



Shire of York

DRAFT CONCEPT STATEMENT

Town Square - Shire of York

1st July, 2015

A strategic review of the Shire of York's community assets that included a comparison between existing assets and accommodation requirements highlighted the deficit that exists for space within its civic precinct.

Connecting the 1873 stone building and land at 25 and 27 South St to Peace Park enables a green Town Square to evolve capable of holding major festivals and events, and directly increasing business activity in the District. Peace Park serves as the venue for the town's monthly markets and is utilised during many of the town's festivals. Redeveloping it with permanent infrastructure will enhance its use for these events and also provide it and the civic precinct with context with regard to the town's main street and contribute to the community's sense of place.

The incorporation of the land adjoining the 1873 stone building into the existing 'footprint' of Peace Park would take the park from its current 'L-shape' and turn it into a proper 'green Town Square' This space would then be more suitable to host festivals and events alleviating the need to close the main street for some festivals which was a concern that had been raised by main street traders.

The strategic review of the Shire of York's community assets highlighted key considerations in the provision of services, facilities and the connectivity between them.

A prominent location for the Visitors Centre, library and Council Chambers were identified as desirable. While the Visitors' Centre clearly needs to be within the civic precinct its present location poses challenges and the Department of Local Government has expressed its concern regarding the unsuitability of the current Council Chamber. Reports commissioned by the Shire of York have raised the question of whether the town's parks and gardens, including 'Peace Park' were fit for purpose and being used optimally. It was also noted that there had been concern formally expressed from one of the community working groups that if the Shire of York was not committed to 'Peace Park' it was feasible that some, if not all, of the park could be sold off in the future, given its freehold land tenure.

Currently there is no space for the library to expand in either its physical volume or the range of community services it can provide. There also exists a shortage for space for work-stations and offices within the main administration building.

During the strategic review of the Shire's community assets, an exercise was undertaken to look at the various options to match the accommodation needs for York's civic precinct and the current assets available within this precinct. Options of additional space that included redevelopment of the old CRC site, the Masonic Hall and the 1873 stone building and associated additions building that was listed for sale at 25 and 27 South St were discussed. While several incarnations of how services the Shire provides could be spread across the civic precinct were viable, utilising the building at 25 and 27 South St was envisioned. The opportunity to secure the parcel of land that adjoins the South St building that protrudes into 'Peace Park' was seen as an additional reason to consider adding this building into the civic precinct. This would enable the park to be opened up to create a natural flow between the civic buildings and South St (and ultimately the town's historic commercial and shopping precinct) with the aesthetically pleasing and historically significant 1873 stone building then able to form a western boundary to the park.

The need for a Town Square, to help provide context and accessibility between spaces and attractions and 'create a space where people want to spend time in and that lets everyone know that York is a town that is loved and cared for' were among the many recommendations addressed by this acquisition that have been identified in numerous consultations and reports undertaken on behalf of the Shire of York, including the Hames Sharley Shire of York Draft Town Centre Outline Development Plan and Report 2006, the York Cultural Heritage Interpretation Master Plan 2015 and the Shire of York Community Plan 2012.

The availability of 25 and 27 South St provides the Shire of York with the opportunity to add this significant building and useful parcel of land to its 'bank' of buildings within its civic precinct and substantially improve the useability and importance of 'Peace Park' to the community. The building itself can be leased out on a commercial basis until the Shire of York is ready to make full use of it, providing public access to the building and an important stepping stone for the pedestrian stroll into the town's adjacent shopping precinct. In the interim steps can begin, in a staged process to improve the amenity of 'Peace Park' for residents and visitors. Tourism is an important economic driver for York and this acquisition and its future development as a part of a Town Square will link two segments of York's major attractions; the iconic Town Hall and the towns historic shopping and commercial streetscape.

York has a unique story to tell as Western Australia's first inland settlement and features a distinctive main street shopping precinct of period shop fronts and verandas. Book ending the southern end of the main street is the town's iconic town hall, council chambers and visitors' centre and public toilet. Adjacent to the Town Hall to a right angle to the main street is the Shire's library and administration building and the heritage listed two-story Masonic Hall.

