

A stitch in time could have saved Victoria Row. A ninth stitch is needed to preserve Albert Row.

Hon. Trevor Moniz JP, MP, formerly Public Works Minister
Hon. Walter Roban, JP, MP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs
Lt. Col. The Hon. David Burch, OBE(MIL), ED, JP, MP, Minister of Public Works
Hon. Lovitta Foggo, JP, MP Minister of Labour, Community Affairs and Sports
Wedco Chairman Charlton Dill
Bermuda Department of Planning

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The Naval Dockyards Society responds to the recent *Royal Gazette* article (Wedco: decision time for Albert Row, Oct 8, 2019) that WEDCo plans to delist and demolish Albert Terrace, refuting claims that 'both the Bermuda National Trust and the Naval Dockyard Society in the UK were unable to assist.'

The Naval Dockyards Society (NDS) reiterates that West End Development Corporation (WEDCo) has the *sole* mandate to care for Albert Row and the other historic buildings within the Dockyard, a duty assigned by the Bermuda government:

5a) Wherever possible, a historic building should be used as it was historically, or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships. (Government of Bermuda, Ministry of Environment, Planning and Infrastructure Strategy, Department of Planning, Development in the Royal Naval Dockyard, GN202, 2012, p. 3)

2.3 *Planning permission is required for the demolition of all or any part of a Listed Building or building located within a Historic Area.* Planning permission will not normally be granted for the demolition of any building or feature of a building that has special architectural or historic interest. (Government of Bermuda, Ministry of Environment, Planning and Infrastructure Strategy, Department of Planning, Alterations or Additions to Listed Buildings and/or Buildings Located Within Historic Areas, GN203, 2012, p. 11)

The Government of Bermuda listed Albert Row, 6-14 Malabar Road Sandys in 2000 (Ministry of Environment, Planning and Infrastructure Strategy, Buildings of special architectural or historic interest, Development and Planning Act 1974, Part V, Section 30, SY 092, p. 34). Albert Row was therefore deemed by the Bermuda Government to be a 'have special architectural or historic interest.' It should thus have been maintained suitably.

However, WEDCo declared in 2012 that they had carried out no maintenance since 2009:

Three years ago we told tenants that we should not be upgrading the units, there would be no ongoing maintenance to improve them and that we would only address safety issues because we were going to do this project. (*Royal Gazette*, Govt rejected Habitat for Humanity proposal for Victoria and Albert Row, June 8, 2012)

In 2014 the Society called for the establishment of a Victoria and Albert Rows Building Trust, to transfer the freehold to new owners. It would have been much cheaper than knocking

them down, would have opened investment opportunities and given work to skilled carpenters and masons. It would also train young people in essential crafts such as applying lime mortar, skills transferable elsewhere within Bermuda's historic buildings. The NDS also recommended that a suitable percentage of WEDCo's rental income should be invested and ring-fenced for refurbishment, ongoing repairs and maintenance expenditure of its listed buildings. That would address the issue of no capital being available to repair built heritage assets.

Bermuda National Trust also regretted the deterioration of Victoria and Albert Rows in 2015, stating:

We are always saddened when they are allowed to fall into disrepair and believe it is better to repair and reuse what is there than to knock buildings down. These buildings are very much a part of the ambience of Dockyard and a part of Bermuda's heritage.

The *Royal Gazette* further stated:

Victoria Row is part of the old Dockyard "town" that included schools, a hospital, theatre, stores and a post office and supplied the technical expertise and labour to run the giant industrial complex. Today, only a few buildings survive in usable condition to represent that thriving community.

Victoria and Albert Rows are the last remaining examples of the housing built for Dockyard tradesmen or artisans and their families. Other, similar rows — Portland Place, Princess Louise Terrace, Clarence Terrace, and Marine Terrace at Lodge Point — have all been demolished.

(Trust regrets end of Victoria Row, Oct 10, 2015, <http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20151010/NEWS/151019988>)

Why do workers' houses deserve preservation? Albert and Victoria Rows, built in 1846–7 and 1858 respectively, were a unique Bermudian solution to house essential Dockyard workers, a blend of British dockyard houses, with "necessary" facilities (toilets and kitchens) separated from the main house, and the Bermudian vernacular style: part of the "Bermuda Image". The houses were solidly built of Bermuda limestone and cedar, needing a regular limewash and removal of vegetation to keep them sound. Workers' houses are as worthy of conservation as the Commissioner's House.

