forgotten spaces
Revitalising Perth’s Laneways
Episode I
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Prince Lane, August 2007
Introduction

Perth has undergone significant economic and social growth in recent years. The city is attracting more development and more people than ever. The strong economy coupled with an unparalleled demand for space has created a unique opportunity to improve vibrancy in the city by revitalising an underused and forgotten resource – laneways.

Inspired by the success of laneway revitalisation in other cities in Australia, an analysis of all the laneways in Perth’s central core was undertaken in August 2007. Each laneway was assessed for its suitability to change. Priority laneways were identified (attachment v) and while efforts will be concentrated on these laneways first, it is important to be responsive and opportunistic in realising this strategy. It is recognised that these priorities may change over time.

While the study area has initially focused on the CBD, this document will form the strategy for the future revitalisation of all laneways throughout the City of Perth. Detailed analysis of laneways in other areas such as West Perth and Northbridge will be undertaken in the near future and as separate, related projects.

Regardless of their historic and current functions or location, laneways share one common asset: they offer human scale experiences and have the potential to be the little jewels of the city, full of charm and character.

With that goal in mind this document will guide the evolution of laneways for the next 5-10 years from the following three perspectives:

• Built form
• Economic development
• Public realm

OBJECTIVE

To improve the contribution that laneways make to the city’s economy and vitality while sustaining their traditional physical form.

AIMS

This strategy aims to promote a city that has:

• Distinct and thriving laneways;
• A greater stock of diverse, affordable business spaces;
• Business diversity that compliments commerce in malls and arcades;
• Strong partnerships with business and community organisations;
• Innovative businesses that offer a point of difference to suburban competitors, representative of Perth’s unique character; and
• Good connectivity and permeability.
There is a growing awareness in Perth of the need to attract more people and activities into the city centre after hours. Currently, the city functions predominantly as a place to work, with few attractions to keep its workers after 6pm. The busy streets quickly empty as the majority of visitors and workers retreat home to the suburbs. For those already living in the city, and for future residents, there needs to be a variety of facilities and activities available. The current economic situation in Western Australia, led by the resources boom, offers a clear opportunity for the city to realise its potential and become a vibrant place that people love to come to work, live and play.

Laneways are often forgotten spaces in the city. In these small gaps between buildings, the gritty, unglamorous, and sometimes socially undesirable activities of the city take place. Many laneways are located in prime locations close to busy streets and shopping precincts. Other cities have recognised the potential that laneways offer with their intimate scale, successfully transforming them from back alleys full of rubbish, to unique destinations thriving with activity.

In the city centre of Perth, laneways could offer inhabitants safe havens away from vehicles and shelter from the sea breezes which buffet the main streets for most of the year. With the city’s commercial office stock at full capacity and recent record leasing deals, laneways could be the affordable alternative to establish niche businesses and much needed night time economies.

“Wherever lively and popular parts of cities are found the small outnumber the large.”

- Jane Jacobs
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PUBLIC REALM

“Good streets equal a good city.”  
Rob Adams, Director of Design and Culture, City of Melbourne

The quality of our streets matters - functionally, socially and environmentally. The creation of spaces that people love fosters a sense of well-being and sends a clear message to citizens that they are respected and valued. Quality spaces that are safe, accessible and inviting at any time of the day or night, encourage walking and social interaction and therefore contribute to the general physical and mental health of the community. As beautiful public spaces attract people they are vital for economic growth.

Apart from the physical qualities, the public realm can further be enhanced by variety - not only visual variety but also variety in terms of experiences and scale. Laneways have the potential to contribute greatly to the public realm.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL - HUMAN SCALE

Laneways are unique in that they offer the opportunity for human scale experiences. They provide us with an intimacy not generally found amongst the skyscrapers. Small dimensions are more social, have a better micro climate, provide comfort and protection. Small spaces cocoon us from the wide busy streets of the city.

