

Australian Capital Territory

# Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of McGregor Hall, City) Notice 2010 -

Notifiable Instrument NI2010-475

made under the

***Heritage Act 2004* s34 Notice of decision about Provisional Registration**

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**1. Name of instrument**

This instrument is the Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of McGregor Hall, City) Notice 2010 -

**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 McGregor Hall, City to the ACT Heritage Register.

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**Mr Gerhard Zatschler**  
**Secretary**  
**ACT Heritage Council**  
**GPO Box 158**  
**Canberra ACT 2601**

19 August 2010



## ACT Heritage Council

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### STATEMENT OF REASONS

#### **DECISION REGARDING THE INCLUSION OF MCGREGOR HALL, CIVIC, (BLOCK 6, SECTION 21, CITY) IN THE ACT HERITAGE REGISTER**

##### **Background**

A nomination for McGregor Hall, City was made on Wednesday 14 July 2010.

Members of the Heritage Council visited McGregor Hall, City in July 2010 to gain a better understanding of its physical fabric and condition.

At meeting #33 on 19 August 2010 the ACT Heritage Council endorsed a Statement of Reasons which does not find McGregor Hall, City eligible for provisional listing.

Detailed reasoning of why this place does not meet the threshold for listing under the heritage significance criteria at Section 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004* is included under 'Assessment'.

##### **History**

###### Canberra Worker's Hostels

McGregor Hall was constructed as a fibro clad and cement tiled building as part of the Turner Workmen's Hostel post World War II in response to the government's extensive building program for the nation's capital.

The Minister for the Interior, Mr H.V. Johnson announced on Monday 29 November 1948 that £7 million would be spent over the next few years for a development program across Canberra, as the greatest building boom in the nation's capital since 1925-27 (*The Canberra Times*, Tuesday 30 November 1948:1).

Hostels, hotels and guest houses have formed a crucial element of Canberra's history, representing the itinerant population and the importance of the city's building and construction industry (Foskett, 2010:3).

There were three phases to Canberra's hostel development:

- construction camps for the initial construction phase of the city (1912-1927);
- more substantial accommodation for those relocating permanently to Canberra (1927-1930); and
- Post World War II, to meet an accommodation crisis in Canberra arising from the much needed influx of public servants and building workers (late 1940s-1952) (Foskett, 2010: 10).

The Turner Workmen's Hostel falls into this third and final phase of hostel accommodation in Canberra.

This phase includes a number of hostels and guest houses which were constructed as permanent accommodation for middle to upper class families and public servants, including:

- Substantial upgrades to the already established Hotel Acton (middle-upper class accommodation)
- Lawley House (middle-upper class accommodation)
- Havelock House (middle-upper class accommodation)
- Mulwala House (middle class accommodation)
- Reid House (middle class accommodation)
- Narellan House (middle class accommodation)

In addition, seven workers hostels were constructed in the third phase, as temporary structures to provide accommodation for mostly single men coming to Canberra from elsewhere in Australia and from overseas to work on the city's construction and building sites. The seven workers hostels were:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Dates of occupation</b>	<b>Numbers accommodated</b>	<b>Current condition</b>
Eastlake	Immediate post WWII-1952	unknown	No remains
Riverside	Immediate post WWII-1952	unknown	No remains
Capital Hill	1952-1966	500	No remains
Hillside	1952-1968	450	No remains
Ainslie	1950-1955	275 guests, 50 staff	Possibly some shed remains, but no accommodation <sup>1</sup>
Turner	1949-1952	Approx. 345	Block G remains
Fairbairn	1948-1951	120	No remains

(Foskett, 2010: 10).

These hostels were built quickly and cheaply. By the early 1950s there were 2500 men living in these hostels across Canberra.

The men lived in rooms measuring 9x9 feet which were unheated and unlined, with common ablution blocks and mess halls (Foskett, 2010).

By early 1952, for reasons unknown, there was an over-supply of hostel accommodation for single men in Canberra. As a result, Fairbairn, Eastlake and Riverside were closed (Foskett, 2010: 11).

By the end of 1952, Turner Hostel was also closed.

