



## ACT Heritage Council

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### TURNER HOUSING PRECINCT (Blocks 1-24 Section 47, Blocks 1, 5-13 and 16-22 Section 48 and Sections 49 & 50, Turner)

At its meeting of 25 July 2013 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Turner Housing Precinct was not eligible for provisional registration. The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Turner Housing Precinct against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

### HISTORY

#### Contextual History

Planning of the national capital has a long and complex history which can be divided into a number of phases. The initial phase included the design competition won by Walter Burley Griffin in 1912, bureaucratic efforts to replace the Griffin plan, its reinstatement, and Griffin's role as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction.

#### 1921-1924: The Federal Capital Advisory Committee

Griffin's role ended in 1921, and a new body was created, the six-member Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC) under the chairmanship of architect and town planner John Sulman. As its name implies the Committee was advisory and was not responsible for construction or administration which were under the control of the departments of Home and Territories and Works and Railways. A new federal government in 1923 coincided with the resolve to begin construction of a provisional Parliament House and the re-location of public servants from Melbourne to Canberra as soon as possible. The task of building Canberra was taken over by the Federal Capital Commission in 1925.

#### 1925-1930: The Federal Capital Commission

Under the Federal Capital Commission (FCC), the principal alignments and broad layout of Griffin's plan were gazetted in 1925 (Figure 1). The need for housing for public servants in the lead up to the opening of Parliament in 1927 resulted in the setting out of the inner suburbs and the development of housing policy. These suburbs included Kingston, Barton, Blandfordia (later Griffith / Forrest) and Red Hill to the south of the Molonglo River and Civic, Ainslie, Reid and Braddon to the north. Development of these suburbs was based on block area and housing standard; better class areas had larger blocks with larger, better quality houses. The overriding concern in the residential planning was the visual appearance of the Garden City, including the use of single-storey 'English Cottages' in garden suburbs, a concept introduced by Sulman under the FCAC (Fisher, 1984).

An Advisory Council was created in 1930, replacing the FCC, however the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s effectively curtailed development in Canberra, which was resumed after 1935, and in 1938 an advisory body of experts, the National Capital Planning and Development Committee (NCPDC), was appointed.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct



(Figure 1) 1925 Gazetted Plan with Temporary Camps. Source Fischer 1984:52

### 1939-1958: The National Capital Planning and Development Committee

At its first meeting in March 1939 variations to the Gazetted Plan of 1925 were among the first actions considered by the NCPDC.

War was declared in Australia on 3 September 1939. The development and construction of a new RAAF Station at Canberra, from late 1939, resulted in the need for an estimated 150 more houses in Canberra. The program aimed at cheaper types, with 42 homes to be provided for RAAF personnel in Turner. New types, designed by the Department of Works and Housing, were to be of standard brick construction. A contract for 21 brick houses had already been let for Section 27, Hackett Gardens, in Turner, and was nearing completion early in 1940. Although there was a proposal by a 'Private Building Company' (a syndicate) for a residential subdivision at Turner at this time, in practice the suburb would be developed almost entirely by the Government.

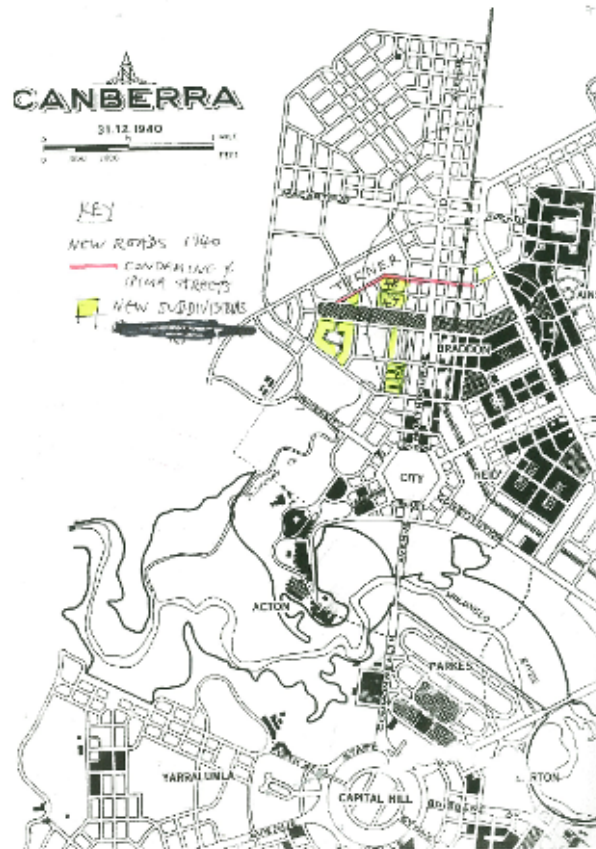
Development Surveyor, Percy Sheaffe, was involved in planning and layout of Turner in the late 1930s under the NCPDC and had worked in the city in the 1920s as a District Surveyor.

