

Monday 12 December 2011

Legislative Assembly for the ACT
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
GPO Box 1020
Canberra, ACT 2601

ATTENTION: Ms. Amanda Bresnan MLA (Committee Chair)

Dear Ms Bresnan,

RE: Inquiry into the future use of the Fitters' Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into "the best use of the Fitters' Workshop".

I am a local architect and also the architect of the prize winning scheme for the entire Kingston foreshore project. This briefing submission attempts to comment on the Standing Committee's Terms of Reference in particular addressing the items under part 2 are addressed;

- (a) the best use of the Fitters' Workshop, taking into account the acoustic qualities, heritage value, its location, cost and community demand of the building;
- (b) Options for alternative venues for use by a range of community music groups,
- (c) Options for alternative purpose built accommodation for Megalo Print Studio,
- (d) Any other relevant matters.

The submission seeks to present some back ground to original thinking associated with the "Cultural Precinct" in order to present some options and new opportunities for both Megalo and many other worthy community groups who may wish to be located at the Foreshore.

I would welcome an opportunity to present these ideas to the Committee accompanied by appropriate plans and other illustrated material which has being prepared.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for embarking on this research. It is timely that all options are considered in order to arrive at the best possible outcome for the whole ACT community.

Yours sincerely,



Colin Stewart
Colin Stewart Architects

(a) the best use of the Fitters' Workshop, taking into account the acoustic qualities, heritage value, its location, cost and community demand of the building;

Best Use: Flexible use for multiple purposes for the following reasons

Heritage

Heritage structure should be available to be experienced and enjoyed by the widest, possible cross section to the community.

Acoustics

Acoustic quality has been claimed by a number of international musicians and groups as extremely special and if these reports are correct it would be ideal if these qualities could be exploited in the widest sense to enable the flexibility of the space without restricting music/ cultural and other uses.

Location

Location of the Fitters' Workshop is central to the idea of a high quality, high calibre cultural precinct at the gateway to the Kingston Foreshore Project.

The entire precinct is centrally located on the edge of the Central, National Area, linked directly to the edge of the Lake Burley Griffin and well supplied with public parking and close access to all forms of public transport including air/ rail/ train and bus, cycle and walking.

These exceptional locational attributes suggest and indeed warrant retaining the Fitters' Workshop as a multipurpose space for the entire ACT and the region in addition to local usage.

Importantly it is well located away from existing residential areas and ideal for multi use purposes – including music and other arts/ cultural related purposes.

Cost

The first stage of the building structure refurbishment has being completed in relationship to reroofing and generally making the building shell safe, secure and generally weather sealed. It currently has a "raw "industrial character referring its original use as a workshop space, offering the maximum possible flexibility for multi-use purposes. A major annex could be attached to the rear of the workshop to provide separate amenities etc as required by Megalo and other groups wishing to use the main space.

Community Demand

Our experience in particular over the last 15 years working on the Kingston Foreshore Project indicates that there is a need for a designated public meeting place in the Kingston area. There are of course church and school spaces nearby which may be available at certain times but their availability cannot be guaranteed. (eg. Wesley Church, Telopea Park school, Greek Church Hall) Also the old Kingston Library was in times past also a potential meeting place but the new shop front Library has restrictions an available meeting spaces.

During the first decade of the Kingston Foreshore Project the Land Development Agency meeting room which was within the Old Bus Depot Markets building offered an excellent venue for meetings of the Community Reference Groups but this space is no longer available. The Fitters' Workshop in addition to its unique and internationally recognized acoustics properties does offer a beautiful opportunity as a public/ community meeting space as one of many foreseeable uses.

Conclusion

The best use of the Fitters Workshop without any doubt, and on the basis of the new information obtained as to its "acoustic DNA" is as a multiple purpose space that does not compromise its open large internal volume as it now presents its self.

Taking account of claimed acoustic qualities, heritage values, central location, cost and community demand it seems absolutely imperative that the Committee insures that these newly discovered qualities of this "public" asset remain available to the entire community of Kingston, the ACT, the Region and the Nation, and indeed the world.

