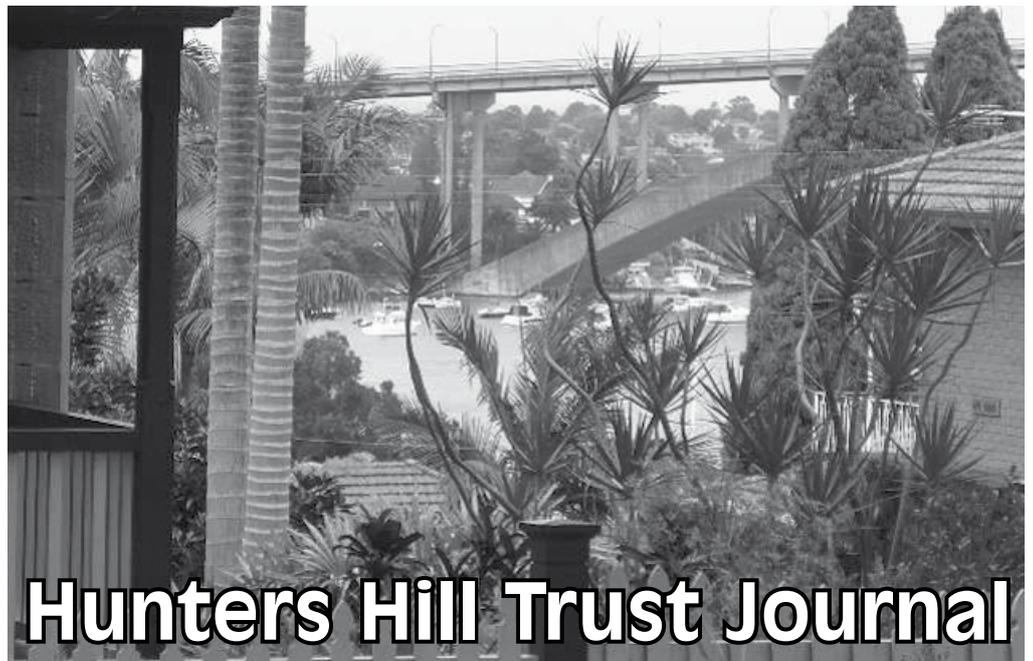




*Preserving Australia's
Oldest Garden Suburb*

April 2007
ISN 0310-011



From the President's Desk

David Gaunt

It's long been said that the best development is the one the neighbours can't see, and sadly it seems that we continue to embellish our domestic and public environment with examples to the contrary. If there's always a tension between the perceived "value" of our real estate and the need for some to capitalise on their property investment in the most unnecessary ways, it's never been truer than now. A walk around our community, a glance at the minutes of any CAP meeting, and you can't but be struck

The long-running question of the Priory and its curtilage, and their future, is still unresolved. The Trust has consistently maintained that the site should stay in public hands, but the Health Department's insistence on selling it for market value means that our Council can't buy it. Nor presumably, can the Historic Houses Trust or the National Trust, so the future of this very significant building and its surrounds hangs in the balance. In the meantime, the old stable site above the Priory (2 Salter St) has been back and forth before Council for several years. In the typical "wearing through attrition" developer's approach it seems that a multi-storey group of villas will be allowed eventually, although it has to be said that the current proposal is a significant improvement on that originally proposed in 2005. Whether the same can be said for a 4 storey "Seniors Living" development in the lower carpark of Blandville Court, directly opposite the Priory seems very questionable. This would seem to have an adverse impact on the Priory setting, not to mention the adjoining cottages in the surrounding streets.

Much else of interest has been happening in our midst: the proposed Telstra Tower in Weil Park, the formation of a precinct group in Woolwich, ongoing plans for a signature corner site in Boronia Park (High St/Park St) and many other developments. I'm delighted to welcome the contributions of two distinguished locals, Paul Fletcher and your committee's own Robyn Christie, whose articles are as entertaining as they are erudite.

Please also note the date of our A.G.M. on May 4th, at which we will be presenting a discussion of "An Inconvenient Truth." (See back page)

Good News For The Madeline St Steps

Council has finally embarked on the restoration of the Madeline Street steps, which connect the west end of Madeline St with Mount Street. The steps are just one of a number of public walkways throughout the Municipality, which have been allowed to deteriorate through years of neglect.

