

# St John's Cathedral, Parramatta Planning Proposal

## Independent Heritage Advice

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prepared for  
The City of Parramatta Council  
by  
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Abbreviations used in this report

CMP	Conservation Management Plan
HAA	Hector Abrahams Architects
PCC	Parramatta City Council
SLNSW	State Library of NSW

## Summary

### A Heritage Review

1. This is a heritage review of a planning proposal to redevelop part of land held by St John's Cathedral.
2. The proposal is to erect two high rise towers, to close Hunter Street at its eastern end to make an urban square, and to remove existing buildings.
3. Three iterations of the proposal are made. They differ in the extent of demolition.
4. The proponent announces the proposal as the creation of a new setting for the cathedral in the form of an urban square and the provision of future accommodation for its work.

### Summary of Findings

5. The first finding, which comes from an analysis of the history of the site, is that the church building does not need a new setting. The fundamentals of its historic setting are in place in its historic site. What it needs therefore is the reinterpretation of the historic setting, in particular the definition on the Western side and the removal of car parking on ground. This is also the view of the draft Conservation Management Plan policies 6.7-6.15.
6. The second finding is that the Church Hall building does possess the heritage significance sufficient to justify local listing as an Item of Environmental Heritage in the Parramatta Local Environmental Plan. It should be conserved.
7. These findings about the retention of the hall and the reinstatement of the western setting do not preclude the resumption of Hunter Street for the creation of an urban square, however it is proposed that an independent planning study into the need for the square be undertaken, since Parramatta has two squares nearby. Also, the success of a square in this location is open to question, as it would be fully shaded in winter between two high rise towers and exposed to westerly winds. Retrofitted urban squares are notoriously difficult to make successful. The precedent mentioned in the heritage impact statement of Saint Andrews Cathedral and Sydney Square is a case in point, as it does not attract many people or events. The square proposed shares many of the same features as Queens Square in Sydney which also is not successful as a place where people go.
8. The above advice does not preclude the erection of high-rise towers on the land which the church owns. Of course, such towers would have to address the urban design objectives for Parramatta CBD. In the authors view, the height of new towers is not a heritage issue if the church yard has its historic integrity. This view is formed in the recognition that towers are the norm in Parramatta, as are small heritage sites nearby. However, towers are not allowed in the current LEP.
9. One of the iterations proposes a tower that overhangs a heritage building. This is not acceptable in Parramatta, a position arrived at in the recent past at 2 Phillip Street. The simple principle behind this stance is that roofs should have sky above them.

## 1. Introduction

This review was commissioned by Parramatta City Council on 19 September 2018. The terms of the review are to examine a planning proposal for the lands of and adjacent to St John's Cathedral, Parramatta, and to address specific questions about the proposal.

The proposal reviewed is that described in the following documents:

- St John's Anglican Cathedral, Parramatta, Planning Proposal by Architectus
- Urban Design Report (by Architectus)
- Conservation Management Plan Draft #1 (prepared by Design 5)
- Heritage Impact Statement (prepared by Paul Davies Pty Ltd)
- Concept Landscape Master Plan (prepared by Aspect Studios)

Specifically, we have referred to the Conservation Management Plan (Draft #1) dated May 2018 for the site prepared by Design 5 – Architects Pty Ltd.

This review was undertaken by Hector Abrahams and Tristan Ryan of this office.

## 2. Nature of the site

### Synopsis of the history of the Site

The documents provided in the application maps a chronology of the buildings on and around the site but not the design of its site, being the church yard or grounds. Since the proposal concerns the site, to provide a base for our review, we set out the following overview history of the church site in plan and illustration. It is aligned to the history of the place to see how its development relates to the history of the parish. The stages we have identified relate to the four discernible configurations of the site as a church. For each stage a plan and key illustration is given.

### Up to 1823 a Church Yard

St John's Cathedral is a foundational Christian site in Australia, having been set up as a place of established ministry and public worship in about 1798. It was sited at the centre of the planned town, heading the cross street halfway between Government House and the Military Barracks and adjacent to the marketplace. As a mark of its civic importance, its towers were added by Governor Macquarie in part as a landmark, visible from Government House.

