I’m Alan Hutchings here on behalf of the Dunstan Foundation on 11th July 2007 to interview Stuart Hart, who was Director of Planning for many, many years, including those encompassing the Dunstan Decade.

Stuart, perhaps you can start by telling me about Don Dunstan when he was first Attorney-General?

I’d like to go a little bit before that, to when I first arrived in Adelaide in 1957 and Dunstan was already a Member of Parliament. He’d been elected in 1952. In 1954 there was a planning congress here in Adelaide and it was held during the same week that a bill was introduced into State Parliament to prepare a plan for the metropolitan area of Adelaide.

_The Advertiser_ had been supporting concerns that were being expressed around the city about Adelaide’s future growth, and eventually Sir Thomas Playford had been persuaded to appoint a committee to report on the need for a plan; and it was this that led to a bill being introduced in 1954 providing for the preparation of such a plan and more controls over the subdivision of land.

Tom Playford was very apprehensive about any planning legislation. He addressed the congress to which I’ve just referred in terms which included phrases such as he was ‘still approaching the problem of town planning with caution: I have not found any legislation so difficult as this to draw up. We have to be careful not to suppress individuality when we talk of planning.’

There was very strong opposition to that bill of 1954 and it lapsed, but it was reintroduced in ’55 and the young Labor Member for Norwood, Don Dunstan, thought it – I’m quoting here from Hansard – ‘significant that the members of the public who are most outspoken against this measure are the speculative landholders, those who reaped a good benefit from the public by means of improper subdivisions.’ And he said the bill is a ‘somewhat feeble and faltering step towards town planning. It does not go all the way it should.’ However, the bill did become law in 1955.

A five-member Town Planning Committee was set up and I arrived in January of 1957 and managed to get a small professional team together and the final plan and report were submitted to Parliament in October 1962. Dunstan at that time was busy
establishing himself politically and working with John Roder in their private legal practice. John later became Judge Roder. I can recall that John told me that much of their work at that time was connected with development and land division; in fact, as Town Planner, as I was then called officially, I remember receiving very terse and forceful letters from Don Dunstan on behalf of his clients who were wanting to subdivide land. John Roder said that he and Dunstan frequently discussed planning matters, including planning activity both overseas and in other States. I believe that Dunstan would have been one of the few Members of Parliament at that time who had any knowledge of the law relating to planning and its broader social implications. I really don’t know where Dunstan got his interest in planning from prior to that date.

**Do you think it may have come a bit from John Roder?**

It may have, but I have no proof of that, but it probably did.

The Adelaide Division of the Australian Planning Institute published a booklet in 1962 called *Future Town Planning Administration in South Australia*, and it described the systems of planning administration then current in the Commonwealth and overseas and recommended action that should be taken when the metropolitan plan was submitted to Parliament. That booklet was frequently referred to in the subsequent debates.

After the plan had been tabled, the way forward for Parliament was not at all clear, but the way backward certainly was. The Act said that either house could refer the plan back to the Town Planning Committee for reconsideration, but shortly before the twenty-eight sitting days elapsed in October 1963 Frank Walsh, who was then the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, moved that provision should be made for lodging the objections and for co-ordinating the work of local councils to give effect to the plan. That motion clearly showed the influence of Dunstan, who spoke in the debate. He referred to the strange provision in the Act which provided for the preparation of a plan and no means for the plan to have any effect upon South Australia. He said, ‘All we have is a plan and that is the end of it.’ He described the situation in the other States, spoke of the need for a planning authority,
the lodging of objections, and said no good purpose would be served by referring
the plan back to the committee.

Playford – he was still Premier – said he supported the principles of the plan but
did not agree with certain aspects of it. Councils had raised objections. But finally
he conceded that Frank Walsh’s motion should be supported – ‘not that it achieves
anything legally’, he said. An amendment to the Act followed, providing for
consideration of objections, amendments to the plan and for making regulations for
various purposes.

Do you think that Dunstan may have been aware of what happened back in 1920
when the original Town Planning and Development Act got through with the
strategy, so to speak, but they just never implemented those parts dealing with
implementation?

He may have been because I had been speaking and writing extensively in the
intervening years since my arrival on the history of planning in the State, so he
could have been aware of that legislation.

In 1965, the Government changed. Playford’s long reign came to an end. Peter
Ward, the journalist, writing in The Australian on 19th March ’94, described
Dunstan as ‘the thorn in the side of Playford on urban planning issues throughout
the ’50s and up to 1965. He did the cajoling and nudging of the Premier who
eventually was forced into taking metropolitan planning issues seriously’.