The development of Turner included rationalisation and simplification of the Gazetted Plan of 1925, for the purpose of creating manageable subdivisions. Sections and roads in the western and central areas of the suburb no longer featured angular alignments, instead, section boundaries were 'rounded' to create gentle curves, although the major alignment of David Street was retained.

Major changes to the road layout had been formalised by the end of 1940. Those sections close to Northbourne Avenue were amended to follow the layout of sections east of Northbourne Avenue to the south of Ipima Street. The extension at this time of Cowper Street, Ainslie, to Northbourne Avenue, as Ipima Street, Braddon, was continued in Turner as an extension of the existing alignment of McCaughey Street,

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct

effectively creating the northern boundary of Section 48, Turner. Holder Street, between sections 47 and 48, followed a road alignment gazetted in 1925. The planning of these sections is evident in a drawing dated 31 December 1940 (Figure 2), with the road reserve in Section 47 identified. Hackett Gardens, on sections 26-28, Turner, was also set out, as were similar subdivisions in Narrabundah and the adjacent suburb of Griffith.



(Figure 2) Canberra 1940, Urban Development & Subdivisions  
NLA: Map G8984 C3G4S

Post-war construction took place under the Department of the Interior, the Director of Works for Canberra and the NCPDC.

From 1948, the NCPDC urged the need for greater planning expertise to deal with the emerging planning and social issues in the context of the new housing program. The expanding suburbs were some distance from the existing shopping facilities and communal services, often without good schools and local centres. In 1945 the Department of the Interior had established a Town Planning Section, under the Department of Works in Sydney, to undertake planning and design. The section was transferred to Canberra early in 1947.

In May 1949, Trevor Gibson ARIBA AMTPI, a Sydney graduate with British town planning experience, was appointed to head the new town planning section of the Department of Works and Housing in Canberra. Trevor Gibson and his family lived at 18 Greenway Street, Section 47, Turner, from mid-1949 to well into the 1980s.

In May 1950, the Town Planning Section prepared 'Outline Schedules of Housing and Accommodation Programmes', incorporating revised block sizes. Frontages were, in some cases, to average 50 feet with block areas not greater than 6,000 square feet. Criticisms arose when the first smaller houses appeared, which were reinforced in 1955 when a Senate Committee of Enquiry confirmed that such standards were not in keeping with Canberra's Garden City character.

Given the development of Section 47 Turner in 1947-49, which was essentially mirrored later by Section 48, it is not clear the 1950 policy of revised block sizes actually had any impact on the Turner Housing Precinct.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct

The NCPDC also stressed the need to implement modification to Griffin's plan in the 1950s, although these decisions were reversed a few years later. Their recommendations included: the adoption of temporary subdivision streets; a reduction in road width to 100 feet from 200 feet for main avenues; and the elimination of more ornamental road configurations. In practice, the large, outer blocks of land, in Griffin's plan, required subdivision, necessitating new subdivision roads and street alignments to meet prevailing housing standards. Under the Seat of Government Act, amendments were made to include new streets.

Subdivision streets in Turner and O'Connor were included in the City Plan in 1950. The overall planning framework for the larger Turner suburban area was finalised in September 1952.

In January 1957 it was noted that there were few blocks left for development- the suburb of Turner was almost complete. The suburb, with its revised road and street layout, had, for the most part, escaped the reduction in block size recommended in 1950. With the exception of a few Monocrete houses, the smaller, often prefabricated housing types found in Narrabundah and Deakin, very much outer suburbs when compared to Turner, were little in evidence. The development of Turner was essentially complete by the time the National Capital Development Commission took over planning and design for the National Capital in 1958.

In effect, the growth of suburbs from 1939-1950s was pragmatic, a consequence of dealing with the real and perceived constraints of Griffin's 1925 plan, a problem made somewhat easier by continuing to employ the Garden City concepts espoused by Sulman, but with cheaper housing.

