

Australian Capital Territory

# Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of McKinlay Street Precinct, Narrabundah) Notice 2011

Notifiable Instrument NI2011–100

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 McKinlay Street, Narrabundah) Notice 2011

**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 McKinlay Street Precinct, Narrabundah to the ACT Heritage Register.

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

10 March 2011



ACT Heritage Council

## STATEMENT OF REASONS

### **DECISION REGARDING THE INCLUSION OF McKINLAY STREET HOUSING PRECINCT, NARRABUNDAH (Blocks 5-16 Section 46, Blocks 1-13 Section 47, Blocks 12-26 Section 50, Blocks 1-6 Section 48, and Blocks 1-8 Section 49, Narrabundah) IN THE ACT HERITAGE REGISTER**

#### **Background**

A nomination for the McKinlay Street Precinct, Narrabundah was made in 1998.

At Council meeting HCM#36 on 10 March 2011 the ACT Heritage Council endorsed a Statement of Reasons which does not find the McKinlay Street Housing Precinct, Narrabundah eligible for provisional registration.

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

#### **History**

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct was developed by the government as public housing in the 1940s to provide accommodation to meet a desperate need for more housing at this time. It is thought that the precinct may have been built for returned servicemen at this time, although these claims are unsubstantiated. The precinct is of a homogenous and austere nature, typical of Post World War II development.

#### Public housing in Canberra and the city's early growth and development

Public housing forms a crucial element in Canberra's history. Unlike other cities, where the main focus of public housing is to provide a minimum level of accommodation for those who cannot afford to provide it for themselves, in Canberra, a large program of public housing established from 1927 has provided housing for all classes of society. It was not until 1972 that the number of privately built dwellings surpassed the number built by government (Wright, 2000:vi).

The Government provided housing in all manner of forms: hostels, hotels, detached residences, and flats.

Well before Parliament's first sitting in Canberra in 1925, the Federal Government knew that it would need to provide housing for those relocating to the nation's capital.

In 1912 the Minister for Home and Territories stated that 'it appears that the Government must, therefore, be responsible for housing its officials who are transferred from Melbourne, and who are

## Statement of Reasons

on a different footing from the commercial population, and will suffer some hardship and inconvenience on their compulsory transfer to the seat of government' (Wright, 2000: 6).

The Federal Capital Commission (FCC) was established in 1925 and set about providing housing for the expected influx of construction workers and public servants. In the year to 30 June 1927 the FCC approved construction of 545 Government houses. A year later 646 public servants had been transferred to Canberra with office and residential accommodation provided. This included houses, hotel and hostel accommodation (Wright, 2000: 17).

The Depression was accompanied by a downturn in the transfer program and with the change of Government in 1930, the FCC was wound up and Canberra reverted to divided departmental control (advised by a partly elected ACT Advisory Council), a state of affairs that was to continue until 1958.