The ways in which people inhabit space are universal. As humans need stimuli every few seconds most people are drawn to busy spaces. Laneways provide the perfect setting to introduce fine details and texture that heighten the senses. They are ideal spaces for small human scale hole-in-the-wall openings which can house interesting and special activities that intrigue and entice passers by.

Smallness also has many environmental benefits and should be treated as a limited resource. Small spaces reduce carbon footprint and are more efficient as less resources are needed for building in these areas. Compact cities are healthier cities; social interactions are easier and people are more likely to walk and cycle where networks are fine grain.
Study Area

The first phase of the laneway revitalisation study has looked at the area encompassing the major retail and business core of the city bound by Wellington Street (north), Swan River (south), Pier Street (east) and Milligan Street (west).

Pedestrian activity is most concentrated in the retail core with William Street acting as the central spine of the study area between the bus and train stations. The ever increasing number of people residing and working in the study area provides an excellent base population for evening venues and activities.
City Grid & Built Form

PAST AND PRESENT

Perth’s laneways are integral to the urban fabric of the city and provide an insight into the city’s built form history. The city’s blocks were shallow rectangles laid out in 1829 – 1830 and remain much the same today as when they were first subdivided. The original allotments ran through from street to street in a north south direction so that premises had two frontages. The large department stores and honeycomb of arcades that run between the two malls are a legacy of this pattern as is the lack of service lanes. What the majority of laneways have in common is their intimate scale, often edged by the original building stock. Their scale offers a vastly different experience to the wider main streets of Perth.

Currently there is limited guidelines within the City Planning Scheme No. 2 which relate specifically to development addressing or adjoining laneways.

Within the planning scheme there are mechanisms to encourage general activation of an area, and to provide good design as part of development adjoining laneways. To be more effective clear guidelines are needed that focus specifically on laneways.
COMPARISON OF THREE CAPITAL CITIES

The comparison shows the number of laneways in the city grid of Perth, Melbourne and Sydney. The number of laneways in a 100ha area of Melbourne is 4 times more than Perth and nearly 6 times that of Sydney. The difference is related to the original subdivisions. Melbourne's laneways were always important pedestrian and service routes that penetrated the large city blocks. Further subdivision in the early 1900's meant that many businesses also had a laneway address. Of the 138 shown in a 100ha area most provide pedestrian connections from street to street. In contrast, the original subdivisions of Perth and Sydney contained a smaller number of laneways. Sydney lost further laneways to block consolidation during later subvisions. Perth's shallow blocks meant that laneways were not essential for servicing hence the low number found in the grid. Of the 34 laneways in the study area of Perth the majority are dead ends and in private ownership.

**PERTH**
- Study area: 100 ha
- Number of laneways in study area: 34
- Study area contains Retail Core
- Ownership: Majority private
- Grid Form: Regular, shallow blocks
- Pedestrian permeability through laneways: Very low

**MELBOURNE**
- 100 ha
- Number of laneways in 100 ha: 138
- Area contains Retail Core
- Ownership: Majority City of Melbourne
- Grid Form: Regular
- Pedestrian permeability through laneways: Very High

**SYDNEY**
- 100 ha
- Number of laneways in 100 ha: 21
- Area contains Retail Core
- Ownership: Majority City of Sydney
- Grid Form: Irregular
- Pedestrian permeability through laneways: Low
The laneways are integral to the way the whole central city of Perth operates each day. This makes them very important little spaces even if they do look a bit shabby at times. Bins can be stored, collected, vehicles parked and shops can be serviced via these tiny spaces without compromising the functions of the adjacent main streets.

Some other activities are not so official. With the lack of surveillance and permeability from nearby streets some laneways become refuges for less hospitable purposes. Tagging, drug use and dumping of illegal rubbish all add to the array of sights and smells quite distinct to these spaces.

The majority of laneways in the study area are Right of Ways and currently in private ownership. Of the 34 laneways and Right of Ways in the study area only 9 are owned (or part owned) by the City of Perth.

