

HERITAGE HOT SPOTS

a) Lake Illawarra

I note that sand-mining is again on the agenda at Lake Illawarra. The most recent proposals are now on display at Westfield , Warrawong and at Wollongong City Council. I think they are worth a very close look.

In a letter published in the Sydney Morning Herald dated June 21, 1993, Duncan Leadbitter, the Executive Officer of the National Ocean Watch Centre wrote:

"In Lake Illawarra, a government agency is planning on removing 3 million tons of sand. The agency involved will both approve its own development application and benefit financially via royalties from the sale of the sand. In Budgewoi Lake, the local council is proposing to extract some 7 million tons of sand. The excuse put forward by both these bodies is that State Government funding cuts are undermining the ability to "restore" the lakes in question. However, the activities proposed will severely damage the lakes and the multi-million dollar commercial and recreational fisheries they support. All in the name of waterway improvements."

If Mr Leadbitter's claims are correct, then I think we should all be taking a very close interest in what the Lake Illawarra Authority has in store for our largest waterway.

b) Keira Street, Wollongong.

The proposed and already undertaken 'renovations' of the facades of buildings owned by the Din family in this street have come in for some gentle criticism from a practising Woonona architect in a recent letter to the Mercury.

He very sensibly argued that the last thing we need is Federation or Chinese Style facades on these simple but dignified vernacular structures.

I can only agree. I have always felt that when it comes to the architectural purification of our cities we should always work with the given and inherited environment with which we are confronted. In this case, the buildings range from two (probably 1870s in my opinion) shops and residences in very plain

style to a classic 1938 Deco shopfront on the south eastern corner of Smith and Keira Streets.

These styles should be accorded some respect and not 'homogenized' in order to conform with the confused notions of heritage and nostalgia which are all the rage at the moment in places like Pioneer Beach Estate

Headlands Hotel, Austinmer

This site is extraordinarily valuable. The only sensible plan would be to create a boutique guesthouse/restaurant/hotel by remodelling the desecrated interior and restoring the Californian Bungalow exterior, a styling that is extremely rare on large-scale structures. Both the hotel buildings and the two nearby ancient Calbung residences are far older than our present heritage study suggests. Indeed, when considered in context with Wyewurk, Chirrup and Ripple at Thirroul, the Northern Illawarra may well take the prize as the birthplace of the Calbung in Australia.

Sadly our present heritage study (Study No: "B-25N") supinely categorizes the hotel in its remarks section as some sort of a development precinct rather than a heritage site on both architectural and environmental grounds. Even where it is known that a site is under consideration for redevelopment it seems less than politic to focus on 'development' rather than 'heritage' values in a document presumably designed to promote awareness of heritage values.

I predict that this site will become both a heritage battleground and a real test for the courage of our city planners in fighting off undesirable development and giving the right incentives to entrepreneurs interested in the sort of eco-tourism a boutique hotel might wish to foster.

Joseph Davis.