

This proposal does not achieve a balance between the low level benefits of a small school providing a small number of jobs and little economic input (just \$600,000) and managing, minimising or mitigating the impacts on the heritage and biodiversity values of this Heritage Listed item, the magnificent Mt Errington Estate which the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (we'll call them DPIE) report acknowledges is *"of significant heritage value"*.

We categorically reject Hornsby Shire Council's assertion, reiterated by DPIE that, I'll quote, *"the proposal would ensure a viable long-term use of the heritage listed dwelling and gardens"*. It is currently a 5 bedroom home of 464 sq metres. That's smaller than many of the McMansions we have around Dural and Glenhaven. DPIE and Council's statements infer that this heritage listed home can't be guaranteed a viable long term use without it being turned into a business. That is nonsense. And not just a home business, a business that will have significant, irreversible, detrimental impacts on the heritage values of this outstanding intact heritage home in perpetuity. A school.

Mt Errington was purchased by the applicant in July 2019 for \$2.9 million. Just six months ago a similar home in Hornsby, the Summers estate, a grand 1890's Queen Anne style home, was sold as a family home for \$2.75 million. Council knows there's a demand for these prestige homes.

DPIE and Council's statements about ensuring a viable long-term use are simply a justification to support this proposal and are not based on facts. Mt Errington has a viable use - as a highly sought after heritage home. I myself have lived in heritage houses for most of my life and have enjoyed the benefits of these well built spacious houses with extensive mature gardens. They're irreplaceable.

The applicant has made no little if any attempt at effective community engagement. We received an invitation to discuss the development with the applicant and another community group, for the first time ever, four days ago. At such short notice we obviously couldn't meet that.

The DPIE report conclusion that, and I'll quote, *"the proposed external alterations to the dwelling, the gardens and removal of trees would have some impacts on its heritage significance"* is a master-class in understatement. This is a rare, intact, Arts and Crafts masterpiece that hasn't yet been tampered with. Yet, is the key word. Once modifications occur, the heritage values of these homes decrease significantly. The next modifications will then be justified on the basis that the home is no longer intact. Hornsby Council would then agree because it simply doesn't effectively argue to protect the Shire's heritage against inappropriate works

Hornsby Shire residents are fed up of seeing the last of our intact heritage buildings and curtilages being irreversibly altered, with little basis in merit and poor justification from applicants and Council alike. After almost 20 years of previous Councils neglecting heritage, current Councillors have now instigated a complete LEP Heritage Inventory.

I'll detail some of the appalling alterations that will irreversibly alter the heritage values of this home:

- The front balcony is to be raised. That will ruin the lines and balance of the front arched portico with balcony above, that form the central visual feature of the facade of the building. These heritage buildings are finely proportioned and changing the balcony will ruin the balance of the front facade of the building. Since when is it ok to make heritage buildings ungainly and ugly?
- The front gates are being removed. At first it was said they were too narrow, and when that didn't work it was said that they were old and rotting. They're timber gates so they can easily be fixed if there is a real desire to preserve the heritage significance of this property. The gates must be retained, and retained in situ. Residents don't want to hear that the replacement gates will respect the original ones. We want the original heritage kept. Otherwise it's not heritage is it? It's just a poor facsimile.
- A hole will be punched through the slate roof to install a skylight.

- Internal walls are being demolished on the first floor.
- Doorways are being widened.
- The whole of the upper floor is to have the timber floor replaced. If the floors aren't integral to the fabric of the building, I don't know what is. They'll replace lovely old wide hardwood floors with cheap pine flooring just because they have to put in soundproofing for a school. Who on earth agreed to this? We don't care if Council didn't object to that, this Council has an appalling record for preserving heritage. To replace heritage flooring, usually the skirting boards have got to come off. Heritage buildings aren't Lego sets. I've restored enough of them to know they don't go back together again like Lego blocks.
- The existing slate roof is to be replaced. That's the original slate roof. Slate roofs last hundreds of years. If there's leaks, then fix the leaks, don't replace the whole original roof.

Next we'll have an interpretative sign that says, Mt Errington was here. Council did that to the oldest cottage in Epping because, wait for it, the original fabric had been altered and euphemistically, replaced. So that applicant said the heritage values had been irreversibly diminished and the cottage got demolished. And all of the above is before we even get to the proposed damage to the heritage listed gardens of Mt Errington.