To date only a small minority of businesses have recognised the potential of these spaces to be something other than service areas.
WOLF LANE CASE STUDY - ALMOST THERE

In 2001 the City of Perth identified the potential for the redevelopment of Wolf Lane into a secondary and distinctive retail area within the King Street precinct. The City owned laneway was dominated by servicing activities, rubbish bins, parking, and through traffic movement.

Drawing inspiration from the successful revitalisation of laneways in Melbourne and London, the project had two main objectives: to visually improve the lane, and to promote interest in economic development. The lane was revamped using the palette of materials employed in King Street. Bins were consolidated and enclosed. Traffic was calmed. Incidental artworks added interest.

The project achieved the first of these objectives, but lack of stakeholder and business interest to open up has limited the success of economic development to a small area of the laneway. Most of the new businesses hug the north-south axis of the laneway, including a small café with al fresco dining and small bar licence, while the east-west portion remains devoid of active shop fronts.

This project has highlighted that while an upgrade to the physical form is vital for economic growth, emphasis should be placed on encouraging and supporting business development to help the laneway reach its potential.
MELBOURNE LANEWAYS - A SUCCESS STORY

Twenty years ago the city centre of Melbourne would come alive on weekdays at the morning peak and empty when the workers retreated to the suburbs in the evenings. The laneways were neglected spaces mainly used by pedestrians and for servicing buildings. Today Melbourne's laneways provide some of the most unique and memorable spaces in the city.

The transformation of the city and its laneways resulted from a necessity to pull the city out of the economic recession of the early 90's. Whilst the Hoddle Grid, including public service lanes, and important north-south pedestrian routes from Flinders Street Station, provided the vital ingredient, an alignment of particular circumstances at the time fuelled the transformation: the City of Melbourne's capital works programs included the physical upgrade of laneways; Creative Industries took advantage of the cheap rents on offer due to the high vacancy rates associated with the recession; liquor licensing reform was adopted in 1988. A few years later the change was further energised by the introduction of a new type of liquor licence under the Kennett Government. The licence was cheaper and restrictive but more conducive to small bars. In 1996 shopping hours were deregulated. Finally, the incentives offered by the City of Melbourne - firstly, to developers to recycle old buildings for residential (Postcard 3000 campaign run with State Government) and then small business grants geared towards attracting innovative young talent – has resulted in phenomenal change.

Today projects such as the Laneways Art Commissions, capital works, small business grants and planning guidelines that protect existing laneways (and encourage new ones), ensure the success continues.

Centre Place, Melbourne, March 2007
PERTH - INNER CITY GROWTH

The City of Perth’s residential population has grown greatly over recent years and should double to around 30,000 by 2030. Inner city population growth and small-business development are closely correlated – a culture shift towards inner city living needs to be supplemented by a healthy local business community and in order to be sustainable, Perth’s small-businesses rely on greater expenditure from the people in the city. In coming years, the strength of this relationship may also be supported by the softening of trading hour regulations and new mixed-use developments in the city.

In addition to the growing residential population, the city will receive an influx of daily workers in the next two years, bringing the city’s workforce to around 130,000 by 2010. When this is considered along with the two million tourists who visit the city annually and the projected state population of around three million by 2030, the opportunity for more inner city activity becomes clear.

**ESTIMATED RESIDENTIAL POPULATION**

City of Perth (actual and projected)

![Graph showing estimated residential population growth in Perth from 1986 to 2020.](image)
In recent years the demand for prime malls and arcades in Perth has been considerable and strong demand should continue as businesses seek a greater share of economic growth.

Retail stock is almost at capacity in the study area and when coupled with the commercial office market (also at capacity), the full extent of Perth’s ‘space squeeze’ is fully appreciated.

Spaces have become more expensive – street frontage on to both Hay and Murray Street Malls are showing the greatest growth, reaching almost $5000m2 per annum in 2008. This ranks as some of the most costly retail in the world and rentals are expected to rise even higher in the coming years.

These conditions make it difficult for small, locally owned businesses. There is a clear need for more affordable space in the city and laneways could provide this low-cost alternative for local businesses.

