



Hawkesbury City Council

attachment 1  
to  
item 198

draft interpretive signage  
and public art policy:  
telling Hawkesbury stories

date of meeting: 31 august 2010  
location: council chambers  
time: 6:30 p.m.



## **HAWKESBURY CITY COUNCIL INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE AND PUBLIC ART POLICY: TELLING HAWKESBURY STORIES**

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### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To broadly define Hawkesbury City Council's approach to the commissioning, design, planning and installation of interpretive signage to inform residents and visitors of the natural and cultural heritage of the City of Hawkesbury.
- 1.2 To establish a framework to assist the community to form reasonable expectations about how Council can support the design and installation of interpretive signage and public art.
- 1.3 To provide guidelines for the design, location and installation of interpretive signage and public art within the City of Hawkesbury which reflects best practice design principles, and conforms with Council's Asset Management Policy and asset management objectives.

### **2. OBJECTIVES**

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to establish guidelines for the development of interpretive signage and public art projects which are aimed at communicating information about the landscapes, history and culture of the City of Hawkesbury to assist visitors and residents appreciate and understand these values. The Policy has been enacted to;
  - (a) support the creation of enriching and engaging public spaces which explore Hawkesbury themes and tell Hawkesbury stories;
  - (b) encourage the development of well-researched interpretive trails which can most effectively promote understanding of the Hawkesbury's significant sites and landscapes within their geographic and cultural context;
  - (c) reinforce the meanings and appeal of interpretive trails through the use of public art and/or the incorporation of specific design elements to everyday objects within the public domain - public seating, footpaths, bridge railings, lighting - which may be located along these trails;
  - (d) promote a consistent approach to the installation of interpretive and directional signs through the application of 'good practice' principles as they apply to the design, location and construction of these signs;
  - (e) clarify the responsibilities of Council, community members and other stakeholders in relation to the investigation and commissioning of interpretive signage and public art projects;

### **3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 Interpretive Signage is a tool to communicate information to help visitors appreciate and understand the environment, history and culture of a site or location. It differs from ordinary factual directional signage in that it incorporates an 'interpretive' element.

3.2 The subjects of interpretive signage can include buildings; an area of countryside; a landscape; a facet of cultural life; a streetscape or town; an object or collection of objects; an industry; a historical event or period; an activity, or other important aspects of an area's natural and cultural heritage.

3.3 The most effective interpretive signage forms part of an integrated interpretive strategy. In this context, interpretive signs are not 'stand alone' signs which present information in isolation, but are part of well-researched interpretive trail whose content has been

developed with the visitor in mind . Interpretive trails create a link between the past and the present so that the visitor can make connections between their own experiences and new information being presented. Interpretive signs present this information in an accessible and meaningful way using metaphors, stories and illustrations.

3.4 Interpretive trails are routinely employed to add value to visitor experiences and provide a focus for tourist visitation. A good interpretive trail orientates a visitor to a place or exhibit and then guides them around it by using an integrated sequence of interpretive signs, way-finders, and directional signs supported by electronic and paper based narrative guides.

3.5 Public Art is also an effective tool for interpreting and strengthening the identity of a place. It can provide unique insights into a place and is widely used to enrich and enliven public spaces. In many places, interpretive signage is combined - in a thematic way - with public art through the incorporation of specific design elements to everyday objects i.e. fencing, public seating, the incorporation of motifs on bridge or footpath railings, engravings on footpaths, and lighting.

3.6 Council has identified a requirement to develop an effective interpretive signage strategy to assist the community to relate the unique identities and history of the Hawkesbury's towns, villages and rural landscapes and to preserve the different memories and stories of its peoples.

3.7 There are significant variations in the quality, design and content of existing interpretive signs, panels and plaques within the Hawkesbury. Council has been receiving increasing requests for the installation of interpretive signs. It is appropriate that Council develop a policy to reasonably manage these requests, within its available resources, in conformance with Plans of Management for particular sites, and in ways that complement the objectives of the Hawkesbury Community Strategic Plan & Hawkesbury Cultural Plan.

#### 4. DEFINITIONS

4.1 Interpretive Signage – signs, panels, plaques and other structures which are primarily used to communicate information to residents and visitors about the natural and cultural environment of an area. Interpretive Signage incorporates descriptive or narrative details to present information about a place, object or event to reveal new insights and understandings about that place, object or event by linking and referencing what visitors may already know with the new information presented.

