

MADDINGTON HOMESTEAD

Grievance

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Thornlie) [9.42 am]: My grievance today is seeking the support of the Minister for Heritage to secure the restoration of the Maddington Homestead in my electorate. This has been an ongoing and longstanding issue and the subject of parliamentary questions, debate and petitions in this place for a number of years. I want to acknowledge one of the leaders in this campaign—that is, Patricia Morris, AM, JP, Honorary Freeman of the City of Gosnells, who chairs the City of Gosnells’ history, heritage and advisory group.

The history and significance of Maddington Homestead is fairly well known in my electorate, but let me provide a little background on it for members today. Maddington Homestead was built from 1836, but the earliest outbuilding on the property was built in 1832, just three years after the Swan River Colony was established. The house is a large two-storey structure, described as Georgian revival style. It had two cellars, four lower rooms and four upper rooms. The historical importance of Maddington Homestead not just to the local area but to Western Australia cannot be understated. It is an extremely rare example of a substantial settler’s house that was constructed in Western Australia prior to the convict era. It is associated with prominent figures in the history of Western Australia, such as John Randall Phillips; Major William Nairn, who, when he purchased land, was the oldest European male in the colony; Surveyor-General John Septimus Roe; and other earlier settlers. The house is the oldest surviving residence in the district, although it has to be said it is just barely surviving at the moment. In fact, it is at a critical point: we could completely lose the homestead and the history that it embodies or, at this point, we could move to save it. The homestead also illustrates the innovative and creative use of material such as the wattle and daub that make up the bulk of the material used for it. Major William Nairn built the two-storey Georgian-style home, starting work in 1836, and the property tells a story of the early days of British settlement on the Swan River.

There is a strong Aboriginal connection to the Maddington park property with records of contact with Aboriginal people on and around the property. Sadly, not all of them were peaceful, often due to the British lack of understanding and acceptance of the local Aboriginal culture and way of life. As a result, gunports were incorporated into the structure of the house. In 1837, it was the scene of a conflict when Buoyen, a Whadjuk Noongar man, was accused of injuring two shepherds. Buoyen was tried and sent to Rottnest Island for the rest of his life. However, one incident was recorded in 1841 when a bushfire that had destroyed a nearby farm was heading towards Maddington Homestead. The neighbours were all battling the fire when a group of Aboriginal people arrived to help them save the homestead and outbuildings. It is these stories that need to be told. They can show people how we were, how far we have progressed and how much further we have to go, especially in our relationship with Australia’s First Nations people. There are some very interesting stories to be told about the reason behind the choice of site for the homestead. The number one reason was proximity to the river, which provided the preferred means of transport at the time.

The agricultural story is very interesting as well. They trialled different crops and tested different animal husbandry methods. Major Nairn experienced footrot amongst his flock, bearing in mind that this is prior to the introduction of merino sheep into the colony. He managed to adapt his practices and became renowned for the success of his sheep husbandry. There are reports that the challenges of building the homestead actually wore Nairn down. In 1843, Nairn mortgaged the property to Surveyor-General John Septimus Roe.

In recognition of its importance, the homestead was entered into the state Register of Heritage Places in 2001. When the property was sold to the current owners in 2003, it was on the understanding that the structure of the homestead would be restored to a reasonable state as part of subdividing the land for residential development. However, this has not happened. Two fires, in 2004 and 2005, caused extensive damage to the homestead, so the cost of repair has obviously risen. However, it could be argued that the owner’s priority was subdividing the land and that the homestead was merely an afterthought. Although I acknowledge that Golden Group, the owner, has spent some money on the homestead, that money has not gone into physically repairing the building and now the owner is citing a downturn in business as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason for not proceeding with work.

The Maddington Homestead and surrounding land constitutes the final stage of Golden Group’s larger project, the Golden Maddington River Estate. The first stages of the estate are complete and, according to Golden Group’s website, it is a \$40 million project. The cost of repairing the homestead is a liability on the books of Golden Group. It could be argued that a portion of the income derived from the Golden Maddington River Estate residential subdivision should have been ring fenced by the company for years to repair the homestead. The Golden Group, according to its website, has land development projects in the pipeline in Western Australia with a value of \$5.52 billion, plus some 2 000 hectares in Eneabba for an as-yet uncosted project. That amount does not include \$22 million for a development project in Queensland and a further \$250 million for development projects in Victoria.