The support of niche businesses in the laneways would help to increase the diversity of activities that the city so desperately needs. Small-businesses make a great contribution to the liveliness of a city. Given that small-business owners personally take on substantive risks in their businesses, they have unique incentives to be responsive to community desires and to be resourceful and inventive in their methods.

Small bars are potentially ideal new uses for the city’s laneways. Small licensed venues can cultivate a café-style bar culture and offer a wider choice of intimate settings; a pleasant daytime café that morphs into a bar at night. They can also function as meeting places for local businesses. The City has strongly supported the State’s recent liquor licensing reform which created greater opportunities for existing local businesses to take advantage of the cultural shift that small bars represent.

Small bar licences are now much cheaper which means that opening a small bar in the city is now financially viable, and the revitalisation of laneways will supplement this opportunity. Small bars act as incentives for people to explore the city and allow the reclamation of underutilised areas.

Laneways are ideal venues for small bars offering live music, comedy or other performing arts suited to ‘intimate’ environments, where the responsible service of alcohol is better managed.

The economic benefit of liquor licensing reform has been demonstrated in other Australian capital cities where small bars prove to be vibrant, low impact venues. These intimate bars are ideal for hidden spaces and the joy of finding them tucked away is part of their charm.
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Creative Industries (CIs) – software developers, design studios, film makers, and writers – turn innovative ideas into commercial outcomes; their contributions are being increasingly recognised and valued. Over the years most of these businesses have left the City as spaces become more expensive and harder to find. These industries are an essential part of a thriving economy, vital in nurturing talent from local art and design schools and providing substantial benefits to other sectors of the community. Today, CI workers are being encouraged and welcomed back in the city.

The rise of CIs in the study area may lead to cultural changes in the way workers interact with the city – entrepreneurs, designers and artists often conduct business in public spaces and after hours in local cafés and bars. The revitalisation of Perth's laneways will support the growth of CIs by providing a greater reserve of spaces for CI workers to interact in – laneways can become the meeting rooms for this industry.

Attracting and retaining skilled and talented local people is crucial as these people generate the economic, social and cultural energy vital to Perth’s prosperity.

Workers in general have more career and lifestyle options than ever. Realising the potential of laneways will help to promote Perth as an internationally attractive city with cultural diversity and exciting places to explore.
A physical analysis conducted in August 2007 identified a number of city laneways which have potential to be developed into fabulous alternative spaces (refer map Appendix v).

Even when laneways are dead ends, there is still great opportunity for activation. Where laneways are located well off the beaten track, businesses such as small bars which do not rely on passing foot traffic are ideal. These night time economies would help to improve safety not only in these laneways, but also throughout the city, by providing much needed eyes-on-the-street.

To capture this potential, and also to support the small number of businesses that have already established themselves in laneways, there are a number of measures that could be undertaken.

**PHYSICAL TREATMENT**

As laneways are often quirky half-hidden spaces, they lend themselves to be treated differently to the main streets of Perth. The physical form of a laneway should enhance and celebrate its distinctive environment by reflecting the precinct or neighbourhood character. Sometimes only small interventions may be needed to give a laneway character. Some could be transformed by lighting alone, for others an engaging artwork may be all that is needed. Others have the existing granite setts sitting under a layer of asphalt waiting to be revealed.

Although many laneways will need to continue to function as access ways for services, small interventions to the way bins are stored and traffic managed could help towards allowing a variety of activities co-exist in these spaces.

Regardless of the scale of the physical intervention, the integration of materials for lighting, paving and artwork should work with the context - an acknowledgement that an element of the ‘grit’ should be retained is necessary.

**BUILT FORM GUIDELINES**

There is opportunity for existing laneways to be enhanced through any new adjacent development. Built form guidelines will ensure that new developments contribute to and protect existing qualities. For example, development should not adversely affect the micro-climate and scale.

Building design which overlooks the laneways should always be encouraged. Greater security would be provided by eliminating blank facades and by using upper floors. Where laneways are deadends there is an opportunity to create future links to increase the permeability of the city.