The Act by 1965 had been amended many times. It was still the basic Act of
1929, which was a very poor relation to the 1920 Act that you just referred to, but
anomalies abounded. Dunstan, during a debate in 1965, gave this dramatic but very
accurate description: ‘the Act, which unfortunately has become these days a
palimpsest of most unsatisfactory and conflicting provisions. Endeavouring to
administer the Act at the moment is a grave headache for those involved.’

Labor came into office with Frank Walsh as Premier and Don Dunstan as
Attorney-General. ‘By a strange administrative quirk’, Dunstan wrote in his
memories, Felicia, town planning became one of his ministerial duties. What
happened next is best described by Dunstan himself in those same memoirs. After
referring to the preparation of the ’62 plan, he writes:
‘We were elected on a policy of putting into effect the recommendations of the plan and giving it force in law, so I called in Stuart Hart, the Town Planner and told him to begin drafting a town planning Act which would put into effect the most up-to-date planning administration and methods. He [Stuart Hart] said, ‘Do you want to go the whole hog, or do what might get past the Legislative Council?’ I said, ‘We’ll go the whole hog, and I see no reason for playing with half-measures.’ He (Stuart Hart) then replied, ‘Well, I admire your courage’, in a tone which clearly implied that there were other qualities which he thought a little wanting’.

The resultant bill faced bitter opposition, particularly in the Legislative Council. Dunstan wrote that he was not going to give up without a fight, and the end came after a long overnight session, and I can well remember getting home just in time to have breakfast with the children.

At that particular period I personally remember Jim McDonald, who was President of the Planning Institute at the time, at some meeting or another saying that he was very tired, too, because he’d been chewing ears of the conservatives in the Upper House.

That would be the case. (laughter)

Well, the Planning and Development Act came into operation on 1st July 1967. The Act established a State Planning Authority and a Planning Appeal Board. Prior to that, the Town Planner himself had heard appeals against his own decisions on land subdivisions. The 1962 plan was given legal status and similar plans could be prepared for other parts of the State. Enhanced controls of private development and powers to acquire land were introduced. A Planning and Development Fund was set up and the Authority given power to borrow money. Dunstan in his memoirs described it as ‘the most flexible and up-to-date legislation of its kind in Australia then and served Adelaide well.’ This was the major breakthrough that Dunstan achieved, coupled with his masterminding the rescuing of the 1962 plan from oblivion in 1963. The genesis of modern planning in South Australia lies in those two events.

Dunstan was Attorney-General for the two years 1965–67, and he then followed Frank Walsh as Premier. He was out of office between ’68 and 1970; he became Premier again from 1970 until poor health caused his resignation in 1979.
Another noteworthy episode in the evolution of planning policy, which began when Dunstan was Attorney-General, was the redevelopment of Hackney. He’d been concerned for some time about the sprawl of Adelaide and on taking office in 1965 he invited councils to submit proposals for redeveloping inner residential areas. The St Peter’s Council engaged a consultant – Moss Lower[?] from memory – and a plan was submitted for the redevelopment of a twelve-acre site at Hackney. The land was to be acquired compulsorily, totally cleared and the new development was to include four eleven-storey blocks of flats. There was bitter opposition. The site was in Dunstan’s electorate and the saga dragged on into the 1970s. It was a major political threat. Finally, Dunstan called for a drastic reversal of policy, a lowering of densities, selective renewal or rehabilitation, and local community involvement.

The ’60s and ’70s were periods of intense activity. The Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Study or MATS, followed the submission of the ’62 plan, the consultant’s report being submitted to the steering committee in ’68. The Hall Government was then in office. Dunstan was convinced the proposals would be a disaster. He called in other consultants from the USA and in 1971 the major freeway proposals were dropped and emphasis placed on public transport. The O-Bahn to Tea Tree Gully was built later on one of the original freeway routes.

Dunstan also wanted to limit the growth of metropolitan Adelaide. Work was well ahead on selecting a site for a new town near Murray Bridge, before the Whitlam Government announced its decentralisation policy in 1972. The site was purchased, controls introduced on adjoining land, and a special authority established to develop the town. Unfortunately, revised population forecasts caused Monarto’s demise.

From the federal point of view I’ve heard it said more than once that Monarto was actually part of the Whitlam scheme, so to speak, for new towns throughout Australia; but, as you’ve just said, I always understood that it was proposed here in South Australia by Dunstan before Whitlam came to power.

