

6.0 Constraints and Opportunities

6.1 Introduction

This section examines the constraints and opportunities arising from the heritage values present at Blundells Cottage.

Issues that came to light as a part of site inspections and consultation with NCA managers and stakeholders in relation to functional requirements of the NCA operations at the site are discussed in Appendix D and include:

- informal proposals for extensions to the slab shed;
- roofing to cover the bread oven;
- limewash finish to the exterior walls;
- interior and exterior colours and finishes;
- heating (and to a lesser extent cooling);
- trees and garden plantings;
- approach views, entry points and access paths;
- disabled access;
- screening to Parkes Way; and
- the establishment of a heritage curtilage as a suitable setting.

6.2 Constraints Arising from Significance

The heritage significance of Blundells Cottage gives rise to a range of obligations and requirements, the most fundamental of which is the obligation to ensure that the heritage values of the place are conserved, managed and interpreted for present and future generations. These values need to be understood, celebrated and cared for by the site managers, visitors and the Canberra community alike.

6.2.1 Significance and Conservation

The use and maintenance of Blundells Cottage should be based on the identified heritage values of the place and guided by the assessed levels of significance of the elements and their levels of 'Tolerance for Change', as outlined in Sections 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0 of the HMP. Change at the site is permissible so long as the heritage values are not adversely affected.

6.3 Constraints Arising from Condition of Blundells Cottage

Much of the original form, fabric and function of Blundells Cottage is relatively intact, although surface treatments have weathered and altered. The slab shed has been altered in both size and form, although slabs appear to be original. The cottage is in generally good condition due to its ongoing maintenance but there are serious issues of continuing water penetration of building—both rising damp from inadequate site drainage and leaks from inadequate roof drainage and pointing. A full condition assessment was undertaken in December 2010 by Gillian Mitchell of Conservation

Works Pty Ltd and its findings have been considered in this HMP with recommendations added on outstanding works to be completed. These are itemized in the Outline Conservation Works and Cyclical Maintenance Schedules in Section 9.0.

The main constraints arise from the need to resolve ingress of water to the building, drainage surrounding the building and the management of the garden and landscape setting.

The setting of the cottage is well maintained, but lacks symbolic or functional relationship to the heritage values of the cottage itself. The immediate garden surrounds are overgrown with certain species taking over. The trees have also grown immensely with the benefit of park irrigation and their canopies overshadow the building. The heritage curtilage (the distinct setting within which the cottage, slab shed and the former associated outbuildings will be maintained, conserved and interpreted) is not adequately defined or interpreted and the cottage boundary is visually constrained by a white painted picket fence in the close proximity, and at a distance by Parkes Way and Wendouree Drive.

6.3.1 Operational and Management Constraints

Funding

The NCA operational and budget constraints arise from its budgets and staffing levels. It has been proposed within the NCA that Blundells Cottage, currently a departmental asset, be redefined as an administered asset, so that future works on displays inside the building can come from the capital works budget.¹ This and other funding issues will have to be fully addressed in relation to policy advice in this HMP to undertake conservation works and regular maintenance—see Section 7.0.

Dedicated Office and Educational Facility Space

The provision of a dedicated staff office and space for storage of educational props and equipment is a perennial issue for historic house museums where rooms are prioritised for display and interpretation purposes. Consultation with the NCA for this HMP identified a strong desire to remove office functions from Blundells Cottage and for the establishment of a modern museum services building with office and facility for educational functions within the vicinity of the cottage. See Appendix D, Section D.5. The lack of such a facility was perceived by NCA educational staff as constraining the extent and quality of educational services provided at the cottage; although It is understood that that adverse comments on educational programs have not been reported as a common occurrence. The presence of office space in one of the cottage rooms was also viewed as a constraint on display opportunities within the cottage.

¹ Information provided to GML by Pamela Owen, Exhibition and Facilities Manager, National Capital Exhibition, 1/2/2013.

6.4 Statutory and Other External Constraints

6.4.1 EPBC Act 1999 and Commonwealth Heritage Management Principles

The legislative requirements of the EPBC Act are outlined in Section 1.4.1.

The EPBC Act requires places on the CHL to be managed according to established conservation principles. Schedule 7B of the EPBC Act Regulations sets out the Commonwealth Heritage management principles. Conservation policy recommendations provided in Section 7.0 of this HMP are written in accordance with the Commonwealth Heritage management principles.

6.4.2 Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988

This is outlined in Section 1.4.3 and includes the role of the NCA and the National Capital Plan in ongoing planning for the development of Canberra.

6.4.3 Other Commonwealth Legislative Requirements and Codes

The following additional Commonwealth legislative requirements and codes are also of relevance for works, and compliance could impact its heritage values:

- *Occupational Health and Safety (Commonwealth Employment) Act 1991 (OH&S Act);*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA Act); and*
- *Building Code of Australia (BCA).*

At Blundells Cottage the immediate landscape setting with its slopes, walls and rough access paths, and the nature of the building itself with narrow entrances, small doorways, uneven floors and different levels, presents particular issues in relation to disabled access. Equality access provisions and the opening of the new Boundless all ability playground nearby in Kings Park will increase the number of visitors with disabilities requesting access to the cottage and interpretation. A range of access opportunities is needed.

