

CBD Lanes Policy Steering Document

Melbourne Heritage Action

June 2012

Basis for Policy Review

The existing policy for the management, preservation and improvement of lanes within the CBD (Local Planning Policies-Clause 22.20) is inadequate and out of date. While it references the importance of lanes to Melbourne's character, history and vibrancy under "policy basis", the policy itself speaks of only four core aspects of a lanes importance. These are

- connectivity
- active frontages
- elevation articulation
- views.

While these are all genuine concerns which require attention, no specific mention is made of heritage fabric or of the adjoining heritage buildings which give laneways their character and significance.

It is clear that under the current policy 80% of Melbourne's laneways (all those graded 3) have no protection at all. Only 9 lanes have been given class 1 protection. This represents a major failure of this policy to provide adequate protection to one of Melbourne's most vital assets.

This policy steering document seeks to guide the formation of a comprehensive laneway policy. This policy must begin with an exhaustive assessment of the existing laneways and while this is being undertaken, a moratorium on laneway sales must be established. Once a full account is made of existing laneways, their layout, fabric, use, potential future use and the heritage buildings which abut them, a new detailed policy must be created. This policy must reflect the current variety of challenges and values associated with Melbourne's laneway network.

Policy

Sale of lanes or parts of lanes

- Establish a moratorium on the further sale of any lanes until a comprehensive laneway policy is put in place.
- Lanes with high heritage value, aesthetic character or which enhance the pedestrian network must be fully protected and designated as unsellable for perpetuity.
- If a lane is assessed as having no heritage, aesthetic or pedestrian value and is to be subsumed into a larger development, the laneway must not be sold and its alignment must be preserved within the development as a preferably 24hr pedestrian access.
- If a laneway is privately owned and is found to be of value, it must be given a Heritage Overlay to ensure its fabric and alignment is preserved.

Retention of “lanescapes”

- The notion of heritage streetscape to be applied to laneways as “lanescapes”
- The implementation of a new grading system which lists buildings adjacent to lanes as either ‘Contributory’ or ‘Not Contributory’ to the lanescape must be adopted. Those found to be contributory must be given a Heritage Overlay.
- Any pre-1940 buildings with frontage to lanes (‘laneway buildings’) should be listed as ‘Contributory’ in order to protect the intrinsic historic and aesthetic qualities associated with these small-scale streetscapes typical of Melbourne’s history prior to WWII.
- Where several adjoining buildings are identified as contributing to a lanescape, they should be given a collective Heritage Overlay.
- Original side or rear walls of any building with a Heritage Overlay, or graded building within a Heritage Overlay precinct, that faces a laneway should be treated as of equal significance to the street façade.

Retention of laneway fabric

- Paving, kerbs and channels that are found to be original should be retained in situ. Where it becomes necessary for paving to be rebuilt following maintenance, it should be re-constructed as close to original as possible, using appropriate heritage details, building materials and construction methods.
- Where existing laneways have been re paved with concrete or other materials other than original bluestone cobbles or where cobbles have been covered with asphalt, the original bluestone cobbles and curbs should be reinstated.

New developments on laneways

- Any frontage of a new development onto a laneway which is part of a valuable ‘lanescape’ should be in keeping with the existing lanescape in scale, material, design and use.
- New development on a laneway with high or potentially high retail or hospitality use should be required to create small scale leasable spaces fronting onto a laneway. For example, blank walls, grilles, large carpark entries, and dominant equipment / plant installations or poorly articulated detailing are to be avoided.
- New development on a laneway with high or potentially high pedestrian use should be designed in a pedestrian friendly manner. For example, blank walls, grilles, large carpark entries, and dominant equipment / plant installations or poorly articulated detailing are to be avoided.
- New development on a laneway with a notable ‘lanescape’ should be built to the general height of the ‘lanescape’, and then be setback at least the width of the lane before higher floors are added.
- Where a previous development has been found to have cut off or subsumed part of an existing laneway, and that envelope becomes subject of another development, the original section should be reinstated with original fabric and made accessible to the public.

Laneway Networks

- A comprehensive study of the connectivity of Melbourne's laneway network should be undertaken.
- Networks of laneways, 'dead end' lanes, branching laneways, and 'dogleg' lanes to be retained to reflect the historic nature of Melbourne's laneway system and further encourage the cultural and commercial development of hidden streetscapes within the city.
- The laneway network should be enhanced to make it possible to move through the CBD via laneways without using the streets. This can be done by connecting a small number of non-through lanes with the street network or other lanes.