Main attributes:

- Known as church and yard
- Sited at terminus of Church Street, off a square
- Site defined as an allotment and fenced
- Constructed visual relationship to Government House
- Functional relationship to Burying Ground
- Tree planting in this period or soon after, in the church yard



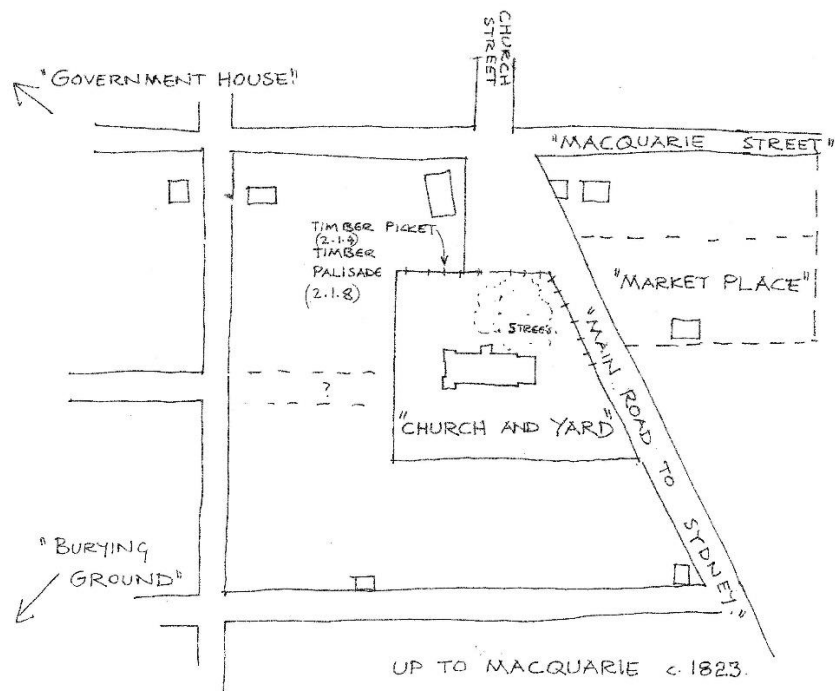


Figure 1: Plan showing siting of St John's Cathedral up to c.1823. (Source: HAA) The trees may have been planted later, but are shown as mature in photographs of the 1870s. Names shown in inverted commas, are quotations from Lachlan Macquarie in his plan of 1814.



Figure 2: Painting of Parramatta 1820 by Joseph Lycett (Source: State Library of Victoria, Image No. 30328102131561/12) This shows the church building and its yard.