It is great to see this important part of the publicly owned heritage of Hunters Hill being given the respect it deserves. Let's hope that Council will be attending to the maintenance of all the other public places under its care and responsibility.



Two Good Results At The Land And Environment Court

Tony Coote

Recently there have been two encouraging results from the Land and Environment Court where the court has dismissed appeals by the applicants against Hunters Hill Council's refusal of their development applications.

The commissioner, in determining the appeals, cited a number of the objectives of the DCP, which relate to the retention of existing landscape features, the enjoyment of views both to and from heritage items and sympathetic architectural treatment. He also noted the problems of setting a precedent (**39 Bonnefin Road**) and the fact that the maxima are not "as a right", they are only permissible if the objectives are achieved (**3 Martha St**).

39 Bonnefin Road Hunters Hill

This involved a DA for the subdivision of an existing block of land at 39 Bonnefin Road. The Trust made a submission to Council that because of its size, shape and topography the land was not suitable for subdivision.

We also noted that the demolition of the existing house and the subsequent construction of two new houses, carports, a driveway, an inclinor and fencing would result in the destruction of a considerable area of existing open space and natural vegetation, as well as a substantial reshaping of the existing topography and would be detrimental to the riverscape of the Lane Cove River in this part of the Municipality.

We particularly argued for the preservation of the bush corridor along the northern bank of the Lane Cove River on the basis that it forms an interface between the natural environment of the river and the built form of Hunters Hill and is significant, not just for the people of Hunters Hill, but for everyone who uses the river, who walks in Boronia Park or who drives across the Figtree Bridge.

We submitted that this bush corridor is also habitat for a wide range of wildlife, where you can still see possums, Eastern Water Dragons, snakes and other lizards, as well as many varieties of birds, particularly the smaller species such as firetails, silver eyes and wrens which rely so heavily on the continuity of low level shrubbery. We said that landowners should be encouraged to maintain and regenerate the native bushland rather than be allowed to pull it up and replace it with buildings and swimming pools.

The Council was of a similar view and did not approve the application. The applicant appealed to the Land and Environment Court subsequently there was a hearing on site, where Tony Coote and Sally Gaunt presented the Trust's objections. Council's expert witness was Brian McDonald, architect, urban planner, heritage expert and member of Council's Conservation Advisory Panel.

Commissioner KG Hoffman dismissed the appeal, finding;

- That the proposal would have an adverse visual impact on the locality,
- That the two houses would have an unacceptable impact on the environmental amenity of the area, including the existing trees, landscaping, natural vegetation and streetscape, in particular natural rock features, stone retaining walls and foreshores,
- That the proposal will require the removal of and significant adverse impact on trees and vegetation,
- That the proposal is not satisfactory having regard to Bushfire Protection matters,
- That the proposal sets an undesirable precedent in terms of the impact on significant vegetation and the foreshore scenic protection area. He noted that a similar large block adjoins immediately to the west.

Continued page 8



An Overlooked Stone Structure - The Bridge Street Bridge

In 1983, the Hunter's Hill Trust and the team assisting Meredith Walker & Associates with the preparation of the Hunter's Hill Heritage Study conducted a field survey of the Municipality of Hunter's Hill, and produced a map that located every visible stone wall in the Municipality. Unfortunately, because it's not evident from the street, the map did not indicate one of the most significant walls, located on the western boundary of the Municipality – a buttressed stone wall 50 metres long, which is a direct link to the earliest infrastructure works undertaken by the Hunters Hill Council.

The Cover illustration to the Hunter's Hill Heritage Study is a copy of a Map of Hunter's Hill published by Higinbotham Robinson and Harrison in 1886. Present-day Pittwater Road is shown on the map as Bridge Street. Why? The first bridge constructed in Australia used logs to span the Tank Stream in 1788, "near the present site of Bridge Street, Sydney, which was named after it". So, was there a bridge in Bridge Street, Hunters Hill, and when did the eponymous structure disappear? It didn't disappear – it's still in place, under Pittwater Road, channelling stormwater that originally flowed down Tarban Creek into Sydney Water's brick-lined Tarban Creek Stormwater Channel No. 92.