In addition to guidelines for good design planning mechanisms will encourage a wider range of uses in an area, which will lead to greater activation at street and laneway level.
Capturing the Potential

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The vision for revitalising laneways will be realised by:

• Continuing to upgrade the physical form of City owned laneways (beginning with McLean and Howard Lanes);
• Where possible, acquiring ownership of private laneways (focussing on laneways with the greatest potential for change and those strategically placed for future links);
• Designing initiatives to attract and retain people and businesses in laneway areas (e.g. small bars, Wifi hotspots, alfresco areas);
• Identifying and promoting complimentary business sponsorships and grant programs (e.g. Heritage, Community and Arts grants);
• Creating strong and active partnerships with local businesses, property owners and community organisations (e.g. arts groups, schools and universities);
• Supporting events including social and artistic activities (e.g. festivals, art installations);
• Attracting and supporting creative industries (through the Creative Industries Steering Committee);
• Valuing and supporting entrepreneurism and innovation (e.g. small business grants);
• Ensuring new adjoining buildings incorporate active edges and upperfloors that overlook the laneways;
• Restoring existing built form edges (e.g. eliminating blank walls);
• Establishing guidelines to protect the fine grain of the city (e.g. explore amendments to the City Planning Scheme); and
• Promoting this document to raise awareness and build enthusiasm.

After the release of this document, the City of Perth will prepare an action plan for each priority laneway in the study area outlining initiatives that focus on built form, economic development and public realm. This action plan will describe in detail the initiatives needed to unlock the potential of these laneways.

It is acknowledged that in addition to these documents it is still important to be opportunistic and to respond to approaches from businesses and to support community-led ideas in any City laneway.
Attachments

i  Study Area Context
ii  Laneways- Locations
iii  WA Economy
iv  Night Time Economies
v  Laneways - Priority
vi  Laneways Analysis
Study Area

Context
# Laneways - Locations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Id No</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>*ROW Little Milligan Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ROW 410 Murray Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shafto Lane North</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prince Lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ROW 64-68 King Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Grand Lane</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ROW 138 Murray Street</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>McLean Lane</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>ROW 46 Milligan Street</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>ROW 419 Murray Street</td>
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<td>ROW 401 Murray Street</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Shafto Lane</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>ROW 381 Murray Street</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Munster Lane</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Wolf Lane</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>ROW 255 Murray Street Mall</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>ROW 237 Murray Street Mall</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>ROW 227 Murray Street Mall</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>ROW 197 Murray Street Mall</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>ROW 183 Murray Street Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>ROW 69 - 99 Barrack Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>ROW 70 Pier Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>ROW 670 Hay Street Mall</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>ROW 564-570 Hay Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>ROW 895 Hay Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>ROW 847 Hay Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>ROW 825 Hay Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>ROW 56-60 William Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>ROW 663 Hay Street Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>ROW 643 Hay Street Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>ROW 108 St Georges Terrace</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>ROW St Georges Terrace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Mercantile Lane</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Howard Lane</td>
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*ROW - Right of Way
Strong economic growth in Western Australia has created substantial retail activity in recent years. Retail turnover soared in the last ten years, much of it in the city. While this growth may soften in coming years, consumer spending is still expected to remain strong, providing momentum for the growth of business in the city’s central core.
Night Time Economies

SUMMARY
Of the night-time economies in the study area two venues currently hold a small bar licence. The remainder of activities available after 9pm range from restaurants, cafes, fast-food outlets or bars within hotels. There is only one cinema remaining in the study area.

For a study area of this size with a large day time visitation rate, the variety of after hours activity on offer is limited and a number of ‘gaps’ are evident.