### Turner Hostel

The Turner Hostel comprised six main Blocks (A-F), with an additional two, smaller ancillary buildings to the north. McGregor Hall was one of these buildings (Block G).

<sup>1</sup> Pers. Comm. Terri Stiller, Ainslie Village Building Manager, Havelock Housing Association, 3 August 2010

In June 1947, two additional sites were required for the immediate establishment of workmen's hostels in Canberra (DHCS file PC 32/7/4, correspondence from the Surveyor-General and Chief Property Officer to the Assistant Secretary, Civic Administration).

It was determined that a sufficient number of hostels had already been constructed on the south side, and that additional hostels on the northern side would support current work in Turner, Lyneham and O'Connor.

In deciding the location of the hostels, consideration was given to any likely impact on development over the next ten years (DHCS file PC 32/7/4, Mr F.M. Johnston, the Surveyor General and Chief Property Officer 5/3/48). The National Capital Planning and Development Committee (NCPDC) noted that the proposed hostels for Turner and Reid 'would be removed within a reasonable period in view of the fact that both areas would undoubtedly be required for permanent development after a few years' (DHCS file PC 32/7/4, extract of minutes of the 69<sup>th</sup> meeting held in Canberra on Thursday and Friday, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1948).

Like all construction accommodation, the Turner Hostel was intended as a temporary structure, with *Canberra Times* articles stating that the hostel might remain for 15 years (*The Canberra Times*, Friday 19 November 1948).

In August 1948 plans for the Turner Hostel were presented to the NCPDC, for a scheme which 'provided for a more compact building than had previously been designed for such hostels' (DHCS file PC 32/7/4, Extract of Minutes of the 70<sup>th</sup> meeting held in Canberra on Thursday and Friday, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1948).

In September 1948 the NCPDC 'realised that the (Turner) site was close to the City but that it would not be desirable for the type of buildings proposed to remain for a long period in such locality as the site would, sooner or later, be required for permanent development. It felt, however, that for a number of years, and pending the provision of the scheme for permanent general hostels to accommodate both workmen and other members of the community, it would not cause any serious embarrassment to allocate the site mentioned for the immediate purpose of a workmen's hostel on a temporary basis' (DHCS file PC 32/7/4, Memorandum 8<sup>th</sup> September 1948, from C. S. Daley Assistant Secretary (Civic Administration) to the Secretary).

Nevertheless, Block G of the Turner Hostel remained in place for the next 60 years.

From July-September 1948 a number of community protests occurred against the proposed site in Turner. The Turner Progress Association, in a letter to the Minister for the Interior, dated 29 October 1948, stated:

*'Hostels for 'men only' or 'women only' have proved to be not in the best interests of a community. The police history of Eastlake and similar hostels is not good. When adult men and women are segregated, the psychological effect upon them is bad. They tend to become morbid and to suffer a sense of social frustration to which the weaker personalities succumb and fall prey to unsocial*

*desires and actions. These people then become a menace to the community in which they live. These mentally diseased persons tend to infect their mentally healthy neighbours with their unsocial tendencies, and what is more serious, to impose their unsocial ways upon them'* (DHCS file PC 32/7/4).

Among the concerns of residents was also that the site 'is too close to the High School, and an area retained for private building... One home owner said he had spent more than £3,000 on his dwelling and now his wife was frightened to stay in the house on her own... Another claimed he would not have erected his home in Turner had he known a temporary building was to be erected. 'Temporary buildings have a habit of lasting longer than 25 years in Canberra' he said' (*The Canberra Times*, Thursday 29 July 1948:5).

The Canberra Chamber of Commerce also supported the residents' protests, stating that 'such a building on this site is a violation of the rights of citizens and property owners' (*The Canberra Times*, Tuesday 17 August 1948).

Despite these protests, work on the Turner Hostel began early in 1949. At this time, in order to save money, plans for the Hostel were changed from a steel frame to timber structures. The Hostel was to cost £100,000 and was reported in *The Canberra Times* as being able to house 300 workers (*The Canberra Times*, Friday 21 January 1949:2).

On Saturday 15 April 1950 *The Canberra Times* reported that there were approximately 144 guests in residence at the Turner Works Hostel, and that the total capacity would be 280.

