

Minister concerned about cost of unused buildings to taxpayers

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It is costing Western Australian taxpayers more than \$1million a year to provide basic maintenance on Government owned buildings while argument goes on between community groups and authorities about their use.

Housing and Works Minister Tom Stephens said general maintenance of sites like Sunset Hospital, Old Treasury Buildings, East Perth Power Station, Old Swanbourne Hospital and Fremantle Prison had cost the State more than \$20million in the past decade.

"That is money that has to be spent just to keep these sites, many of them historical, in reasonable repair, but most are still a long way from becoming functional, living sites for the community," Mr Stephens said.

"Old Treasury Buildings in the heart of the city, for example, has been vacant and unused since 1996, Old Swanbourne Hospital has been empty since 1987 and South Fremantle Power Station since 1985.

"The community is picking up the bill for holding these sites vacant for so many years and it is time for the community to say if it's prepared to keep paying this price.

"What the Government wants to do is work with the broader community to put parties together to create sustainable heritage, financial and social solutions that are acceptable and provide appropriate uses.

"That may be through private investment, the participation of local councils or through long-term leasing arrangements.

"These are the avenues that will make these sites live again and useful to the whole community.

"At the moment they are expensive, empty shells of very little use to anyone."

Mr Stephens said sites like Old Treasury Buildings, Swanbourne Hospital, Sunset Hospital, Hillview in Victoria Park and the power stations represented a major responsibility for the Government and debate on creating sustainable uses needed to happen *now*.

"This debate is starting to happen and I will be keen to see the report produced early next year by the Sunset Steering Committee which, in consultation with the community, is currently looking at uses for the Sunset site which has been vacant for the past seven years," he said.

"The nub of many debates surrounding these sites is often who is going to pay for restoration and ongoing maintenance and where there is historic significance, what usage is likely to be approved.

"The community needs to understand that no Government would be willing to commit taxpayer funds to do all this work. It would cost about \$80million to totally repair and restore only a handful of these sites, which is why we need to consider other options which include the direct involvement of business and the wider community.

"That amount would buy a lot of hospital equipment, school rooms and police stations and to be frank, this Government cannot justify that sort of expenditure on anything except its key priorities such



Tom Stephens

Former Minister for Local Government and Regional Development; Heritage; the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne; Goldfields-Esperance

as health and education.”

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Project	Status	Total Maintenance Costs	Outlook
Old Swanbourne Hospital (includes Montgomery Hall)	Hospital vacant since 1987.	\$100,000/year or \$1.3million since 1993	
Old Treasury Buildings	Vacant since 1996.	\$120,000/year or \$700,000 since closure	Needs \$3.75million over five years to repair externals inc balconies. Would cost \$40million to restore
Sunset Hospital	Vacant since late 1995	\$150,000/year currently but about \$3million since closure	Would cost \$9million to restore existing buildings
Hillview	Edward Millen House vacant since 1994	\$80,000/year currently	Needs \$1.26million to bring it up to a useable standard
Fremantle Prison	Tourist operation only since 1992	\$130,000/year or \$1.3million over past 10 years	\$1.3million to be spent from 2004-2006 on strategic maintenance such as stonework conservation and water management
Duncraig House	Vacant since 1994 Currently for sale	\$50,000/year or \$250,000 in past five years	
East Perth Power Station	Vacant since 1981	\$100,000/year or about \$6million* since closure	Cost \$5million to upgrade facade and grounds. A further \$15 million to upgrade interior
South Fremantle Power Station	Vacant since 1985	\$100,000/year or about \$10million^ since closure	Cost \$4.5million to upgrade facade and grounds
Total		\$830,000/year \$22million since closures	\$80million to upgrade/restore

* includes removal of asbestos

^ includes removal of plant and equipment