Given the resources of the company, it would not be unreasonable for the group to fulfil its obligations to bring the Maddington Homestead back up to a reasonable standard. What is more, this part of Maddington desperately needs a community gathering point, complete with a community meeting room, a local cafe, a hub for trail walkers

around this part of the Canning River and perhaps a workplace for those keen to nurture environmental projects that are so needed on this stretch of the Canning.

I hope the minister agrees with me and brings the legislative resources of the state government to bear to persuade the Golden Group that the opportunity to develop land in Western Australia comes with obligations to the community and that repair of the Maddington Homestead is its prime obligation in this instance.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Heritage) [9.49 am]: I genuinely thank the member for Thornlie for his ongoing concerns about this particular Western Australian heritage asset, Maddington Homestead. I also acknowledge Pat Morris and those other keen and passionate supporters of the protection of this place of state significance. My first comment to the member is: I agree with him; Maddington Homestead is a significant place in our state's history. The member has outlined in his grievance this morning a range of stories associated with the homestead over its long life and also highlighted something that I did not know—that is, the significance of the earlier outbuilding in that the structure was established in 1832.

The member is right; under the watch of the homestead's current owner, and due to a range of events, including some destructive fires and vandalism, the building has been damaged and is in a deteriorated state. As the member said, the property on which the homestead is located has been subdivided for residential development and it is true that it was understood that works would occur to restore the physical fabric of the homestead as part of that process. This has not occurred, and that is very sad and disturbing. I understand the member's frustration with the failure of the owner to appropriately protect this important state asset.

In 2009, a protection order pursuant to the former Heritage of Western Australia Act 1990 was issued by the then Minister for Heritage to provide an additional layer of protection, but, as we know, due to the limitations of that former act, this order could not require the owner to undertake any conservation works. As the member knows, the McGowan government, through me, as Minister for Heritage, introduced, passed and has now made law the new Heritage Act 2018 and that gives me, as minister, statutory authority to initiate a process that can require an owner to undertake repair works to a place on the state register.

Due to the advanced deterioration of Maddington Homestead and the owner's continued failure to address conservation protection issues, the Heritage Council of Western Australia has issued a repair notice to the owner. This is significant, because this is the first repair notice to be issued by the Heritage Council under our new act. I hope that this indicates to not only the wider community in the member's electorate, but also the owners the seriousness in which I see this matter. It is unfortunate that this notice has needed to be issued, but the fact of the matter is simple: this is a state asset that is now under this group's ownership and it needs to respond to this notice. The notice contains specific works that the owner has to undertake, and there are repercussions for failure to do so. Failure to do so is likely to result in the Heritage Council recommending to me, as Minister for Heritage, that a repair order be issued. If a repair order is issued, there are serious ramifications for contravention of that repair order, including penalties of up to \$1 million, one year's imprisonment and also a daily penalty of a \$50 000 fine. The issuing of the repair notice draws a line in the sand for the owner to understand the seriousness of the situation with the deterioration of this state heritage asset. I am certainly calling upon the owner to ensure that it carries out, as is its responsibility, the requirements outlined in the repair notice. I will be watching very closely the owner's response to that notice.

I regret that we have reached this point, but it is because of the advocacy of the member and his community—I thank him sincerely for that—that the matter has now reached the stage it has reached. The Heritage Council has seen how serious the matter has become and has seen fit to issue that repair notice. The ball is now firmly in the court of the owner to ensure that it upholds the responsibility it has as the owner of that property. Indeed, I am very hopeful that it understands the serious nature of the position we are in.

I can assure the member that the Heritage Council and I will continue to pursue the repair of Maddington Homestead through the mechanisms available under the Heritage Act that I have outlined. I also assure the member that state assets such as Maddington Homestead remain key and pivotal aspects of our state's history. The stories that are attached to that structure are significant for our state. I am hopeful that the member's fierce advocacy on behalf of Maddington Homestead will bear good fruit and that we will protect that asset through the cooperation of the owner and that that will be done in a timely manner.

I thank the member for his grievance this morning and I again thank him for his absolute passion for heritage issues and particularly for the protection of Maddington Homestead. I appreciate it.