In early 1952 the Turner Hostel was closed, whether due to an oversupply of government hostels in Canberra, or to losses in running the hostels, with four of the seven hostels closed by the end of that year.

*The Canberra Times* of Thursday 22 May 1952 reported an economic loss on workmen's hostel accommodation of £94,987 for the year ended 30 June 1951. This was an increased loss of £4,579 from the previous year. The net loss on the Turner Hostel alone was £10,484 for the year ended 30 June 1951.

*The Canberra Times* (Wednesday 22 April 1953: 3) reported that 'Turner Hostel was taken over by the Department of the Interior on Friday after the Department of Works closed it, because of insufficient demand by workers for accommodation'.

After the Turner Hostel was closed the hostel's northern A, B and C blocks were used for a variety of purposes including office space for the Bureau of Mineral Resources (Foskett, 2010). The Canberra College (later the Australian National University) acquired and used the southern blocks D, E and F. These blocks were also used by community and conservation groups known as the ROCKS (residents of Childers and Kingsley Streets). The hostel's central dining and recreation hall became the Childer's Street Theatre (Foskett, 2010).

When the Bureau of Mineral Resources moved to its new buildings in 1965 the hostel accommodation was used by the Dept of Education and Sciences until the late 1960s.

From 1978-1983 these three northern halls (A-C) were used by various community groups including the Conservation Council and ANU Food Co-op (information supplied by nominator).

The hostel's three northern blocks (A-C) were demolished sometime between 1981-1983. By 1984 this site was used as carparking. The recreation hall north of Block G was demolished at the same time (information obtained from aerial imagery supplied by ACTPLA).

In the early 2000s, the hostel site became part of the City West development, following an agreement between the ANU and the ACT Government. In 2005 the southern blocks were demolished. All that remained were a few nearby buildings including that which has become known as McGregor Hall (Foskett, 2010). The other buildings except for McGregor Hall have since also been demolished.

### Block G (McGregor Hall)

The precise history of Block G (which has later become known as McGregor Hall) is unknown. This Block did not form part of the initial planning for the Turner Workmen's Hostel.

Accommodation at Turner Hostel was originally intended to be provided for:

*'324 persons, inclusive of hostel domestic staff and in addition for the Hotel Manager and Canteen Officer. Guest accommodation is in single rooms arranged in pavilions and a principal recreation room and Billiard Room in the central Block'* (DHCS file PC 32/7/4, memorandum from W.E Potts Director of Works, ACT to Department of Works and Housing, Canberra ACT 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1948).

The original drawings, numbered 17931 to 17933, show six blocks (A-F) arranged symmetrically around a central dining and activity area. Blocks A, B and C were to the north and Blocks D, E and F to the south.

Each of the Blocks A-F was comprised of three wings, with 18 beds in each wing, therefore accommodating 54 men per Block, creating a total of 324 for the Hostel.

Block G (McGregor Hall) does not feature on these early plans. It is smaller than the other six Blocks (roughly 2/3 the size), comprised of two wings only, likely due to the available land space, and was located further north of Blocks A, B and C. It aligns with the eastern row of the other six Blocks but, because of the diagonal intersect of Barry Drive with the land title, Block G is much shorter in length at its western end than the other Blocks.

Block G is likely to have accommodated an additional 36 men across the two wings, thereby bringing the total number of rooms at the Turner Hostel to 360.

It is unclear exactly when planning for Block G occurred. There are no articles in *The Canberra Times*, nor any records held in the DHCS files relating to the early planning and construction of Block G.

The Turner Hostel was constructed in 1949. Aerial imagery dating from 1950 shows that Block G had been constructed by this time. It may have been constructed at the same time as Blocks A-F.

Classified advertisements in *The Canberra Times* from late 1949 provide contact details for men living at the Turner Hostel. Block and room numbers are often given in lieu of a telephone number. In 1951, advertisements were placed by men giving contact details as Block G, Turner Hostel.

*'Tarpaulin, in perfect condition, ideal for motor car covering, tent, 12x10, new. H. Smith, Turner Hostel, G19'* (classified advertisement in *The Canberra Times*, Thursday 1 March 1951:5).