The buttressed stone wall is the eastern wing wall of the Bridge Street Bridge, a stone arch bridge, with a span of 1.8 metres and a width of 20 metres (66 feet, or one chain, being the width of a Government road in the 1800s). The arch is composed of nine tapered voussoirs, with four courses of stone blocks below the springing line. Construction of the bridge and its wing walls began in 1864 and was completed in 1867.

The quality of the craftsmanship of the arch is inspiring, and the warm, honey colour of the stone when dry is as fresh today as when it was laid. As part of a series of four essays about the Great North Road for the Convict Trail Project, Dr Grace Karskens developed a typology that graded the quality of the walls, based on a simple scheme of three ascending categories – rubble, coursed and ashlar - developed in the 19th century by Dobson and Tomlinson. The stonework in the bridge and retaining wall is equal to the best (Type 3b) on the Great North Road, with "stones dressed to definite dimensions to give a smooth face and tight bedding with perpendicular joints and even horizontal coursing."

The eastern end of the stone bridge and the northern end of the eastern wing wall are in the front yard of our property in Pittwater Road. Neither the arch of the bridge or the eastern wing wall is visible until you enter the two properties in Pittwater Road that have the sandstone wall as their western boundary. The western wing wall voussoirs can be glimpsed from inside the arch itself; the western wing wall is probably intact, buried below a grassed surround to a block of home units on the western side of Pittwater Road.

Tarban Creek runs in a north-westerly direction for half a kilometre from the point at which it enters the harbour. Working upstream from the harbour, and using the present-day names for streets and roads, Tarban Creek has had three bridges constructed across it: at Manning Road, Batemans Road, and at Pittwater Road.



1. "Bridge Building in New South Wales, 1788-1938", being extracts from December, 1950, September, 1951 and December, 1954 issues of "Main Roads", Journal of the Department of Main Roads, New South Wales, Vol. XVI, No. 2, 1950, p. 37.
2. 'Dry-laid Walls and Filling for the GNR', pp. 1-2, at www.convicttrail.org/history

The present bridge at Manning Road is a modern bridge, but there are remnants of the original bridge's wing walls in an adjoining reserve. This bridge is quite close to the site of the Asylum Dam, and the original bridge built in this location would be the bridge referred to in Council Minutes as the "Asylum Dam Bridge".

The present bridge at Batemans Road is a modern composite bridge, with the original bridge's wing walls still in use. The original timber-framed roadway has been replaced with a reinforced concrete roadway, topped with a bituminous surfacing. From below the roadway, the original rebate to the top of each wing wall which originally would have taken the hardwood logs or beams to span between the wing walls is visible. The road surface of timber decking would then have been fixed to the top of the timber structural members.

The third bridge over Tarban Creek, the Bridge Street Bridge under Pittwater Road, is the only one of the three bridges that is still in its original condition. This is despite the fact that, in terms of traffic volumes, it is by far the busiest of the three locations. It is probably due to the fact that the stone archway only spans 1.8 metres, is founded on bed rock, is more that two metres below the surface of the roadway, and was well-constructed and built from durable materials.

An outline of the Notices of Motion, Tenders let by Council, skilled contractors, costs and activities of the "Improvement Committee" associated with the three year construction period of the bridge is contained in Hunters Hill Council's Minute Book A, the sole surviving record of the bridge's construction.

The November 1979 issue of *Landscape Australia*, Official Journal of The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, contained an article titled "Landscapes and Dialectics – Incitements to a Public Expedition" that was written by Dr Joseph Michael Powell. The article centred on landscape evaluation and the need for a peculiarly Australian methodology rather than the adoption of recent overseas methods. Dr Powell noted: "If we seek an identity with this place [Australia], we must also know more about how we developed Australia's built environments in the countryside, cities and towns ... not only individual buildings treasured by and for whatever élitist reasons; not only the highly valued specific site or landscape with an unimpeachable scientific accreditation deserving of 'national classification', but also ... the networks of road and rail meshed across the odd physiognomy of the continent."

