

Division 64: Heritage Council of Western Australia, \$9 461 000 —

Ms J.M. Freeman, Chairman.

Mr A.P. Jacob, Minister for Heritage.

Mr G.A. Gammie, Executive Director, State Heritage Office.

[Witness introduced.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to “Conservation of cultural heritage places in Western Australia, for the benefit of present and future generations” under the heading “Desired Outcome” on page 714. Given this is the centenary of the First World War and, of course, next year will see the Anzac centenary commemorations, I refer to the graves of seven Victoria Cross winners in Western Australian cemeteries, in particular a letter written to a Miss Playle who requested that the graves of the seven VC winners of Western Australia be put on the heritage register. Why has the council been dilatory in doing something about that?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I caught the question, but what part of page 14 is the member referring to?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: “Desired Outcome”.

Mr A.P. JACOB: This is a good opportunity to tell the member what we are doing in terms of recognition of the Anzac centenary. A lot of work has been done by the Heritage Council.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am asking for a specific answer, minister; time is very limited. I am asking about the seven VC graves.

Mr A.P. JACOB: So that nobody who might read this afterwards gets the impression that nothing has been done, a lot has been done from the State Heritage Office —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Put out a press release. I am asking about the seven graves.

Mr A.P. JACOB: — particularly in Albany. Only this week we announced \$250 000 of heritage grants for upgrades —

Ms S.F. MCGURK: A pathetic amount for Fremantle.

Mr A.P. JACOB: It was \$2 million for Fremantle the week before. We announced \$250 000 for upgrades in Albany, particularly in advance of the centenary Anzac celebration. Graves, more generally, obviously sit under the Minister for Local Government and Communities and his carriage of the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board. As to a formal nomination of those seven VC winners’ grave sites for consideration for heritage listing, it has not yet come to me as minister. Mr Gammie is the operational arm, although not actually on the Heritage Council, but he might know where those nominations are.

Mr G.A. Gammie: I am sorry; I am not prepared with information to answer that question. Perhaps we can deal with that as a supplementary.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does the minister think it is somewhat paradoxical that Bon Scott’s grave is on a heritage register but not our VC war heroes?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Member, I do not think that is something to be a bit cute about, to be honest. I find that a bit off, to be quite frank. If there is a nomination for that, it will be considered and it will follow due process. I do not want to presuppose the outcome but no recommendation has come to me. I can certainly see that that is something that, at the very least, is worthy of nomination and consideration. It simply has not come to that point yet. We will give an undertaking to go away and find it. Clearly, if Bon Scott’s grave is one of those, it has been through the nomination and listing process.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: On 8 April, the State Heritage Office wrote “Karrakatta and Fremantle Cemeteries are both included in the Heritage Council’s assessment program and will be assessed for entry into the state register at some time in the future.” I am just asking whether there are any particular reasons for delay. Is it lack of resources? Why will it be done some time in the future?

Mr A.P. JACOB: None whatsoever, member for Girrawheen. That is a different matter altogether. That is a heritage registration of the entire cemetery and I imagine that will be generally a more involved process. We might not even have received a nomination for the seven specific graves. Again we will get that information back to you.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 714 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” where it refers to a new, modernised heritage bill and the most often requested question in Guildford: when will the minister introduce this bill into Parliament?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The Liberal–National government has committed to bring into Parliament this year a new modernised heritage bill for Western Australia. In response to two rounds of stakeholder and public consultation that has been undertaken by the SHO on behalf of the Heritage Council, this new legislation will feature a state register of heritage places that will truly embody the story of Western Australia and promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the state’s cultural heritage. It will include a streamlined heritage assessment framework as well as a streamlined process for entry into the state register that promotes owner and stakeholder engagement, and will be clear and transparent. It will be timely and provide a clearer and more simplified process for amending a register entry. Proposals for works on state registered heritage places will be handled in a much clearer and simpler way and will ensure that any such work goes no further than is absolutely required to ensure protection of heritage values and fabric. It will also include certainty for owners about what they can and cannot do with their state registered heritage places as well as provide access to deliverable incentives.