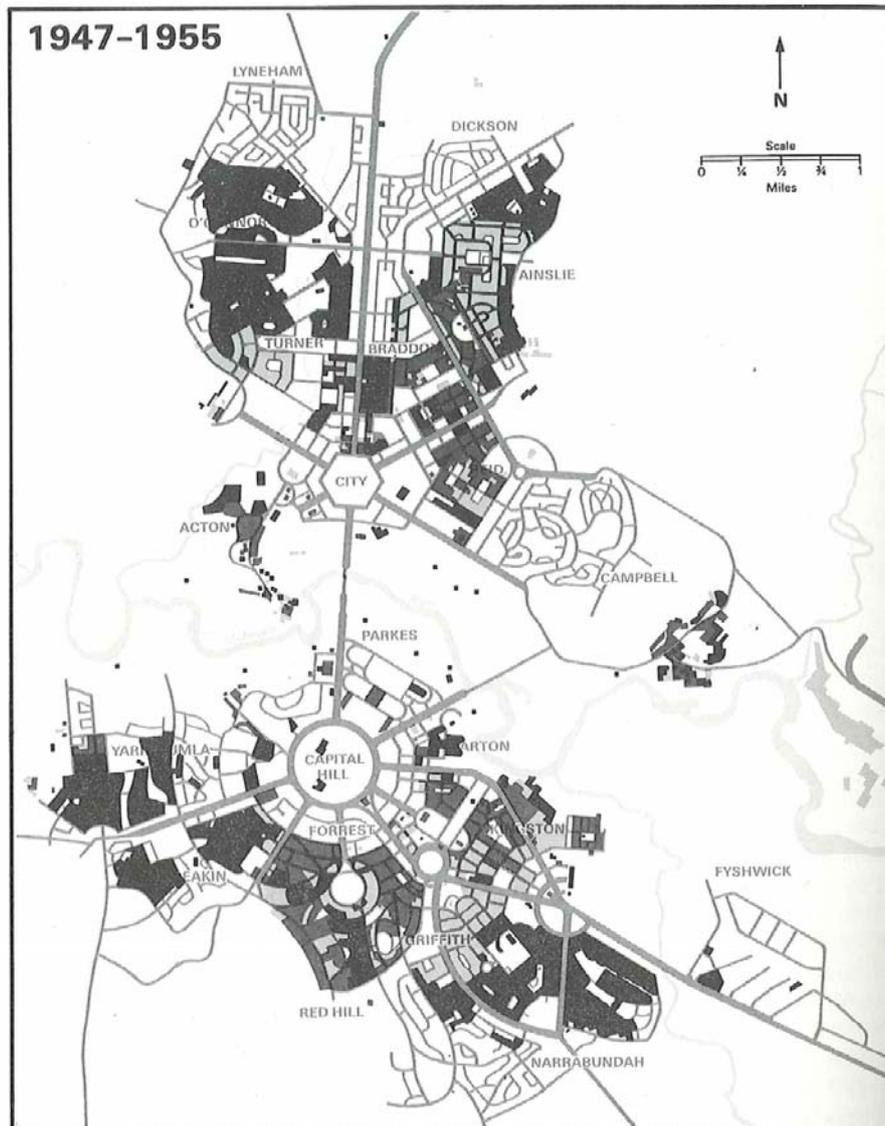
By the late 1930s the piecemeal approach to development by the Department of Interior and other responsible agencies was having significant adverse impacts. In February 1939, there were 400 people on the waiting list for government housing in Canberra. Administration was not coping with Canberra's rate of growth (Wright, 2000: 28).

During World War II construction of Government houses in Canberra was halted leaving Canberra with an estimated shortage of 500 houses through the latter part of the war.

Putting still further pressure on the housing situation, Cabinet decided in 1948 to recommence the program of transferring the public service from Melbourne to Canberra (Wright, 2000: 29).

On 11 March 1947, Cabinet approved a 5-7 year construction program to build 3,500 houses in Canberra. Of these, the government had built 2,124 houses in the first five years (Wright, 2000: 28). Blocks of flats started to find favour at this time.

By the mid 1960s the population of Canberra had reached 80,000. A record 5,374 people were registered on the waiting list for government housing and the waiting time was three years. The NCDC's solution was detached family houses (almost all brick-veneer) in virtually every new suburb, medium-density developments, large flat developments, and hostels. While the NCDC built upwards of 800 family houses a year in greenfields development at the expanding edge of Canberra, the number of government flats grew to 2,659 by 1972 (Wright, 2000: 66).



This map shows a considerable increase in built-up areas with new buildings in black extending the grey areas built earlier. Turner and Narrabundah had appeared but the city was still confined to its 1927 boundaries. The map is based on the statutory plan as amended in March 1956

Source: Gibbney, 1988: 250.

### The planning and development of McKinlay Street, Narrabundah

Walter Burley Griffin's 1918 plan for Canberra shows a street configuration very similar to that which was eventually built in the late 1940s as McKinlay Street. Much of Griffin's detailed planning did not eventuate beyond the amended designs of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) in the 1920s and the Department of the Interior in the 1940s.

The only departures from Griffin's 1918 plan evident in today's street layout of McKinlay Street are the omission of service lanes running north-south and parallel to McKinlay Street, and the introduction of a 'cul de sac' end to McKinlay Street.

