

## HERITAGE — STRAWBERRY HILL FARM

### *Grievance*

**MS R.S. STEPHENS (Albany)** [9.54 am]: I rise today to raise a grievance to the Minister for Heritage regarding an iconic local Albany site, Strawberry Hill farm at Barmup. I thank the minister for taking my grievance and for the opportunity to bring to the attention of the house the much-needed restoration and repairs at this important cultural heritage site on Menang Noongar country. The site is significant as an important campsite for the Menang people and a place of close and ongoing contact between Menang people and European settlers. It is the site of the first colonial farm to be established in what was to later become Western Australia, in close proximity to the present-day Albany CBD. Established in 1827, Barmup Strawberry Hill Farm features historic buildings dating from the mid-1830s in a relatively intact cultural landscape setting. The site is included on both the State Register of Heritage Places and the Aboriginal Sites Register.

A new visitor hub completed in 2020 has increased visitor numbers and improved the visitor experience at Strawberry Hill. However, there remain some serious problems that need to be addressed at the property regarding the site infrastructure and the condition of the historical buildings. The two-storey stone house on the site is a rare example of old colonial Georgian architecture, while the nearby cottage is a rare example of an adobe farm worker's cottage. The grounds of Strawberry Hill contain examples of the earliest European planting in WA.

The National Trust of Western Australia has conserved the place. It was the first property acquired by the trust and has been accessible to the public since 1964. All of the northern portion of the land under National Trust management is an Aboriginal heritage site. The elevated position of the site and the existence of permanent water meant that the site was used as a meeting place and for ceremonies by Menang people. The campsite was on a travelling route used by Menang people that was widened for access to the newly established government farm and became known as Sleeman's track. It is also recorded that there is a track from Albany town centre to the rocks above the Strawberry Hill site—which are a known birthing place—from the Beauchamp Road side of the farm and out to Lake Seppings. A bank was constructed below the Beauchamp Road boundary of the farm to stop stormwater runoff and obstruction of the track. It is the first known obstruction of the track by settlers.

Strawberry Hill at Barmup holds a unique place in the history of Western Australia as it was the first property to be vested in the National Trust after its formation in 1959. Strawberry Hill was opened to the public in 1966 and has been managed by the National Trust as a publicly accessible heritage site. Currently, 38 volunteers keep Strawberry Hill at Barmup maintained and open to the public. It is a popular and important site, offering a welcoming, stimulating and attractive environment.

Since the new visitor hub was completed in 2020, additional serious risks have been identified that need to be addressed at the property such as the condition of the historic buildings, the collection of moveable objects within the building, health and safety for visitors and staff, and universal access. A recent review identified issues with the arrival experience and traffic management at the property, which include potential confusion over points of entry and exit from Middleton Road. The front fence is not in good condition and has been criticised on aesthetic grounds. There is no separate entry for pedestrians and cyclists from Middleton Road and paved surfaces in the car park off Middleton Road are in poor condition with many potholes. Timber kerbing in the car park off Middleton Road has rotted away, making it very unsafe for visitors. Additional problems identified within the site include inadequate paved surfaces and toilet facilities in the form of two toilets housed in a transportable at the rear of the site, which is at the end of its life. The grade of the ramp leading up to this facility is noncompliant in terms of universal access.

Moisture ingress in the 1836 main house is a significant risk to the house. Recent data shows high sub-surface water levels to the north and east of the main house and very high humidity levels and mould inside. The house is cracked in various places and some walls are starting to lean. The external render on the 1835 worker's cottage is failing in sections, posing a risk to its original adobe walls. There are problems with both of the historic buildings regarding stormwater disposal, including inadequate gutters and pipes.

A collection preservation needs assessment completed in 2023 found that the historic buildings at Strawberry Hill are in varying states of deterioration, which is causing risk to the collection through exposure to inappropriate and fluctuating climatic conditions, giving overall potential for physical damage through full or partial collapse.

The users of Strawberry Hill farm have provided to my office the following remarks as feedback: "The pathway up to the house is pretty dodgy", "The carpark is a disgrace and full of puddles after it rains", "How are we meant to show off this wonderful place when the house is falling apart", "The pathway through to Beauchamp St is an accident waiting to happen" and "Having just one disabled parking bay is not good enough".

