Cottesloe's Sense of Place

"Our cultural heritage is what we pass on to future generations and it is expressed in how we build and how we shape our landscapes" "This sense of belonging, of attachment to and ownership of particular places, is our 'sense of place'. The loss of a sense of place within sectors of the community is of vital concern . Its link to most environmental issues is obvious – people want to look after a place that means a lot to them personally." [1]

1. Regional Context

The Town of Cottesloe is located on a narrow peninsular of land between the Swan River and the Indian Ocean. It is a relatively small municipality (less than 4km^2) adjacent to the Shires of Mosman Park and Peppermint Grove. Stirling Highway forms the eastern boundary and the Perth to Fremantle Railway runs through the Town. Curtin Avenue, a major north south regional vehicular route passes through Cottesloe and in so doing dissects the Town. Many of the facilities in Cottesloe service surrounding shires and the residents of Cottesloe utilize the facilities in adjacent shires. Cottesloe and North Cottesloe beaches are regional, national and international destinations and the hotels on the foreshore have a catchment far beyond the boundaries of the Town of Cottesloe. The Ocean Beach Hotel is traditionally a holiday destination for people from rural areas and more recently caters for international backpackers.

2. Cultural Context

Written records of early European explorers and settlers describe the Cottesloe coastal strip as an area frequented by indigenous people. The Nyungar Aboriginal people's seasonal pattern of movement in this region (mainly December to March) was for fishing, hunting and ceremonial purposes with archaeologists suggesting this hunter-gatherer lifestyle was sustained in the area for some 50,000 years. Mudurup Rocks, adjacent to the Cottesloe groyne, remains an Aboriginal site of great mythological significance. The Dutch explorer Vlamingh landed on Cottesloe Beach in 1697, however it was not until European settlement in 1829 that non-indigenous human activity impacted on the area. In the 1830s, John Butler used his farmhouse (known as the Halfway House) as an inn to accommodate travellers between Fremantle and Perth. This inn was located just below the current View Street in Peppermint Grove. Settlement in Cottesloe was minimal until the 1850s and increased in the 1880s with the opening of the Fremantle to Perth railway line. Following the promotion of Cottesloe as a coastal destination, there was significant development in 1910s and 1920s, including the building of many guesthouses and holiday shacks. There are a number of buildings in Cottesloe listed on the State Heritage Register or the municipal heritage inventory.

Cottesloe today is a coastal residential community covering a land area of 3.9 km^2 with a population of 7,821 comprising 2,590 households and a population density of 2,015.6 people per km^2 (ABS 2006).

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[1] *Hope for the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy* Government of Western Australia 2003

3. Landscape Character

- **Climate**

Cottesloe has a Mediterranean climate, receiving rain in the cooler winter months between May and September from moist south westerly prevailing winds. It has hot dry summers with strong dry east-south-east winds in the mornings and a cooling south westerly sea breeze most afternoons.

There is generally only one high and one low tide per 24 hours, the range of tides being less than one metre. Sea surface temperatures vary from 16.5C in August to 22C in February near the Perth coast and can be affected by the warm Leeuwin Current in winter.

- **Landform**

Cottesloe is in the Cottesloe landform unit within the Spearwood Dune system and is characterized by yellow to toffee coloured sandy hills overlaying a belt of pale rough limestone which is exposed in places. The beaches and low coastal areas have Quindalup fine to medium grained white sand. The elevation of Cottesloe varies from 5 to 47 m in height.[2] Numerous limestone nearshore reefs are scattered along the Cottesloe coastline especially along the Cottesloe Reef Fish Habitat Protection Area. The coastal landscape is of horizontal form, the major vertical feature being the introduced Norfolk Island Pines that have been planted extensively as street trees throughout Cottesloe. Low lines of limestone cliffs emerge from the beach at Grant St, Mudurup and south Cottesloe.

- **Flora and Fauna**

Tuart, Marri and Peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*) forests were a feature of this area with closed heath on the limestone outcrops. Just 15 ha of remnant vegetation remain. Coastal microhabitats occur in the beach sands, on the mobile fore dunes and within 100m of the beach but are rather degraded in many areas.[3] A dominant introduced vegetative feature of Cottesloe is the vertical form of the Norfolk Island Pines.