The Bridge Street Bridge continues to play its part in the nation's road and water management infrastructure. A fitting way to mark 140 years since it was completed would be to nominate it for inclusion on the State Heritage Register.

*Paul Fletcher,
BArch, MBA, MBEnv(Sust Dev)*

The text for this article is based on The Bridge Street Bridge – a puzzle solved, a Research Project submitted by Paul Fletcher in June 2006 as part of the Master of Heritage Conservation program at the University of Sydney.



3. Powell, Dr Joseph Michael, 'Landscapes and Dialectics – Incitements to a Public Expedition', *Landscape Australia*, 4/1979, p. 192.

“The Concept of Context” *Robyn Christie*

The National Trust’s Heritage Festival ran from 3 to 18 March, a little earlier than usual in the year, brought forward by the State election. This year the Festival was titled “Places in Context – Natural & Cultural Landscapes”.

I chose to explore the concept of “context”, both because of its importance to the heritage nature of the suburban environment in Hunters Hill, and because of the degree to which it has governed all my professional philosophies.

Starting with a definition of the word “context”, I selected a single line from the Concise Oxford English Dictionary :

Context – “parts that precede or follow a passage and fix its meaning.”

In our case “passage” is not a passage of text but an object or a place, a heritage item or a conservation area. And “fix its meaning” is how we “best” interpret that item or area. The semantics closely echo the Burra Charter – the bible of heritage professionals. The process of conserving the cultural significance of a place depends upon an understanding of the past and is our legacy to future generations.

I started professional life as a curator and was very fortunate to study Renaissance art at the Courtauld Institute in London. One of the main methodologies that I was taught became my first conscious understanding of the application of the word “context”. Ironically, however, art objects - isolated on the wall of a museum - appear to epitomise the complete opposite of the above definition of context. They are, in fact, totally de-contextualised from their original context. But the method of research that was ingrained in our teaching was not: we were taught to reassemble the work in its original context so that we could begin to understand its meaning better.

Research into the art work comprised a process of gathering as many layers of information about its history as possible. It was never a case of a single stylistic analysis: we sought to understand contemporary works, the original commission, the client and contract, the exact location of the original site, the iconography of the imagery. It was a process of understanding the context of the work layer by layer. If it were an altarpiece, for example, what were its original panels? How were they put together; in what frame? Why were particular saints chosen, for the patron and/or chapel? What were the patron’s demands? Where was the chapel? What was the location of the windows - this often governed the light within the painting? The questions accelerate. Although not all layers of information were immediately forthcoming, the deeper you delved the better your understanding of the art work. Its original context was slowly reassembled.

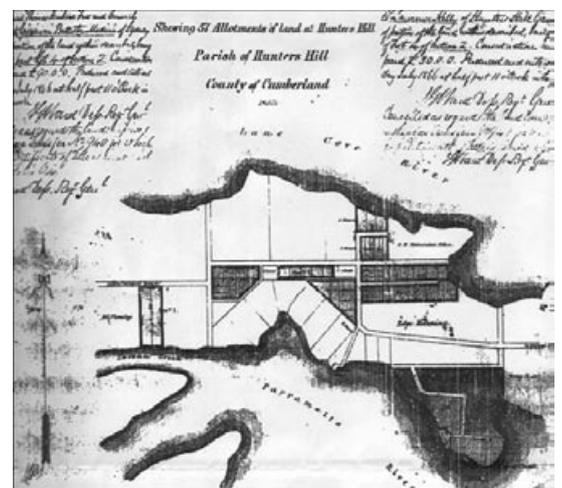
It was a natural transition to apply a similar method when I chose to move from curatorial work to heritage conservation and began researching historic buildings. Unlike many historians, I begin with a site visit. I need to see the building and read visually what information it and its surroundings might immediately have to say. It helps enormously when undertaking documentary research. Information about the land on which the building was built, when



Sands Directory

No.	Owner	Particulars of Holding	Locality	Ac.
109	Andrews, J.	50	St. Peter's Lane	100
110	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
111	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
112	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
113	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
114	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
115	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
116	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
117	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
118	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
119	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
120	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
121	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
122	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
123	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
124	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
125	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
126	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
127	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
128	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
129	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100
130	Andrews, J. P.	20	St. Peter's Lane	100

Rate Record



Fosstitle

and how the building was constructed, who were the owners, who were the occupiers, what changes had taken place to the building were all sourced. Documentary material included land titles, Sands Directories, rate records, early maps and photographs: each source assisted in assembling the layers of information that helped to locate and give context to the building's history.