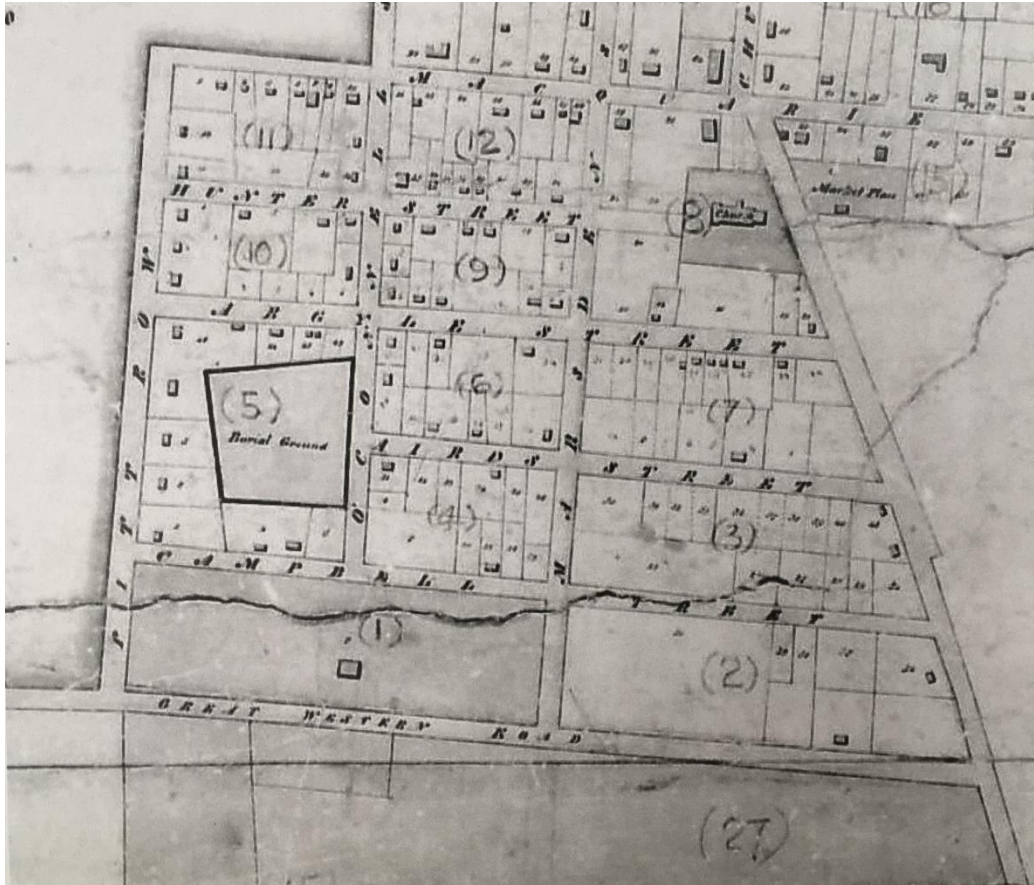


Figure 3: Detail of 1823 Plan of Township of Parramatta showing location of the church (Source: State Archives AO Map 4907 as shown in CMP). The church yard is defined as an allotment. The burial ground is to come into the control of the church in 1826. Hunter Street was extended to the church about this time to allow access from the western gates of the yard to the ground.

#### c.1856-1926 A fully developed and expanded church yard

The ministry of the parish and its site were largely reconstructed in the remarkably long incumbency of Archdeacon Gunther, from 1868-1909, and the decades around it. The extent of the current land parcel, most of the key fabric and the landscape spaces of the site date from his vision. It is taken that the church hall, opened in 1910, is part of this vision.

#### Main Attributes

- Development of church yard with fencing, paths, tree plantings
- Formal entry to Hunter Street with fine wrought gates
- Ceremonial entrance from Church Street, with its War Memorial Gate
- Creation of St Johns Park to the north of the yard
- Creation of Church hall, Vergers Cottage which address the yard
- Purchase of adjacent land as source of funds to endow the parish



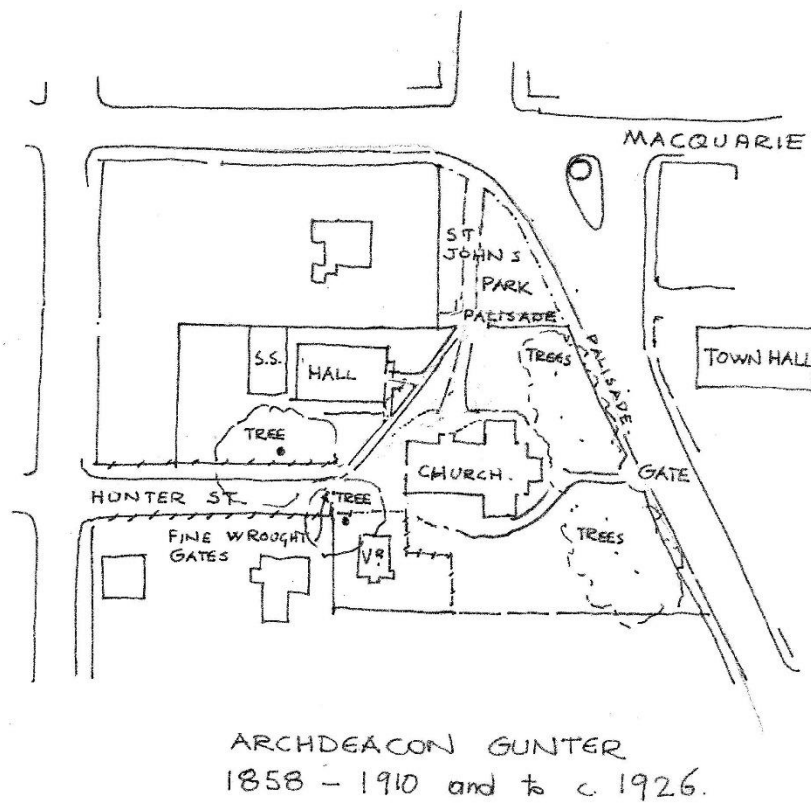


Figure 4: Plan of the St John's site showing the extent and layout up to 1926. (Source: HAA) The design of paths around the church building is based on photographic evidence.