4.2 Interpretive Trail - a thematic exploration of a place, object or event which orientates a visitor to a place or exhibit and then guides them around it by using an integrated sequence of interpretive and directional signs designed to facilitate self-exploration by allowing a visitor to take control of their own experiences along an interpretive trail. Interpretive trails generally employ a hierarchy of signs which may include a *trail head* sign to provide an overview and map of an interpretive trail located at key entry points to the trail; *interpretive panels* which provide themed information and are located at key sites along the trail; *path-markers* which locate and identify a trail and direct visitors along it, usually in conjunction with directional *signs* indicating distance and direction to key destinations along the trail.

4.3 Way-finding - paper-based, audio or electronic guides generally consisting of maps, descriptions and narratives which assist visitors to navigate their way along an interpretive trails by locating and interpreting sites along the trail in their geographic and cultural context.

4.4 Public Art - refers to works of art in any media that has been planned and executed with the specific intention of being sited or staged in the public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. The term is also applied to include any art which is exhibited in a public space including publicly accessible buildings. Public Art can take the form of monuments,

memorials, civic statuary, fountains, architectural detail, sculpture, street furniture, graffiti, murals, installation art, plaques, signage and other capital works such as roundabouts

4.5 Plan of Management - refers to a plan which sets out objectives for the use of an area of community land and the uses permitted on that land.

4.6 Cultural Significance - refers to the aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value that a site may hold for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance can be embodied by the site itself, or by its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects (*Definition derived from the International Council of Monuments and Sites- ICOMOS*).

4.7 Interpretation - *Interpretation* means all the ways of presenting the cultural significance of a place. The cultural significance of many places is not readily apparent, and should be explained by interpretation. Interpretation should enhance understanding and enjoyment, and be culturally appropriate (*Definition derived from ICOMOS*).

## 5. PRINCIPLES

5.1 Council acknowledges that in historical, cultural and environmental terms, the City of Hawkesbury is an area of state and national significance. This position is reflected both in the relatively high number of historical signs and plaques that exist within its townships, and the aspirations of its residents to preserve the memories and stories of the Hawkesbury through the use of these structures.

5.2 Council accepts that there may be different stories arising from the same historical event, or different perceptions about the significance of an aspect of the Hawkesbury's cultural and natural heritage and that these different stories and perceptions each have a place in interpreting and understanding the history and development of the Hawkesbury.

5.3 As a local government authority, Council may share responsibility for sites of cultural, historical and environmental significance within the City of Hawkesbury. It will therefore have a role to play in promoting the natural and cultural values of these sites so that residents and visitors have the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy them. Council accepts that the significance of site may not always be captured by the site itself and that signage can assist in interpreting and explaining an area's significance.

5.4 Council recognises that interpretive signage and public art can be effective catalysts for heritage conservation, tourism, sustainable environmental practice and economic development. The incorporation of interpretive signs and public art into well-designed and researched interpretive trails carries the potential to deliver substantial benefits in raising community awareness about key heritage and environmental issues (as identified in the Community Strategic Plan) and in achieving the tourism, township renewal, and infrastructure linkage strategies in the Plan.

5.5 Council notes that the installation of effective interpretive trails, based on good design principles, may represent a significant public infrastructure investment in both capital (initial installation) and ongoing funding (repairs and maintenance). Accordingly, Council will, subject to available resources, work with community partners to further the knowledge and understanding of residents and visitors about a site, object or event through the use of interpretive signage, public art and/or way-finding guides where;

5.5.1 information about the site, object or event can be used to tell a broader story about the cultural and natural heritage of the Hawkesbury and its people and can be thematically linked with other sites, objects or events through an interpretive trail;

- 5.5.2 the proposed interpretive signage or public art is to be located in a prominent and accessible public space which will complement the existing functions and uses of that space;
- 5.5.3 the interpretation of the site, object or event can be supported and enhanced by paper-based, audio or electronic guides sourced from readily available historical records and/or contemporary research;
- 5.5.4 the proposed location of interpretive signage or public art is consistent with any applicable Plans of Managements for the site;
- 5.5.5 the site, object or event is assessed to be a place of environmental, historical and/or cultural significance by Council's professional staff, or where Council staff have identified important natural or cultural conservation values that need to be communicated, and/or where the site, object or event is listed or noted in state or local heritage registers;
- 5.5.6 there is a good possibility that an external source of funding may be able to be secured to fund the design and installation of interpretive signage or public art;