A new heritage green bill is being drafted by Parliamentary Counsel. It will be published in the coming months to give all stakeholders the opportunity to see the draft legislation and to provide feedback to government. As mentioned by the Premier in his opening address to Parliament this February, it is the government’s intention to introduce the new heritage bill to Parliament later this year.

Ms S.F. McGURK: My question relates to the heritage revolving fund that appears in a few places on pages 713 and 716 of budget paper No 2. The minister announced that \$2 million of that fund would go to the Fremantle warders’ cottages. How much of that will pay for a feasibility study for restoration and future use of the cottages and how much will go to what the minister euphemistically called de-risking the cottages, which I think —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is not a word.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right. I think it is a term that the minister may have made up but really means maintenance of the cottages. How much of the \$2 million will be allocated between each of the two areas?

[5.50 pm]

Mr A.P. JACOB: It is very early days on that project; it could be a combination of both of those. De-risking may not be a term, but it is the best description we have. I hope the member is not claiming that it is a word I have introduced into that process.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Most people call it maintenance.

Mr A.P. JACOB: This is about getting underutilised or disused state government–owned properties—in some cases local government–owned properties—to the point that we can maximise a return from them and sell or lease them to a proponent, who will then undertake the lion’s share of that work. In some instances, the feasibility may go a long way to doing that. I can give the member some very good examples in which we found underutilised or disused buildings in other government ownership, where we have done some feasibility work and then, all of a sudden, the owner sees the value in that and that is a catalyst to get the work going. Other instances, such as the warders’ cottages, will also include a range of physical works to get them to a state at which they are good to market and they are an attractive prospect for somebody to pick up and restore to their full glory or potential. I will not say former glory as I think the result will go beyond what they have ever been in the past. It also seeks to get a return back into the fund, hence the term “revolving fund”. I do not know whether Mr Gammie wants to add anything to that.

Mr G.A. Gammie: At this stage, we are in the process of negotiating the transfer of property from the Department of Housing to the Heritage Council. As part of that process, we are gathering all the information that the department has prepared over recent years and also consulting with the City of Fremantle on its views on the future use of the property. We are in the early stages of working out what body of work we need to undertake to look at the feasible options for the future use of those properties. In terms of articulating the exact proportion of cost to the feasibility study versus perhaps works directly needed on the property, it is a bit early at this stage. The member should bear in mind that we have been in the hot seat on this one for only two weeks. We are getting on with the job, but we have a bit of homework to do first.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the heritage revolving fund on page 713 under “Spending Changes”, showing expenditure of \$250 000 for 2014–15 and \$300 000 for 2015–16. However, I think the updated commitment is \$4 million over two years. Can the minister explain that disparity?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Certainly, member. I turn the member’s attention to page 716. The last item under “New Works” is the heritage revolving fund, which shows the remaining \$3.45 million, comprising \$1.75 million this year and \$1.7 million next year being added to those spending changes on page 713.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Who will do the feasibility work for the Fremantle warders’ cottages?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will get Mr Gammie to give a quick response, and I will add something at the end.

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Mr G.A. Gammie: The State Heritage Office undertakes the feasibility study and engages external experts when required—for example, in things like valuations or market assessment of future uses. Basically, the office itself is the primary analyst of the feasibilities.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Have the cottages been valued as part of the transfer from the Department of Housing to the Heritage Council?

Mr G.A. Gammie: Not at this stage. We are in the process of entering into those discussions with the Department of Housing. We will work from there once we have met the current valuation it places on the property as a government asset and the cost associated with keeping it and so on. That piece of work is yet to be completed.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to “Desired Outcome” in the table on page 714 and the recent destruction of the Michelides building in Northbridge, which the Heritage Council recommended retention of, or part thereof. What were the reasons for the minister deciding otherwise? Did the minister meet with the owners prior to making the decision not to preserve it? Did the minister have representations from the local member and the Greek community?