The history of architecture is often a history of the styles of building, but it is more than that. It is a process of understanding a building within its physical, social and contemporary context. The Burra Charter identifies the cultural significance of a place as resting primarily in its aesthetic, historic, scientific and social values. While I have probably coalesced these values into the words "social" and "contemporary" (as in the time when the building was built), I have added the word physical to denote the building's environmental context.

This is a key to understanding a building. It is not an object isolated like the remnant of an altarpiece in a museum. It grows out of and is part of a place. That place is complex. It is as much about detail as it is about forms. It is all about the accretion of layers with time. So, to use the example of Alexandra Street, to acknowledge the Hunters Hill Historical Society and Museum's exhibition, the street does not just comprise major historic buildings like the Town Hall, the Congregation Church, the public school and post office. Similarly, it is not the addition of attractive 19th stone cottages. It is not just this mixture of building types or the predominantly residential character. It is the scale of the vernacular forms, the coherency of the 19th century style, the locally sourced sandstone building material.

It is also about the landform, the sandstone ridge that eventually drops down to the Alexandra Street wharf: the broad width of the roadway, the sandstone guttering, the street trees. It is the relationship of the Alexandra Street spine to the harbour on both sides; the connecting glimpses to the Parramatta and Lane Cove rivers, as well as the sheltered views within the streetscape.

Importantly it is the relationship of the buildings to the spaces around them, what I term the volume space volume ratio. We forget that the space comprises the place as much as the form. So the garden sets off a building not just because it is attractive greenery, but also because it allows the building to breathe. It allows us to read the building. Vienna's significance does not lie solely in the intact nature of cottage but also in the orchard alongside: together they signify both the history of how the cottage and land functioned and a physical relationship of how the orchard provides space around the cottage to the present day.

Ross, just off the highway between Launceston and Hobart in Tasmania, is an example of a complete town that has stayed amazingly intact to the present day. A Georgian garrison town, built in sandstone, it perhaps illustrates how Hunters Hill may have looked if it had been free from the pressure of subsequent development. At Ross the spaces remain as much a part of the context as the vernacular building forms.



Vienna



Vienna and its orchard



Alexandra Street

Loosely we might label Vienna as an object and Ross as a place. The concept of object and place parallels the heritage conservation categories of heritage items and conservation areas. The concept of context is equally valid for both the item and the area. My mission is to work towards preserving a meaningful, relevant context for both heritage items individually and conservation areas as a whole.

Much new development fails to acknowledge and understand this: it is of a scale and boldness that wrestles for attention with the historic landscape alongside. Successful design and planning processes do not occur in a vacuum: good development only occurs as a result of a sensitive and meaningful appreciation of the historic and present place, with all its nuances intact. Understanding the historic environment, unravelling the layers both through historical documentation and by reading the cultural landscape, is both a learned and intuitive process. For me, this is the “concept of context”. Without it we risk the isolation of our heritage into a series of de-contextualised icons, rather than being part of the way our past informs and tempers our future built environment.

An edited version of a talk given by Robyn Christie, Hunters Hill Trust Committee member, to the Hunters Hill Historical Society & Museum on Sunday 11 March 2007 as part of the National Trust’s Heritage Festival.

TWO GOOD RESULTS AT THE LAND AND ENVIRONMENT COURT.. cont

3 Martha St Hunters Hill

At 3 Martha Street the applicant proposed the demolition of an existing house and the construction of a new, architect-designed dwelling. Council’s Conservation Advisory Panel first considered this application in July 2005 at a preliminary discussion. The panel’s view was that the building was “uncharacteristically massive in its street presentation” and that the design needed to be revised to make it “more appropriate in scale and expression within the context of the conservation area”.