*'Auto cycle or 125 cc motor bike, and boy's 26 ins. Wheel bicycle. Apply: Room G3. Turner Hostel'* (classified advertisement in *The Canberra Times*, Wednesday 6 June 1951:5).

An additional ancillary building was constructed to the north of Block G. It is unclear whether this building was used for accommodation, though it is thought that it was used for recreation purposes. This building was not constructed at the same time as Blocks A-F. It does not appear in the 1950 aerial imagery but is shown in a 1953 image.

Following the closure of the Hostel in 1952, it is unclear what use was given to Block G. However, it is likely that it was used by the Bureau of Mineral Resources, along with Blocks A-C.

In 1974, records on DHCS file state that with *'Block G, Childers Street Offices falling vacant'*, approval was given for the allocation of the western half of this block to permit use by the Pensioners Social and Recreation Club Inc. (DHCS file TL74/200). The reference to Block G as part of the Childers Street Offices implies an association with the other Childers Street Offices, used by the Bureau.

The Pensioner's Social and Recreation Club occupied the building on an initial four year lease from 1974 (DHCS file TL 74/200).

The name 'McGregor Hall' was formally notified in May 1980 after past club president, Gordon McGregor. The building's naming coincided with the opening of a \$60,000 extension to the eastern end (Foskett, 2010).

This extension included the metal deck roof to provide a cathedral type raised ceiling had over the main activity/restaurant room (DHCS file TL 74/200).

In 1984 there was much discussion and debate about the ongoing future use of Blocks D, E, F and G and the hall as continuing community space (DHCS file TL 74/200).

The Pensioner's Club continued to use the hall (Block G) until they relocated to Gungahlin in 2003.

Since this time, the hall has been leased to Gaby's Dance Studio by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. The extended part of the building is particularly favoured by a number of community groups for its high quality dance floor. In addition, the hall's central location and minimal hiring fees are convenient for many people.

#### Comparative assessment

<b>Name</b>	<b>Dates of workers hostel occupation</b>	<b>Numbers accommodated</b>	<b>Current condition</b>
Eastlake	Immediate post WWII-1952	unknown	No remains
Riverside	Immediate post WWII-1952	unknown	No remains
Capital Hill	1952-1966	500	No remains
Hillside	1952-1968	450	No remains
Ainslie	1950-1955	275 guests, 50 staff	Possibly some shed remains, but no accommodation <sup>2</sup>
Turner	1949-1952	Approx. 345	Block G remains
Fairbairn	1948-1951	120	No remains

(Foskett, 2010: 10).

Of the seven post World War II workmen's hostels, Turner and Fairbairn Hostels had the shortest periods of occupation.

The Turner Hostel was constructed in the middle of this third phase of workers hostel development, with three hostels being established in this phase prior to Turner, and three after.

The number of men the hostel could accommodate was average for hostels of this period, with some hostels of this time catering for greater numbers, and other hostels catering for less.

The Turner Hostel is the only one of the workers hostels of this period with any physical fabric remaining.

It is thought that a shed might remain at Ainslie Village from the former Ainslie Hostel. However, there are no remains from the hostel accommodation (Pers. Comm., T. Stiller, Property Manager Ainslie Village, Havelock Housing Association, 3 August 2010).

Some of the more substantial hostels constructed during this time, for middle-upper class families remain, including:

- Hotel Acton;
- Havelock House;
- Lawley House; and

<sup>2</sup> Pers. Comm. Terri Stiller, Ainslie Village Building Manager, Havelock Housing Association, 3 August 2010



- Reid House.

The Turner Hostel is the last surviving type of Post World War II workmen's hostels in Canberra. These buildings were constructed as temporary structures to provide short term accommodation for an influx of construction workers and tradesmen to support the government's post World War II building program for the city.

