

Australian Capital Territory

Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of the Allawah and Bega Courts sample group, Reid) Notice 2015

Notifiable Instrument NI2015–156

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 Allawah and Bega Courts sample group, Reid) 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 Allawah and Bega Courts sample group, Reid 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

ALLAWAH AND BEGA COURTS SAMPLE GROUP

(part Block 1, Section 7, REID)

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 Allawah and Bega Courts sample group, Reid. This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of the Allawah and Bega Courts sample group, Reid and finds that the place does not meet any of the criteria under s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Background

On 15 September 2010, the ACT Heritage Council (the Council) made a decision not to register the Allawah and Bega Courts on the ACT Heritage Register. The Council concluded that Allawah and Bega Courts demonstrate part of the history of the government's provision of public housing in Canberra and, in particular, post World War II medium density housing flats. They were considered to only demonstrate minor characteristics of the Post-War International style of architecture. It also concluded that Allawah and Bega Courts may have some heritage value in relation to their site planning and development philosophy, and a shift towards a more modern approach to town planning in Canberra in the early 1950s. However, it acknowledged that there was insufficient information, at that time, to accurately assess those values. It expected that a heritage assessment that was being commissioned by the then Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services would provide sufficient further information to assess these values. It also considered that any values which may arise in relation to those aspects could be encapsulated through an example which demonstrates the full courtyard and open space planning of Bega Court. The full decision is available at: www.environment.act.gov.au/heritage

In October 2010, the ACT Heritage Council nominated the Allawah and Bega Courts sample group, Reid to the ACT Heritage Register.

In November 2011 Philip Leeson Architects, for the then Community Services Directorate completed its '*Heritage Assessments of Housing ACT Properties*', the document anticipated in Council's decision of 2010. However, this report did not directly assess the Allawah and Bega Courts but provided broader contextual information.

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 Allawah and Bega Courts sample group, 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 Allawah and Bega Courts sample group*, 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 Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid 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 courts make 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 1960s.

The development of the Allawah and Bega Courts, and the Currong flats in the mid 1950s, represented the first major housing project in the Federal Capital since the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) type houses and precinct developments of the late 1920s. The development defined the Federal commitment to the growth and development of Canberra, defined the future growth of the commercial centre of the city, and the importance of public housing within and adjacent to the city. The development was the major achievement of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee (NCPDC), in the period prior to the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC). (Freeman: 2009:4.1)

The scale and density of the Allawah, Bega and Currong flats project, represents a significant departure from the domestic scale of the first flats built in Canberra (many extant but not registered on the ACT Heritage Register) in Griffith (1948), Braddon and Reid (1951) and Ainslie (1952). In another departure it exhibits features of Post-War International Style (1940-60) in enclosed landscape courtyard settings. The increased scale and density of Allawah-Bega, as well as the shift in architectural style, initiated a trajectory evident in subsequent developments completed or initiated by the National Capital Development Commission from 1958. These include Northbourne Flats (1959, not registered) the mixed typology group housing projects of Red Hill Precinct (1961, not registered) and Northbourne Housing Precinct (1959-62, registered). More generally, the continued presence to date of medium density public housing built before and after Bega-Allawah, demonstrates the shift in approach. These examples currently continue as public housing, today provided in accordance with national public housing policies.

On this basis the Allawah and Bega Court sample group is not considered to make an important contribution to the course of the ACT’s public housing history. Places may fit into a context of evolving design, development or provision that is represented by 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 Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid does not meet this criterion.

In the broader context of medium-density public housing constructed in the post-war period, the sample group is not considered to be uncommon, rare or endangered. While Allawah-Bega was a singular housing development of the pre-NCDC period and was the first to use elements of Post – War International style, extant examples of medium density public housing that preceded and followed it demonstrate earlier and later styles, including post-war international, in the post-war period. These include the first groups of flats built in Canberra (many currently extant but not registered on the ACT Heritage Register) in Griffith (1948), Braddon and Reid (1951) and Ainslie (1952); the Northbourne Flats (1959) the mixed typology group housing projects of Red Hill Precinct (1961) and Northbourne Housing Precinct (1959-62, registered) and Kanangra Court (1965)

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

The Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid does not meet this criterion.

Whilst the courts make 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 in the post-war period 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 Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid does not meet this criterion.

