

FROM THE CHAIR



ACF CHAIR REPORT TO TENANTS No 1, February 2011

At the Abbotsford Convent Foundation Board meeting in December, directors decided that the Chair would issue a written report to tenants after each quarterly Board meeting.

This was part of our effort to widen and improve communications between the Board and tenants which we acknowledged was less than ideal during periods of rapid change and growth in 2010.

I have been greatly impressed with the dialogue between directors and tenants in the communications and tenancy committees established last year and this is being continued in the permanent Tenancy and Site Development Committee. The Board will continue to search for ways to open further lines of communication.

Our first Board meeting for the year was on 14 February. This meeting formally endorsed the key documents produced and/or discussed at the committees – the Vision/Mission statement, the Tenancy Vision, the Precinct Rules, the Leasing Policy and the Communications Charter.

Directors were particularly pleased with the Vision/Mission statement and thanked tenants for their suggestions which improved the statement considerably. It will be displayed prominently on the site to remind us all of the big picture.

New directors

The Board's Governance Committee (Chair Sally Romanes, Mike Smith, Andrea Hull and myself) is searching for new directors as part of the Board renewal process foreshadowed last year. I am expecting four or five retirements this year.

The process for Board selection is based on skills required for the next three years. Gap analysis is done between skills needed and skills already on Board. We are also taking into account recommendations from a review of the Board by independent specialist in board reviews; OPPEUS. Directors leaving the ACF have indicated they are flexible on timing; new appointments will be announced as they occur during the year.

The Board has set maximum terms for directors. The initial term will be for three years, with an option for a second three years. Directors may service a third term only at the unanimous invitation of the directors. This policy ensures regular turnover of directors while providing for the retention of extraordinary skills in particular circumstances.

Vision statement

The Board has formally adopted the Vision/Mission statement after final suggestions from tenants through the Tenancy and Site Development Committee. It will guide our activities and the creation of our new five-year business plan being developed in coming weeks.

This is the final text:

VISION

To create an exemplary arts, cultural and learning precinct at the convent, a welcoming and lively place that encourages collaboration and social interaction at all levels.

MISSION

To animate the physical spaces and natural environment by attracting creative and innovative people as users, collaborators and tenants. (PEOPLE)

To ensure the continued financial strength and long-term viability of the Abbotsford Convent Foundation (VIABILITY)

To provide good governance, build the public reputation and profile of the Abbotsford Convent, ensure diversity of tenancies, undertake commercial activities in an ethical and fair manner and ensure public safety and enjoyment of the precinct (GOVERNANCE)

To conserve and enhance the heritage assets of the Convent in their historical context whilst ensuring maximum access and amenity to all precinct users (HERITAGE)

To encourage lively dialogue about the activities and directions of the precinct in an atmosphere based on transparency, tolerance, respect and open-mindedness (CULTURE)

Management

The Board has reappointed Maggie Maguire as Chief Executive Officer and warmly congratulated her for her achievements in the past five years.

The Board has decided to maintain the position of Chief Operating Officer following the outstanding success of Anthony Cullen's work in recent months. We are hoping that Anthony will maintain contact with the ACF after his permanent replacement begins work. Interviews for the COO position are taking place this week.

The ACF will continue to review the management structure to make sure it aligns with the strategic directions of the Convent.

Sophia Mundi

The Board is anxious that tenants and others are informed accurately about proposals for the Sophia Mundi Steiner School to erect a new building on site. The Board has been alarmed at the extent of misinformation in the public domain, largely triggered by an ill-informed and premature release by individuals who did not bother to check their facts.

To set out the facts, the ACF has prepared a short background paper which is attached to this communication.

Maintenance

One of the consequences of occupying historic buildings is high maintenance costs. In November, the Board approved \$350,000 expenditure on works such as plumbing, power board maintenance, pathway repairs, roofing and internal painting in the Convent building. Much of this

work has already begun, some of it more visible than others. The ACF will be spending record amounts on maintenance this financial year. It is a top priority of the Board in order to make the site safe, comfortable and attractive to tenants and visitors.

Traffic Management

Parking and traffic management are some of the most contentious issues at the Convent. Please be assured that the ACF is working hard with the City of Yarra and other stakeholders to make sure that the interests of tenants and our neighbours and visitors are best served when the Council decides on the development of the Lourdes site. Please be assured that the ACF is being a strong advocate on your behalf.

Logo

Tenants will have noticed the replacement of our original logo on Convent materials. It has been replaced with a stylish new font developed especially for the Convent and the stylised church image has been dropped. The logo was changed because of a potential legal issue with the original design. We think the new livery is an improvement and timed well to usher in the second five-year development plan.

Operations

The Board has been delighted with operational progress on the site. It is a credit to management and tenants that so many people are visiting the site for so many and varied activities. Did you know, for instance, that there were 74 markets on site in 2010, 64 art exhibitions featuring 235 artists, 182 articles on the Convent in the mainstream Press, almost all of them positive, 205 interested parties were on the tenancy Waiting List and the CEO met 329 community leaders and groups. The ACF has raised more than \$13 million to date for the restoration of buildings and gardens. Venue hires in 2010 included 227 by charities, 232 by not-for-profit community groups, 291 for classes and workshops, 164 for business or corporate events, 474 for performing arts rehearsals, 370 for wellbeing and fitness groups, 91 by government organisations and 86 for arts development events. There were 61 weddings and social events. And there were 22 film shoots. To me, that all adds up to a successful arts, education and cultural precinct.

Challenges Ahead

As we begin drafting our second five-year plan, our major challenges are to raise money to complete the restoration works for the convent buildings and to manage the growth of the convent's activities in a way that is consistent with our vision. They are formidable challenges but we approach them with vigour and confidence.

Our first five years brought incredible activity and growth. We exceeded most of our targets and the rapid expansion brought some growing pains. We are confident they are settling down and our energies can be directed to positive development of the site.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the tenants who have made such a valuable contribution to the site and for their input through various forums to make sure the future is even better than the past.

Yours,

Hayden Raysmith
Chair
ACF