Yes, I think Whitlam had given some indication in papers that he’d given whilst he was in opposition, so Dunstan was really one step ahead in just getting some sort of action started.
Do you know of any discussions between Dunstan and Whitlam or Dunstan and Uren?

No. No, I don’t, but they could have taken place. But I was then working directly under Broomhill having secret meetings early in the morning before everybody arrived, to discuss where and how and when such a proposal could take shape.

Public concern for the environment gathered momentum in the late ’60s and early 1970s. Dunstan appointed a Minister of Environment and Conservation in 1971, and established a new department the following year. The saving from demolition of the ANZ Bank Building, now Edmund Wright House, and the threat of subdivision adjoining the geological site at Hallett Cove focused public attention on heritage items. Quarrying on the face of the Hills received constant media attention; in fact, the State Planning Authority eventually bought a quarry and worked it as a model for other quarry people to follow.

Where was that?

At Tea Tree Gully. The late Basil Thompson [a planning staff member] was involved in that. Problems along Adelaide’s beaches led to the *Coast Protection Act*. Third-party objector appeals and pollution controls along the Murray were introduced. Rundle Mall was established and a new *Building Act* came into operation.

The State Planning Authority, with its powers to determine policy, exercise controls and buy and develop land attracted criticism from many quarters. Despite the frenzy of planning activity, Dunstan was not satisfied. The Authority was not coming up to expectations, he told delegates to the Australian Planning Institute Congress in Brisbane in 1972. Special legislation for West Lakes in 1969, then in 1972 for North Haven, created inconsistent controls of development. In 1973 the South Australian Full Court referred to the ‘deplorable and chaotic’ state of the planning legislation. A committee of inquiry was appointed. In 1976 the Government acceded to the wishes of the City of Adelaide to have its own planning legislation, which duplicated all the existing administrative machinery. Separate procedures were again established for Golden Grove in 1978.
In 1977 I was appointed, under Hugh Hudson, who was the minister to whom I was then responsible to conduct an inquiry into the controls of private development and the effectiveness of the Authority. Despite all the criticisms levelled at the Authority, it achieved remarkable results during the Dunstan era. Large areas were purchased for parks and recreation areas, planning policies were established for various regions of the State and effective controls of land use were introduced.

Dunstan was instrumental in changing transport policies; he responded to the upsurge of interest in the environment, pollution and conservation; he accepted the public’s aversion to high-density living, introducing selective renewal. He attempted to limit Adelaide’s growth by a new town at Monarto, and he introduced urban management by allocation of resources. Perhaps of greatest importance for the planning profession, he gained political acceptance of a comprehensive planning system.

After retirement, Don Dunstan maintained his interest in planning and urban design. He was made an honorary fellow of the Planning Institute in 1987, and in the same year became President of the Civic Trust, continuing in that role until his death.

All South Australians have benefited from his commitment to improving quality of life. Looking back, it is with a sense of wonderment that so much was achieved. Dunstan the politician gave planning both direction and substance. The profession became firmly-established in South Australia due to his efforts, and planning was only one of his many interests.

Yes. I was thinking of his – you referred to his ‘impatience’. The Authority was set up and, as you’ve said, its achievements are large and many, but he became impatient. Do you think that was his personality or just the usual problem of politicians wanting to move quicker than the bureaucrats can move under the law, or is there a mixture of both, or what?

I would think a mixture of both, Alan. I never quite understood why in 1972 he expressed those sentiments in Brisbane to that congress. He made extensive references in his talk about Hackney, but in relation to the Planning Authority he said the members who were chief officers in the State Government were reluctant to
implied, ‘waste their time’ at meetings. But statistics never proved that so I was never quite sure where he got those stories from. I was quite upset by it at the time.

Yes, well, it seemed to go against the grain, so to speak, of what he was seeking to do, to co-ordinate infrastructure and public spending on urban development, *et cetera, et cetera*, and it’s a problem that still keeps coming up with the arguments about whether you let the chiefs get on with it or you let the politicians make all of the decisions.

Yes. It was only five years since the Authority was established that he came up with those criticisms.

Ah, well – well, what about tourist development in relation to planning? Have you any thoughts about that at all? Because he was deeply involved in that and then went over and tried to run the Victorian Tourist Authority later.

That’s right. That was one of his interests, too, but he never expressed any relationship between planning and tourism to me personally. I’ve always felt that the work that was done by planning staff in relation to various regions of the State were a lead-in to a lot of work that could be done to boost tourism, such as in the Flinders Ranges and Kangaroo Island.

END OF INTERVIEW.