A description of the Cottesloe Reef Fish Habitat Protection Area from the Department of Fisheries web site is included below

"The Cottesloe Reef ecosystem extends intermittently approximately 4.5 km along the coast, and extends to approximately 1.5 km off-shore from Cottesloe. The reef is composed of limestone pinnacles, elevated limestone platforms and water-eroded outcrops, with patches of seagrass, kelp beds and sponge gardens. It provides habitat and shelter for a vast range of aquatic life including fish, shellfish, crustaceans, weedy seadragons and the rare leafy seadragon.

In recognition of the popularity of the reef ecosystem, and its vulnerability to increasing human impacts, the Cottesloe Reef has become a Fish Habitat Protection Area (FHPA")[4]

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[2] Ecoscape Cottesloe Natural Areas Management Plan p17

[3] Ecoscape Cottesloe Natural Areas Management Plan p20/23

[4] http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/docs/pub/FHPACottesloe/index.php?0502

- **Water forms**

The dominant water feature of Cottesloe is the Indian Ocean.

- **Visual Quality**

The element of high scenic quality and the dominant feature is the Indian Ocean. Other landforms that rate as high scenic quality are the dunal system, limestone cliffs and large stretches of coastal landscape free of disturbance. Other coastal landscapes and reefs rate as moderate scenic quality.[5]

- **Built form.**

The built form in Cottesloe is an eclectic mix of periods and styles. Although many of the buildings that had their heyday at the beginning of the 20th century have been demolished or have lost a significant number of features, many heritage buildings still remain. The Albion Hotel (c1865) on Stirling Highway, a former halfway house between Fremantle and Perth, still operates as a watering stop. There are small workers' cottages and the Civic Centre that was once a palatial residence. Most residential buildings are single or two storey with some 3 storey blocks of units and a handful of higher structures. Buildings are of a human scale, being of a height that allows a person to recognize a face on the street below. Generally buildings interact with the street and are full of detail, texture and variety.

4. Land use and Street Patterns

Historically Cottesloe evolved from a travel Inn based half way between Fremantle and Perth. Initially most traffic to Perth travelled via the Swan River. By 1858 the road was upgraded and a new Halfway House established on the site of the present day Albion Hotel by Thomas Briggs in the mid to late 1860s. In 1881 the railway was completed and by the early 1900s a second node had developed on the beachfront as a health and recreation centre. A new railway station and post office were built in the 1890s by which time both day trippers and residents were attracted to the "healthy air" of the seaside. The original land holdings were relatively large (4 acres) and by 1900 there were boat builders, dairies, quarries, lime kilns, a brewery and an electrical supplier. The Ocean Beach Hotel was built in 1907 and other tearooms and facilities developed along both Cottesloe and North Cottesloe beaches.

Cottesloe's original street pattern is a large square grid. A primary street grid of particularly wide streets still exists on both an east west and north south axis (Grant, Eric, Napier, Broome Marmion Griver etc). These larger blocks have subsequently been subdivided into the suburban lots and streets that exist today. Most of these secondary streets have an east west axis that gives the lots a preferred north south orientation. These lots were subdivided according to the popular Garden City practice and as such were not of an urban scale but created more like a "villa landscape"[6](I.e. wide streets, larger blocks, open spaces and homesteads as individual, detached units set back from the street line).

These sub divisions were based on public transport and the distance one could walk in 5 minutes (nominally 400m) and included corner shops, delis, butchers and newsagents, all located within a short train ride or walk from residential areas. Cottesloe maintains that legacy of variety of land uses and walkability that is missing in the suburbs that emerged from a later planning philosophy based on the motor vehicle.

[5] Revel G CALM Reading the Remote, Landscape Characters of Western Australia CALM 1994

[6] For a discussion of the conflict between enclosed Urban space and open "Villa Landscapes" (Krier Urban Space) see Kostof The City Assembled p215

The other legacy that remains in the population that has grown up or chosen to live in Cottesloe is a strong reluctance to enclosed urban form.

> *"In cultures where there is a strong sense of the homestead as an individual, detached unit, there will be a corresponding indifference to the formation of enclosed street spaces,"[7]*

Cottesloe has a unique form of street enclosure in the towering Norfolk Island Pines.[8]

5. Circulation Patterns-Vehicular

Two dominant regional north south vehicle routes dissect Cottesloe. They are Stirling Highway and Curtin Avenue. The railway line also dissects Cottesloe but connects the town to Perth to the north and Fremantle to the south. These dominant north south routes are both connectors to regional areas and barriers within the town. These three all form barriers to east west traffic flow that tends to isolate the Cottesloe town centre from its hinterland. Both primary schools that serve the area are located on the eastern side of Curtin Avenue and the railway line and Cottesloe Primary is located in Peppermint Grove on the eastern side of Stirling Highway. Due primarily to the limitation of the Western Power substation near Jarrad Street, Curtin Avenue traffic bottle necks through Cottesloe which is a hindrance to north south regional traffic flow.

