

SUBMISSION TO UMWELT

On the Future use and Management of the Tomaree Lodge Site

December 2022

From Tomaree Headland Heritage Group Inc. (THHG)



Possible Precinct Hub Concept - Clouston Associates

ABOUT THHG

In late 2018, with the knowledge that there were plans to relocate the residents of Tomaree Lodge, nine community organisations on the Tomaree Peninsula decided to work together and with Government and Port Stephens Council to retain the Lodge site in Public/Community hands. Initially we were a group called the **Friends of Tomaree Headland** but in 2020 we incorporated as the **Tomaree Headland Heritage Group Inc (THHG)**. Our paid-up Membership now numbers around 100. THHG has Board with a membership drawn from nine (9) community associations which in turn represents the interests of many thousands of local residents. These associations are listed below:

- **Business Port Stephens Inc.** (*formerly the Tomaree Business Chamber Inc.*)
- **Nelson Bay RSL Sub-Branch Inc.**
- **Destination Port Stephens Inc.**
- **Port Stephens Historical Society Inc.**
- **Shoal Bay Community Association Inc.**
- **EcoNetwork - Port Stephens Inc.**
- **Marine Parks Association Inc.**
- **Tomaree Ratepayers & Residents Association Inc**
- **Tomaree Museum Association Inc.**

THHG's **general membership** also is open to organisations, businesses and members of the public with an interest in the future of the Lodge Site.

The THHG prepared a **Community Vision document** for the Lodge site (see [HERE](#)). The Vision was based on objectives agreed by the membership and the collective local knowledge and appreciation of the assets and constraints of the site. The Vision postulates broad concepts for the future use of the site and for its on-going management. The need for a comprehensive Master Plan and Business Case was recognised.

THHG in 2022 commissioned planning consultants to prepare a **Strategic Concept Plan for the Adaptive Reuse of the Tomaree Lodge Site**. The Report, completed in October, is [HERE](#). This Strategic Concept Plan recommends planning principles and land use criteria (see pages 18 and 26) and provides useful guidelines for the assessment of proposed future land uses on the Lodge site.

THHG'S VISION FOR THE LODGE SITE

The site:

Tomaree Headland at the southern entrance to Port Stephens is a prominent landmark, providing spectacular views to the north and west of Port Stephens and of the Pacific Ocean and its extensive beaches.

The Tomaree Lodge site located on the western shoreline of this headland is an outstanding asset celebrating Aboriginal, European, Heritage and Natural values. In conjunction with the adjoining National Park, it provides opportunities as a nationally significant heritage, tourism, recreation and education precinct for Port Stephens.

The Headland and the Tomaree Lodge site are especially significant due to the presence of Australian and other allied forces during World War II. The remnants of Fort Tomaree are still available to demonstrate the enormity and significance of the defence initiatives of that era.

The Lodge site and its buildings are listed on the New South Wales Heritage Register. The listing notes that ***'the site is rare as one of the few surviving, relatively intact, army garrison camps dating from the Second World War in New South Wales'***.

The Opportunities:

THHG's Vision is for the Lodge land to be retained in public ownership with the objective of providing maximum public access consistent with safety and conservation objectives.

THHG proposes a range of potential uses which it believes can be accommodated without detracting from the core heritage and natural values of the site and which do not require new large-scale buildings which could be inconsistent with the existing scale and current character of the heritage village.

- **Recreation and sightseeing**

The Lodge site is already very popular for passive recreation such as walking and sightseeing. NPWS records indicate that each year some 200,000 persons climbed to the Headland summit prior to the Covid19 outbreak. Many also take the tracks through the Lodge site and these numbers are expected to increase dramatically once the NPWS Coastal Track is completed.

- **Visitor access orientation and amenities**

These facilities are needed to cater for the Lodge site and Tomaree National Park and its Coastal Walking Track.

Uses proposed by THHG include walking track extensions to increase accessibility to the Headland as a whole, interpretive facilities and displays, services such as toilets, a visitor information booth (wayfinding materials and displays), café/light refreshments and a base for guided walking tours focused on the natural and cultural heritage.

- **Museum and Interpretation facilities** showcasing the History of the Headland and Tomaree Lodge, Worimi Culture, Port Stephens generally and its marine environment, especially whales and dolphins.

Some of the existing heritage buildings may be able to accommodate **a permanent display on the history of the site, of world class standard, utilising state-of-the-art display techniques and audio-visuals.** This has potential to be a core attraction complementing any board mounted information planned for the Coastal Walk. This could be a source of revenue and become a primary attraction for Port Stephens as a whole.

The Nelson Bay RSL Sub-branch has proposed that the key World WarII military relics (some require interpretation and restoration) be linked by a 'Memorial Walk' dedicated to those that trained and served from the Tomaree Peninsula.

- **Education and Research**

The natural and heritage assets, coupled with the existing dormitory accommodation, could support educational activities such as school or tertiary level excursions. This could also be associated with marine science research facilities.

- **Visitor Services and Retail**

In keeping with the village character of the Lodge and its relative isolation from the local retail and service centres, there may be scope for refreshment, dining and food outlets as well as retailing of site-related souvenirs, arts and crafts, clothing and outdoors equipment.

- **Events and Culture**

There are some locations within the Lodge site which are suitable for outdoor events such as music, dance, drama and celebrations such as weddings. Subject to more detailed inspections of the existing buildings, there may be indoor spaces with similar potential. The capacity of the site and its open spaces as well as space for parking to accept these events is limited. This would determine the appropriate scale of such events.

Arts and Crafts, including a gallery and workshops, could also be a suitable use.