5.6 Council will only install interpretive signage (as provided for in Clause 5.5) where:

- 5.6.1 construction is of durable materials which are generally tamper and vandal proof and include provision for removable panels or other devices to facilitate easy cleaning, repair and updating;
- 5.6.2 design is consistent with Council's guidelines regarding the use of fonts, formats, content style and texts and where the information presented is relevant and attractive to the visitor and is provided at level appropriate to the general public;
- 5.6.3 content has been developed, as far as possible, in consultation with stakeholders who have been provided with an equal opportunity to contribute their ideas and to reach consensus;
- 5.6.4 interpretations of indigenous sites have been developed in conformance with applicable guidelines for interpreting indigenous culture and country;
- 5.6.5 the accuracy of the content has been reviewed by Council's Local Studies and Community Outreach Librarian, the Gallery and Museum Curator or other relevant staff;
- 5.6.6 Hawkesbury City Council branding is used (having regard to the overall design of the signage, its content and location);
- 5.6.7 required approvals have been obtained from the Roads and Traffic Authority and/or other agencies where signs are to be installed on land controlled by the RTA and/or other agencies;
- 5.6.8 the proposed signage conforms with Council's signage policy, development controls and risk management processes;
- 5.6.9 Council's asset management principles have been applied to assess the capital and ongoing costs of installing signage to ensure that appropriate financial provision can be made for the maintenance and replacement of signage.

5.7 Council will not ordinarily consider individual requests for the installation of interpretive signage that fall outside of the provisions of this policy. However, community groups seeking to install an interpretive sign are encouraged to apply for financial assistance under Council's Community Sponsorship Program. It would be the responsibility of the community group to seek and obtain relevant approvals which may be required to install the sign. Council will

not generally support the installation of interpretive signage on Council land which may conflict with the provisions of this Policy.

5.8 Council recognises that the development of an interpretive trails or public art is an important community undertaking. In supporting the design and installation of an interpretive trail or public art which highlights aspects of the Hawkesbury's cultural or natural heritage considered to be of significance to a community group, it will be important for stakeholders involved to understand Council's broad obligations to the wider community as detailed in its Community Engagement Policy, Plans of Management, Community Strategic Plan, Cultural Plan and other policies and plans.

## **6. Application**

6.1 The following operational and management framework will be applied to the commissioning, design, planning and installation of interpretive signage and public art;

6.2 In practice, proposals for the design and installation of interpretive signage or public art will ordinarily be generated in conjunction with the implementation of the actions and strategies within Council's adopted Management Plans, Section 94A Contributions Plan, Cultural Plan, Community Strategic Plan and tourism strategies. In this context, Council staff will be required to assess the feasibility of interpretive signage or public art projects either prior to seeking the General Managers approval to lodge any associated grant applications, or in conjunction with the preparation of Council's Draft Financial Estimates and Operational Plans. Where proposals are approved, Council staff will consult with relevant stakeholders on options for the design and location of interpretive signage and public art in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Policy and/or Deeds of Agreement (as they relate to the operations of the Hawkesbury Cultural Precinct) and/or the Constitutions of relevant Council Committees.

6.3 Community groups with proposals for the installation of interpretive signage or public art on land controlled by Council, should, in the first instance, discuss their proposal with Council staff prior to any contact with stakeholders or government agencies. Initial enquiries can be directed to the Manager, Cultural Services.

6.4 Where a proposal for the installation of an interpretive sign or public art (received from a community group), has been assessed by Council staff as falling outside the provision of Councils Interpretive Signage and Public Art Policy, the community group will be encouraged to seek financial support under Council's Community Sponsorship Program or other relevant non-Council funding programs . While Council staff will be available to provide advice to the community group on appropriate design and materials for the proposed sign, it will be the responsibility of the community group to procure the sign, and seek the necessary approvals for the installation of the sign.

6.5 Where a proposal for the installation of an interpretive sign or public art has been assessed by Council staff as complying with the provisions of Clause 5.5 of Councils Interpretive Signage and Public Art Policy, Council may establish a reference group (or such other consultative mechanism as provided for under Council's Community Engagement Policy) to investigate and further develop the proposal. As provided for in Clause 6.2 of this Policy, the responsible Council staff will be required to prepare a report on the feasibility of the proposed project prior to seeking the General Managers approval prior to lodge a grant application for an interpretive signage or public art project (where funding for the project is to be derived from external sources).

## **7. Delegations**

7.1 The delegations and responsibilities of Council staff in relation to the implementation of this Policy will be as determined by the General Manager.

**References and Governing Policies & Documents.**

1. *Hawkesbury Cultural Plan 2006-2011*, Hawkesbury City Council, Adopted 30 May 2006.
2. *Hawkesbury Community Strategic Plan*, Hawkesbury City Council, Adopted 13 October 2009
3. *Community Engagement Policy*, Hawkesbury City Council, Adopted 26 June 2007.
4. *Sponsorship Policy*, Hawkesbury City Council, Adopted 13 May 2007.
5. *Cultural Collections Policy*, Hawkesbury City Council, Adopted 14 August 2007
6. *Asset Management Policy*, Hawkesbury City Council, Adopted 29 September, 2009