

# REPORT

To: Claire Krummenacher, Planning  
Officer, City of Greater Geraldton

From: Tanya Henkel

Date: 9 May 2023

Subject: Proposed subdivision of  
Lot 757 (No. 22) Tamarisk Way,  
Woorree

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In assessing the proposal to subdivide Lot 757 (No. 22) Tamarisk Way, Woorree, please be advised of the following:

**1.0 The Place:** Lot 757 consists of a 1.5025ha parcel of largely cleared land located on a bend of the Chapman River in the residential suburb of Woorree. Previously a much larger landholding, the property has been gradually subdivided and presently only the subject land parcel remains of the original Woorree Estate, from which the surrounding suburb derives its name. The property is accessed via metal gates set in an impressive tall stone fence which runs along the property frontage. A second set of gates located further west provides access to the farming sheds. Some sections of stone wall fencing are noticeably older than this main entry including the fence immediately to the east of the gates and the fence which extends in a curve to the north and north east and which features a third set of metal gates. It is assumed by the Heritage Adviser that this gate comprises the original entry to the old Woorree Homestead, but was superseded by the current one following the subdivisions and newer road networks (as verified by photographic evidence in the Geraldton Camera Club 1997 "Homesteads of the MidWest Region of Western Australia"). A bituminised circular driveway which is lined by mature Canary Island Date Palms leads to the large dwelling. The main house is of rendered stone and brick construction with a tiled hipped roof and has undergone considerable changes and extensions over time, noticeably in the c1950s when a second storey was added to the northern end, the roof was reclad, verandahs were enclosed, the size and orientation of window openings were altered and extensions made. The result has largely obscured the original stone homestead and presents as a sprawling 'hacienda' residence in the Mediterranean architectural style. The property also contains worker's quarters to the immediate south of the homestead, a stone garage adjoining the north west of the Homestead, and large iron farm sheds.

**2.0 Heritage Listings:**

**2.1 Local Heritage Survey:** The place is included in the City of Greater Geraldton Municipal Inventory of Heritage Places (Greenough Volume) as Place No. 175 wherein it has been allocated a management category of 4:

**Level of Significance:** SOME SIGNIFICANCE. Contributes to the heritage and/or historical development of the locality.

**Management Recommendation:** Conservation of the place is desirable. Any proposed change to the place should be in sympathy with the heritage values of the place.

## **2.2 Heritage List:**

In 2015 it was resolved to adopt the Municipal Inventory as the Heritage List and as such the Woorree Homestead is included in the City of Greater Geraldton's Heritage List and is therefore subject to the regulations contained within the Local Planning Scheme No. 1.

**3.0 The Proposal:** The application is seeking to subdivide the existing 1.5025ha lot into 7 new lots, 6 lots being 2000m square and the other lot being 2234m square. Access to four of the lots is proposed by four adjoining battleaxe legs with easements over them for reciprocal rights of carriageway. The subdivision will necessitate the demolition of all structures on the site, inclusive of the Woorree Homestead, the outbuildings and the stone wall fence as well as the removal of the mature Canary Island Date Palms, the Cotton Fan Palm and the old pine tree adjacent to the circular driveway. It is noted that no subsequent development application for demolition is required.

**4.0 Site Visit:** The Heritage Adviser conducted a site visit of the property on Tuesday 11 April 2023 to inspect the place and take photographs following permission being given by the owner. Please note that the Heritage Adviser was unable to gain access to the interior of the Homestead.

## **5.0 Issues:**

**5.1 State Planning Policy 3.5 Historic Heritage Conservation:** Section 6.6 of the SPP 3.5 states:

“Demolition of a local heritage place should be avoided wherever possible, although there will be circumstances where demolition is justified. The onus rests with the applicant to provide clear justification for it.”

Further; “Demolition approval should not be expected simply because redevelopment is a more attractive economic proposition, or because a building has been neglected. Consideration of a demolition proposal should be based upon the significance of the building or place; the feasibility of restoring or adapting it, or incorporating it into new development; the extent to which the community would benefit from the proposed redevelopment; and any local planning policies relating to the demolition of heritage places.”