- **Marine-Linked Businesses**

The existing oyster spawning operation is reliant on easy access to the relatively pristine water of the Bay and its owner is willing to accept visitors for tours and inspections. This facility may be a nucleus for an oyster-tasting and sales business.

Reinstatement of the jetty (recommended later in this submission) could also service tour boat, ferries and diving operations.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY:

THHG recognises the challenges of maintaining the heritage buildings and relics on the Lodge site and the costs of servicing a potentially significant increase in visitation associated with the new Coastal Walk.

Accordingly, we believe that the future uses of the site should have potential to generate revenue say through lease arrangements. There may also be opportunities to charge entry fees for some attractions such as the museum/interpretive centre depending on the quality of the experience on offer. Fees for parking could be another revenue source. There is a public expectation that access to the remainder of the site should not be subject to entry charges.

Particularly due to the State and National heritage and tourist significance of the Tomaree Headland site, THHG believes that there are very good prospects of securing substantial grants from NSW and Commonwealth sources to assist with the adaptive reuse of the site. THHG has already succeeded in obtaining a grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Once proposals are in place for the acceptable future uses of the Lodge site there needs to be a business case prepared to evaluate the sustainability of the options under consideration.

This would examine capital costs, operational costs and the future scope for income generation from visitors and any business leases. The sources of funding for future improvements and ongoing maintenance would need to be explored in this case.

A key market indicator would be the likely significant increase in visitor numbers to Port Stephens, the recovery of the international tourist numbers and the expansion of the Newcastle Airport to take international flights.

ACCESS AND PARKING:

The 2022 Strategic Concept Plan identified the limitation on current and potential parking space as a constraint on future uses and developments at

the Lodge site. They advised against providing significantly increased access for private cars inside the site, on the grounds that it would be difficult to provide safe shared access routes and the replacement of open spaces with extensive car parks would detract from the natural and village character of the site.

The external parking along the foreshore and in Shoal Bay is already nearing saturation point at weekends and in the holiday seasons.

THHG and the Concept Plan consultants believe that the access requirements need fresh solutions such as:

- reconstruction of the wharf at the Lodge to accommodate a ferry service from other locations further west along the Bay
- provision of dedicated remote carparks on the Tomaree Peninsula or on Nelson Bay Road with frequent small shuttle bus services to the Lodge entry
- Reconfiguration of the existing public bus routes to service the entry point to the Lodge, along the Coastal Walk and proposed remote carparks.

FUTURE PLANNING:

The THHG Strategic Concept Plan (see link on page 1 in this document) provides a useful start to planning for the Lodge site as it recommends a set of planning principles and identifies broad opportunities and constraints.

Once a determination has been made on the proposed future uses and broad management requirements for the Lodge site, there needs to be a detailed Master Plan and Plan of Management. These would need to ensure integration with adjoining National Park, and other associated administrations such as Port Stephens Council, Maritime Services and Shoal Bay community activities.

OPTIONS FOR A MANAGEMENT MODEL:

Land Tenure

THHG considers the Lodge site is of such significance to be retained in some form of NSW State ownership to ensure its long-term protection as a public asset which is accessible to the community and other visitors.

On-going Management

THHG has a preference for a Management Trust under the oversight of a State Authority or Port Stephens Council with representation from significant stakeholder interests including:

- Port Stephens Council (See Attachment 1 for PSC resolution concerning its interest in Tomaree Lodge site.)
- NSW NPWS
- The Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council
- At least one representative from THHG
- Representatives of other key community stakeholder organisations such as Destination Port Stephens, Nelson Bay RSL Sub-Branch, the Port Stephens Historical Association, Shoal Bay Community Association, PS EcoNetwork and the Port Stephens Museum Association

Interim Administration and Support:

THHG recognises that some time will be necessary to finalise decisions on the future of the site and to conclude master planning and a business case for any development proposals.

To ensure that in the short term, the asset continues to be adequately protected and that proper master planning is achieved, THHG recommends that the State of NSW remains as the administrator and funds the necessary security and maintenance for the site for up to say five years and that it funds the planning processes (and management model) including master planning, a plan of management and a business plan as well as necessary key upgrade costs required following due diligence and any other transitional costs.

THHG believes that the momentum inherent in this Umwelt survey of local opinion and the information gathered should be followed by an early commencement of the Master Planning for the Lodge site. This would maintain the high level of public interest and involvement which has been achieved and avoid the need for later updates to the survey. It should be also noted that the Conservation Management Plan has been completed.

ATTACHMENT 1: Council's interest in the future of the lodge site.

Port Stephens Council resolved on 14th July 2020:

- That Council recognise the significant opportunities that Tomaree Headland Shoal Bay offers and therefore requests the development of a Plan of Management for the overall headland site to be developed by the owners
- In the meantime investigate the following:

- Additional parking which is already significantly constricted
- The 'cricket pitch' on the Tomaree Lodge site as a potential paid carpark to maximise the number of parks available and improve safety
- Public Transport Options closer to the Headland site
- Investigate the needs for amenities at the entry point to the headland on Council land (in progress)
- Investigate the establishment of a water station at the entry point to the headland walk (already installed)
- Investigate the introduction of appropriate signage on Council land including a walking map of the headland and the directional signage in Shoal Bay CBD (in progress)

Council has provided ongoing support for THHG and its objectives with financial assistance enabling THHG to establish a formal structure, including marketing material, website etc. and to commission consultants to prepare a Strategic Concept Plan for the Adaptive Reuse of the Tomaree Lodge Site. Council also commissioned a Heritage Study of the site.

