

13 August 2017

General Manager
Ku-ring-gai Council
818 Pacific Highway,
GORDON NSW 2072

PROPOSED MIDDLE HARBOUR ROAD CONSERVATION AREA, LINDFIELD: PEER REVIEW

I refer to the Council's current review of conservation areas and specifically to The Middle Harbour Road Conservation Area proposal.

I have been requested to review the information prepared to date by residents in the area and provide an independent assessment of whether I professionally believe the area warrants Conservation Area status. I do not believe the area warrants a Conservation Area status.

I have been a professional heritage consultant for over 30 years. I have been an elected member of Woollahra Council and assisted in the heritage controls for that area. I am currently Chair of the NSW Heritage Council.

I have had the opportunity to inspect the area, assess Council's documents and to review the assessment prepared by Architectural Projects, 2017. (AP)

The Architectural Projects documents have clearly set out the difference between contributory, neutral and detracting places within the defined boundary. I have reviewed their assessment of the earlier Perumal Murphy Alessi, 2015, Study. (PMA)

In the methodology AP quotes the NSW Heritage Guidelines in saying that "heritage conservation boundaries should be simple to explain to the public". The issue for this area is that the residents of the area are having trouble recognising the quality of the area as a heritage conservation area due to the fact that the significance is not reflected on the ground and that the planning technique of a conservation area designation is not appropriate to manage this proposed area.

I agree that there are individual dwellings in the area with individual merit and these have been assessed as individual items.

The survey carried out by AP proves that the area has less than 50% of the dwellings that are recognised as 'contributory items' I have not redone the survey graphically however I consider that there are even more dwellings that do not meet the threshold of contributory. The Land and Environment Court NSW has recognised that there are buildings that contribute more and less and I consider that there are a number of dwellings in the proposed area that are of a lesser contribution, even within the numbers under 50%. These dwellings have been analysed in the AP review and some of those considered contributing are in my opinion are of a minor contributing value.

The area is a very mixed one with large numbers of dwellings which have undergone alteration and change. There is little cohesion in typology and little cohesion in quality in the area. The principle cohesion is the detached dwelling type and the setting of these buildings in well vegetated

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streetscapes and front gardens. The area is “attractive”, however the Court warns of the sense of “attractiveness” against the rigour of the real contribution the individual elements make to the whole.

It is not always reasonable to expect a modified or a very pedestrian example of the interwar period to be retained on a site which has the opportunity to be developed with a larger family dwelling. I always ask three questions:

What is the significance?

What is the context? and

What are the opportunities?

The AP study has proven that there are less than 48% of the dwellings which are contributory to the area in a meaningful manner. The context is therefore one of a mixture of dwellings of styles and sizes that have very little relationship to each other aesthetically. One has to evaluate the buildings as they currently exist and not depend on a historical examination that does not bear witness on individual survey.

The issue for this area is that since the original surveys - which actually did not recommend the making of a conservation area- many of the dwellings have been demolished or significantly altered and added to. There has been the level of expectation that even well recognised “contributory” dwellings of the period have been consented to be demolished. In this regard, and having evaluated the recommendations of the Architectural Projects report, the area has lost the inherent qualities that make it a conservation area under the current professional guidelines.

One of the common attributes of ongoing heritage studies is that many more places are placed on potential lists as the surveyors work to increase the numbers. It has been my experience that many of the earlier surveys - or the first to review an area - provide a more accurate picture of the qualities that make up a conservation area. There are always the individual exceptions that can be found or have been overlooked but this is a rarer occurrence and should not necessarily extend to larger numbers being included because they are borderline. The reality of listing is something that should be taken seriously and have the due regard that is warranted. This is the approach that has been undertaken by the Architectural Projects review.

I support the recommendations of Architectural Projects not to include the precinct as a heritage conservation area and commend the rigour that has been applied to its evaluation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Davies".

Stephen Davies
Director