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New plans needed to ensure future heritage

Market forces have an important role to play in preserving our built environments, particularly as the number of properties attracting heritage listing has rapidly grown in the last two decades, the author of a book to be launched today says.

"A business-like approach to conservation, coupled with greater public participation in decision making, will help to give the past a future," says Tony Gilmour, author of *Sustaining Heritage: giving the past a future*.

How much of our built environment should be preserved for future generations? Who should decide what we keep and what we demolish? More importantly, who will pay the ever-increasing bill for heritage conservation?

Using examples from Australia and the United Kingdom, Gilmour addresses these questions, controversially arguing that market forces offer more opportunities than threats.

Based on an award-winning dissertation as part of his Masters degree in Architectural History at the University of Sydney, this lively and thought provoking book provides a frank and sometimes disturbing picture of problems with heritage planning in Australia. It is likely to cause a stir amongst Sydney's planning and heritage elite

"The byzantine layering of voluntary and statutory listing provisions make heritage listing confusing. The fight to prevent demolition of the Maritime Services Building, which now houses the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) at Circular Quay, is an example where public outcry overturned the demolition decision. But it has still not been given statutory protection on the State Heritage Register.

"Historical precincts such as The Rocks are protected by our 'new guardians of heritage': organisations such as the Sydney Foreshore Authority, the MCA and the National Trusts. These bodies are not lacking in good intentions and dedicated staff, but they suffer from a dangerous democratic deficit."

"The book is a rallying call to raise public awareness of our threatened heritage and to push for an overhaul of a creaking planning system," says publisher Susan Murray-Smith of Sydney University Press "It is recommended reading for planners, policy makers, conservation professionals and anyone concerned about how we should best preserve and interpret our rich historical legacy."

Sustaining Heritage will be launched this evening by Mary-Lynne Taylor, an Adjunct Professor of the University of Sydney and lecturer in planning law and heritage conservation. The University of Sydney's Professor Ed Blakely, currently heading up the reconstruction of New Orleans, will also speak.

About the author: Tony Gilmour is the Planning Research Centre's Research Policy Manager and a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney.

Sustaining heritage: Giving the past a future

By Tony Gilmour

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