



Revisiting Buildings on the Brink – 2006

Press Release for Heritage Day, Monday February 19

Heritage London Foundation provides an update on the status of last year's Buildings on the Brink - 2006

Last year, to commemorate its 25th anniversary, Heritage London Foundation initiated a new program: Buildings on the Brink, an annual list of the 5 most threatened historic or heritage properties in London. Each year, the list will be released on Heritage Day as a way of communicating the importance of these buildings to the citizens of London and to recommend ways in which these structures may be preserved.

In this release we provide a brief update on what's happening to the buildings from last year's list.

Note: "Buildings on the Brink – 2007" was distributed as a separate Press Release.

Heritage London Foundation is an innovative non-profit corporation, founded in 1981, which advocates the preservation of significant heritage properties. Created when the wrecker's ball was rapidly destroying many of London's architectural treasures, Heritage London Foundation now provides viable contemporary uses for two beautiful city-owned properties, the Elsie Perrin Williams Estate and Grosvenor Lodge, and is open to future projects. Today these buildings are popular sites for weddings, business conferences and private gatherings, as well as housing offices for heritage and environmental organizations. Revenues assist the foundation to preserve, protect and promote our heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Members of Heritage London Foundation also support the goals of the organization. Membership is open to anyone interested in supporting this worthy association. For more information, contact John Manness (jmanness@rogers.com) at 645-2845.

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A brief review of any changes to the properties listed last year

1. Normal School (formerly the Monsignor Feeney Centre)

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- One of Ontario's first teachers' colleges.
- Focal point of Old South and the Wortley Village community.
- Designated under the Ontario Heritage Act as one of London's prominent heritage resources.

Threats:

- Owned by the province and managed by Ontario Realty Corporation with unknown plans for the future.
- Expensive repairs and restoration required to stabilize the exterior features and upgrade the interior, estimated at \$3 – 4 million.

HLF Recommendations:

- Support the Old South Community Organization efforts to keep this gem.
- Identify potential modern uses.



2007 Update:

- The Government of Ontario has taken back title to the Centre and the property is managed by the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC). They are currently reviewing the condition of the property. Their planned actions include:
 - Reviewing the consultants Building Condition Assessment Report looking at the options for preserving and restoring the building.
 - Continuing to work closely with the municipality and area residents to determine potential future uses.

2. Locust Mount (661 Talbot Street)

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- Residence of a former mayor and longtime political representative for London.
- Excellent example of Georgian period architecture.
- Identified as a Priority 1 property (London's most important heritage structures) in the Inventory of Heritage Resources.



Threats:

- Currently owned by a developer who appears to be neglecting the structure, leaving it to decay beyond hope for restoration with the stated intention of demolishing the home and building high density housing.

HLF Recommendations:

- Support designation of the structure immediately as a heritage property and ensure that plans are in place to stabilize the structure to prevent further deterioration.
- Consider alternate uses for the building after restoration. Its closeness to downtown makes it ideal for professional offices, a small inn and/or fine dining restaurant. It could also become offices and/or guest accommodations for any planned high density development adjacent to it.

2007 Update:

- During the past year City Council has passed the Community Improvement Plan which allows for a 10 year tax reduction, up to the value of renovations completed on a property. Locust Mount would qualify for these incentives.
- City Council is discussing heritage designation of the property and City departments continue to work with the present owner.

3. Woodholme (former Lawson estate at 1384 Wonderland Road)

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- Residence of two very prominent London families; Shaw-Wood and Lawson.
- Identified as Priority 1 property in the Inventory of Heritage Resources.



Threat:

- Currently owned by a developer with a redevelopment plan for the property which will preserve the old home within a condominium development of new luxury detached houses. The surrounding neighbourhood is against the proposed development and the developer has taken the issue to the Ontario Municipal Board.

HLF Recommendation:

- City Council should support the developer's proposal and allow the development subject to heritage designation of the home to ensure that this unique building will be preserved.

2007 Update:

- The Ontario Municipal Board ruling supported the neighbourhood, ruling against a private roadway and supported the developer, permitting higher density, single family development.
- The developer is revising their site plans, and retaining a lot for Woodholme within the new subdivision plan.
- City Planners are working with the developer and prospective purchasers on reasons to designate the building as a heritage property.

4. Wonderland Gardens (now the new Springbank Gardens)

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- Holds wonderful memories of music, dancing and recreation for a great many people.
- Connected to the Thames River park system by the Maurice Chapman walkway as a link between downtown and Springbank Park.
- Venue for area musicians and bands, including Johnny Downs and Lionel Thornton, as well as countless internationally famous talents.



Threat:

- Under city control with plans announced last week to transform the site into parkland while retaining the heritage band shell. If acted upon as reported, the city plan will keep the space in the public domain; this is important to maintain the integrity of the waterfront and park network.

HLF Recommendation:

- In considering future use, London City Council must keep in mind the aesthetic, environmental and historic use of these lands. Any new construction should retain the Spanish influenced style of the band shell and restaurant buildings.

2007 Update:

- The Master Plan calls for the restoration of buildings and the grounds to reflect the Wonderland Gardens site at its peak in the 1940s.
- Elements include a bandshell, open-air pavilion and new food concession as well as trails and pathways featuring themed walks.
- Endorsed by City Council in October 2006. Construction is scheduled to begin this spring and be completed in the fall.
- See the details in the City of London website at <http://www.london.ca/SpringbankGardens>



5. London Psychiatric Hospital (London Asylum for the Insane – 850 Highbury Ave.)

Heritage / Historic Significance:

- The large barn, the chapel and the Infirmary building are all that remain now of the early portion (prior to 1900) of this important facility. The buildings represent the implementation of innovative care and maintenance of patients at this asylum.
- The entrance from Dundas Street, along a wide tree-lined avenue, forms a magnificent vista north to the hospital grounds.



Threats:

- The Exam building is fenced off and outwardly shows signs of extreme neglect and decay. Breaks in the roof have let water to damage the structure and the building may not be able to be saved.
- The barn appears to be in better shape, at least from the outside, but has been abandoned, with no current use.



HLF Recommendations:

- Assess and immediately stabilize the buildings to prevent further deterioration.
- Involve Londoners in a project to preserve the site and determine suitable public or private uses for the facilities which will retain the heritage and historic nature of the grounds and buildings.

2007 Update:

- Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC) is currently reviewing the property as a whole in terms of options.
- ORC is working with the city planners and are planning more public consultation regarding the site.