On Jan 25, 2013, in 'Historic' housing to be preserved' the *Royal Gazette* quoted Public Works Minister Mr Moniz as stating: 'Although there is no currently defined plan or timeline, it is our intention to restore both Albert and Victoria Row properties in due course'. <http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20130125/NEWS/701259947>

Dockyard architectural historian Jonathan Coad wrote in January 2016:

This group of buildings at Bermuda is extremely rare. The buildings form an important element in the architectural, economic and social history of Bermuda. They are almost the last survivors of very limited examples of housing built for dockyard workers — skilled tradespeople and others — as distinct from housing for dockyard officers. Bermuda base developed as the fleet changed over from sail to steam which led to a growing need for skilled workers in the dockyards. Ireland Island was also a distance

from the main settlements, but the major problem was the very high cost of living on these islands that seems to have forced the Admiralty to provide this housing. The 1909 National Archives plan of the dockyard (ADM 140/1484) shows a quite extraordinary amount of housing outside the yard for the workforce. It would be interesting to know exactly who was living in these terraces. It would seem that workers' housing was provided only in very limited circumstances and only survives today at Haulbowline and at Bermuda. In short, Albert Row has considerable rarity value.

In 2014 the Naval Dockyards Society urged through the *Royal Gazette* that:

Wedco create a Conservation Management Plan for Bermuda Dockyard, funded through its rental income, which specifies a conservation programme for all the buildings in the Dockyard estate according to best international heritage practice and finds appropriate uses to conserve their integrity and ensure their future security.

(<https://www.facebook.com/NavalDockyardsSociety/posts/new-solutions-for-victoria-and-albert-rows-bermuda-dockyard-picture-royal-gazett/619653021438077/>)

In 2016 NDS forwarded to WEDCo a proposal for an historic building survey, cost plan, and development and investment analysis to establish options for developers or a Building Preservation Trust to refurbish Albert and Victoria Rows, as the absence of such a survey to date had precluded any development process. This would have demonstrated sustainable best practice and restored a material asset for Bermuda Dockyard. WEDCo has presented no evidence for the cited \$10m or \$11m cost to renovate Albert Row.

Sadly, on 27 April 2016 *Royal Gazette* reported that 'Reluctant' demolition starts at Victoria Row' (<http://www.royalgazette.com/news/article/20160427/reluctant-demolition-starts-at-victoria-row>).

On 27 May 2016 the total cost of demolishing the Victoria Row units was reported as \$331,400 by Minister of Public Works Craig Cannonier in the House of Assembly, replying to a question from Shadow Public Works Minister Dennis Lister. The report noted:

According to WEDCo, surveys indicate it would take approximately \$11 million to renovate Victoria Row which would mean that the interest alone on the renovation for each unit would be \$2,500.00 per month which far exceeds any rental return they may be able to earn.

However, no evidence of these surveys was ever presented. A video of the demolition may be seen at <http://bernews.com/2016/05/minister-cannonier-cost-demolition/>, showing the solidity of Victoria Row.

The NDS emphasises that sustainable value is a crucial 21st century concept. Commercial rental value is just one element. The aesthetics of the design and appearance of traditionally constructed houses within their dockyard context are also significant for tourism and property development. Environmental sustainability derives from embodied energy contained within houses built by manual labour of locally quarried limestone. Sensitive renovation of these historic houses would address social sustainability and restore some of the unique tangible and intangible heritage of the Bermudian dockyard community, shown by the popularity of

the Facebook group Bermuda Dockyard community during the Second World war and the postwar years

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/408892213001927/>.

In 2016 the Director of Planning, in consultation with Bermuda National Trust, the National Museum and the Historic Buildings Advisory Committee, created a sub-committee to discuss possible solutions including a Heritage Preservation Trust as described by the NDS. We have seen no evidence of any progress.

Is it financially prudent to spend \$331,400 to destroy environmentally sustainable and potentially desirable properties, rather than adopt best conservation practice? Is it not financially sensible to invest and ring-fence a set percentage of investment income for refurbishment, ongoing repairs and maintenance of listed buildings? Alternatively, a Building Trust should be enabled which can apply for interest-free government loans to renovate Albert Row (Government of Bermuda, Ministry of Environment, Planning and Infrastructure Strategy, Department of Planning, GN309, 2010).

The NDS calls for Bermuda Planning Department to refuse to delist Albert Row and require WEDCo to set up a fiscally responsible Conservation Management Plan for Bermuda Dockyard. This CMP should be funded through WEDCo's rental income and specify a conservation programme for all the buildings in the Dockyard estate according to best international heritage practice. For Albert Row, as WEDCo has conspicuously failed to care for it, an Historic Building Preservation Trust should be set up to conserve its integrity and ensure this asset's future.

This is the 21st century. Bermudians deserve transparency and best practice. There is no excuse for letting any more of the Bermuda Dockyard estate fall into dereliction when other bodies could care for it more responsibly.

Yours sincerely, Ann

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cc. *Royal Gazette* News Editor Tim Smith and Jonathan Bell Senior Reporter