

**COMMENTS BY THE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC. (ASV) ON
THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS VICTORIA (RBGV)'S DRAFT 20-YEAR MASTER
PLAN FOR MELBOURNE GARDENS**

Following the release of the RBGV's Draft 20-Year Master Plan for Melbourne Gardens (88 pages), an Analysis of the Plan (7 pages) as it affected the Melbourne Observatory site was circulated to the members of the ASV Council on 5 April 2019.

This report (2 pages) is based on that Analysis and highlights the majority of the issues and objections which the analysis has identified as inappropriate, unacceptable and contrary to the significance and status of the Melbourne Observatory site.

- The RBGV is failing to comply with the management criteria required by the Melbourne Observatory's status a National Heritage listed site.
- The RBGV's Draft Plan discloses that, were their Plan to be implemented, non-compliance would escalate considerably and the site would be seriously damaged and compromised.
- The RBGV is failing to comply with Victorian Government policy which requires them to act "in the best interests of the people of Victoria" with regard to Melbourne Observatory.
- The RBGV is ONLY concerned with Gardens. In developing its Plan it was not willing to consult and seek advice regarding astronomy – the RBGV management simply consider Melbourne Observatory to be a convenient site to misuse and damage in favour of the Gardens. Despite the RBGV's claims, they did NOT "collaborate" or "consult" extensively regarding their Plan - certainly not with the ASV, despite the fact that it has been actively associated with the site since the 1930s and possesses extensive astronomical expertise.
- Melbourne Observatory is a separate and distinct site, it does not belong to Melbourne Gardens and its purpose is entirely different from Melbourne Gardens. (~2.5 ha compared with ~36 ha) The Plan does not admit this - it refers to the site being "transferred" to RBGV.
- The Plan for a "premier event space", "fully serviced performance space" for 5,000 people is utterly incompatible with the Observatory, let alone given its National Heritage status. This is appalling and unacceptable. It would seriously damage and downgrade the Melbourne Observatory. Even the current "performance" usage is inappropriate and unjustifiable.
- Similarly, providing services to support such a performance space is incompatible and unacceptable. This includes services such as permanent storage space near the Great Melbourne Telescope (GMT) House for "tenants", as well as other services not mentioned or shown on the plans/maps, such as toilets (80 required for 5,000 people), access roads, lights, power, food and beverage outlets, etc.
- The above would severely diminish the prospect of World Heritage listing.
- The Melbourne Observatory covers the whole site, not just the NW portion as shown on the RBGV's plans/maps. References to an "Observatory Character Zone", only on the NW portion of the Observatory site, clearly indicate how the RBGV disrespects the Melbourne Observatory site. All its buildings, contents and curtilage must be properly acknowledged.
- The Plan shows some two thirds of the Melbourne Observatory covered in plants/trees and only one third partially open but subject to extra paths plus the services noted above. This is totally inappropriate in an observatory. Furthermore, the RBGV has its own extensive 36 ha for horticulture, etc, while Melbourne Observatory has only around 2.5 ha.




- New paths added on the Observatory Western Lawn which extend to the street boundary are not appropriate and their purpose is not explained. Also, the connecting pathways to the Shrine would cause even more inappropriate coverage of the site.
- Stopping existing vehicular access on the road beside the Caretaker's Lodge is not practical or acceptable as it is needed for on-going access and maintenance of the telescopes, etc.
- Added specific planting is not appropriate. This includes the extension of inappropriate planting in the Children's Garden where it has impacted on the Observatory site; around the modern café building where vegetables and fruit trees are proposed; further planting to the southern boundary in front of the existing café/plaza (incorporating racks and parking for bikes); and planting from the Main Observatory to the GMT House, then northwards.
- The modifications to the modern café building and its extended use are of great concern and absolutely inappropriate on the Observatory site. The building should be totally removed, not upgraded for even more RBGV purposes as a Learning and Participation Centre.
- Furthermore, the abovementioned Learning and Participation Centre is a complete misnomer and demeans the status and heritage importance of the Observatory. It is designated ONLY for use for horticulture/botany – this is not the only science and it is already well served by the adjacent, extensive Gardens area.
- Removing any more boundary fence is wrong – especially given the admitted vandalism and arson problems. The Plan's claim to "restore to public open space" is misleading. The Melbourne Observatory site was always fenced - it is NOT part of Domain Parklands. By comparison, the Plan is concerned with "securing the Gardens."
- Observatory buildings should not be used by the Gardens for their accommodation and storage space, they are required for display and activities, including astronomy and the other important scientific activities such as weather, time-keeping, weights-and-measures, seismology and magnetic studies, and ventilation studies, which were carried out on the site.
- To suggest that the GMT would be the centrepiece of a Nature and Science Precinct devoted to botany and horticulture is nothing but misleading lip-service. It was not the only important telescope in Melbourne Observatory. Clearly any telescope whatsoever could not function properly in an "entertainment space."
- The RBGV's claim that it is "preserving" Melbourne Observatory is nothing more than a lie. The RBGV have not done so in the past and clearly do not intend to do so in the future.
- The RBGV has an appalling record of mismanagement of the Melbourne Observatory site over almost 30 years. Heritage structures have been destroyed and heritage buildings have been left to deteriorate significantly.
- The use of heritage consultants Lovell Chen has been unsatisfactory and the more recent work by Context leaves much to be desired.
- The damage already done by destruction and neglect on the Melbourne Observatory site under RBGV's management is appalling. Referring to the utterly inappropriate modern cafe structure, under the auspices of the Observatory Gate project, as a "significant new development" well illustrates the RBGV's unwillingness and inability to respect the site.