### **1958-1989: The National Capital Development Commission**

The National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) completed the last major project in Turner, the design and construction of Condamine Court, a complex of bachelor flats, in 1959.

Although the planning of Dickson in 1958 employed traditional street patterns similar to Turner, by the 1960s new concepts in Neighbourhood Planning, based on hierarchical road systems, had begun to emerge under the NCDC. The suburb of Downer employed an internal road system with cul-de-sacs in 1961, while in the same year Watson was developed using a 6-tier hierarchy of streets as the basis for all future development.

However, self-government in 1989 changed the administrative context for residential suburbs such as Turner, which now came under the authority of the ACT Government.

### **Garden City Planning Principles**

The Garden City planning movement in the early twentieth century endeavoured to replace the crowded and unhealthy suburbs which developed around industrialised cities with a more harmonious combination of city and country, and house and garden.

The Garden City movement was, on one view, an approach to street planning to present a harmonious whole, including vistas of treescapes and mountains, street furniture and services and housing. However after 1945 dwellings of the early post-war years have more often than not been referred to as background elements, because house sizes had reduced and their street presence on large blocks within broader precincts was reduced. (Ward 2000)

As a theory of site planning, the Garden City tradition stressed the importance of an overall design approach, the limitation of housing density, the primacy of single family housing, private gardens, and the provision of public open space. (Freeman, 1996)

The key features of Garden City planning principles in the ACT, identified by Ward (2000) are:

1. the creation of a distinct physical and social entity;
2. a hierarchical road system with residential roads determined by geometry or contours;
3. elimination of back lanes;
4. elimination of front fences to allow a transition of private and public space;
5. rounded street corners to open up vistas at intersections;

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct

6. rationalisation of overhead wires to the sides and rear of blocks, leaving the streetscape clear;
7. a suite of uniform street furniture;
8. the use of shared verge crossings, both for economy and to minimize visual intrusion;
9. the provision of garages behind the building line to emphasise the landscape setting of the houses;
10. uniform tree planting on wide verges to emphasise the landscaped setting;
11. hedge planting to front boundaries;
12. staggered house setbacks to provide variety and reinforcement of street curves;
13. generous side setbacks to allow for landscaping on all sides;
14. planned vistas both within and beyond each housing precinct;
15. variation in aspect of front doors;
16. stylistic consistency in the houses, preferably well executed examples of traditional styles, e.g English style cottages;
17. predominance of single storey cottages;
18. linking fences behind the front building line;
19. the use of external reserves, often containing community facilities; and
20. the use of public walkways.

### John Sulman

It is impossible to discuss early views on site planning in Canberra without reference to Sulman, given his personal stature and professional authority. By the 1910s he had evolved a coherent philosophy of planning revolving around several themes. These included the necessity of street improvements; the logic of radical city planning; the desirability of polycentric city extension; the importance of public health considerations; and the need to pre-plan suburban development. Site-specific principles included sensitivity to topography and natural features; the avoidance of long, monotonous roads and relating width to function; the abolition of back lanes; the need for street beautification, open space and sites for community facilities; the segregation of residential from other land uses and the restriction of housing density through predominately detached housing. (Freeman 1996)

The proper planning of town planning subdivisions for him started from pragmatic design parameters such as existing and future trams connections, the relationship to contiguous subdivisions, the most convenient location for the main business centre, and site topography. Although a long standing critic of gridiron planning, Sulman's preference to accommodate the straight-line provision of public utilities and motor vehicle traffic endorsed a rather 'formal' method of layout. (Freeman 1996)

Since the latter part of the nineteenth century Sulman had worked to codify the main principles of planning for Australian conditions, culminating in *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia*, published in 1921 (Freeman 1996).

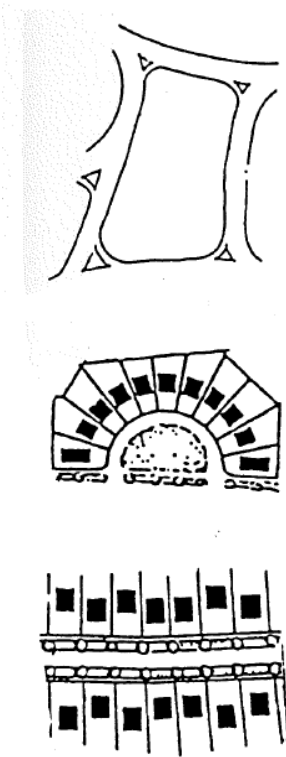
Sulman noted the following features in his book:

- common spaces;
- pedestrian walkways;
- curved (external) street corners;
- laybys (a public area between a main road and houses where cars may stop temporarily);
- alternating setbacks (to single-story housing); and
- street trees.