The opportunity exists for Megalo to be the "caretaker" of the Fitters' Workshop by retaining the workshop as a multipurpose/ exhibition space while occupying a new annex built adjacent to the workshop. Land was specifically set aside for this purpose over 10 years ago and is to my knowledge still available for to 1000m2 GFA (Gross Floor Area).

(b) Options for alternative venues for use by a range of community music groups,

At the Foreshore we understand there are no alternative venues for a range of community purposes.

- The Power House has been refurbished and modified as necessary to meet the needs of the Canberra Glassworks and as a result this very customized adaptive reuse project does not lend its self as an alternative venue.
- The Old Bus Depot Markets building is rarely if ever used for community music groups although it can be used for a range of purposes requiring very large spaces.
- To our knowledge there are no other public venues in the entire 37 hectare Kingston Foreshore Project identified for the community purposes requiring a space of the size of the Workshop.

Conclusion

From our understanding of the Kingston Foreshore Project and our association and involvement in the design and planning of the Foreshore since 1997 the Fitters' Workshop offers an absolutely unique quality venue offering a multi use function/ exhibition space for a very diverse group of arts, cultural and community organizations including music.

To compromise this opportunity cannot be justified with the claims we now have before us in relation to the special and unique acoustic qualities of this Fitters' workshop building.

(c) Options for alternative purpose built accommodation for Megalo Print Studio,

There are opportunities for new purpose built accommodation for the Megalo Print Studios both within the Cultural Precinct at the Kingston Foreshore and immediately attached to the Fitters' Workshop.

This idea is not new but has been an integral part of the entire Kingston Foreshore Project vision for about 15 years since its inception in the 1997.

Since that time various refinements were developed in relation to this idea of making land available on the south side of the Fitters' Workshop to make space for an annex with a site of 500m² and a potential gross floor area of 1000m² assuming a two story annex.

This option was developed and designed at the request of the LDA in order to explore the opportunities of retaining the Fitters' Workshop as a single open space and attaching the necessary support amenities, plant and functional requirements in an attached adjacent building for a yet to be nominated arts/ cultural facility.

In addition to this option, the master plan for the entire Cultural Precinct presented a host of purpose built space opportunities for a range of small and large arts / cultural and community organization wishing to be located at the Kingston Foreshore. The master plan for the Cultural Precinct was prepared to safeguard the heritage aspects of the heritage buildings group at the Kingston Foreshore. The master plan identified approximately 20,000m² of new development space within the Cultural Precinct.

This space was provided with in a group of new "industrial type buildings and were designed in conjunction with ample parking space for more than 500 cars to serve the Foreshore Project. This parking resource combined with a huge development scope for more that 20,000m² of arts and business space was designed to ensure the ongoing sustainability of this exciting growing Cultural Precinct.

When these opportunities exist for high quality new space either attached to the Fitters' Workshop or located elsewhere within the Cultural Precinct it is puzzling why the Government would support a design for the Megalo that apparently ignores such practical, economical and functional options.

(d) Any Other Relevant Matters

1. Heritage Issues

Extensive Heritage studies of the Kingston Power House group of buildings and the immediate heritage precinct which includes trees and the rail way embankment have being undertaken by various expert heritage consultants in the late 1990's and in subsequent years.

Extensive consultation and investigations with the ACT Heritage Council in particular with Dr Michael Pearson have also taken place in 2007 – 2010 period regarding various Heritage aspects and requirements particularly in relationship to public access and visual access to and within the cultural precinct of the Kingston Foreshore.

The Conservation Management Plan (by Peter Freeman 1990's) includes a detailed investigation of the potential uses of the Fitters' Workshop. Conclusions from this Conservation Management Plan and subsequent work by Peter Freeman – Heritage architect include;

- The retention of the Fitters Workshop as a single open multiuse space.
- The need for a “sister” building (eg annex) to be added to the southern side of the Fitters Workshop for the purpose of housing amenities, service areas and other ancillary spaces to service and support the multipurpose function of the workshop building.

The opportunity to consider this new addition or annex to the Fitters' Workshop as a contemporary design thereby avoiding the need to imitate or duplicate the existing architecture of the Fitters' Workshop which of course is extremely difficult and unwise to duplicate in this day and age.

- This work by Peter Freeman's office has had a major influence on the retention and refurbishment of the Fitters' Workshop. This work also influenced the decision subsequently of the Land Development Agency to demolish a major addition to the south side of the Fitters Workshop which blocked the extension of Printers Way to bend and connect with East Lake Parade.

Also it should be noted that the footprint of the Fitters Workshop (approximately 500 m²) was matched with a new proposed site and development opportunity to the south of the Fitters' Workshop for the annex (a further 500m² site) allowing a two story addition with a GFA up to 500 x 2 = 1000m² to be attached and to service the Fitters' Workshop. The current plans designs for the Megalo appear to ignore this opportunity arising from the work undertaken by Peter Freeman and the subsequent work of the LDA in setting up the opportunity for a major annex building to be built alongside the south wall of the Fitters' Workshop.

2. *Urban Design objectives of the original Foreshore Project:*

The design and vision (for the 37 ha project) is articulated in the stage 2 submission to the ACT government prepared by Colin Stewart and a highly specialist consultant Team in 7 November 1997. The team and this scheme were subsequently awarded first prize in the National competition. Colin Stewart has over the past 15 years been working closely with the LDA to advise on design issues and to assist in the implementation of the entire project. Colin has for many years been described by the LDA as the “Master Architect” for the entire Foreshore Project.

In relation to the “cultural Precinct” and the Fitters’ Workshop the Committee should be aware that this concept for a major community/ cultural/heritage was to be the focal point of the entire Foreshore project. This cultural, arts and enterprise precinct was envisioned as being capable over time of emerging as one of the ACT’s and the nation’s great cultural precincts. It was to be “self funding” and capable of growing to over 20,000m² of new space in addition to the space within the existing heritage buildings.

We worked with the LDA for many years with this vision in mind and we understand the LDA supported this ambitious concept for a comprehensive cultural precinct that could be managed by the community and the users in combination with the Government. This was to enable the full potential of this large site (embracing the heritage building group but extending well beyond this area) to include opportunities for growth and change over time to meet the need to create a self funding arts/ enterprise area of the highest calibre.

It is also important for the committee to be aware that this entire cultural precinct area was, I understand, treated separately as a public asset to be retained indefinitely by the ACT Government for arts/ cultural and related enterprise in order to one day realize this wide ranging vision for a world class cultural precinct that is self funding, and capable of accommodating numerous arts, cultural and community groups.

In this context of a wide ranging plan for the Cultural Precinct it would seem appropriate to start by providing new “industrial type” space within the Cultural Precinct as required for groups such as Megalo without the need to compromise the integrity of the Fitters’ Workshop at this time.

This new “low cost” industrial space could be funded by arts funding combined with the income (rent) from businesses wishing to be located in the Cultural Precinct. In this way the scope and wide ranging idea of a Cultural Precinct could grow into an incredibly vibrant arts and cultural hub providing space for the numerous community and cultural groups alongside space for allied businesses wishing to be associated with such an enterprise.

These ideas we believe to be relevant matters that have been on the table for over 15 years and therefore deserve some consideration if we are serious about creating a truly remarkable Cultural Precinct at the Kingston Foreshore. The concept of a comprehensive cultural/enterprise precinct, with self-funding potential built-in, requires some thinking outside the square because this is not the usual way of doing things.

We would welcome an opportunity to present these ideas to the Committee accompanied by appropriate plans and other illustrated material which has been prepared. We take this opportunity to thank the committee for embarking on this research and it is timely that all options are considered in order to arrive at the best possible outcome for the whole ACT community.