

SWAN HILLS ELECTORATE — HERITAGE SITES

Grievance

MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills) [10.00 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Heritage and I thank him for taking it. It is about the preservation and protection of sites of heritage value in my electorate. The first is St Mark's Church in Mt Helena, which was deconsecrated on 22 January 2012, after serving the community for over 100 years. This site was brought to my attention some months ago by Owen Briffa of the Lost Mundaring and Surroundings local history museum. Owen is an extraordinary young man, whom I met very recently at the Hills Billy Cart Festival. He had his mobile museum in place, with all sorts of artefacts and photographs. He is very knowledgeable and passionate about preserving the hills history. He is 13 years old and drives a re-engagement with the history of the hills. He does a wonderful job. He has started a Facebook page and online petition dedicated to saving St Mark's. The church has, unfortunately, fallen into disrepair since deconsecration and has also been subject to senseless acts of vandalism. It is very disappointing that people think it is appropriate to callously attack key parts of our hills history. I thank the members of the local community in the hills who, even within the last fortnight, have taken steps to prevent further vandalism at the church. I understand that St Mark's will be protected and restored as a condition of any transfer and subsequent development of the land. That should occur through the local government processes. I acknowledge Owen's commitment to the preservation of our local history. He is a truly remarkable young man.

The second site is on Betty Street in Chidlow and was brought to my attention by Bob Shepherd, who is an esteemed historian and has been working tirelessly to try to have these sites recognised and protected. In preparation for an influx of troops from the east coast in response to Pearl Harbour and the Japanese attacks in northern Australia, 10 staging camps were built in Chidlow. By 1942, Western Australia was the base for around 30 per cent of the Australian Army. Most of the 60 000 troops who served in WA in World War II would have spent some time at the Chidlow camps. In fact, very recently at a Scouts WA volunteer event, I met Mr Gordon Cargeeg, who was in his mid-90s. Only the day before I had been at the site of the Chidlow camps, and he told me about the time that he had spent at the Chidlow camps during World War II. It was an extraordinary coincidence.

Chidlow played an integral, and yet under-acknowledged, role in the defence of this nation. Today, the site provides valuable evidence of the activity that formerly occurred there. Indeed, during a recent visit to the site with Bob, who also runs walking tours for local community members, another amateur historian was doing some metal detecting on the site. He showed us some artefacts that he had found that day on that site in Chidlow. The Chidlow camp sites are the only sites on public land close to Perth that have a direct link to many servicemen and servicewomen. We could provide a compelling narrative about our responses to Pearl Harbor, the defence of our state and Western Australia's contribution to the national war effort. We could give people a fascinating insight into the daily camp lives of our servicemen and servicewomen. The people of Chidlow are proud of our links to this nation's defence. We celebrate and commemorate the service of our men and women each year at our new memorial site in touching ceremonies organised by the state's newest Returned and Services League of Australia branch, which Chidlow has set up. The services are held in conjunction with the Chidlow Progress Association. Our local tavern, the Chidlow Tavern, is a living museum. The publicans, Norm Brewer and Fran Berry, have completely transformed the place, filling it with fascinating memorabilia, including material covering our proud military history. Chidlow could be the location of an invaluable community asset that would tell a story of significance to both local and national audiences.

Recently, the Shire of Mundaring allowed the private development of the site where camp 4 is located, and much of the heritage value of that camp has now been, tragically, completely destroyed. This has greatly upset the people of Chidlow. Many people are concerned that appropriate steps were not taken to include the site on the shire's municipal inventory and it was, therefore, unprotected. Three other camp sites are still located proximate to the destroyed site. I have been disappointed, and frankly a little confused, by statements made by representatives from the Shire of Mundaring about the respective roles of the shire and the state government in the protection of heritage sites. The shire has stated that it is for the state to preserve these sites, yet I was under the impression that protections are delivered through the planning system and sit squarely in the remit of local government authorities. In the hills, we have a deep history and rich heritage that we are very proud of. We have community champions who are out there preserving the value of our historical sites in the hills. I am aware that there have been changes to the Heritage Act that significantly improve our state heritage regime, but I know that my constituents would welcome some clarification of how heritage is protected in Western Australia, and how the different roles of state and local governments overlap and relate to one another. I would be grateful if the minister could outline the steps that can be taken to protect sites of significance to my community, detail the process to obtain heritage listing and clarify the role of local government authorities and the state government in safeguarding places of historical or heritage significance.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Heritage) [10.07 am]: I thank the member for her grievance. This is a very important opportunity to highlight and reinforce the role that local government plays, and

