

## **SILVER WATTLE**

### **AQC Perspective**

The Australian Quaker Centre will need either a temporary or a permanent location.

If temporary, the AQC will require a place to operate for at least 3-4 months each year, either in one block or two. A single block booking reduces setup and departure costs. Two bookings, eg early and late in the year, would provide a greater range of options for attendance. A permanent AQC site would allow a more integrated Quaker presence to be established with permanent facilities and the option for establishing a continuing faith community.

The third alternative would be to have a permanent AQC, with the ability to provide extended courses on-the-road elsewhere.

*Silver Wattle* provides a possible site for an AQC and this paper provides information so Friends can start to think whether it might fulfil either a permanent or a temporary home for the AQC.

### **Access**

*Silver Wattle* is 13km along Lake Road north of Bungendore, NSW, on the western side of Weerewa (Lake George). This is 40 minutes by road from Canberra. Lake Road is a double lane graded gravel road.

Bungendore can be reached easily by bus and train, with Canberra close for air travel.

### **History of the Property**

*Silver Wattle* was established as a sheep property. There was little clearing of the land, and much of the sheep grazing was done on the dry areas of the lake bed.

The property was bought in the 1990s by Peter Ring who developed the main buildings as a training and conference centre. Adventure courses, army bivouacs and courses for wayward youth were held.

The Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn bought the property in 2005, when the Catholic lay community House of Prayer moved from Goulburn to *Silver Wattle*, and the community started to go their separate ways in 2007. This faith community had a sense they were not to be here permanently but were preparing the site for the next group.

The property is for sale with an independent valuation of \$1.35 million, on a walk in walk out basis.

### **Land Area and Tenure**

The *Silver Wattle* property has three parts:

1. Freehold block (DP868882) of 42.44ha (105 acres) acres, on which the main buildings are situated

2. Leasehold blocks (DP754891) and DP723778 cover 1,052.66ha (2600 acres) of the scarp and bed of Lake George. There is Permissive Occupancy for grazing on these leasehold blocks.
3. In total the freehold and leasehold provide some 2.7km of tenure along the hills and slopes on the western side of Weerewa.

## **Topography and Condition of the Land**

### **Climate**

The winter months are cold, with cold winds, and the summers can be hot.

### **Utilities**

- **Water** – a water bore (~80 metres) on the slope behind the homestead, and adjacent to the gully creek system is connected to mains power. Pump details not known. Water is pumped to a settling tank on the spur which drains to a lower tank to provide clean water which is then gravity fed to the buildings. The water is hard (409mg/L), and a water softener in the workshop provides softened water to the buildings (softens to 10mg/L). Its pH is 7.49 (bore) - 7.59 (treated). No rainwater storage tanks are on site. Tests in 2005 showed no concentrations of heavy metals associated with the old sheep dip and sheds.
- **Gas** – Origin Energy 990 gallon gas tank on concrete base behind residence wing
- **Electricity** - single phase, with transformer on pole on southern side of homestead.

### **Buildings**

**Homestead and Residence wing** – L-shaped building with Dining area and commercial kitchen and coldroom, lounge and adjacent four bedroom units, conference room with adjacent 3 bedroom units. Residence wing has four units each with three bedrooms and bathroom/toilet. Gas space heating. Hot water from three gas (135l) heating systems and solar system on roof. Acceptable condition with walls and roof alignment good. Verandahs and woodwork need maintenance.

**Pink Palace** – 4 room demountable unit and adjacent 1 bedroom/bathroom unit, and wooden deck, located south of Residence Wing. Electricity and water connected. Not installed to Council standards. Used for offices and storage.

**Garage/Store** – Galvanised steel kit shed, ca 4m x 7m x 1.8m high at door, divided by wooden partition. One part was laundry, used as storage for domestic items and garden tools. Concrete floor broken and heaved. Gutters but no tank

**Workshop** – galvanised steel shed ca 4m x 7m x 2.1m high at door, personnel door and sliding door 3m wide. Power connected. Chemical storage locker. Concrete floor OK. Gutters but no tank.

