Community Arts Association Inc
- 19. Ms R McDonald, Ms D Ciampa & Mr R McDonald
- 20. Mr G Theo
- 21. D P (signature unclear, no address)
- 22. signature unclear, no address
- 23. G Donnelly

24. L Bewley
25. Ms M Corcoran
26. signature unclear, no address
27. Canberra Business Council Inc
28. Mrs M Morris
29. ACT Heritage Council
30. National Parks Association of the ACT
31. Conservation Council of the SE Region & Canberra Inc
32. Department of the Environment, Land & Planning
33. Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, ACT

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF WITNESSES AT PUBLIC HEARING

Mrs C Parsons, Department of the Environment, Land & Planning
Mr H Sommer, Department of the Environment, Land & Planning
Mr J Feint, Department of the Environment, Land & Planning
Mr R Nichols, ACT Planning Authority
Mr E Martin, ACT Heritage Council
Ms C Keirnan, ACT Heritage Council
Mr J Anderson, Anderson Holdings Pty Ltd
Mr P Hunt, Anderson Holdings Pty Ltd
Ms J Rees, Conservation Council of the SE Region & Canberra
Mr K Doyle, Tuggeranong Community Arts Association
Mr D Mico, Tuggeranong Community Arts Association
Mr N Sorensen, Tuggeranong Community Council
Mrs L Forceville, Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead
Mr G Forceville, Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead
Mr D Mitchell, Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead
Mr N Jensen, Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead