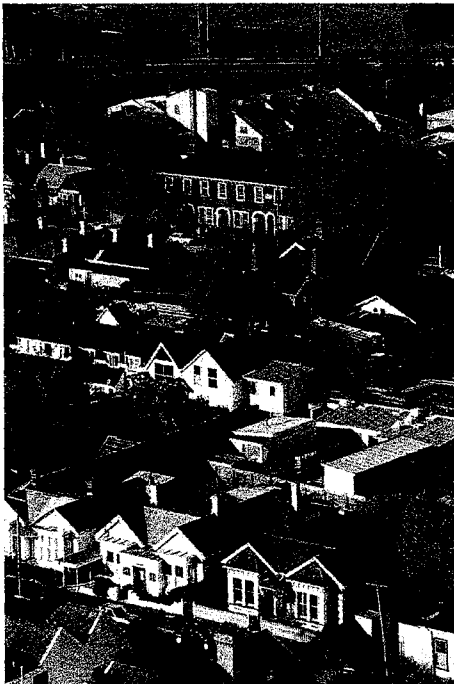


HERITAGE HOUSING IN DUNEDIN

DUNEDIN'S CLAIM TO THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS IN NEW ZEALAND IS ONE OF ITS BIGGEST ASSETS.



Upper George St, a popular student flatting area, has Victorian terraces.

The unique aesthetic, historical, cultural and architectural aspects of the Dunedin townscape are characterised by a high concentration of heritage buildings - the highest in New Zealand - many of them residential. In total there are 739 buildings scheduled in the proposed District Plan. Although development has continued, the general appearance is one of a Victorian or Edwardian city and this is part of Dunedin's intrinsic charm and appeal to residents and visitors alike.

Dunedin has managed to retain many buildings that reflect its prominence as a centre of industrial and commercial growth during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Subsequent slower growth rates have allowed the retention of much of this valuable architectural inheritance, and by the same token the solid sense of permanence and grandeur endowed by the planners and builders of the Victorian and Edwardian era.

Warwick Winn, the Dunedin City Planning Manager, recognises the challenge of retaining and encouraging the maintenance of heritage and character buildings as part and parcel of the current policy of sustainable management acknowledged by the Dunedin City Council and adopted in the proposed District Plan. "We understand the need to retain buildings, but also realise that the key to their long-term maintenance is successful re-use. We try and take a positive 'can do' approach, on the one hand recognising the need to protect and preserve, whilst on the other actively working with property owners to shape changes so as to reflect the character and vitality of our beautiful city."

HERITAGE AS AN ASSET

Heritage buildings and homes are recognised as a major asset to Dunedin and of benefit to the local population in a number of ways. They provide a strong sense of community and belonging, enhance community lifestyle, promote the appropriate re-use of buildings, and maintain the important link between the present and the past for current and future generations.

The economic advantages of active protection of heritage and character buildings can be seen in

the growth of associated tourism businesses, urban renewal and development, the creation of employment opportunities and property investment.

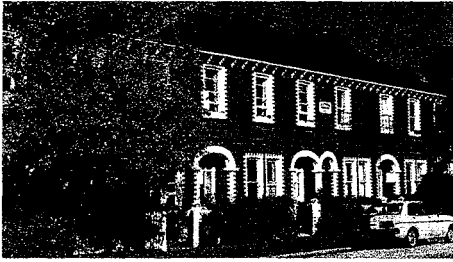
CAMPUS CHARACTER

Dunedin's reputation as a centre of learning is also significant in defining the character of certain areas within the city. Located in a flat, sunny part of the city close to the main retail area, the North Dunedin campus (containing Otago University, the Otago Polytechnic and the Otago College of Education) provides the physical setting for the wide range of educational, social and recreational activities in which students participate. It is defined by its characteristic student flats, which are recognised as part of the historic fabric of this residential area.

The image of the city as a good place in which to study, with an attractive and compact student environment, is consistently matched by the reality. This year, around 15,000 students are enrolled at the University of Otago. Many of those will be housed in Halls of Residence, but a large number choose to rent privately-owned houses. Students have a wide range of older housing stock to choose from, and many are let from year to year - such is the demand for these attractive and unique homes.

PRECINCTS AND ASSOCIATED VALUES

The Dunedin City Council has identified the North Dunedin Residential Townscape Precinct as an area exhibiting "coherent townscape character" with specific precinct values worthy of preservation and enhancement. These include the strong connection between individual houses and the street, with dwellings facing the street, and front doors, verandahs and decks at the street frontage, which creates interaction between street and private activity. Building materials, which include red brick, plaster, weatherboard or Oamaru stone, add to this sense of coherence, and colour schemes are similar to the original colours of the precinct at the turn of the 19th century. Building heights are between one and three storeys, allowing for light and a feeling of human scale and space.



The neighbouring Willowbank Heritage Precinct also features a variety of building types reflecting a wide socio-economic range, and is unified by its age and by having remained intact. As it is located on George Street, at the entrance to the city centre, this precinct therefore offers a strong first impression of the city.

WHAT IS AVAILABLE?

A variety of building styles becomes apparent as one passes through the precincts: from grand family homes to modest brick cottages, from two-storey terraces, some with intricate ironwork balconies, to two-storey villas with verandahs. The double bay villa is another singular building style frequently encountered in Dunedin, but rare in other parts of New Zealand, and this adds to the unique visual appeal of the city.

Students living in these areas tend to personalise their homes and by doing so add to the distinctive flavour and appearance of the streets. Typical are couches on the verandahs to catch the sun and brightly painted front doors that convey an individual identity to the street. The lively atmosphere of an area populated by young people, and the constant movement to and from the university, create a particular sense of community and involvement.

The Royal Terrace, Pitt Street, Heriot Row Heritage Precinct is also a predominantly residential area within walking distance of the university. This precinct has been identified as valuable because of the concentration of heritage buildings within it, one of the most notable being Olveston. Now a thriving tourism business, Olveston has been successfully preserved as a window into life at the turn of the century, and is home to a wonderful collection of treasures from around the world. A group of carefully selected senior students are also fortunate to call it home, currently occupying the



maid's quarters at the top of the building.

Ironically, many of the private houses in this area once let to students have recently reverted to their original function as large family homes, but students can still find shared accommodation in this area, where older family homes are let as a household unit for groups of students. This is a prime example of the adaptive re-use of a building. Each student has a substantially sized room for privacy and study, there are shared areas for communal activities, and the integrity of the building is still intact.

OWNERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

Owners are responsible for the retention and care of heritage buildings in their original form. Their task is to maintain the building against the ravages of time and in compliance with the rules and legislation currently in place. Janet Stephenson of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust offices in Dunedin recognises the fundamental tension between the private rights of a property owner to use their resource as they see fit, and the public's interest in those resources as the "repository of the nation's or community's heritage". Achieving an appropriate balance between these often conflicting interests is the essence of sustainable management.

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust is active in advocating heritage incentive funding, rates relief, and supporting applications for funding from The Lotteries Grants Board and other funding bodies. The Trust can also provide technical and conservation advice and assistance to owners.

The Dunedin City Council's policy on rates relief for heritage and townscape buildings states that "imaginative or productive re-use of an existing heritage building should be viewed favourably", but the focus tends to be on commercial development rather than residential maintenance. However, "the use of such buildings for retail or residential purposes may also be granted rates relief". The council does provide some financial assistance through its involvement with the Dunedin Heritage Fund where favourable loan terms are provided for the refurbishment or repair of historic buildings.

CHANGES

According to the proposed District Plan, any changes to buildings or redevelopment within identified precincts must be compatible with the surrounding streetscape. Consideration should be given to form, materials, colours, and street



Above left: Victorian terraces which are classified category II by NZ Historic Places Trust.


Above right: Brick cottages in George St have a category II classification.

Left below: An impressive Basil Hooper designed residence which the Historic Places Trust is proposing for a category I classification.

orientation. While many new buildings have been developed to meet the heavy demand for student accommodation, in general these have been built in keeping with the coherent characteristics of the existing buildings. Modern developments are arguably the potential heritage buildings of the future.

The city architect, Robert Tongue, is clear in his view that the adaptive re-use of existing buildings is being actively encouraged by the Dunedin City Council. "Heritage on this scale can only be preserved by having the buildings in everyday use. The Architecture and Urban Design (AUD) department provides detailed advice on the renovation and refurbishment of older homes and has produced several guidelines for the protection and enhancement of identified precincts." These include *Design Guidelines*, which apply to renovations, extensions and modifications to existing properties, and to proposed developments, and *A Painting Guide for Early Dunedin Houses*, which is self-explanatory.

The Dunedin City Council planning department and AUD work very closely in assessing planning applications or developments requiring resource consent. Warwick and Robert both agree that rules and more rules are not the answer to protecting Dunedin's important heritage assets. As Robert says, "Many people enjoy living in a 100-year-old house, but few would enjoy having a bathroom at the bottom of their garden!

"Education is the critical factor as well as raising the awareness of what people can reasonably do with their property whilst maintaining these wonderful old buildings and areas for future generations." 

Article commissioned by the Dunedin City Council, written by Marjorie Cape. Photographs by Elizabeth Goodall.