The lack of heating, cooling and insulation is also an issue for staff stationed at the cottage during high summer and deep winter seasons when Canberra weather reaches extremes of heat and cold. The lack of proper office space and modern toilet facilities with running water was also raised by NCA staff was also raised as an issue for full compliance with WHS standards for both work and rest periods. These were all issues raised in consultation and are recorded at Appendix D at Sections D.5, D.6 and D.9.

6.5 Opportunities for Blundells Cottage

6.5.1 Conserve and Celebrate the Heritage Values of Blundells Cottage

The conservation and celebration of the site's identified heritage values is an important component of its management, as required by the EPBC Act. Its many layers of heritage values give rise to opportunities for gradual re-presentation of the site. Guidance is provided by the Conservation Policies which are included at Section 7.0.

This HMP recommends the development of a Collections Significance Assessment and Collections Management Plan which will inform display operations at the cottage, collection conservation and storage strategies.

6.5.2 Interpretation, Marketing, Education Programs and Promotion

The active interpretation of the heritage values of Blundells Cottage will support wide recognition and understanding of the site's interesting history, relevance and its heritage significance. The new National History Curriculum provides opportunities to extend student visitation to the cottage so that every child in the ACT visits at least once during their primary schooling.

6.5.3 Relationship to Other Historic Places in the ACT

The ACT contains an excellent collection of historically associated places including Duntroon, the Duntroon Dairy, Mugga Mugga, and St John's Schoolhouse. Developing links with these places is an opportunity which could be explored in a future interpretation strategy.

6.5.4 Enhancement of the Landscape Approach to Blundells Cottage Within King's Park

The heritage values of Blundells Cottage lie both in its former functions as a tied farmhouse cottage and leased small landholding, and its current function as a house museum (1964-present). Clarification of its farmhouse period is recommended with modifications to the surrounding landscape whilst recognising its current function as a house museum.

The setting of Blundells Cottage provides an opportunity for enhancing the visitor experience, re-establishing visual links to and from the cottage and reinterpreting its original setting, which will better interpret early life in the Limestone Plains. The establishment of a visually legible heritage curtilage which reflects this is one of the recommendations of this HMP. See Section 4.0.

This may include the removal of cypress trees on the eastern bank on the lake side of the cottage (which do not relate to the historic cottage) to increase the visibility of the cottage from passing pedestrians and traffic. The removal of these trees would also improve visual links between the lake, High Court and other cultural monuments around the cottage. The large Himalayan cypress to the north of the cottage verandah and the Roman cypress between the cottage and the slab shed equally crowd and obscure the cottage from view, as well as posing conservation risks. The preparation of a Landscape Masterplan to resolve and manage these issues is one of the policy recommendations of this HMP.

The removal of the CDHS installed white picket fence is recommended to re-interpret the historic cottage as a farm landscape. The CDHS planted 'cottage garden' can be selectively conserved as an artifact of its own time. Other landscaping elements should be simple and appropriate to the period of Blundells Cottage.

6.5.5 Heritage Curtilage

The establishment of a heritage curtilage for Blundells Cottage as outlined at Section 4.2 is recommended to identify a distinct setting within which the cottage, slab shed and the former associated outbuildings will be maintained, conserved and interpreted.

This complex concept needs to be defined with a good understanding of how the surrounding landscape has altered and informed decisions regarding provision of desired new educational and office facilities and the opportunities for interpretation of the wider 'lost' agricultural landscape associated with Blundells as a farmhouse cottage.

6.5.6 Non Museum Use—Galleries and exhibition spaces

Consultation with stakeholders and NCA managers raised the issue that Blundells Cottage has remained static as a house museum since the late 1970s with very little change in the way it is used or presented to the public. At present there is little incentive for a return visit despite its interesting history and picturesque location by the lake. When it was occupied as a residence with many occupants at all stages of its use it would have been an active and vital home with children, animals and multiple domestic activities taking place within the cottage and its immediate surroundings.

Of all the house museums in Canberra Blundells Cottage is the most robust and the most suitable for hands-on experience, as most of the surfaces have been re-worked since their significant occupancy phase. The building could support a range of uses without adverse impact on its significance.

There is also an opportunity to review the operational role of the cottage to capture more of the thousands of visitors walking past along the Menzies Walk with a program of activities. The Interpretation Discussion Framework of Appendix E provides suggestions for rotating display content and temporary exhibitions and education/public program.

6.5.7 Moveable Heritage Collection

The Blundells Cottage collection of objects is an important and integral part of the heritage significance of the place. It has strong associations with both the CDHS period of operating the cottage as a folk museum and important ties to the early rural period of the region's development and many other farms and homesteads in the local area. There is an opportunity to refine the displays within the cottage in line with the heritage values of the cottage as defined in Section 5.0 of this HMP and the Interpretation Strategy outlined in Section 8.0. An Interpretation Strategy and Implementation Plan as recommended as one of the policy directions in Section 7.0.

Good opportunities exist to investigate partnerships with the University of Canberra which teaches in the cultural resource management field. Informal discussions with the University have indicated that there is a need for access to a teaching collection just such as that at Blundells Cottage. Fully supervised student exercises on conservation, assessment, cataloguing, exhibitions and displays could be enthusiastically supported. The collection needs a Significance Assessment and the evolution of a Collection Management Plan as a priority. Negotiation of a memorandum of understanding with a tertiary institution might be able to explore these and a range of activities that would bring a whole new audience to Blundells Cottage and cost efficient engagement with professional museum expertise.