Strawberry Hill has 38 volunteers, including 10 garden volunteers, who do an amazing job keeping the gardens and grounds looking beautiful. Judy started as a volunteer coordinator in 2017 and is now the caretaker of Strawberry Hill. Judy loves going to work each day with her dedicated team of volunteers, who take so much pride in their work. David is one of the garden volunteers and started at the farm two years ago. He has fond memories

of family visits to the farm when he was a child. He was motivated to become a volunteer because of those experiences and the connections that he has with lots of locals.

As the minister knows, I am a born and bred Albany girl and have very fond memories of school excursions to the farm. We would walk from my school at Spencer Park to the farm for the experience and to learn the history and walk the tracks that the Menang Noongar people would have walked. I have fond memories of having Devonshire tea in the tearooms. When I visited the farm last year, a volunteer asked me to have a look with them, and it was disturbing to see the cracks and water buckets scattered throughout the historic building. My office has been advised that most cracks in the house have appeared over the last 10 years and are a serious problem that need to be fixed. Mould is also becoming a serious problem, which is not helped by the drainage problems caused by the run-off.

I can confirm that locals love this site, with many using the grounds as part of their early morning walking regime. The farm can now not host many events onsite due to the poor conditions of the path and car park. The car park also needs to be expanded to increase its capacity as it is too small. My constituents have made their position very clear that they want to see urgent repairs to Strawberry Hill. Can the minister please update the house on the status of Strawberry Hill farm in Albany?

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Heritage)** [10.01 am]: I thank the member for Albany for a passionate plea. It was a very important example of how grievances should be used. The member for Albany has not only highlighted the significant importance of Strawberry Hill farm to the state's heritage, but also alluded to what I think is a very important element of Strawberry Hill farm, and that is the importance of the site to the Menang people prior to the farm being established. As the member for Albany highlighted, the Strawberry Hill farm site was a very important meeting place for the Menang people. Over 150 years ago, during colonial settlement, the site was established as a farm, the state's first, as the member highlighted correctly. There are a couple of reasons why this grievance is important. The first is that we are approaching two significant dates in the state's history, which we will acknowledge appropriately. One date is in 2026 to recognise when the town site of Albany was established from a colonial perspective. Of course, the second date is later in this decade, in 2029, when the state will acknowledge 200 years since colonial establishment.

The importance of significant heritage assets like Strawberry Hill farm is becoming more greatly enhanced. That is why I am pleased the member has raised this grievance. As the member knows, I have visited Strawberry Hill farm. The member and I were there in February this year and we looked at the site. The reality is that despite the tremendous efforts by both the National Trust of Western Australia, which of course is the custodian of the site, and the magnificent 30-plus volunteers the member mentioned, the need for urgent action is now before us. The buildings are very old. They are a remarkable example of colonial buildings, including the imposing two-storey dwelling that was the old farm homestead. I was able to inspect, with Julian Donaldson, the CEO of Strawberry Farm, the various challenges that the structures across the precinct are facing, including the cracking in the two-storey building, the impact of water egress on the foundations, the fact that the site slopes into the foundations of the building and issues around access, which are very concerning for me because we want more people to experience and learn from that place by visiting it. The pathway approaches, the car park and how the farm fronts onto the main road are also very important issues.

As a result of the member's extremely strong advocacy, the trust has done some work on assessing what needs to be done. It is extensive work. It includes addressing a number of structural matters and a range of conservation matters. The past practice for replacing mortar is not the modern approach taken for heritage buildings of this nature. There are also issues with roofing. We need to ensure that the buildings not only are safe, but also can welcome more visitors. I am impressed with the member's grievance, so I will have conversations directly with the National Trust of Western Australia about what works are required for remediation, and of course I will seek support for those works to be funded. It is important, as I said, that we ensure that this very significant heritage site not only is safe and welcoming for visitors, but also has great potential to deliver some tremendous outcomes for learning, cultural experiences and tourism. As we approach 2026, I am very keen for that important heritage asset to be able to welcome even more visitors than it has in the past. I thank the member for that.

I also want to briefly highlight that I was in Geraldton only last week, so this may give the member some hope. We announced \$7.6 million towards the conservation works at the old Victorian centre, which was the old hospital in Geraldton. Again, similar to Strawberry Hill farm, it is a significant heritage site. The materials used are similar and we need to fix those buildings. I thank the member for her grievance and assure her that I will turn my attention to it forthwith.