**Farm Shed** – Pole shed with iron roof and 3 walls, contains 3m x 6m wooden coolroom, not functional and with decrepit wooden floor. Open part 6m x 10m x 2.4m high with three bays for farm machinery.

**Warden's cottage** - Approx 300m east of the Homestead, above the lake edge, brick and hardiplank construction with steel roof, 4 bedroom, ducted gas space heating, evaporative air-conditioning, satellite dish, and storage container

Further removed from the main buildings area are :

**Shearing Shed** – 7m x 20m, elevated, pole and iron building, with shearing equipment, sorting table, rusty woolpress intact. Out house toilets. Water and power connected. Ender and surrounded by derelict yards. Plunge dip below race at back is free of chemical pollution.

**Stable** –low (2m high) pole/iron building, 5m x 8m with four stalls. Leaning and would require repairs.

Some 1.5km to north is

**Boatshed** - concrete block garage with roller door .

There are also 2 other buildings to the north above the lake edge – a pole/iron old shearing shed and the ruins of cottage burnt to the ground

## **ISSUES IN TERMS OF AQC USE**

### **Council Planning Regulations**

Zoning and possible constraints on further buildings and use need to be sought.

### **Buildings and Amenities**

- Disabled access ramps and stair-lifts needed
- Rainwater storage tanks
- Water Softener needs to be evaluated
- Hot water system evaluation to check possible hard water damage
- Woodwork and verandahs need maintenance and oiling
- Wear and tear on some carpets, esp. office
- Double-glazing would ensure better energy use in cold months

### **Land Degradation**

The landscape behind the homestead is severely degraded: goats have eaten down the vegetation and erosion of topsoil has occurred. The goats belong to an adjacent property and a very strong fence has been erected along the common boundary. However erosion in gullies has undermined the fence, and meant the fence is breached in several places.

The slope of the spur behind the homestead has a small area of serrated tussock grass, and the paddocks contain a wide variety of broadleaf weeds and thistles.

In summary three issues need to be addressed:

- Fencing security
- Declared weeds to be eradicated
- Revegetation to stabilise slopes and regenerate the native flora.

## **SILVER WATTLE RETREAT CENTRE BUNGENDORE**

The property is in need of maintenance and development to meet the safety and usability requirements of the Society. The information that follows lists items that have been considered so far.

### **SHORT TERM MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

- The preparation of a bushfire survival plan for those in attendance at Silver Wattle at the time of any future fire emergency. We have had contact with the local bushfire control authority, based in Queanbeyan, and we are currently working on the plan, including risk assessment of the danger fire would present. When completed, we will discuss the plan on site with a representative of the fire control authority. The closest bushfire brigade is located in Bungendore. It appears that, in the event of an extreme or catastrophic fire, evacuation of the property would be the only safe and recommended action. Work to minimise the potential for serious fires around the buildings is in hand, with slashing to minimise the localised fire loadings having already been started. There are no cost implications related to the fire survival plan. Some costs such as fuel and equipment maintenance will be incurred in the slashing related work. It is expected to be minimal, and a budget of \$1000.00 is suggested.

- Clearing of rubbish in general, and combustible material in particular, around the buildings is required to minimise the fire risk and to generally tidy the building surrounds. Efforts should be made to house all usable equipment under cover to prevent further deterioration. Regular trips to the local garbage disposal centre are required to remove non-compostable rubbish. There is minimal cost implication associated with this work.

- Some building maintenance work is required, and includes the preservative oil treatment of the verandahs, windows and doors of the main building, cleaning of the gutters and the replacement of some deteriorated roof timbers related to the pergola and some external roof trimming members. This work is envisaged as being carried out by our own volunteering labour, with only material costs being anticipated. A budget of \$1000.00 is suggested.