All of these ideas can be seen in early Canberra, although not always combined within any one subdivision. This partly reflected Sulman's approach to site planning tasks on a site-specific basis as well as his judgements about the sorts of features desirable in different classes of neighbourhood. As he wrote in 1916 '*...residential subdivisions...may be solved in many different ways, according to the character of the locality, the contours of the land, and the class of dwelling intended*'. (Freeman, 1996)

Sulman influenced most of the developments planned and commenced before 1930 however the planning features above continued to be implemented in the 1930s and 1940s as the setting for single-storey housing across Canberra's growing suburbs within the framework of the Gazetted Plan of 1925.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct



(Figure 3) Distinctive features in Sulman's Garden City designs.  
Source: Freeman 1996:15

### Town Planning Influences on Turner

The broader Turner-O'Connor neighbourhood unit, proposed in 1947, was one of the first four neighbourhood districts considered for Canberra in the early post-war years. Turner was however never large enough to have its own shopping centre and would ultimately share this with O'Connor. Even as Turner was considered not large enough for a separate shopping centre, the Baptist Church was clearly located on Section 48 as part of the wider Turner-O'Connor neighbourhood unit. Such siting, adjacent to houses within a subdivision, rather than on a dedicated, more public site, as had been normally the case previously, was perhaps an indication of change and recognition of the importance of the emerging local communities.

The streetscapes of Turner were landscaped after July 1952 and have horticultural elements and a character common to many areas of the inner southern and inner northern suburbs of Canberra. Tree planning programs and similar plantings in the period 1944-1958 were made under the direction of the Director of Parks and Gardens, Lindsay Pryor.

Development in the 1920s, under the FCC, had promoted differentiation of suburbs, based on social and economic factors. This paradigm was continued in the 1940s and into the post-war years, reflected in the size of blocks and type of houses employed.

The planning of sections 47-50, Turner, had its origins in the need to quickly develop new subdivisions in 1939 and 1940 for RAAF and other government personal.

Sections 47-50, Turner, employed a combination of rectilinear, geometric and curved boundaries established under the NCPDC by December 1940. Subdivisions creating sections 47 and 48, Turner, developed between 1947 and 1951, included two small central reserves, section 49 and 50, which also functions as lay-bys. The layout is symmetrical and provides a formal internal focus, and a focus, linked to the O'Connor shopping and community centre across Sullivan's creek, by a walkway running through section 48. The subdivision reflected prevailing policies for block size as well as the disposition and type of houses however it retained blocks averaging 1000m<sup>2</sup> and a more varied range of housing types.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct

The 24 brick and tile houses on section 47 comprised Department of Works and housing types 182, 187, 188, 189, 193, 195, 200, 204, 205 and 206, erected between 1947 and 1949. Plan types were often reversed, with houses on corner blocks generally placed diagonally. Some degree of symmetry in layout was employed with alternating and varied setbacks of 30 and 40 feet from the street. The block widths were generous, being from 75-80 feet at the front boundary.

The subdivision and layout implemented on section 47 was continued on section 48 between 1950 and 1951. The 19 brick and tile houses on section 48 included Department of Works and Housing types 134, 139, 148, 158, 193, 195, 235, 236, 239, 240, 241 and 243. Plan types were often reversed however houses on corner blocks were not generally placed diagonally. Symmetry in layout and block widths were similar to section 47.

### **Description**

The Precinct is bounded by Greenway Street to the south, Macleay Street to the east, Condamine Street to the north and Bent Street to the west and is bisected by Holder Street which runs east – west. The precinct runs parallel to Northbourne Avenue, slightly east of a northerly alignment and is roughly rectangular except for Bent Street where it follows the alignment of Sullivans Creek.

The precinct mostly contains single storey red face brick and tile cottages with detached garages on blocks of around 1000m<sup>2</sup>. The block sizes of the Precinct are smaller than other Garden City precincts but not significantly.

Houses on the perimeter face outwards to surrounding subdivisions. On three sides this consists of largely open landscaped space – Haig Park to the south, Sullivans Creek Reserve to the west and the grounds of Turner Primary School to the north. The outlook to the east is across Macleay Street to cottages which are similar to those within the precinct.

