

Australian Capital Territory

Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct, Red Hill) Notice 2015

Notifiable Instrument NI2015–155

made under the

Heritage Act 2004, s34 Notice of decision about provisional registration

1 Name of instrument

This instrument is the *Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct, Red Hill) Notice 2015*.

2 Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after notification.

3 Notice of Decision

Pursuant to Section 32 of the *Heritage Act 2004* the ACT Heritage Council has decided not to provisionally register the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct, Red Hill to the ACT Heritage Register.

Jennifer O'Connell
Secretary (as delegate for)
ACT Heritage Council
9 April 2015



ACT Heritage Council

STATEMENT OF REASONS

DECISION NOT TO PROVISIONALLY REGISTER

RED HILL PUBLIC HOUSING PRECINCT

(Block 1 Section 25, Block 2 Section 26, Blocks 26-34 Section 29, Blocks 1-16 and 47-49 Section 31, Blocks 6 and 51-56 Section 32 and Block 1 Section 40, RED HILL)

IN THE ACT HERITAGE REGISTER

In accordance with Section 32 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, the ACT Heritage Council has decided not to provisionally register the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct, Red Hill. This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct, Red Hill and finds that the place does not meet any of the criteria under s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Background

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct (the Precinct) was nominated to the ACT Heritage Register by members of the ACT community in 2002.

In 2011 Philip Leeson Architects, for the Community Services Directorate, completed a study titled *Heritage Assessments of Housing ACT Properties*. The study included an assessment on the heritage significance of the Precinct. It concluded that the Precinct had heritage significance in relation to its site planning. No significance was identified in relation to its architectural design. It considered that the buildings were unremarkable and in all respects subservient in intellectual rigor and design integrity to the overall planning intent. It concluded that the design qualities of the planning layout, reflecting a combination of three strong radial axes intersecting two curved elements reinforcing the site topography and view lines, should be retained.

In 2014 the ACT Government notified its decision to prepare an 'Omnibus' Draft Territory Plan Variation that will propose changing zoning and development opportunity for approximately 17 sites across Canberra, including the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct.

Assessment

The Council's assessment against the criteria specified in s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004* is as follows.

In assessing the nomination for the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct, Red Hill, the Council considered:

- the original nomination and documentary evidence supplied by the nominator;
- information provided by a site inspection on 9 October 2014 by ACT Heritage; and
- the report by ACT Heritage titled, *Background Information Red Hill Public Housing Precinct*, October 2014, containing photographs and information on history, description, condition and integrity.

Pursuant to s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a place or object has heritage significance if it satisfies one or more of the following criteria. Future research may alter the findings of this assessment.

(a) importance to the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

The provision of public housing is a distinct historical theme within the context of the ACT. Within the wide variety of residential buildings erected in Canberra by the Commonwealth Government in

the inter-war and post-war decades, the Precinct makes a contribution to an understanding of the Government's development and provision of public housing in response to the need to accommodate the expanding public sector workforce in the 1950s and '60s.

The Precinct was one of the earliest housing projects developed by the National Capital Development Commission in a massive and urgent campaign to provide accommodation for a huge influx of public servants. It was developed in the context of tight planning and construction budgets and time frames designed to meet the prevailing policy of basing rental charges on construction costs.

Most notably the Precinct was the first of the NCDC's two mixed typology group housing initiatives which provided different housing types to accommodate families, couples and individuals within the same development. The NCDC pursued this approach further in the architecturally more ambitious Northbourne Housing Precinct which included pair houses, garden flats and maisonettes as well as bachelor flats. The NCDC recorded that architecturally the Red Hill Precinct was to be seen as a 'test exercise' rather than 'as a basis for future house standards' NCDC Minutes 29 January 1959 p2 item 6). On this basis the Red Hill Precinct's contribution to the course of the ACT's cultural history, in particular the provision of public housing in the ACT in the post-war period, is as a test case of a type rather than as an exemplar.

Places may fit into a context of evolving design, development or provision that is represented by many other examples (as in the case of the provision of public housing in the ACT). In applying the criteria the Council has to determine which, if any, of the places in that evolving context merit registration. Nearly every building in the ACT could be said to fit into a story of a particular design or planning context, or historical trend, but this does not mean that every place meets the threshold imposed by the criteria. An entry on the Heritage Register is valid to the extent that it establishes a level of significance that is strong and special that is therefore above the ordinary.

(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

In the broad context of medium-density public housing constructed in the post-war period, the Precinct is not considered to be uncommon, rare or endangered. While it is one of only two examples of the NCDC's mixed typology group housing approach of which Northbourne Housing Precinct (1959-62) is registered on the ACT Heritage Register, it is also one of several currently extant but not heritage listed post war medium density developments initiated before and during the NCDC period (Griffith Flats 1948, Braddon and Reid Flats 1951, Ainslie Flats 1952, Allawah and Bega Courts 1956/57, Northbourne Flats 1959 Kanangra Court 1965) All of these groups currently continue as public housing, today provided in accordance with national public housing policies.