Oral history accounts of the early days of McKinlay Street, and Narrabundah, illustrate the sense of camaraderie and community within the street following World War II. Mr Coghill of 34 McKinlay Street remembered that:

## Statement of Reasons

*..' All houses in McKinlay Street were built as Government housing stock, and were completed by 1948. Both sides of the northernmost block were the first houses completed in 1946 and were of superior quality to those that were to follow. The finishes were better, with maple architraves. The houses that now have concrete roof tiles originally had sheets of Wunderlich metal, in a metal 'tiles' pattern'.*

The 1940s houses here were built of solid materials. Mr Ron Hourigan remembered of the house at number 32 McKinlay Street:

*....'The floors throughout most of the houses were radiata pine, with cement floors to the laundry and bathroom. Heating was supplied in the lounge room by an open fireplace, which had a decorative brick surround. A chip heater supplied the bathroom with hot water, and a copper and stick dealt with the laundry. Free radiata pine off-cuts were collected from the Causeway timber mills. In the lounge room was an alcove, which in the odd-numbered houses opposite were filled in with book shelves; however the shelves were omitted in the later buildings and the Hourigans filled in the space with an ice chest'.*

The later stage of the McKinlay Street development adopted a more confined layout, with smaller block sizes and narrower frontages. Many of the houses on these allotments were placed along—rather than across the block—because there simply was not enough space to adopt the earlier 1946 configuration.

## References

Gibbney, J., 1988, *Canberra 1913-1953*, AGPS Press, Canberra.

Wright, Bruce 2000 *Cornerstone of the Capital – A History of Public Housing in Canberra*, ACT Housing, Canberra.

Oral history respondents Mr & Mrs B Coghill, and Ron & Holly Hourigan, Narrabundah (2005).

## **Physical Description**

McKinlay Street is located in Narrabundah, and runs approximately north-south between McMillan Crescent to the North and McIntyre Street to the South. The street is roughly aligned with Mount Ainslie to the North, and there are views along this axis to Mount Ainslie.

The original housing stock of the street belongs predominantly to the late 1940s. The houses generally have their origin in the Department of Works/Department of the Interior period, which followed immediately after World War II.

The earliest dwellings were constructed in the northern sections, with later dwellings to the south. Original housing has a general austerity in appearance. These were generally of simple plan configuration with break-front gables to the street frontage.

The earlier section of the precinct housing (to the north), originally consisted of brick cottages with 'break-front' gables, and prominently expressed chimneys, with simple, well-proportioned windows set symmetrically within the facades. These earlier cottages were placed 'across' the comparatively

## Statement of Reasons

wider street frontage, and were subtly screened by both public and private plantings. This section has a mature and leafy appearance.

The later sections of the precinct housing (to the centre and south), consist of brick cottages with simple gable roofs, prominently expressed chimneys, and simple, well-proportioned windows set symmetrically within the facades. These later cottages were generally placed 'down' the allotment because of the narrower allotment size. They were also less adequately screened by both public and private plantings. These sections have a barer and less leafy appearance.

Many of the original street trees remain intact, and new plantings have been chosen in order to continue the regular and symmetrical plantings of the 1940s. The street trees to the western side of the street have prospered. The street trees are generally *Celtus australis* [nettle trees], now regarded as environmental weeds, and these are being replaced by Chinese elms.

McKinlay Street presents a flat terrain, undeviating straightness, long axial views from the street, and a simple character evident in the remaining original 1940s brick dwellings.

However, many of the houses in McKinlay Street have been altered and extended over time, including a number of new homes within the precinct, diminishing the homogeneity and consistency of the streetscape and compromising its integrity.

Where once the precinct would have presented as a homogenous character of modest red brick dwellings, today it is 'interrupted' by a wide range of materials, styles and designs which have been introduced over time. The streetscape now is of varied character, rather than the original row of 1940s dwellings.



Images taken 23 September 2010

## Statement of Reasons

### 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 McKinlay Street Housing Precinct, Narrabundah, the Council considered:

- The material identified under the heading 'References', above; and
- The physical evidence including streetscape setting.