Despite this setting, for so many of the tourists travelling through York- particularly on tourist coach tours, York is merely a toilet stop on the way to Wave Rock. Once completed the Town Square would effectively give tourists a welcoming metaphoric embrace by joining together the civic precinct including the visitors' centre and town hall, create relevance to nearby heritage listed buildings, create a logical and inviting pedestrian journey into the main street and give visitors and local residents a welcoming open space to gather, rest and enjoy. Incorporating the building and the land that is currently a car park

at 25 & 27 South Street into this park would create a perfect opportunity to deliver a civic precinct and town square that can achieve such a strategic embrace and the connection between the historic civic buildings that host the tourist type services and the retail precinct of the town's historic main street.

The area would need to have some existing landscaping and infrastructure removed and a professional design developed to capture the concept and achieve the project's aims, but would include abundant and inviting seating, Wi-Fi, lighting, open and shaded areas and support rather than impinge on the park's current main use as the location of the monthly weekend markets. The project would involve raised garden beds, significant areas of paving and other hard-stand and the planting of mature trees and associated landscaping.

As an additional historic building to the civic precinct; the 1873 stone building would create a picturesque western border to the town square and eventually be utilised to further welcome and provide services to travelling tourists and local residents. Having purchased the building and land, the Shire of York would stage the required landscaping and infrastructure needed to turn these parcels of land into the town square described and to incorporate the 1873 stone building into the town square.

By joining the iconic tourist attractions within the town along with additional historic buildings to the main shopping precinct (that also includes the York Motor Museum and the National Trust's Courthouse Buildings) visitors would be enticed into turning their comfort break into an opportunistic wonder through the town's historic main street. The more relaxed environment along with the corresponding revamp of the Visitors' Centre would create an increased opportunity to show-case the town's visitor attractions and tourist related businesses.

Despite having so much to offer for the visitor, there is currently no enticing conduit from the Visitor's Centre and the public toilet into the town and its attractions. By moving the existing TransWA bus stop to one corner of the town square and by providing an attractive place to 'land' and then begin to meander back into the town's shopping precinct visitors would spend at the town's wonderful cafes, specialty shops and museums. Not the least of these would be the patrons of the significant number of tour buses that stop at the town hall as a toilet break on the way to Wave Rock and seem to wonder aimlessly unaware of the shops and attractions only 100 metres away.

The town square and civic precinct and the way it would contextualise the civic buildings and Visitors' Centre would provide visitors with a reason to amble through the Visitors' Centre and the main street giving an opportunity for the town's full range of attractions to be show-cased. Not the least of these would be the town's abundant and quality accommodation providers and restaurants.

York has a long established reputation as a destination for day-trips and weekends. It is a wedding town, a festival town and a haven for people wanting to get away to a nice B & B for a weekend. But it is also on the road to a large portion of the Wheatbelt including tourist sites such Wave Rock, the Tin Horse Highway, picturesque canola fields, expanses of wild-flowers and vineyards. It is these tourists that presently stop at York momentarily at best. By building infrastructure to provide an inviting place to rest and absorb what the town and

region has to offer York can entice such travellers to stay and savour the town and region's other attractions. Above all though, the town square would be the hub of the civic precinct and provide an inviting atmosphere for the town's residents to meet, relax, have lunch and be a part of a vibrant community.

Given the above, the indicative total of less than \$120 000 that would be paid in interest over the period of the loan required to purchase 25 and 27 South St seems a modest investment to deliver the town square alone. Commercial rental indications are in the vicinity of \$15 000 pa. The expected rent if the building was leased until the Shire locks in the best future use for the building then would adequately cover the interest and some of the capital repayments from the outset. If the Shire later utilises the buildings for one of its civic purposes then such costs are comparable with any cost that would be incurred by building or renovating any other civic building. With the initial focus on the town square the Shire has time to seek funding opportunities for the development of the building, including remedial works. While a structural engineering report indicates that the building is sound the building will require on-going maintenance and significant renovations when eventually converted to whichever civic use is determined. Grant availability is already being explored for this. A registration of interest has also been lodged for a grant for work on the town square.