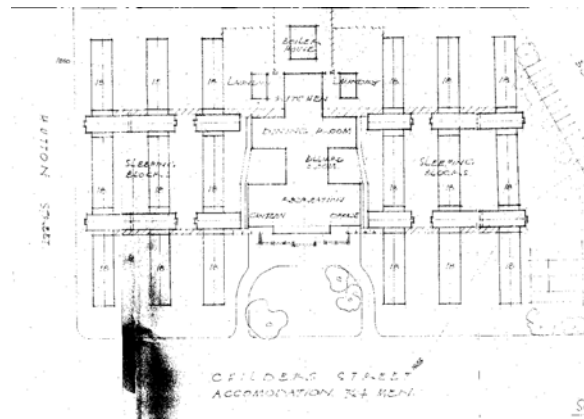
Physical description

The building retains some of its original detail, particularly in its alignment of timber-framed windows and doors to the western end of the building. This alignment has an ability to portray the size and dimensions of the single men's quarters. Partitions have been removed.

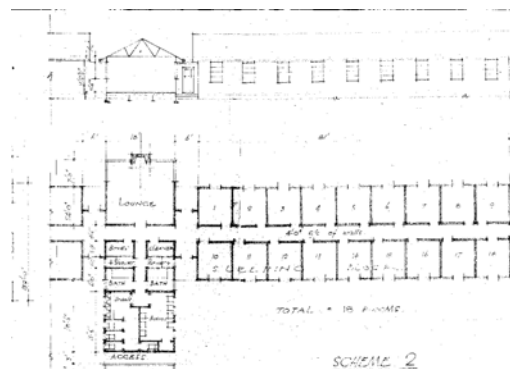
Other original elements which remain include a narrow interior hallway, central gable, fibro clad sheeting to the exterior façade and cement tile roofing.

A large extension has been made to the south-eastern end of the building to accommodate a new hall. Many alterations and additions have been made internally.

Images:



1948 Drawing no. 17931



1948 Drawing no. 17932



1958 aerial imagery with Turner Hostel to the centre right.  
NCDC photo library ca 3/7/58

### References

Eric Martin and Associates, 2002, *City West Masterplan Heritage Study*, report prepared for Planning and Land Management.

Foskett, A., 1998, 'Canberra's Hostels, Hotels and Guest Houses – A Part of our Heritage', report prepared under the ACT Heritage Grants Program.

Foskett, A., 2010, *The Memories Linger On*, Alan Foskett, Canberra.

Information provided by nominator, Wednesday 14 July 2010, Chief Minister's Department (CMD) file number 10/12427.

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Service (DHCS) file number PC32/7/4 – Hostels for Artisans and other Workers, Turner and Reid

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Service (DHCS) file number TL 74/200 – Canberra Pensioners Social and Recreational Club Inc Use of Block G Childers Street, Civic.

*The Canberra Times*

### **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 McGregor Hall, City the Council considered:

- The original nomination form provided by the nominator and accompanying supporting information;
- The publications and material identified under the heading 'References', above;
- Aerial photography and historical images; and
- The physical evidence and surrounding context as ascertained from an onsite visit in July 2010.

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

**Criterion (a) *it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches***

*The nominator made no claim against this criterion.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion.

**Criterion (b) *it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group***

*The nominator claims that the place meets this criterion.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

McGregor Hall is constructed as a cheap fibro clad, cement tiled temporary building. The use of cheap building materials reflects the frugality of post World War II construction, and the intended nature of the building as a temporary structure. It has undergone significant extensions to its eastern end which compromise the symmetry of the building.

Its design and aesthetic qualities are appropriate to the original purpose of the building, and relate to its use as a workmen's hostel. These qualities are not considered to be outstanding.

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion.

**Criterion (c) *it is important as evidence of a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function that is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest***

*The nominator claims the place meets this criterion to a high degree.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

McGregor Hall forms part of the history of Canberra's hostel life, post World War II workmen's hostel accommodation in Canberra, and contributes to the story of the government building program of that time.

While this history is of significance to the ACT, McGregor Hall is not considered to be 'important as evidence' of this function as it has undergone alterations and additions to an extent that no one hostel room remains. These changes compromise the ability of the remnant building to demonstrate its design function as a construction worker's hostel.

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion.

**Criterion (d) *it is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations***

*The nominator claims the place meets this criterion to a high degree.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

There is no evidence to suggest that the early use of McGregor Hall is valued by the community or a cultural group, including by those who may have occupied this place between 1949 and 1952.