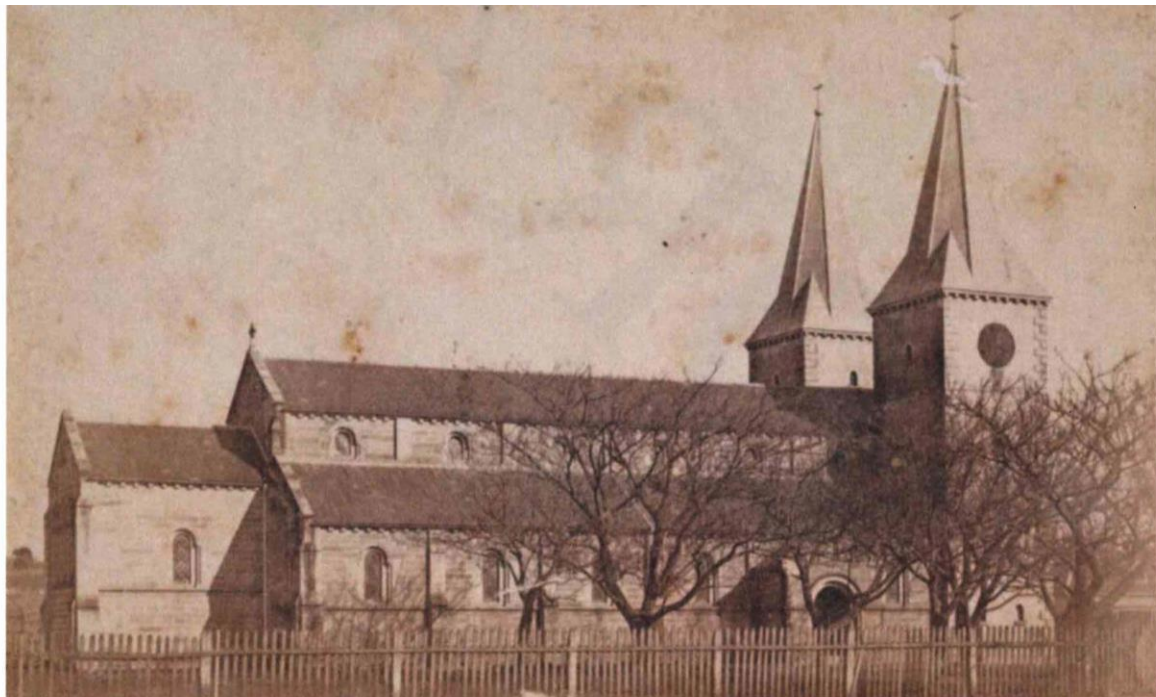


Figure 5: St John's c1860 (Source: St John's Archives as shown in CMP) or St John's in 1870 (Source: SLNSW as shown in the CMP) This shows the trees that are part of the colonial church yard.



Figure 6: 1934 aerial photo of St John's and surrounds (Source: St John's Archives as shown in CMP) This aerial view shows all the components of the second development of the church yard.

#### c.1953- c.2000 a Civic Park

The site has been accorded a civic eminence throughout its long history, but has been particularly brought to the fore since 1953, when the grounds were replanted and fences removed in the style of a public park, whilst retaining and extending the ordering of paths. The design of the Queensland Arcade in 1959 introduced a continuous colonnade to address the southern part of the grounds, and make entry possible on that side.

#### Main Attributes

- Low wall on edges
- Formalising of old path system into Gravel drive on both sides of church leading to court on west side
- New trees
- Retention of paths and planting in St Johns Park
- Additional access and address along Queensland Arcade





Figure 7: Plan showing layout of site in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Source: HAA)



Figure 8: Aerial photo of St John's, c.1953 (Source: St John's Archive as shown in the CMP)

#### c.2000 to near future: Adapted to carpark and new setting

In about 2000, when church street was closed to traffic and became a mall, very extensive areas of brick paving were introduced into the grounds and many cars parked on it. The fences of the Town Hall opposite were removed about this time as well. Currently the prominence of the site is being extended by the construction of the Parramatta Square, which is axially aligned to the colonial towers of St John's.