Public housing is distinctly and strongly 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 Allawah and Bega Court sample group was selected to be an example of medium-density public housing constructed to house the post-war influx of public servants in the 1950s of which there are comparable extant examples of that precede and follow the scale and style they represent: Griffith Flats (1948, not registered), Braddon and Reid Flats (1951, not registered), Ainslie Flats (1952, not registered), Northbourne Flats (1959, not registered), the ‘group housing’ projects of Red Hill Precinct (1961, not registered) and Northbourne Housing Precinct (1959-62, registered); Stuart Flats (1959, not registered), Gowrie Court (1959, not registered) and Kanangra Court (1965, not registered)

The Council acknowledges that the Courts, represented by the sample group, demonstrate aspects of Post-War International Style (1940-60) as do the Northbourne Flats (1959, not registered). Post-War International style in Canberra medium density public housing is most notably represented in the Northbourne Housing Precinct (1959-62, registered).

The attributes of Post-War International Style demonstrated by the Courts include:

- Cubiform overall shape;
- Expression of structural frame;
- Large sheets of glass;
- Plain, smooth wall surfaces;
- Contrasting texture.

The Courts are an example of medium-density public housing in an enclosed landscape courtyard setting, exhibiting features of the Post-War International style. The integrity of the style has been diminished through the absence of a number of key features. The style, as applied to medium-density public housing, is better represented in the Northbourne Housing Precinct, Dickson and Lyneham.

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

The Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid does not meet this criterion.

The courts exhibit some design qualities in relation to its site planning, building layout and landscaping however there is no evidence that these qualities are highly valued by the ACT community of a cultural group in the ACT.

There is no evidence that the architecture of the courts is of an outstanding design valued by the ACT community of a cultural group in the ACT.

There is no evidence that the architecture of the courts is of an outstanding design valued by the ACT community of a cultural group in the ACT.

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'.

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

The Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid does not meet this criterion.

The courts were designed by the Department of Works, with limited resources, in response to limited budgets and short timeframes. They were conceived upon the conceptual foundations of previous flats designed by the department. They contain ideas and formal devices that reflect some aspects of Post-War International Style thinking, however these are limited. They are incremental and workmanlike, representing a gradual shift away from previous methodologies rather than the adoption of radical modernist design ideals. Additionally, the design of the courts was modified throughout the development design and documentation phases, and the finished buildings were significantly different to those depicted in the preliminary sketch plans. (Leeson, 2010:21-22)

As outlined under Criterion (d) the Courts are an example of medium-density public housing in an enclosed landscape courtyard setting exhibiting features rather than fully demonstrating Post-War International style. The style, as applied to medium-density public housing is better represented in the Northbourne Housing Precinct, Dickson and Lyneham (registered).

While the Courts demonstrate a degree of creative achievement through its combination of site planning, building layout, architecture and landscaped open spaces, these qualities, individually or collectively, are not considered to be of a high degree.

(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 Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid does not meet this criterion.

The Council acknowledges that the courts may be valued by its original occupants, public servants and service personnel, for whom it was constructed. The Council also recognises that the courts currently provide 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 court'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 courts are 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 Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid does not meet this criterion.

The courts have an association with the Department of Works, Canberra and its architects, Richard Ure (Principal Architect), Bruce Litchfield (Supervising Architect) and Ian Slater (Project Architect). The courts also have an association with the National Capital Planning and Development Committee (NCPDC) and John Overall, its Chief Government Architect at the time. Whilst Ure, Litchfield and Slater, in association with the NCPDC and Overall, were responsible for the design of the courts, 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 Courts are a seminal design in their bodies of work.

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 Bega and Allawah Courts Reid m, represented by the sample group, make 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.

The Courts were designed and constructed by the Department of Works when Trevor Gibson was in the position of Town Planner, with the advisory oversight of the National Capital Planning and Development Committee. Notably, they represented the first large scale public housing project in Canberra after the War, planned to address the increasingly urgent need to house public service transferees. They were also the first medium density public housing project in Canberra to use elements of Post-War International style including an enclosed landscape courtyard setting.