The current community use of McGregor Hall and the value placed on the hall by those who use it is acknowledged. However, without any additional information to provide evidence of social values for the place itself, it is believed that the value placed on the hall is for the use and function which the hall provides, rather than an attachment to the place itself and its historic or heritage fabric.

It is likely that if the use and function of the hall were suitably transferred to another place, there would be no loss of value by the community for the actual hall itself.

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion.

**Criterion (e) *it is significant to the ACT because of its importance as part of local Aboriginal tradition***

*The nominator made no claim against this criterion.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

This criterion is not applicable.

**Criterion (f) *it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness***

*The nominator claims the place meets this criterion to a high level.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

At the time of its construction, McGregor Hall was one of many similar workers hostels in Canberra. It is now the last remnant of the post World War II workmen's hostels in Canberra.

Alterations and extensions to the building make it difficult to consider this building as an example of its kind (i.e. – a post World War II worker's hostel).

While the western exterior of the building has some ability to demonstrate the original façade as a worker's hostel, the eastern end and the interior have been substantially modified.

While it is acknowledged that McGregor Hall (Block G) is the last remaining extant of post World War II workers hostels, the building's fabric and lack of integrity do not sufficiently demonstrate this type of place to warrant listing under this criterion.

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion.

**Criterion (g) *it is a notable example of a kind of place or object and demonstrates the main characteristics of that kind.***

*The nominator claims the place meets this criterion to a high level.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

McGregor Hall is not considered to be a notable example of a worker's hostel, nor to demonstrate the main characteristics of this type of place.

McGregor Hall was constructed as Block G of the Turner Worker's Hostel. McGregor Hall demonstrates some elements of the post World War II worker's hostels in Canberra (sleeping components).

Interior and exterior extensions and alterations limit the ability of the building to demonstrate this type of place.

The building is a remnant example of only one component of the post World War II workers hostels. Other components which would be required to demonstrate this kind of place include kitchen, mess hall, laundry and recreation spaces.

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion.

***Criterion (h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history***

*The nominator claims the place meets this criterion to a high degree.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

McGregor Hall has an association with the development of government construction post World War II, and the cultural phase of hostel life in Canberra including, in particular, post World War II workers hostels. It also has an association with the group of people (workers) who were accommodated in workers hostels in Canberra at this time.

However, none of these associations are considered to be strong or special.

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion

***Criterion (i) it is significant for understanding the evolution of natural landscapes, including significant geological features, landforms, biota or natural processes***

*The nominator made no claim against this criterion.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

This criterion is not applicable.

***Criterion (j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site***

*The nominator claims the place meets this criterion.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

McGregor Hall is not considered to be a research or teaching site. Information pertaining to the history of this place and its context within Canberra's history is likely to be ascertained more readily from documentation and written material than from the site itself.

The site itself is unlikely to provide information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the cultural history of the ACT. It has been compromised by extensions and alterations.

The McGregor Hall does not meet this criterion.

***Criterion (k) for a place—it exhibits unusual richness, diversity or significant transitions of flora, fauna or natural landscapes and their elements***

*The nominator made no claim against this criterion.*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

This criterion is not applicable.

**Criterion (I) for a place—it is a significant ecological community, habitat or locality for any of the following:**

*(i) the life cycle of native species;*

*(ii) rare, threatened or uncommon species;*

*(iii) species at the limits of their natural range;*

*(iv) distinct occurrences of species*

The nominator made no claim against this criterion.

*Heritage Council assessment:*

This criterion is not applicable.

## **Conclusion**

While McGregor Hall, City is acknowledged as forming part of the history of the government's program of construction in Canberra, hostel life and, in particular, post World War II workers hostels, the place does not meet any of the criteria of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

It was occupied for only a very short period of time; its design and ability to demonstrate the post World War II worker's hostels in Canberra has been compromised by extensions and alterations, and it was an ancillary building within the broader context of the Turner Workmen's Hostel.

The ACT Heritage Council finds that McGregor Hall, City is of insufficient heritage value to warrant provisional registration in the ACT Heritage Register.

**Mr Gerhard Zatschler (Secretary)**  
**ACT Heritage Council**

19 August 2010