The dominant vehicular street pattern within the town of Cottesloe is the traditional grid. As explained above a primary square grid exists with a secondary street and lane grid within this.

6. Circulation Patterns-Pedestrian & Cycle

Cottesloe has two regional cycle routes, one adjacent to the rail reserve that extends as far as Grant Street from Perth and the principal shared path (PSP) that connects Cottesloe to Fremantle and Scarborough along the coast. Curtin Avenue has sealed shoulders either side of the road that are suitable for cyclists. Several Perth Bicycle Network (PBN) routes and cycle friendly streets are marked through Cottesloe in an east west direction. These connect Mosman Park, Peppermint Grove Swanbourne and Claremont to the beach.

Cottesloe is a town that is supportive of walking (i.e. it has high 'walkability').[9] It is highly legible and has good connectivity. It has highly visible edges being the ocean to the west and Stirling Highway to the east. Although the railway, Curtin Avenue and Stirling Highway form dominant barriers they also act as paths, being the predominant public transport routes. Cottesloe is blessed with a number of destinations from corner delis and parks to cafes, pubs, the beach and the Swan River. Streets are treed and shady and vary from wide and open to narrow secretive lanes that add interest.

Although a SAFE (Safe, Attractive, Friendliness, Efficiency) mapping of Cottesloe was not carried out by the author for this paper, Cottesloe would intuitively appear to rate relatively well on these parameters. Generally the streets of Cottesloe have high passive surveillance, the town having a policy that encourages building interaction with the street. There is a mix of ages with distribution of older retired residents so the likelihood of there being 'eyes on the street' is high. Footpaths are well maintained. Streets are attractive and there is a variety of destinations. Most areas are shaded. Streets are legible, there are landmarks and connectivity is good. The railway has the potential to form an excellent system of public transport.

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[7] Kostof, The City Assembled p214 .

[8] If one doubts the ability of these trees to give a sense of enclosure one just has to visit the Somerville Outdoor theatre at the University of WA to experience the cathedral like space created predominantly by the formation of a planting of these trees.

[9] 'Walkability' is defined in this paper as *'the measure of a place's capacity to cater for and enhance the choice of people to walk."*

7. Connectivity[10], Legibility[11] and Permeability[12]

The Town of Cottesloe has relatively good connectivity having a traditional grid street pattern. This gives maximum choice at each intersection and has a high predictability. The grid also gives a great choice of routes to get to any one place. (Compare this with a street system made up predominantly of cul de sacs). Cottesloe however has several major barriers that restrict access across the Town. The railway has a limited number of crossings and both Stirling Highway and Curtin Avenue act as barriers to east west access through the Town.

Legibility for visitors could be improved within the town centre.

8. Public- Private Domain

Public and private domains are relatively well distinguished in Cottesloe. The town centre, although it lacks an open public town centre space, has good public ownership of the streets that differs from large privately owned malls (e.g. Cottesloe Centro and Floreat Forum). This helps to reinforce the 'village' main street character of the town centre. Cottesloe in some ways has a split public personality in that its civic centre is removed from the centre of commerce and its municipal library is actually located in Peppermint Grove, adjacent to the town centre on the eastern side of Stirling Highway. The Cottesloe Civic Centre previously Overton Lodge, the location of local governance and municipal ceremony, is set in landscaped gardens and centrally located with easy access to much of the residential area of the Town. The community appears to use the gardens extensively for gatherings, open air concerts, informal play groups and weddings.

In some ways the location of the centre of governance in a *'Villa landscape'* symbolizes and reinforces that which sets Cottesloe apart from other towns of a similar size.

9. Safety and Passive Surveillance

The Town of Cottesloe has a policy of encouraging good street interaction in residential areas. High solid front walls are no longer permitted and the street grid dimensions are such that there is active frontage on the majority of streets. The majority of lanes are also used by both vehicles and walkers. Cottesloe has a wide distribution of ages in its population. Approximately 30% of the population is under 19; 40% 20-54; 21% 55-74 and 7.7% over 75.[13] This means there is a variety of household types with older people and younger parents at home during the day time. This allows 'eyes on the streets' and so creates a relatively safe walking environment.