must play, in the ongoing protection of our state's assets and heritage. This is a very good and timely grievance. First of all, I also acknowledge the heritage warriors the member has in her community and has mentioned, including young Owen Biffa. I think I have met Owen and have seen some of his work, which is quite inspirational. He is a remarkable young man. His efforts are a wonderful example of young people taking a direct interest in the heritage of their local area and the importance of the story of the hills area of our state. I also acknowledge Mr Bob Shepherd, whom the member mentioned. I will talk about Mr Shepherd's efforts with regard to the Chidlow issue particularly. I also acknowledge the work of the publicans of the Chidlow Tavern, Norm Brewer and Fran Berry. People like Fran and Norm understand that to have a tavern, which is a place of hospitality, is a magnificent opportunity to celebrate and share the stories of their local area with people who enjoy their hospitality. I think it is a tremendous thing for those people. I know that many other people in the member's electorate are attuned to the importance of heritage.

I will go through a couple of things. As the member highlighted, the Chidlow camps were overflow facilities for servicemen undergoing training and they are located in Betty Street, Chidlow. Prior to the Heritage Act 2019 coming into operation, this site was not listed on the state register or, indeed, on what was known as the municipal inventory of the Shire of Mundaring. My understanding is that it is still not on the list, and I will talk about that very shortly. Thankfully, a member of the public has nominated the site to the Heritage Council for heritage listing. As the member may be aware, the council will consider that nomination as part of its work, and determine whether to undertake a full heritage assessment at its December meeting; that meeting is imminent. I cannot pre-empt what the Heritage Council will do with that, but obviously, the nomination warrants consideration by the Heritage Council.

I am also a little concerned about mixed messages that the shire may be sending to the community about its role in heritage issues. Let me make it very clear: local governments have a critical role in heritage acknowledgement, because one of the things they are now required to do under the new act—a McGowan government achievement in heritage—is maintain heritage surveys, which replace heritage inventories. These are very important, because the local community, through its local shire or council, has the role of ensuring that not only are those surveys up to date, but also, indeed, they are always considering other sites and assets of a heritage nature that should be added. It is a responsibility of a local government to do that. Many good local governments that do that do it with great consultation and in close consultation with their community. The member's electorate has a large number of people who take heritage issues very seriously, and I would urge the shire to understand its role in not only maintaining its heritage survey, but also looking very actively at other sites that need and warrant consideration to be on that list. This site should be on the list; that is the reality. It allows a layer of protection because it is acknowledged by the local community as being an area of significance. The other aspect, of course, is that other protections can be gained through planning processes; therefore, through consideration of rezonings and zoning and land use issues, the local shire can have a direct influence. It is not right if the shire is giving mixed messages and saying that only the state is responsible. That is not correct, and the community needs to understand that and hopefully continue to put pressure on the local shire to ensure that it upholds its responsibilities in heritage protection.

What does heritage listing mean? The entry of a site on the Register of Heritage Places ensures that any future changes to a site are made with the approval of the Heritage Council. That is an important process. Generally, the Heritage Council is not there to prevent development, but a listing means that there is a recognition of the role of the Heritage Council in any proposed development of a particular site. Should the Chidlow camps receive a listing, the Heritage Council will be able to consider the proposed development and make recommendations to the developers, and, again, I underpin that the shire can play a role in the zoning of that particular area or site.

The new Heritage Act, which this Labor government passed through this place and is now law, does a number of things. It removes interim listings, streamlines the process, cuts red tape and saves the taxpayer money in administration costs. It provides a protection against demolition by neglect, a very important component of the new act. It retains the same penalty regime, and remember that there are fines of up to \$1 million. It has adopted the nationally recognised criteria for assessment under the Burra Charter. It clarifies the definition of cultural heritage and overcomes many of the common misconceptions and uncertainties about the current requirement for local governments to prepare and regularly review inventories of heritage buildings. The act also clarifies the purpose of these surveys as repositories of information on places of local heritage interest to better equip local governments to make informed decisions about heritage matters. Get it on the list! That is important. Get it on the heritage survey list. In respect of the site raised in the member's grievance, the Shire of Mundaring has the capacity to include the Chidlow army camps in its survey. It has that capacity now, and I urge it to do it.