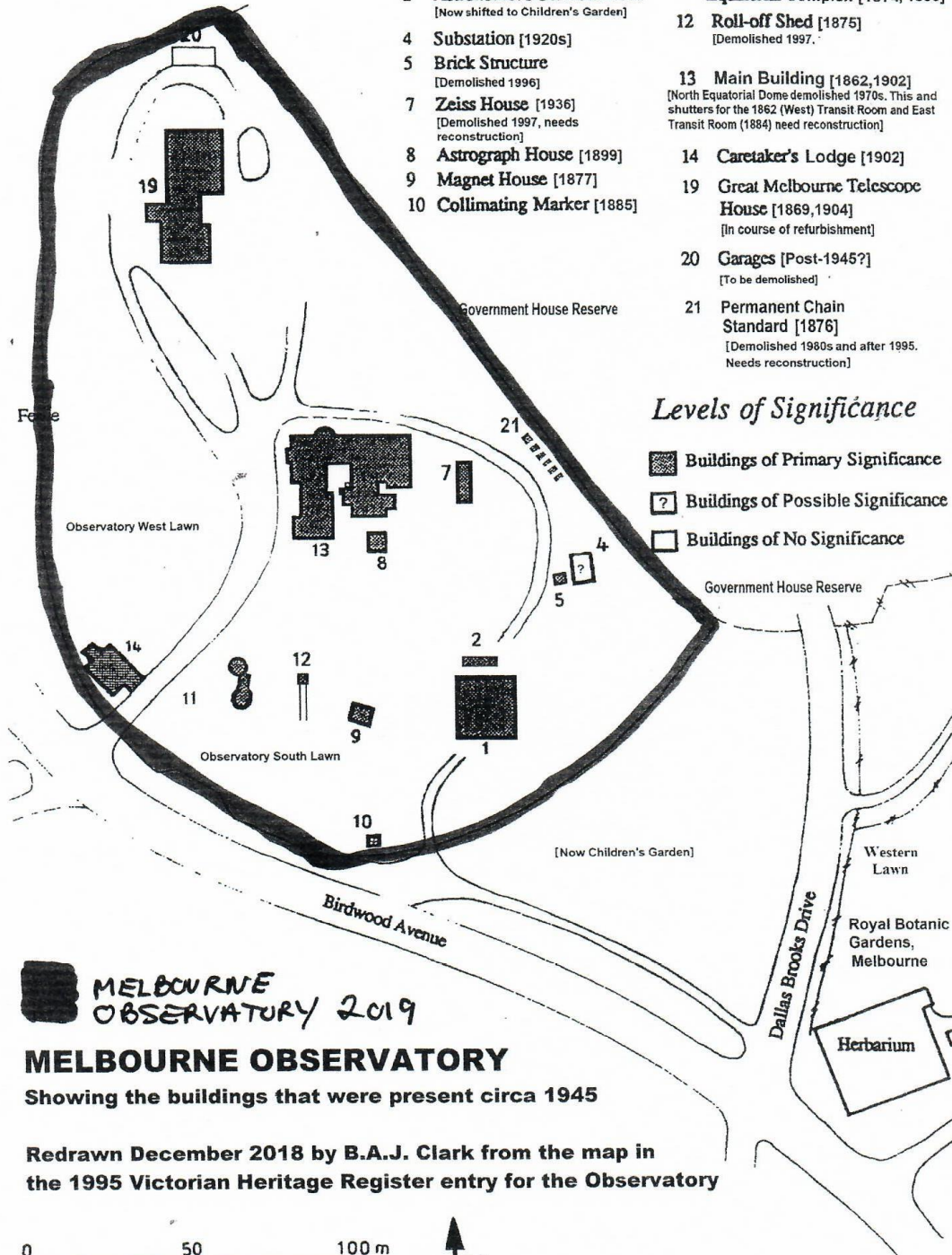
14 April 2019

LEGEND [Missing numbers belonged to modern buildings demolished since 1994.]

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Astronomer's House [1889] | 11 Photoheliograph and South Equatorial Complex [1874, 1883] |
| 2 Astronomer's Service Block [Now shifted to Children's Garden] | 12 Roll-off Shed [1875] [Demolished 1997.] |
| 4 Substation [1920s] | 13 Main Building [1862, 1902] [North Equatorial Dome demolished 1970s. This and shutters for the 1862 (West) Transit Room and East Transit Room (1884) need reconstruction] |
| 5 Brick Structure [Demolished 1996] | 14 Caretaker's Lodge [1902] |
| 7 Zeiss House [1936] [Demolished 1997, needs reconstruction] | 19 Great Melbourne Telescope House [1869, 1904] [In course of refurbishment] |
| 8 Astrograph House [1899] | 20 Garages [Post-1945?] [To be demolished] |
| 9 Magnet House [1877] | 21 Permanent Chain Standard [1876] [Demolished 1980s and after 1995. Needs reconstruction] |
| 10 Collimating Marker [1885] | |

Levels of Significance

-  Buildings of Primary Significance
-  Buildings of Possible Significance
-  Buildings of No Significance



MELBOURNE OBSERVATORY 2019

MELBOURNE OBSERVATORY

Showing the buildings that were present circa 1945

Redrawn December 2018 by B.A.J. Clark from the map in the 1995 Victorian Heritage Register entry for the Observatory