Mr A.P. JACOB: There were four parts to that question. In parts two, three and four the answer is no, no, and no.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So the minister had no representations from the local member.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The answer is no, no, and no to parts two, three and four. That is not the way the heritage listing process generally runs. In relation to part one, in considering the matter I did not believe that it represented a level of state significance that warranted listing on the state Register of Heritage Places to preserve those values going forward.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What was the basis for that decision?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The state heritage register is intended to be a list that captures properties with the highest level of state significance. It has some 1 300 or so properties on it at the moment. A certain amount of the value is in maintaining a level of exclusivity with that list, and I did not consider that that particular nomination met that threshold.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to the Heritage Council’s line item “Grants and subsidies” on page 717 of budget paper No 2, which shows a \$1.436 million decrease in expenditure between 2013–14 and 2014–15. Can the minister explain that decrease, please?

Mr A.P. JACOB: That decrease is primarily attributed to an anticipated finalisation of the goldfields earthquake restoration fund and a return to normal levels of funding for grant commitments. As at 30 April 2014, \$4 million has been awarded through 62 grants, of which \$3 179 316 has been acquitted and \$1 million remains in unallocated funds. Overall, it has taken longer than anticipated to see this program fully utilised and finalised, obviously following on from that goldfields earthquake, and this is mainly attributed to resolving insurance claims. One significant claim has only recently been resolved by court mediation, and the difficulties in getting qualified builders to undertake repairs and conservation works has also been a factor in the time line drawing out. Nevertheless, this program has seen significant improvements to the conservation values of the historic Boulder precinct. It has returned, and is continuing to return, numerous buildings to the condition they were in—in fact, in many cases it is returning them to a better condition—prior to the earthquake. It has created an opportunity for the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder and its community to work together to reinvigorate the unique and substantially intact gold rush–era streetscapes of Boulder. In the meantime, the State Heritage Office is continuing to work with owners who have expressed an interest in receiving financial assistance but are still finalising insurance claims. Based on current grants or acquittals and expected time lines in finalising grants for unallocated funds, it is expected that those funds will be fully committed and substantially acquitted in 2014–15.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to “Desired Outcome” on page 714. The minister will be mindful that the development application on the Guildford Hotel is expiring in three weeks. What contingency plans does the minister have in place and when did he last meet with the owners?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I want to see that hotel restored to its former glory, as much as, if not more than, anybody. I probably have a higher motivation than anybody. However, the Guildford Hotel is privately owned and its care is a matter for the owners. The owners provide the City of Swan with regular updates and reports from a qualified structural engineer on the condition of the building as part of an ongoing monitoring program agreed with the city, which arose out of an order issued by the City of Swan in December 2009 under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1960. As I stated, the owners have obtained development approval for the restoration. That remains current. They have also demonstrably gone out to market and sought tenants. There is a clear determination on the part of the owners and also the City of Swan that the hotel is in a condition to effect conservation of its heritage value. Therefore, as it currently stands, there is no legal ground or case for interfering

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with the owners' right to repair, restore and redevelop their property in a manner that has my full support and that of the Heritage Council. Section 73 of the Heritage of Western Australia Act does lay out powers that could be applied, but, as I said, the current situation is as it stands. It absolutely remains the government's preference that the owners exercise their development approval and commence restoration of the hotel without delay. Quite simply, we all want to see that hotel restored as quickly as possible. The quickest way it can be restored is if the valid development approval that it sits under is acted on. Anything else will take us back to square one and would inevitably result in further delays. Simply wanting, as I do, to see restoration of that hotel as soon as possible, the best way for that to happen is for the current owners to act on the current valid DA.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I refer to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 715 and the heading, "Outcome: Conservation of cultural heritage places in Western Australia, for the benefit of present and future generations:" I refer to two establishments in my electorate—the Royal George Hotel in East Fremantle and the courthouse —

The CHAIRMAN: I must interrupt the member to put the appropriation.

The appropriation was recommended.