

Special Significance and Beauty

Lorne was the first place in c.1975 to be designated 'a town of Special Significance' and an area of 'Natural Beauty'. The intention was for new ways of town planning to protect and preserve this idyllic seaside gathering place.

Indeed, Lorne has been a meeting place, a 'blue gum amphitheatre' long before settlers found their way here and then toiled to build the majestic access roads. Lorne is blessed with an original inland track, widened in 1879 to become the Coach Road traversed by Cobb & Co Coaches from the Winchelsea and later the closer Deans Marsh Railway Station, cutting the journey time from six hours to four.

An explosive charge was detonated just over a hundred years ago on 19 September 1919 by the Premier of Victoria, Harry Sutherland Wightman Lawson, as part of a ceremony to mark the official start of work, and a new era where service men returning from World War I commenced crafting the famous Great Ocean Road. The first section between Lorne and Eastern View opened to cars on 18 March 1922, and the Great Ocean Road then officially opened in 1932 with a ceremony held in Lorne, by the Grand Pacific Hotel.

What a change access by roads brought to this seaside village over the years. The coastal Great Ocean Road is pivotal in the entire area's accessibility and shows off the magnificence of the ocean coastline. Indeed, we were advised at community meetings that the Great Ocean Road has become a world class tourist attraction, ranking even above both the Great Barrier Reef and Uluru. Dotted along this spectacular driving journey are rare precious jewels, Lorne being for us arguably the most lovely of all.

Within town boundaries, the subdivision of what is now known as Lorne commenced over 150 years ago in 1869. Histories record the town being named c.1870/1 for Queen Victoria's son-in-law, the Marquis of Lorne, who married Princess Louise on 21 March 1871. Just over 100 years after becoming known as Lorne, new planning methods delivered under an Interim Development Order by the Town and Country Planning Board were intended to support the conservation of the natural beauty and ensure the area retained its special significance.

In conjunction with the declaration and protections afforded by the Interim Development Order, there was since January 1966 an active group titled the Lorne Planning and Preservation League (LP&PL). The League answered a calling for those who fulfilled a role as custodians of this special area, just as its current day incarnation over 50 years later operating as Friends of Lorne (FoL) draws upon the expertise of voluntary members from the wider Lorne community.

To understand where the phrases 'town of special significance and area of natural beauty' came from, is to venture back to discussions and meetings held by the Lorne

Planning and Preservation League in 1974. Watching development in the early 1970s buzz around them, and recognising the unique natural beauty of Lorne, the League set about ensuring the clause 'Special Significance' was included in the Interim Development Order.

Initial discussions with the Town and Country Planning Board in late September 1974 revealed that within the Lorne Plan there had been a wish to encompass a plan across the whole of the Foreshore area. While the Board was unable to finance the Foreshore portion of the Plan, their representative, Mr Fraser "smilingly suggested that the League may be able to help with procuring the necessary \$25,000." An interview was sought in late November 1974 with the then Victorian Premier, Sir Rupert ('Dick') Hamer to request funding to establish the Lorne Foreshore Plan. At the time, the honourable Dick Hamer, "immediately agreed to make the money available and ... pointed out the urgency of having the study undertaken to include the height of the season."

It is possible that just as Lorne was perhaps surprised in 2018-2019 with generous funding announcements, the Lorne Planning & Preservation League were delighted when the Lorne Foreshore Plan was suddenly supported to the at the time substantial tune of \$25,000. This enabled Urban Group Pty Ltd in association with Natural Systems Research Pty Ltd to commence a detailed study in early January 1975 and produce the Lorne Foreshore Plan booklet for the Town and Country Planning Board of Victoria in April 1976. This 1976 Lorne Foreshore Plan canvassed issues that still remain central for the community such as public toilet blocks, car parking and preservation of the natural environment. During the mid-70s there was also an in-depth study into the possible relocation of a harbour with options evaluated including the St George River and the Erskine River. What a different town we might have had!

While the Town Plan was gazetted on the 13th July 1977 with the then Shire of Winchelsea as the responsible authority, the December 1977 newsletter from the LP&PL noted the Foreshore Plan had not yet been adopted. The aim of the local custodians was to have the Foreshore Plan incorporated into the Town Plan so that it would not be ignored. Drawing parallels there is a major Structure Plan under review, and a feedback process occurred last year with respect to a new Foreshore Plan. As always it is the detail, and sometimes absence of, that requires countless hours from volunteers who seek the best possible outcomes.

Now, as ideas and activities are generated for Lorne's recovery from the effects of the first half of 2020, Friends of Lorne, working with the community, will strive to ensure we all preserve the significant and beautiful aspects of Lorne, which make it unique.

References:

- A History of The Great Ocean Road by Peter F.B. Alsop (Geelong Historical Society, 1982 50th Anniversary edition for 26/11/1982)
- Lorne Preservation & Planning League Annual Reports
- Interim Development Order - Town and Country Planning Board (unsigned copy dated 22 November 1974)

- Lorne Foreshore Plan for Town and Country Planning Board by Urban Group Pty Ltd in association with Natural Systems Research Pty Ltd (April 1976)
- Tour of Lorne - Shire of Winchelsea - Thursday 24 February 1977 - National Trust of Australia (Victoria) - Women's Committee
- Lorne A Living History by Doug Stirling (October 2004 Publisher J.D. Stirling)
- Friends of Lorne website <http://friendsoflorne.org.au/>

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