#### Main Attributes

- Introduction of large areas of brick paving and car parking, which have blurred the historic scale of the spaces around the western side of the cathedral.
- Lifted exposure of spires at terminus of Parramatta Square
- Removal of some trees
- Closing in of side of Hall

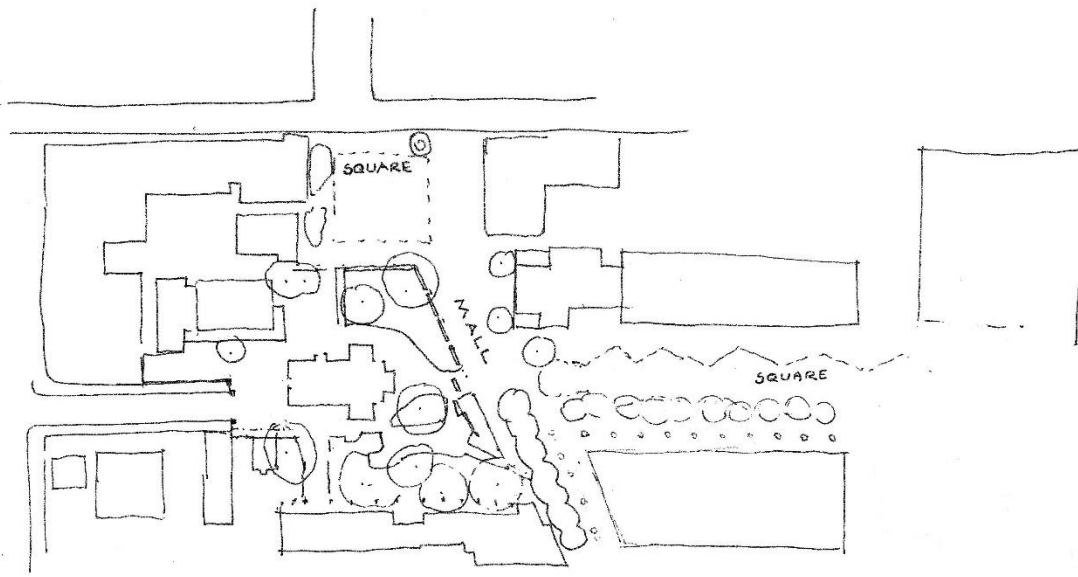


Figure 9: Plan showing the church and its location within Parramatta Square (Source: HAA)

### Summary of the integrity of the church yard.

The above analysis shows that, despite the enormity of late-20<sup>th</sup> century and current development around it, the site of St John's Cathedral has largely retained its civic urban relationships and eminence, and the landscape order of the 1950s landscaped grounds which were developed out of the site as brought about in the time of Archdeacon Gunter. The Cathedral is settled in a park which arose from and recalls the historic vegetated character of the churchyard for which there is important relationships and evidence from the colonial period.

### Summary of the Setting of the Site.

A strong visual relationship to the Parramatta Town Hall and Macquarie Street, the Cathedral is still located in the approximate centre of the town plan. It retains a strong visual relationship to Parramatta Town Hall and the low-rise buildings around Centenary Square. The immediate setting has been diminished by the creation of Centenary Square, the form and installations in which has obscured the relationship of the cathedral with Macquarie and Church Streets.

Though no longer visible from Government House, the Cathedral retains its landmark status within the City of Parramatta. Long views south down Church Street and east down Hunter Street culminate in the Cathedral. The centrality of the Cathedral within the cityscape is enhanced in the creation of Parramatta Square, the long pedestrian mall, which has its western terminus at the Cathedral.

The existing buildings near to the Cathedral, including the 1910 Parish Hall, the 1939 office building next door to it, and the Queensland Arcade to the south are of a sympathetic scale to



and setback from the Cathedral. The plentiful vegetation, and particularly the mature trees planted within the park and at Centenary Square, contribute positively to this setting.

### 3. Key Issues

#### 3.1 Setting of the church site in the town centre

Though it was conceived as occupying a central place in the Parramatta townscape, the church building has always been surrounded by a churchyard as well. The yard was established at the latest by 1810, developed greatly in the period 1853 - 1926 and later was amended and landscaped as a public park.