Minor changes were made to the design and it was later submitted as a DA, which CAP was again unable to support. The Trust made a submission opposing the proposal noting that it is “located amidst a cluster of heritage items and within a narrow laneway. The proposed development has an 18 metre long by 2 storeys high wall to Martha Street, which, with its severe horizontal lines and unrelieved massing, is stylistically reminiscent of mid 20th century Soviet formalism”, which “is completely at odds with the surrounding heritage listed houses and is totally unsympathetic to the domestic character of the streetscape of the immediate vicinity”.

We also argued that; “the issue is a wider one for the Municipality. Unless new development is subservient to and respectful of the surrounding character of the conservation area, the special character of the suburb will gradually disappear from view.”

Because of the time spent at Council exceeded that allowed for determination, the applicant claimed a “deemed refusal” and went to the Land and Environment Court to appeal against the refusal.

Commissioner KG Hoffman, who was also the commissioner in the 39 Bonnefin Road case, took evidence from the Council and various objectors including Trust committee member, Robyn Christie.

He dismissed the appeal finding, among other things that;

- The building should be less dominant and have more area available for landscaping, and have less impact on the views to the water and local heritage items and tree cover from neighbouring sites.
- The enjoyment of heritage dwellings and the care and management of their future is often associated with the context in which they are located. Views to and from heritage item and the leafy context within the area are regarded highly, both by the occupants, and by the public in the maintenance of the setting. The proposal adversely impacts on both these aspects.
- The nearby heritage items at No 55 and No 4 had extensions designed in sympathy with the architecture of each item, which were both one storey high so that the original heritage item remains dominant and the location of the extensions enables vegetation that has been planted to retain the leafy, “houses set in gardens” character of Hunters Hill.
- The proposal by comparison is the antithesis of this with a high stone wall, and blank walls to the street and little space for vegetation.
- The small size of the allotment is a constraint in the achievement of the objectives of the legislation and controls and not a justification for development to the maxima. The maxima are not “as a right”, they are only permissible if the objectives are achieved.

Your House – A Successful Seminar

Tony Coote

In association with the National Trust The Hunters Trust ran two afternoon seminars during Jacaranda week last November. The seminars were billed as two afternoons of expert advice on your house and how to look after it.

A number of experts gave presentations on common problems associated with older houses including rising damp, termites and possums, masonry cracking, painting techniques and timber repair. Presenters included Mark Goodchild and Jacqui Goddard from the National Trust, Alicia Long from the NSW Heritage Office and Richard White from TAFE.

The National Trust has previously run a similar conference at Observatory Hill, but this was the first time it has been taken out into the suburbs. The National Trust is concerned that a number of traditional building trade skills are dying out. And as a consequence people are inadvertently causing damage to their properties by using inappropriate techniques when making repairs, carrying out maintenance or doing alterations and additions to them.

For example, it is very important to use the correct mortar mix when repairing old brickwork or the right strength of plaster on old walls. As well, you don't have to throw away that old damaged timber sash window, it can be repaired and the sash cords and balances replaced rather than having the whole thing replaced by an incompatible modern spring balanced window.

Those who attended the seminars were also able to have their own individual problems addressed by the experts and all reported that the experience had been worthwhile and informative. One person reported that the tips given by Mark Goodchild on how to get rid of possums from the roof actually worked. Following Marks instructions, after the possum left the roof space at night, the entry point was blocked off and a lead light hooked up and left on. As well a quantity of camphor was left in the place where the possum had been entering the roof. Possums hate camphor apparently. Anyway Marks advice did the trick (up until the time of writing at least).



INVITATION TO AGM

and a presentation on
“An Inconvenient Truth”

What does global warming mean for Australians and our way of life - and what can each one of us do about it?

The Annual General Meeting of the Hunters Hill Trust will be held (briefly) on Friday 4th May, at 6.45pm in the RSL Hall, Alexandra Street, Hunters Hill.

At 7.30 we will be introducing Caroline Pidcock, a Sydney architect with a deep interest in sustainable built environments, particularly residential. She has trained with Al Gore and a team of renowned scientists and will be enlightening us on the science, impacts and solutions that are critical to our future.

Please come and bring friends and family for an inspiring evening.
 Refreshments provided.

Please RSVP beforehand if possible to
Sally on 98164047 or Brigid on 98163168



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