While the Precinct is atypical of the public housing developments of post-war Canberra due to it being situated on a uniquely elevated site with views of Capital Hill, this is not considered to be an exceptional quality to be considered as unique amongst medium-density public housing of the post-war period.

(c) potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

Whilst the Precinct makes a contribution to an understanding the ACT's cultural history, in particular the provision of public housing in the ACT in the post-war period, it is not considered to have the potential to yield important information that will provide a significant contribution. What ability the place has to provide information to the ACT community regarding its contribution to the provision of public housing in the ACT is adequately represented by documentary evidence and the physical material of the buildings is unlikely to contribute further to a wider understanding of the cultural history of the ACT.

(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects;

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

Public housing is strongly and distinctly represented in Canberra's history because a large program of public housing operating from the 1920s – 1970s was established to provide housing for people of all classes of society coming to work in the national capital. The Precinct is an example of medium-density public housing constructed to house the post-war influx of public servants in the 1950s and 1960s. More specifically the Precinct is one of the two examples of the mixed typology group housing approach to this provision initiated by the NCDC. However, the Northbound Housing Precinct is more important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of this class of public housing in Canberra.

(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT;

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

The Precinct exhibits some design qualities in relation to its site planning, building layout and landscaping however these are not considered to be of an outstanding nature. Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence that these qualities are highly valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT.

There is also insufficient evidence that the architecture of the Precinct is of an outstanding design valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT.

(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period;

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

The Precinct is acknowledged as being atypical in the context of medium-density post-war public housing as it is situated on a uniquely elevated site with views of Capitol Hill. The Precinct demonstrates a degree of creative achievement through its combination of site planning, building layout, response to topography, landscaped open spaces and variety of accommodation types, however these qualities, individually or collectively, are not considered to be of a high degree.

There is also no evidence that the Precinct's architecture, including its terrace style buildings, demonstrate a high degree of technical or creative achievement.

(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

The Council acknowledges that the Precinct may be valued by its original occupants, public servants and service personnel, for whom it was constructed. The Council also recognises that the Precinct currently provides public housing for some members of the ACT Community, and therefore may be valued by its current tenants as a place which represents home.

The Council interprets a cultural group as a 'group of people within a society with a shared ethnic or cultural background' or 'a group of people connected through the same way of living, which has been transmitted from one generation to another'. The Council therefore does not consider the Precinct's former or current tenants to be a cultural group for the purposes of the criterion.

Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence before the Council to demonstrate that the Precinct is highly valued by the broader ACT Community for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.

The Red Hill Public Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

The Precinct has an association with its architects, Ian Thompson and Denis Wylks of Leith-Bartlett Architects and Engineers, Professor Denis Winston, and the National Capital Development Commission. Whilst Thompson and Wylks, in association with Winston, were responsible for the design of the Precinct, these associations have not been demonstrated to be special above the association any architect or planner would have to any of their designs. There is no evidence suggesting that the Precinct was a seminal piece in their body of works.

Evidence concerning the association with Gough and Margaret Whitlam who lived in the Precinct during the 1970s is not strong enough to suggest that the Precinct was a significant residence of the former Prime Minister.

Conclusion

The provision of public housing is a distinct historical theme within the context of the ACT. Within the wide variety of residential buildings erected in Canberra by the Commonwealth Government in the inter-war and post-war decades, the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct (the Precinct) makes a contribution to an understanding of the Government's development and provision of public housing in response to the need to accommodate the expanding public sector workforce in the 1950s and '60s. Notably it was the first, but not the most significant, of two mixed typology group housing projects.

The Precinct was the first mixed typology group housing project developed by the National Capital Development Commission in the massive and urgent campaign to provide accommodation for a huge influx of public servants 1950s-60s. It was developed in the context of tight planning and construction budgets and time frames designed to meet the prevailing policy of basing rental charges on construction costs.

The Precinct is acknowledged as being atypical in the context of medium-density post-war public housing as it is situated on a uniquely elevated site with views of Capital Hill and demonstrates a degree of design achievement through its combination of site planning, building layout, response to topography, landscaped open spaces and variety of accommodation types.

However, although the Precinct makes a contribution to the understanding of the provision of public housing in the ACT, particularly as an example of the mixed typology group housing approach initiated by the NCDC, it is not as important as the Northbourne Housing Precinct. In addition, in so far as there are other remaining examples of Canberra's unique public housing provision from the 1920s until 1972 which demonstrate the principal characteristics of its evolution, the Precinct is one of several currently extant post war examples of key developments: Griffith Flats, 1948 (not registered), Bega and Allawah Flats, 1951 (not registered), the Northbourne Housing Precinct, 1959-62 (registered) and Kanangra Court 1965 (not registered).