10. Public Open Spaces

The majority of Cottesloe's public open spaces (POS) are located along the coast. Some of these reserves have limited access to the public. The reserves adjacent to Napier and between Forrest and Pearse Streets also service the wider community housing the Cottesloe Tennis Club, the Sea View Golf Club and the Cottesloe Rugby Club. The wide treed street corridors and the open coastal reserves give Cottesloe the appearance of a green leafy place but in fact the accessibility to POS for a major part of the Town is limited. A comparison of pedestrian access to

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[10] Connectivity in urban design terms, refers to the principle of promoting accessibility and permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before (or on a par with) traffic and integrating land use and transport. It is also associated with legibility in that promoting recognizable routes, intersections and landmarks assists people in negotiating their way around.

[11] Legibility in urban design terms refers to the ease at which a place can be 'read' or understood by cues from the landscape.

[12] Permeability refers to the ease at which people can pass through the urban fabric.

[13] ABS 2006

POS within 400m (a ped shed)[14] indicates that those dwellings on the coastal strip and those centered on the parks in Grant Street have reasonable access to POS but dwellings on either side of Marmion Street and those east of Stirling Highway have limited access to local POS. There is an opportunity to address this if part of the rail reserve land central to this area was set aside for POS.

11. Public Transport

Cottesloe is well catered for with access to four train stations on the Perth Fremantle Line. It is often said that patronage at Grant Street has declined but this must be considered with the knowledge that not all trains stop there and only one train an hour services that station after 7.30pm. The visual connectivity from Cottesloe Station to the shopping precinct and the beach could be improved with better pedestrian links, visual connectivity and cues and prompts for visitors who are not familiar with the area. The same could be said for Grant St station and its link to the beach.

Cottesloe is served by numerous bus services although recently routes have been revised in southern Cottesloe.

12. Activity Nodes

Cottesloe has a number of activity nodes. The major ones are the town centre, the North Cottesloe Beach and the Cottesloe Beach. There are a number of other shopping opportunities just outside the town boundary in Swanbourne and Kirkwood St and two within the town in Daisy's and the Eric Street shopping centre. Activity is also centered on the Civic Centre and the local schools and kindergartens. The library, and the Cottesloe Centro shopping centre, although outside the town boundary, are also activity nodes that are frequented by residents of Cottesloe. Cottesloe has a number of mixed use dwellings outside the town centre providing rooms for health providers and offices.

13. Barriers, Paths, Edges[15]

The current form of the Perth to Fremantle railway line creates a major north south barrier within the Town of Cottesloe. There are limited vehicle and pedestrian crossings points. It does however also act as an edge (which assists in orientation and legibility) and a major connecting path to other regions. The same may be said of Curtin Avenue and Stirling Highway. The Indian Ocean is an edge and greatly assists orientation within the town of Cottesloe. Of course the water may be perceived as a physical barrier as well. There are a number of signed paths especially the dual use paths and cycle paths. There is an opportunity to develop paths from the train stations to the beaches and other attractions. Most streets also provide paths not only to vehicles but pedestrians and cyclists, the primary grid of wider treed streets adding to the street legibility.

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[14] A 'ped shed' is a measure of the pedestrian catchment of a place taking into account the actual walkable routes rather than a simple 'as the crow flies' distance.

[15] Barriers are generally seen as a hindrance to connectivity and permeability of an area and may divide communities. They are not always physical barriers (they may be ethnic or political) but more often in urban design terms they are likely to be physical. Paths more often assist legibility, connectivity and permeability but often act as barriers as well (e.g. rivers, freeways).Edges assist orientation and so legibility but are often barriers in themselves (e.g. a coastline or a forest).

14. Summary

Cottesloe has a unique 'Sense of Place' that both residents and visitors relate to. It has developed from a 'villa' or village landscape that has strong connections to its natural coastal environment. This has resulted in a casual relaxed style with an indifference to traditional enclosed urban built form but a high regard for the natural environment. Land and built form are predominantly horizontal and of human scale. Cottesloe is a town of unusually high 'walkability' due to its high legibility, connectivity and permeability; a variety of key destinations and "S.A.F.E." streets. Interest is provided in its eclectic collection of building style and form, various activity nodes; mixed land use and the constantly changing coastal landscape. The town centre is a village 'main street' style. This compliments the low key relaxed coastal style that characterizes the rest of the town.

Significant barriers hinder the east-west connectivity of the hinterland to its town centre, the eastern precincts to the coast and access to Cottesloe and North Cottesloe Primary Schools. This is due to the three major regional transport routes of Curtin Avenue, the Perth to Fremantle railway and Stirling Highway.

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