Houses on the inside of the precinct in Holder Street face towards two pocket parks (Sections 49 & 50). The general effect within the precinct is of wide views across landscaped space, views over the houses to the “borrowed” landscapes external to the precinct and, at various points, views out from the precinct towards Mount Ainslie to the east and Black Mountain to the west.

The integrity of the housing stock varies from intrusively re-developed to relatively intact. The single-story housing types on large blocks, with varied setbacks, which are characteristic of Garden City suburbs established in Canberra, are evident but not to a high degree. Section 47 displays a high level of integrity, with 20 out of 24 houses being largely intact or sympathetically altered. The housing in Section 48 has much reduced integrity, with only 7 out of 17 houses being largely intact or sympathetically altered.

The plantings within and external to sections 47-50, Turner, include eucalypt species along Greenway Street, with a combination of oak species on Macleay, Bent and Condamine streets with a small planting of this species on Section 49, Turner. Both sections 49 and 50, Turner, feature small plantings of native species, although both Holder Street and the street frontage of Section 47, facing Section 50, have been replanted with Desert Ash (*Fraxinus oxycarpa*), the Claret Ash variety, replacing the original planting of Desert Ash. The *Eucalyptus* species have not performed as well as the oaks, which include Algerian oaks (*Quercus canariensis*) on Bent Street, Turkey oaks (*Quercus cerris*) on Macleay Street and Burr oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*) on Condamine Street. The dominant, surrounding streetscapes, due to the oak trees, have integrated the housing precinct with its surroundings, including the large scale features of Sullivan’s Creek and Haig Park.

The southern boundary and streetscape of Section 47 reflect the dominance of Haig Park, which dictated the southern boundary of this and the adjacent sections. The western boundaries of sections 47 and 48 are also dominated by the ‘treed’ landscape and contours of Sullivan’s Creek, which gave rise to Bent Street. Both of these areas have visual links to the sections, and are part of the visual catchment, surrounding and enclosing the subdivisions on two sides. In this respect the surrounding landscapes dominate the western and southern streetscapes. There are views to Black Mountain and Mt Ainslie from within the sections, although this is a function of the overriding geometry of Griffin’s plan, with Holder Street at an angle to the main alignment of David Street, not a result of the planning alignment of Holder Street.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct

All streets have standard concrete kerbing and guttering, constructed a few years after the houses were built, approximately 1951. Verge crossings are mostly single width, with a few paired crossings, in bitumen.

There are 24 lamp post within the precinct, many are of cast concrete consistent with development in the pre-NCDC years, although variously fitted with different light fittings.

There are seven original bollard type fire hydrants which are minor contributory elements in the streetscape.

### Physical condition and integrity

The houses are in generally good condition and both houses and gardens are well kept. There are varying degrees of alteration including those houses which are in virtually their original state, those which have been sympathetically altered, those which have been unsympathetically altered and several which have been demolished and the blocks re-developed.

The housing in Section 47 displays a high level of integrity, with 20 out of 24 houses being largely intact or sympathetically altered. The housing in Section 48 has much reduced integrity, with only 7 out of 17 houses being largely intact or sympathetically altered.

15 of the 24 lamp posts are original fluted concrete posts dating from the NCPDC era with the remainder a variety of replacements posts, steel and concrete. There are no original lamps, although several posts retain remnants of original lamp collars.

The seven original fire hydrants are in fair condition, three are missing their caps.

The original fabric of the concrete kerbing and guttering is highly intact, with modifications only where works have been done on services. The extent of original fabric to the verge crossings is difficult to determine.

Street plantings are in generally good condition. Some streets retain original plantings dating from the early 1950s. Others have been systematically replanted with the same or similar species.



SITE PLAN



(Figure 4) Nominated Precinct



(Figure 5) – Nominated Blocks.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct

PHOTOGRAPHS



**(Image 1)** Pocket Park, Section 49  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



**(Image 2)** Holder Street, looking east  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



**(Image 3)** Holder Street, looking west  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



**(Image 4)** Pocket Park, Section 50  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



**(Image 5)** Bent Street, looking south  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



**(Image 6)** Bent Street, looking north  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct



**(Image 7)** Greenway Street, facing east  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



**(Image 8)** Macleay Street, facing north  
ACT Heritage Unit November 2012



**(Image 9)** Original lamp post  
ACT Heritage Unit June 2013



**(Image 10)** Original fire hydrant  
ACT Heritage Unit June 2013

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Turner Housing Precinct

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