Places may fit into a context of evolving design, development or provision that is represented by many other examples (as in the case of the provision of public housing in the ACT). In applying the criteria the Council has to determine which, if any, of the places in that evolving context merit registration. Nearly every building in the ACT could be said to fit into a story of a particular design or planning context, or historical trend, but this does not mean that every place meets the threshold imposed by the criteria. An entry on the Heritage Register is valid to the extent that it establishes a level of significance that is strong and special that is therefore above the ordinary.

Furthermore, there is no demonstrated evidence that the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct is highly valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT.

This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of the Red Hill Public Housing Precinct and finds that the place does not meet any of the criteria specified in s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

The ACT Heritage Council recognises that the provision of public housing is a distinctive theme in the context of the ACT and would encourage future publications capturing this unique story.

SITE PLAN

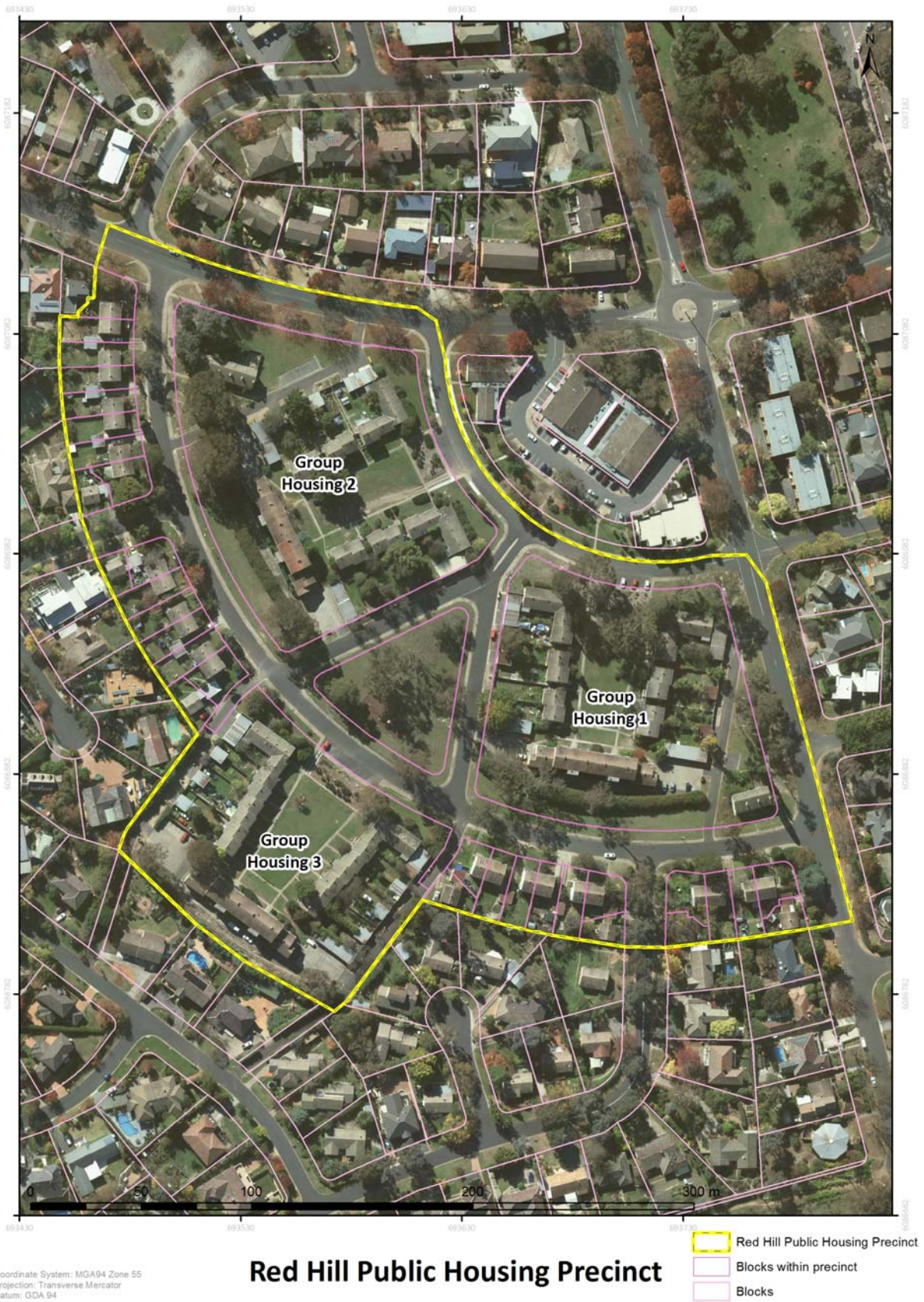


Image 1 Red Hill Public Housing Precinct boundary