- We're stunned that section 6.1.45 of the DPIE report says that the trees to be removed, and I'll quote *"within and adjacent to the tennis court comprise planted species with low retention value and poor contribution to the site's heritage value"*. These are Blackbutt trees of the locally significant Blackbutt Gully Forest that are up to 25 metres in height and half a metre in diameter and the arborist report does not say that they have a low retention value. They certainly do contribute to the heritage value of the site because they're remnant and regrowth forest, as referenced in DPIE's report.
- We are outraged that 41 trees are being removed with only 3 replacement trees. That is even contrary to Council's Green Offset Code which requires at least the same number of trees be replaced. Hornsby Shire Councillors have already rejected a proposed new Offset Code that suggested shrubs as replacements for trees, which this report is trying to do, but Council staff keep agreeing to it anyway.
- The report states that removal of the significant trees T111 and T112 are unavoidable for safe access ie for the new driveway. Then the heritage site simply isn't suitable for the new driveway. Justifying the removal of those trees by saying it will open up views of the house we think is a bit facetious - full frontal views of homes were never the design intent of heritage gardens.
- The DPIE report says that no more trees will be removed for the bushfire inner protection area and that conditions of consent will protect the rest of the trees, in perpetuity. How can any tree be protected in perpetuity? It can't. It's a hollow promise. All the native trees will eventually be felled. The first big branch that drops, as natives do, the school will say the tree is dangerous to children and it'll be felled.
- And why a black paling fence? That's not just historically inaccurate, it's downright ugly. It's a modern architect's poor, unimaginative, interpretation of heritage. Someone needs to give these people a copy of *"Colour Schemes for Old Australian Houses"* by Ian Evans, Clive Lucas and Ian Stapleton. Respected heritage architects. Nothing was painted black, nothing. That was the colour for funerals and mourning clothes and it should be nowhere on this site, including those ugly, black monolithic fire stairs.

In conclusion, this is one of the worst examples of adaptive reuse of a heritage listed dwelling that Hornsby Shire has seen. A more long-term sustainable option for the site is to maintain and retain the dwelling and gardens as a prestige home. Council knows it could ensure the site would be protected from subdivision by a lot size amendment during its current LEP heritage review.

This proposal does not achieve a balance between the low level benefits of a small school which provides a small number of jobs and little economic input (again just \$600,000), and managing, minimising or mitigating the impacts on the heritage and biodiversity values of this Heritage Listed item. Nor can any residual impacts be managed by consent conditions. This proposal should be resoundingly refused.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM 2019 SALE OF MT ERRINGTON













BLUE GUM COMMUNITY SCHOOL - SSD-10444

Additional submission - post IPC hearing 10.02.21

Further to the advice provided by the Independent Planning Commission on 10 February 2021 that the IPC will accept additional submissions up to Wednesday of the following week (17.02.21), below are additional points that we would like to raise with the IPC, in addition to those points raised in our oral evidence provided to at the hearing on 10.02.21 and our previous submissions.

We further object to the above proposal on the additional following grounds:

- The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) requested that the applicant explore other driveway access and parking options to further protect the heritage and environmental values of the property. That view was supported by the consultants GML. However the applicant has declined to utilise any other options, stating that the other options in themselves create different problems.

As a result, two heritage listed trees, T111 and T112, both of which GML said should be retained, would be removed. These two trees are a prominent feature of the heritage listed gardens and should not be removed when there were other options available.

Furthermore, if this proposal was approved, the heritage gates would be removed, the driveway irreversibly altered, and a significant number of mature trees from the locally significant Blackbutt Gully Forest removed just for a carpark.

The visual impacts of the removal of these heritage items would have an irreversible impact on the heritage and values of this dwelling, as well as on the environmental values. These impacts alone would warrant refusal of this proposal.