* recorded on a Friday night
Laneways

Id No  High Priority Laneways
4  Prince Lane
6  Grand Lane
8  McLean Lane
15  Wolf Lane
34  Howard Lane

Other Laneways
1  ROW Little Milligan Street
2  ROW 410 Murray Street
3  Shafts Lane North
5  ROW 64-68 King Street
7  ROW 138 Murray Street
9  ROW 46 Milligan Street
10  ROW 419 Murray Street
11  ROW 401 Murray Street
12  Shafts Lane
13  ROW 381 Murray Street
14  Munster Lane
16  ROW 255 Murray Street Mall
17  ROW 237 Murray Street Mall
18  ROW 227 Murray Street Mall
19  ROW 197 Murray Street Mall
20  ROW 183 Murray Street Mall
21  ROW 69 - 99 Barrack Street
22  ROW 70 Pier Street
23  ROW 670 Hay Street Mall
24  ROW 564-570 Hay Street
25  ROW 895 Hay Street
26  ROW 847 Hay Street
27  ROW 825 Hay Street
28  ROW 56-60 William Street
29  ROW 663 Hay Street Mall
30  ROW 643 Hay Street Mall
31  ROW 108 St Georges Terrace
32  ROW St Georges Terrace
33  Mercantile Lane
Laneways Analysis

SUMMARY
The study undertaken in August 2007 focused on the central core of the City of Perth. This area contains a greater concentration of laneways and Right of Ways than other parts of the city. This area also suffers from a lack of after hours activity.

The analysis, which took several weeks to complete, was conducted by a team from the City of Perth's Urban Development and Strategy Units.

The data collected was collated and a priority list of laneways was formed. High priority laneways were those identified as having most potential for activation.

August 2007
Laneways Site Analysis – Data Sheet

Area Number
Name of Lane and/or Id Number
Other comment

1. Location
2. Topography
3. Climate
4. Environment
5. Water
6. Vegetation
7. Built form
8. Services
9. History
10. Circulation & Safety
11. Land use
12. Visual Analysis
13. Atmosphere
14. Potential for Activation

Any other comments:
Laneways Analysis

LANEWAY SITE ANALYSIS EXAMPLE

August 2007

Laneways Site Analysis

Area Number 12
Name of Lane: McLean Lane – Owned by City of Perth

1. Location
   - Extends between Murray St and Wellington St, just west of Pier St.
   - North-east of city centre not far from RPH

2. Topography
   - Even slope down to Wellington St

3. Climate
   - Quite protected due to narrowness of laneway

4. Environment
   - Long, narrow laneway
   - Relatively cleanliness

5. Water N/A

6. Vegetation N/A

7. Built form
   - Bounded by original buildings on both sides at the north end.
   - Newer buildings (car park) on the south-west side, unattractive building to south-west.
   - Bitumen surface – possible cobble sets underneath?

8. Services
   - Service vehicles through – bin collection, deliveries etc

9. History
   - Original building stock at northern end
   - Newer buildings at southern end

10. Circulation & Safety
    - Used as thoroughfare by pedestrians

11. Land use
    - Multi storey car park
    - Business from Pier St opening on to laneway
    - Old Gas works building

12. Visual Analysis
    - The original buildings provide visual interest

13. Atmosphere
    - Not much at present through definitely potential to create some given the character of the building at the northern end,

14. Potential
    - Definite potential – already has some pedestrian movement including people coming and going from carpark, Gasworks building, students at the adjacent language school and dance studio
    - Amber Bar already has entrance opening on to laneway at southern end – could be capitalised on
    - Potential to have bar/cafes opening on to laneway

LANEWAY SITE ANALYSIS EXAMPLE
Related Strategies

Of particular relevance to this document is the City of Perth’s Strategic Plan 2004-2008* objectives to create:

- A liveable city
- An accessible city
- An attractive and functional city
- An environmentally responsible city

Alignment with other strategies:

- Women and Safety Study (CoP, State Gov, April 2004)

List of strategies and studies relevant to this document:

- Perth’s Creative Industries – An analysis (CoP, State Gov 2007)
- Public Spaces and Public Life in Perth, Jan Gehl, 1994
- City of Perth Gasworks and Garages Sites Study, Donaldson & Warn, April 2005
- Pier Street Framework, Donaldson & Warn, September 2005

End notes

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the end of episode I and the laneways lived happily ever after...stayed tuned for episode II