**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***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct was constructed by the Government Post-World War II to meet an urgent need for housing for the growing population. The simple plan residences built in McKinlay Street are reflective of the period of austerity following World War II and do not show a high degree of technical or creative achievement in the provision of this accommodation.

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

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

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct is characterised by an austere and simple architectural style with brick façade and medium-pitched terracotta tiled roofs to the original 1940s dwellings. The relative consistency in original design has been modified over time by a series of extensions and alterations to many homes.

While a pleasant suburban street, the McKinlay Street Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion as there is nothing about the streetscape or precinct character in its modified form which is outstanding in design or aesthetic qualities.

**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 practiced, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct is evidence of the government's response to a housing shortage in the nation's capital Post-World War II. The history of public housing in the ACT is a distinctive custom which sets Canberra apart from other capital cities in other Australian states and territories, as Canberra is rare in the extent of government housing provided during the city's early history through to the 1980s.

After World War II, Canberra expanded dramatically. As a result, extensive government housing was constructed in Narrabundah, Ainslie, Turner, O'Conner, Griffith and Yarralumla. The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct forms a part of this story, but is not considered to be 'important as evidence'.

## Statement of Reasons

The integrity of the precinct has been compromised by additions and alterations over time, such that it no longer presents as a consistent streetscape evident and reminiscent of the 1940s.

Much of the housing constructed at this time was intended to meet shortages in accommodation. The McKinlay Street precinct is 'typical' rather than 'important' as evidence of this period.

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct 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***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

No information has been provided to suggest that the McKinlay Street Housing Precinct is highly valued by the community or a cultural group.

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct cannot be assessed in relation to this criterion.

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

*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***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct is but one of many government residential housing areas constructed Post-World War II to meet housing shortages in the nation's capital. Other detached residential developments include homes in Narrabundah, Ainslie, Turner, O'Connor, Griffith and Yarralumla.

The integrity of the McKinlay Street Housing Precinct has been compromised by more recent development such that the precinct and streetscape can not be considered rare or unique in its comparative intactness.

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct 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.***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct is of the kind of place of Post-World War II detached public housing in the ACT. As with many precincts of this kind, the McKinlay Street Precinct is a simple and understated group of buildings, set-back from the street.

## Statement of Reasons

However, the precinct in its modified form is not a ‘notable example’ of this kind of place due largely to compromises to the integrity and intactness of the precinct.

The integrity of the precinct has been compromised in recent years by more modern extensions and alterations, and there is nothing that sets this precinct apart from other similar areas constructed by the government at this time.

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct 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***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct has an association with Post-World War II public housing in the ACT. However, there is nothing strong or special about this association which would set it apart from other public housing constructions at this time.

The Precinct also has an association with Walter Burley Griffin, being one of the few streets in this area which conforms to his design plans of 1918. Although of some interest, this is not considered to be of strong or special association. There are many other places in Canberra which demonstrate a much stronger and more special association with Walter Burley Griffin.

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct 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***

*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***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct is unlikely to yield information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT.

The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct 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***

*Heritage Council assessment:*

This criterion is not applicable.

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

## Statement of Reasons

- (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*

*Heritage Council assessment:*

This criterion is not applicable.

## Conclusion

The McKinlay Housing Precinct was constructed by the government Post-World War II in response to a shortage of accommodation in the nation's capital. The shortage and supply of government housing is a theme which permeates Canberra's history from the 1920s to the 1980s. All development during this time, of which there was a great amount Post-World War II, is evidence of this theme.

However, it is not all 'important as evidence' of this theme. The McKinlay Street Housing Precinct is but one of many developments which contributes to the theme but is not considered 'important as evidence'. It does not demonstrate any pivotal point in the government's provision of housing and accommodation, nor anything innovative, notable or outstanding. Claims that the area was developed for returned servicemen are unsubstantiated.

The precinct is a simple, austere example of government housing and is typical of the period Post-World War II. The integrity of the precinct and its streetscape character has been compromised by more recent development.

At best, this area might be of some local significance for its (modified) streetscape character, and its contribution to the theme of government housing in the ACT Post-World War II.

However, the place does not meet the threshold for provisional registration to the ACT Heritage Register.

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

10 March 2011