- It is unacceptable to describe the removal of the tennis court as being an "interpretation" of the tennis court as a carpark. That is akin to 'interpreting' a historical home as a block of units.
- As described by Elizabeth Roberts of the Hornsby Historical Society, the Jacaranda has a social history of being the 'parent' plant from which the Jacarandas in the local area were propagated. Jacarandas were propagated by the owner of Mt Errington and given as a welcome gift to people who moved into the local area. It is rare to have such a long standing provenance for the local environment. The Jacaranda should not be removed.
- The removal of 41 trees, many of which are endemic to Hornsby Shire, and their replacement by just 3 trees, is totally unacceptable and is inconsistent with the current Hornsby Shire Council Green Offset Code.
- There has been no evaluation of what flora would need to be modified for the safety of children.
- As detailed by The Hon. Mayor Philip Ruddock, AO, there are precious few Arts and Crafts homes in Hornsby Shire, even less that are as intact as this fine example - the mansion that is Mt Errington. It is a style perfected by Frank Lloyd Wright and the heritage values of Hornsby Shire's rare intact examples of this style should be preserved and protected.
- The incremental degradation of such an immaculate and rare example of mansion and heritage garden should not be permitted. The removal of many of the internal and external features that make up this intact dwelling is unacceptable and is an incremental degradation in itself.
- No matter how much effort the applicant puts into amending plans, the site simply is not suitable for this development.
- We feel the opinion that was expressed that "there is no value in a heritage estate that can't be accessed", to be nonsense. Some of the finest examples of Sydney's heritage are not publicly accessible. That being said in non-COVID times many people open their heritage homes during Heritage Week or for guided tours by the National Trust. None of these homes have destroyed heritage values just to give access to the public.

We think that the statement made that Mt Errington "shouldn't be a private jewel" is appalling, particularly when the proposal is for a private school ie just another "private" jewel.

- It was suggested that the upstairs balcony was not safe for any use. That statement implies that whoever owned the home would have to change the balcony height and therefore ruin the delicately proportioned lines of the front facade. We feel that this is also nonsense. As a private home, there would be no compulsion on the owner to change the balcony if there were no alterations or additions proposed. It is only that the current owners want the home to be turned into a school, that there would be a requirement to change the balcony.

The phrase "in the spirit of" and "interpretation of" are frequently used in the applicant's documents. Hornsby Shire residents want their heritage to be preserved and protected, not interpreted in spirit.

- The neighbouring property has a legally constructed studio apartment just one metre away from the driveway. The applicant and then DPIE, have incorrectly ascribed this as being a garage, which would therefore not be described as a habitable dwelling. However as the neighbouring owner attests, it is a habitable dwelling. The driveway, with multiple car use, should not be in such close proximity to this habitable dwelling.

These living quarters should have been ascribed as a 'sensitive receiver' with regard to noise levels. The noise levels have therefore been incorrectly calculated.

- Rosemead Road does not allow for two-way flow of traffic.
- There has been no evaluation of the traffic flow and parking for extended usage of the school for such events as Christmas and Easter pageants, fairs, parent/teacher nights, end of school concerts and assemblies, etc, all of which are an integral part of any school year.
- It is proposed to replace the original slate roof. Slate roofs last hundreds of years. The photographs provided with our oral evidence on 10 February 2021, were photos from the sale of the property in July 2019. Clearly there were no major leaks in the roof then. Any subsequent damage that has occurred to the roof should be fixed by the current owners - the original roof should not be replaced.
- While it is probably politically incorrect to make the following point, there could not be a worse group of individuals to have long term use of a heritage mansion than a large group of children from 3 to 12 years old. Whatever incremental damage would be caused by changing the use from a home into a school, it would be nothing compared to the damage unwittingly caused by small children.
- Does anyone seriously let little children access valuable heritage in any other sphere? We think it is unacceptably flippant of the applicant to suggest that it will teach 3 year olds to love heritage. Either the teachers will be forever telling the little ones not to climb on the marble fireplaces or the older ones not to scratch their names in the woodwork (didn't any of you carve your name into school desks?).

Or more likely the good hearted teachers won't want to harangue the children too much and will turn a blind eye to the inevitable damage that 80 small children will inflict on this rare intact home.

- Mt Errington and its heritage gardens were always a private home and should remain so. The applicant said that they hadn't been looking for a heritage building for the school. We respectfully suggest that they resume their search and that Mt Errington remains as a private jewel in Hornsby's crown.
- This proposal should be refused as it is not in the public interest.