In applying the above principles of SPP 3.5 to the subdivision application the following is noted:

- The application proposes the removal of all structures and vegetation on the subject lot and as such no evidence of the historic property will remain.
- The application is accompanied by a Heritage Impact Statement providing some justification for elements of the proposal (ie demolition of the Woorree Homestead), but offers clear recommendations on how best to ameliorate the loss of the built fabric. (Refer to recommendations 4 and 5).
- The application appears to be maximising the lot potential of the land and hence presents as “a more attractive economic proposition”, instead of the alternative proposition of retaining the Woorree Homestead and potentially achieving less lots within the subdivision.
- While the condition of the Woorree Homestead shows signs of some recent deterioration due to a lack of repair and maintenance, the structural integrity of the place remains sound. The place is capable of restoration and adaptation for ongoing use.

- The application effectively removes any evidence of the historic property which gives its name to the surrounding suburb. The local Woorree community, and indeed the wider Geraldton community, may feel an affinity and connection with the original property; with the Woorree Homestead Precinct, inclusive of the stone fencing and mature vegetation, being the last physical evidence remaining.

**5.2 Heritage Impact Statement:** A Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared by Stephen Carrick Architects on 13 December 2022 and submitted as part of the application. This report concludes with 5 recommendations in Section 8 (p.25) as follows:

1. This Heritage Impact Statement should be considered by the client. If accepted by the client, this HIS should form part of the Subdivision and Development Application.
2. This Heritage Impact Statement should be considered by the City of Greater Geraldton as part of their evaluation of the Development Application.
3. An Archival Record of the existing building and site, including landscape elements, in accordance with the Heritage Council of Western Australia's brief, should be undertaken and provided to the City of Greater Geraldton for their approval.
4. Development of interpretation of the history, former use and built form of Woorree Homestead.
5. Retention of part or all of the front boundary fence as well as the existing mature palm trees within the subdivision.

**Comments on the Heritage Impact Statement:**

- Recommendations 1 and 2 above have been actioned with the HIS forwarded to the City of Greater Geraldton's Heritage Adviser for careful consideration in her assessment of the subdivision application.
- Recommendation 3 would form a condition of approval for the proposed subdivision in accordance with Section 4.4 of the City of Greater Geraldton's Heritage Conservation and Development Local Planning Policy.
- Recommendations 4 and 5 have not been actioned in the subdivision application as currently presented. While it is possible to include the request for an appropriate interpretive outcome as a condition of approval and hence respond to Recommendation 4, Recommendation 5 appears to be an impossibility based on the current subdivision plan which shows all buildings, structures and landscaping elements removed. (Please note that the stone garage located to the immediate north west of the Woorree Homestead is actually not shown on the Plan of Subdivision as one of the "existing buildings to be demolished".)

**5.2 Further Comment of the Heritage Value of the Property:** As evident in the Heritage Impact Statement and the Municipal Inventory Place Record, the Woorree Homestead and the surrounding property has considerable historic significance as one of the early farming properties taken up east of the town of Geraldton along the banks of the Chapman River. That value is further enhanced by the historic associations with well-known Geraldton pioneers Dr Robert T. Foley and then Arthur du Boulay who was responsible for the construction of the original Woorree Homestead in 1879. However it is the

strong association with the Rowan Family from 1915 until recent years that is possibly of more relevance given their lengthy ownership of the property and their influence on the agricultural industry. Firstly Christopher Rowan, who was known as the Lupin King as well as being an expert in sheep production, his wife Mrs Rowan who was responsible for developing the attractive gardens inclusive of planting the Canary Island Date Palms in c1920; and their son John Rowan who was a pioneer in the export of sheep and cattle to Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s. It was John Rowan who was responsible for the substantial renovations and extensions to the original homestead in 1950, reflecting a period of prosperity in agriculture, the social standing of the Rowan family as well as the popular architectural 'fashion' of the day; being the Mediterranean, hacienda-style of residential construction. Originally consisting of a large land-holding, the Woorree Estate has been gradually subdivided over recent years as evident in the series of aerial photographs contained in the Heritage Impact Statement (pp.10-13); reducing the impact of the setting around the Homestead and possibly resulting in a new tree-lined access driveway off Place Road replacing an original access driveway from the west. Nevertheless the more recent construction of the grand stone front fence and decorative metal entry gates, combined with the mature Canary Island Date Palms, helped the property retain some of its former grandeur despite it falling into a partial state of disrepair.