- The old shearing shed and stables require some work relating to the stability and water entry of both roofs. It is not envisaged that the roof of the shearing shed requires complete replacement however, because of its height, it is recommended that professional building assistance be sought to rectify the leaks. The roof to the stables is currently held down by logs and rocks in some areas – work is thus required. Some work on the stairs and external landing is also required, particularly for child safety. A budget of \$5000.00 is suggested for this work.

- Control of noxious weeds is required. The longer control is deferred the greater the problem becomes. Spraying of the blackberries and other noxious weeds is considered the only viable option. Using equipment on the property, the majority of this work can be undertaken by experienced volunteers within the Society. On this basis, the cost of chemicals and fuel for year 2010 should be budgeted at \$1000.00.
- The renovation of mechanical farm equipment has already been started and will be continued, with the work being done by Society members with mechanical aptitude. Costs associated with this work are not high and are estimated to be less than \$1000.00. In order to help substantially with the production of “home grown” food, the purchase of a small plough and tractor-mounted rotary hoe would be of significant value, and a budget of, say, \$2000.00 should be allowed for this purpose.
- There is insufficient shed and garage space to put farm implements, tractors and useful racks of steel and wood – all of which has been left in the open, deteriorating till present. The 2 tractors are in the old shed now, though several implements, trailers and other equipment are outside in the weather. there is no garage room for staff cars of those permanently on site. A 18m x 6m x 4.5m high skillion farm shed will cost \$20,000 with electricity, more with a concrete floor.
- The absence of rainwater collection tanks on all buildings is of concern. The installation of tanks on the main building and cottage are a priority and will also require electric pressure reticulation pumps and pipework. It is not envisaged that this water supply would replace the present treated water bore supply, but supplement it for kitchen usage. To allow for two substantial tanks for the main building plus a single tank for the cottage, plus associated infrastructure, a budget of \$15000.00 should be allowed.
- Electric power costs associated with the operation of the water bore are high, and a review of the operation of the pump is required to minimise or eliminate overflow and wastage. Amplification of the present water supply will be required to cater for the new vegetable garden. Work is also envisaged to extend the present grey water system and septic effluent to irrigate some of the orchard area. A budget of \$1000.00 should be allowed for this work.
- Short term maintenance work that is envisaged includes:
  - The rebuilding of the chook run
  - The creation of a new sheltered vegetable garden
  - Pruning and fertilising of the orchard trees. This work is labour intensive, to be done by volunteers, and as such costs are expected to be low – a budget of say \$1000.00 should suffice.
  - In order to help control noxious weeds and reduce the potential for grass/bushfires, the use of agisted stock is a sound option that could possibly also provide a small income source. For this to take place, work on the fencing is required.

As it stands, the present property is comprised of 42.44ha of freehold land and 1052.66ha of lease land. There is little or no fencing associated with the leasehold land, much of it being the bed of Lake George. There is no necessity for us to

consider the fencing of the leasehold land. The risk of fire from the limited growth of grass on Lake George is not high. The fencing around the freehold land is variable, some is of a high standard and other less so. A final check of the condition of the fencing is still to be made. At this time, it appears that approximately 50% requires attention/replacement. This work can again be done by experienced volunteers and a material cost of say \$20,000.00 should be allowed.

## **DESIRABLE LONGER TERM DEVELOPMENTS**

- The development of the “island” and or the shearing shed area as a camping area with a water supply, toilets, cooking shelter etc.
- The development of the “boatshed” as a hermitage.
- Re-location of the “pink palace” as farm sheds/amenities block for the camping area.
- The rebuilding of the entry into the main building and the conversion of the present laundry to a reception office. A new visitor/reception car park is to be located close to the entry, whilst the long term car park near the accommodation units is to be retained. The re-location of the present laundry next to the linen store and the overly large en-suite associated with the present AQC Director’s room. The building of a new teaching/meeting room,
- Solar water heating/electric energy.
- Water recycling system
- Land care plan and implementation to upgrade/re-vegetate damaged areas.