

ALBERT HALL: 82ND BIRTHDAY: 10 MARCH 2010**PANEL SESSION****RECORD OF QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

Chair: Mr Peter Lundy RFD, President, Friends of the Albert Hall Inc

Panelists:

- Mr Eric Martin AM, President, National Trust of Australia (ACT)
- Dr Lenore Coltheart, Vice-President, Friends of the Albert Hall Inc
- Mr David Dawes, Chief Executive, Department of Land and Property Services (not present for the Q and A session)
- Mr Stephen Ryan, Director, ACT Property Group, Department of Land and Property Services
- Mr Andrew Wilson, Senior Manager, Strategic Project Facilitation, Department of Land and Property Services

Anne Forrest asked whether the colours and finish that we now saw were the same as the originals. Dr Lenore Coltheart replied that the outcome was as close as possible to the original as for the first time the paint scraping technique had been used. She noted that the aesthetic sensibilities of 1910 and the present were a bit different but an expert had been used so we could have confidence in the result. The early photographs of the external paint on the building showed that it was blotchy so the external walls had been painted in the same porous paint that had been used in 1928, and the original paint had taken the building back to 1928. We could have different colours and finish but then this would not represent the heritage building of 1928. Anne Forrest commented that the paint at the entry seemed to be more porous, giving a rather less finished look than the rest. Do these have sufficient coats? She asked whether the red curtains would go with internal walls this colour. Dr Coltheart said that the current curtains would be replaced with the original coloured curtains. She also indicated that Anne Forrest's question about the paint finish also related to the workmanship. Dr Coltheart said she could talk about colour but not the workmanship.

Kel Pearce (ACT Govt) said that the painting expert (Donald Ellsmore) would attend the next meeting of the Capital Works Reference Group on 17 March to answer these sorts of questions and if there was a need to fix the painting, the ACT Property Group would fix it. The workmanship related to this visual aspect.

Graeme Jackson offered congratulations on the work so far but noted that the small stairwell to the left of the front door, as in the past, was without a handrail. He asked about the policy towards change to provide handrail with particular reference to providing for the disabled. Stephen Ryan (ACT Govt) replied that while trying to maintain heritage the building had to be accessible. This might require some improvements. The last meeting of the Reference Group had been held in the foyer and discussed issues such as the stairs and carpet. The building needed to be fully accessible for the disabled but this needed to be done within a heritage context. Dr Lenore Coltheart added that it was a misconception that maintaining heritage meant not making any improvements. There is now the technology to provide such improvements. Even if there was not previously a handrail, one could be put in. Disabled access to the building was more pressing. Creative thinking was needed to come up with a solution that was beautiful. She noted that the words restoration and renovation were words not usually used by heritage people who preferred the concept of 'putting back faithful to heritage values'.

Pam Ray noted the stress on requiring that the Albert Hall be a financially viable building and suggested what was wanted, as in many places overseas - where places such as disused churches were being used by communities and this use supported by local communities – was that finance not be the top priority. Andrew Wilson (ACT Govt) replied there were three criteria governing the work on the Albert Hall: ensure preservation of an important community and cultural asset; ensuring continued community access; and deliver this in a financially sustainable way. This reference to sustainable does not mean viable in the sense that it does not have to make a profit. It doesn't even have to break even. It would be good if other uses and current uses could work together to make this possible. But the government did need to make it as sustainable as it could and this is why it was important to have input to the Plan of Management from a wider community about this.

Questioner commented that water was still coming through the roof as the Ladies toilet was damp and there were places where you could see daylight through the roof tiles. She asked when the building would be waterproofed. Kel Pearce (ACT Govt) replied that the roof was now waterproof. But the request to put increased waterproofing was not approved. It was however water protected and the electrical work could not be done until this was the case. He said the tender for repairing the toilets had been advertised that day.

John Carroll (Friends of the Albert Hall Inc) asked whether any consideration had been given to charging for parking in the public car park across the road outside the Hyatt to raise funds. Andrew Wilson (ACT Govt) thought that the area covered by the Plan of Management might enable this, noting there was a landscape plan for the broader curtilage which might include areas which would bring a financial benefit. Gina Pinkas (Friends of the Albert Hall Inc) noted that the area that would have to be covered by the Plan of Management would have to be the parcel of land specified as Public Land in the Territory Plan. This was the statutory requirement. She noted that she thought the car park was included in the Public Land although this would need to be checked. Andrew Wilson added that it had always been his view that in the area at the back of the Hall there might be opportunities for activities to financially support the Hall. This was simply an observation on his part.

Rosemary Brissenden asked whether the sound system would be improved, noting that she, being a little deaf, had had trouble understanding anything that was being said. Kel Pearce (ACT Govt) that while ACT Property Group was looking at improved event lighting, there was nothing in the Plan of Works for improving the acoustics in the main hall. He noted that the absence of the curtains might be having an effect. Without these there was a large bounce of sound into the Hall. But ACT Property Group would look at this issue.

Di Johnstone (Friends of the Albert Hall Inc) indicated deep concern about the inability of many community groups to take advantage of this facility. She asked what the government was doing about public liability insurance noting that, under the present policy, small groups could not afford that cover and therefore did not use the Hall. Stephen Ryan (ACT Govt) said he could not answer as this was a policy question for government. It was a Treasury issue and ACT Property Group has to work within this policy. Peter Lundy (Chair) noted that this was an issue which had been pushed by The Friends. Although so far The Friends had had no success with Treasury, it would continue to push and would eventually get the policy changed. The problem was that all liability was placed on the user. Peter Lundy spoke briefly about the aims of The Friends and encouraged those present to join.

Gina Pinkas (Friends of the Albert Hall Inc) noted that The Friends had also been in consultation over a consultant being brought in to look at 'adaptive reuse of the Albert Hall'. That is something is real worry to The Friends. She noted that the prime use should be as a municipal cultural and community building. Adaptive reuse could mean anything. The hall under this brief could be proposed to be the foyer of the Hyatt or a bus depot. Andrew Wilson (ACT Govt) said that Gina Pinkas really need not be nervous about this as the intention was that the Hall be a full community asset used by the community. If the use changed it would do so in accordance with

community desires. The use of a consultant was to provide ideas to broaden the discussion. These are for public discussion. The government was looking for a future for the whole community in the Hall.

Pam Ray asked if the consultants were local and had local knowledge. Andrew Wilson (ACT Govt) said both yes and no. One consultant was from the ACT and another was from outside and would bring ideas from other areas. This would broaden the range of ideas. Pam Ray also asked if there could be an annual low cost insurance scheme for community use. Andrew Wilson said he didn't know about this but perhaps there could be a group insurance scheme.

Dr Coltheart asked whether a survey could be done of the public land that was to be encompassed by the Plan of Management. Stephen Ryan agreed to take this question on notice.

Prepared by Rosemary Greaves as notetaker for Friends of the Albert Hall Inc with additional material from a tape recording of proceedings.