- 5.3 Interpretation:** Recommendation 4 of the Heritage Impact Statement states that consideration should be given to "interpretation of the history, former use and built form of Woorree Homestead". The Heritage Adviser agrees with this recommendation and would like to see an Interpretation Plan developed and implemented. It is noted that the small stone plinth located in the road verge could potentially be used as a base for any signage. Furthermore the retention of original sections of stone fencing and mature vegetation, inclusive of the Canary Island Date Palms would contribute considerably to the interpretive outcomes for the property. An Interpretation Plan should be submitted to the City of Greater Geraldton for approval.
- 5.4 Retention of Elements:** Given that the surrounding suburb has taken its name from this property which had the Homestead at its heart, it would be appropriate for structural and landscape elements of it to be retained as part of this subdivision to act as a reminder of the historic value of not only the Homestead but also the original extent of the property. Furthermore the reuse of building materials, such as stone for feature walling in landscaping and/or entry statements, should be considered. While recommendation 5 of the Heritage Impact Statement states that "part or all of the front boundary fence" should be retained within the subdivision it has been noted elsewhere in this report that the majority of this stone wall is of much later construction with the older sections being confined to the eastern end and extending to the north within the property where the third set of gates are located. As such it is recommended that further investigation be undertaken to determine which sections of stone fence are more appropriate for retention.
- 5.5 Proposed Demolition of the Woorree Homestead:** Given the location of the Homestead to the far east of the Lot 757 and within relative close proximity to Tamarisk Way, it would be quite feasible to retain the building on a separate lot within the proposed subdivision, as the Heritage Adviser

pointed out to Mr Sam Bowers, Town Planner from the Rowe Group the consultant planner in an email in October 2022.

**It should be pointed out that retention, renovation and conservation of the Woorree Homestead for ongoing use into the future is the preferred outcome.**

However, after considerable assessment and reflection the Heritage Adviser is in agreement with the Heritage Impact Statement which states in the Conclusion (Section 7.1, p.24):

“While demolition is generally discouraged for a place of Some significance it does need to be recognised that the 1879 homestead no longer exists and the building is a 1950s homestead of little cultural heritage significance due to its low authenticity. In our professional opinion, the low authenticity of the homestead means that the cultural heritage value of the place is assessed as low. It is recommended that demolition be approved with conditions to recognise the historical value of the former use.” (My emphasis)

The site visit conducted on 11 April 2023 confirmed that the Woorree Homestead is in a fair condition, with some signs of deterioration due to lack of use, ongoing maintenance and weather ingress. While the building is considered retrievable, its large scale combined with the current configuration of rooms would make it a very costly enterprise. Furthermore the 1950 renovation and extension works were so extensive that they have served to largely obscure the original form of the old 1879 Homestead. While it could be argued that the 1950’s form and style of the building marks an important stage in the development of the property over time, it is nevertheless not considered to be especially representative or special a case so as to warrant its retention.

Please note that the Heritage Advisor is only supportive of the demolition of Woorree Homestead provided that Recommendations 4 and 5 of the Heritage Impact Statement are actioned.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Based on the above considerations the proposed subdivision application as submitted is NOT supported as it fails to take into account Recommendations 4 and 5 of the Heritage Impact Statement.**

**The subdivision of Lot 757, which includes the demolition of the Woorree Homestead, would only be supported in terms of heritage considerations provided that an appropriate interpretive outcome is agreed to and elements of the existing built and landscape fabric are retained within the new subdivision, including remnants of stone wall fencing and mature Canary Island Date Palms.**

**However, please note that ideally the Woorree Homestead would be retained on its own lot within the new subdivision and continue to be used for residential purposes.**

I hope these comments are of assistance and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any additional information.

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