However, although the Courts make a contribution to the understanding of the provision of public housing in the ACT in the post-war period, and demonstrate a degree of design achievement, they are not considered to be important as evidence 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. In the post-war period, extant examples of key developments which also show changes in approach over time are Griffith Flats, 1948 (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.

There is no evidence that the Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid is highly valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT.

This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of the Allawah and Bega Court sample group, Reid 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 recognise 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

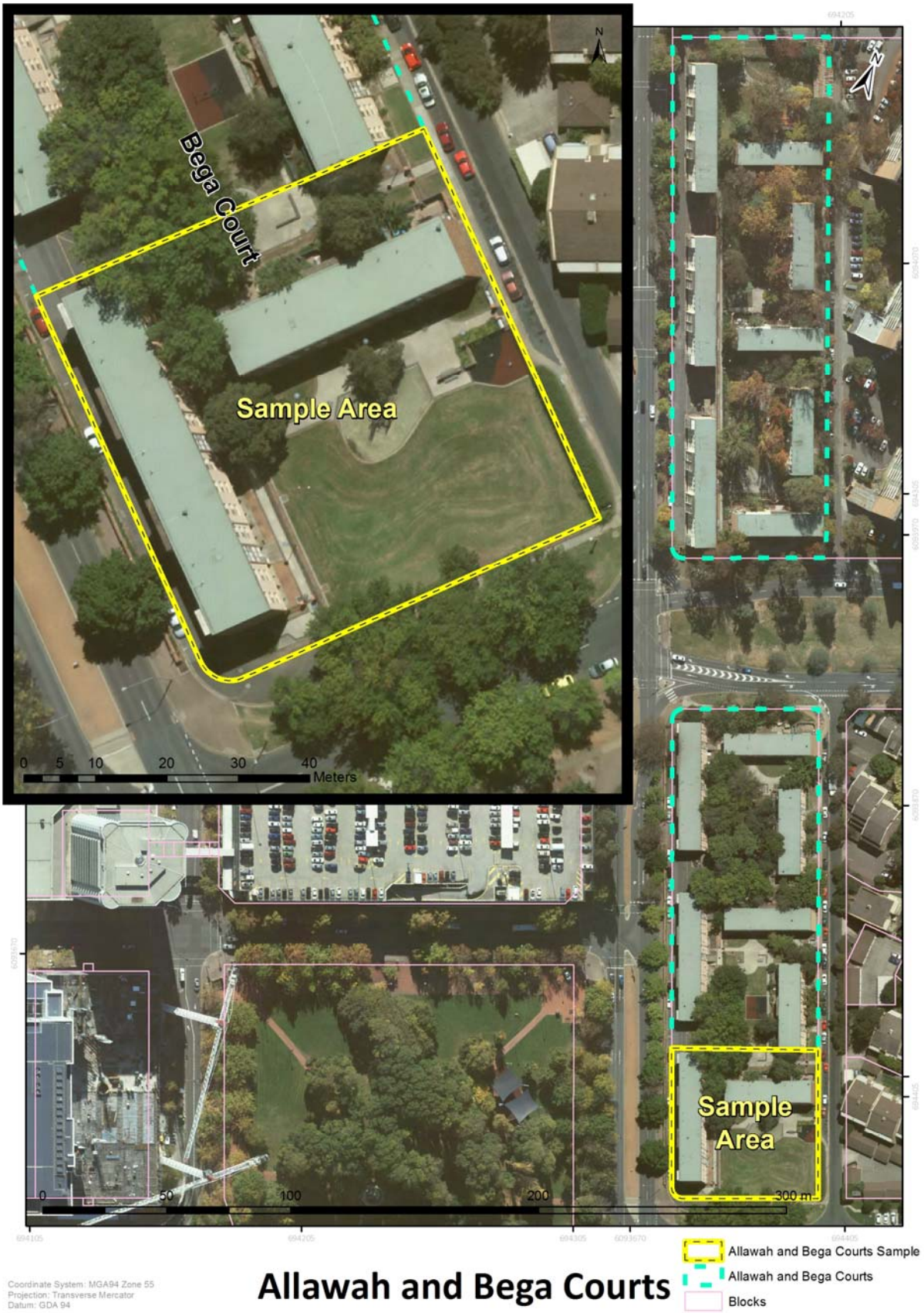


Image 1 Allawah and Bega Court sample group nominated boundary