The church in its yard has a strong relationship to the urban plan of Parramatta, and the vegetated landscape surrounding the Cathedral is equally important to its character. For most of its history until the 1953<sup>1</sup>, the church and churchyard were enclosed by a paling or picket fence, and in one period by a high wall. The open public park that currently surrounds the Cathedral was also established in 1953<sup>2</sup>, altering the relationship of the Cathedral to the surrounding townscape. This intervention nevertheless preserved historic entrances to the Cathedral and churchyard in the form of defined paths, as well as the general vegetated character that had existed in the churchyard. New trees were planted to the east and north of the Cathedral at this time.

All of the proposed development options disrupt this historic setting by removing the defined churchyard to the west of the Cathedral. The proposal is to lay out a paving extending from the western side of the transepts of the Church building, running west about one hundred metres. The historic space of the church yard is removed. In its place is a major paved open space at the west, and the remaining church grounds to the rear. It is true, the setting is presently least defined on this part of the site, due to the paving works of the 2000s, but this is not a reason to remove altogether the integrity of the church site.

A proposal that interprets the historic space within which the church building was set is warranted. Such a proposal would recognise

- the historic boundary of the allotment established by Macquarie, or before.
- the amount of space historically defined in front of the western towers, which is in proportion to the towers
- the integrity of a church yard or grounds that have a considered network of paths, based on the network designed in the Gunther period, and reinterpreted in the 1953 redesign.
- Planting of appropriate trees in all parts of the grounds

This advice accords with policies 6.7-6.15 of the CMP by Design 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Date given for the removal of the fence and establishment of a public park in the chronology of the Cathedral given in Design 5 – Architects, *St John's Cathedral Conservation Management Plan*, Draft #1, 2018, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

This is not to say the urban setting of the church and grounds could site would not be augmented by a square outside its western boundary by closing Hunter Street to vehicles. However, amenity is key. Few urban squares are successful in Sydney, particularly those related to major churches; Sydney Square and Queens Square in the City of Sydney, both of which have low amenity due to being shaded, windy and without focus. They are only sometimes used for events, and are principally pedestrian thoroughfares.

The design of the proposed square presents the church on a uniform paved platform shared with two Highrise buildings. When placed together on a shared platform, the scale difference between the high rise and the church building most apparent and no reconcilable. The result is to render the church a mere small object. In other words, the church building is a cup on a tray. In scheme 1 the hall is placed on the same tray, which provides some relatable scale, however this is no real difference, and the historic buildings should not have their context removed in this abstract way.

The square as proposed is shown to be fully shaded in winter. It is also exposed to the natural winds from the west, and may be further impacted by wind generated by high rise forms. These factors point to poor amenity of outdoor space, and are the same as found in the Sydney and Queens Squares in the City of Sydney.

### **3.2 Church Hall**

The hall has statutory protection as an item of environmental heritage.

The first reason put forward for the removal of the hall is based on an erroneous assessment that it is of representative value, being criteria (g) in NSW State Heritage Assessment Criteria) This means it represents to a better of lesser extent a class of buildings.

The 1910 Memorial Church Hall was a definite part of the planned development of the parish and its eminence as a centre of the arch-deanery under the long incumbency of Archdeacon Gunther (1865-1909). In this period the church building was rebuilt, the grounds landscaped and replanted, a verger's house erected in the garden church yard and the temporary hall planned to be replaced with this hall building. In addition, in this period the parish set up a trust to see to the endowment of the parish, and went on to acquire the lands along Macquarie Street. Clearly, the hall has an important status in the history of the ministry of the parish, and its site

Architecturally, the hall is no ordinary church hall either. Most church halls are a single space, of large or small size. This hall is not only large in size, it has a full aisle, a cast iron arcade, and a clerestory. It is in fact conceived like a large church. For this attribute it cannot be said to be representative of most church halls, with their simpler order.



Figure 10: Interior of the parish hall (Source: CMP by Design 5) showing clerestory, arcade and aisles.

Its siting with respect to the main church building is not representative. Church halls are often placed to the rear of a church building, and sometimes in a side street. St John's Hall is prominently placed with its entry adjacent to the north part of the church grounds, and its entry paths integrated into the landscape of this most prominent part of the grounds, the path that connected its two entrances, that from St John's Park and from Hunter Street).

In light of this, its significance is a rare example of a large church hall conceived as part of a landscape of a major church building. It is also a major building in Parramatta, and worthy of listing as a local item notwithstanding its relation to other church halls in other Local Government Areas.

The second argument for its removal is that it is necessary for the greater good. In short, that a new and better setting for the cathedral is preferred. This overlooks the evidence that the church has a historic setting. Of more concern, it creates a precedence for the removal of any heritage item, if an option, which is considered better, is proposed instead.

### **3.3 Sun access and shading**

The church yard and church building rely on sun for the health of its vegetation, the amenity for people, and the rendering of the architectural form in light.



The amount of sun in the proposal is not sufficient we believe to sustain these values.

## 4. Answers to Questions posed by Council

### 1. Is Option 1 (retention of the Hall) supportable / not supportable in heritage terms? *Yes*

#### 1a. If supportable, what are recommended LEP/DCP controls for the site in this case? \*

*Historic Site to be retained and its landscape design reinterpreted from the Gunther period design with a Civic intent. This includes*

- *Retention of hall*
- *Retention of path system on site*
- *Retention of trees and plantings from 1953*
- *Retention of Verger's cottage and palisade fence*
- *Removal of brick paving and parking lot use*
- *Redefinition of western boundary*
- *Square must be beyond, focussed on church is good, but not so as to place church building and Highrise on same platform.*
- *Protection from natural wind*
- *No introduction of wind from high rise*
- *Sun on western side of the church towers to a certain extent (to be defined)*
- *Sun on western elevation of church to a certain extent (to be defined)*

*No heritage issue with respect to FSR and Height.*

#### 1b. If supportable, what are recommended DCP controls for the site in this case? \*\*

*See above answer. If a square is to be allowed on the end of Hunter Street then a similar special character area study is required to support it., as was the case in Parramatta Square and the World Heritage Curtilage area. The writer is not a planner, and has no view on the role of DCP controls in a special area.*

### 2. Is Option 2 (modification/partial retention of the Hall) supportable / not supportable in heritage terms?

#### 2a. If supportable, what are recommended LEP controls for the site in this case? \*

*The option is not supportable in heritage terms. We refer to the discussion in 3.1*

#### 2b. If supportable, what are recommended DCP controls for the site in this case? \*\*

### 3. Is Option 3 (demolition of the Hall) supportable / not supportable in heritage terms?

#### 3a. If supportable, what are recommended LEP controls for the site in this case? \*

*The option is not supportable in heritage terms. We refer to the discussion in 3.1*

#### 3b. If supportable, what are recommended DCP controls for the site in this case? \*\*

### 4. A comparison of any option(s) supported in 1, 2 and 3 above to the scenario presented in the draft CBD Planning Proposal (i.e. "Option 4 – draft CBD Planning Proposal").

*The current planning frame work for the sites of the proposed towers is for a development of several heights up to 28 metres. The planning proposal for the CBD with its vision of slim towers, and strategy of incentives and design excellence, the placing of development rights on heritage sites, is clearly relevant to the future of these two sites which occupy the edge of the business zone.*

*The sites of the proposed towers are an area that is between two special planning areas in the LEP: the CBD Parramatta Square and the Park Edge. For this reason alone, it seems warranted that the area between the two special planning areas be studied and given future desirable form statements. The study should examine the appropriateness of the existing LEP controls that control bulk.*

*The proposal of a new square in Hunter Street could be a valuable addition to the area, depending on its amenity and successful urban relationship to the site of the church. But an extra public square here may not be warranted, as Hunter Street currently performs the role of a backstreet, providing garbage, loading and car access, and this may be its best use. Such a study would come to terms with the impact on the church yard of pedestrian traffic. The church is called a cathedral, but its functioning role is that of a regional parish church with many congregational meetings. A key question is one of balance between civic role and normal church operations.*

5. A clearly justified recommendation amongst the options presented and the LEP scenario presented in the draft CBD Planning Proposal.

*Refer to our identification and discussion of key issues in Section 3.*

6. Commentary on any other relevant matters that arose during review.

*The review has identified that the next steps should be*

- *the incorporation of the findings of the church site analysis into the heritage planning of the site of the church*
- *if a new square is intended in Hunter Street then a process to define a special area be put in place, which would mean a study leading to a LEP amendment*
- *that the design of Centenary Square be amended to restore visual relationships between the church. This would mean reconsideration of the light structures, trees, etc.*
- *that the amenity of the colonnade of the Queensland Arcade adjoining the site immediately to the south be maintained as a good southern boundary to the site, through which people can move along and enter the cathedral grounds.*