

Summary Record
Friends of the Albert Hall meeting with NCA on NCA's Heritage Assessment
27 July 2007
Canberra

(The following is a Friends' summary record of the meeting. The record of the meeting has been cleared with the NCA to ensure accuracy in recording of NCA views)

On 27 July 2007 representatives of the Friends of the Albert Hall (Di Johnstone and Brett Odgers) met with Jennifer Hill, Architectural Projects Pty Ltd and Stuart Mackenzie from the NCA at the NCA's invitation to discuss the NCA's heritage assessment for DA53 Precinct.

The Friends were advised that the NCA was revisiting DA53 with a 'clean slate'; following the earlier decision to consult further the NCA would be moving shortly to planned public workshops. There was no date for these yet but the sequence would be heritage, traffic, urban design. They would take begin in late August/early September.

The heritage assessment was being conducted preliminary to the workshops. It would be for the entire DA53 area, focus on heritage values on the site beyond the Hyatt, Croquet Club and Albert Hall and cover the entire precinct. It was understood that the area beyond the bounds of the DA53 precinct were also significant to the DA53 area – such as Lennox Gardens. FAH asked for a copy of Ms Hill's brief and the NCA agreed to provide this.

The NCA was consulting organizations such as the National Trust, Canberra and District Historical Society, those involved in the Conservation Management and Landscape Plan (CMPL) Dr Lenore Coltheart and Dr Pearson, aboriginal groups, and academics including Di Firth, John Gray, Prof Ken Taylor, Prof John Mulvaney and Prof James Weirick. FAH asked for the full list of people being consulted in this process.

There was no specific deadline for the heritage assessment but that the material that was being gathered through the assessment would be used by the NCA for the heritage workshops. FAH asked for a copy of the draft and final version of the consultant's report

FAH were advised that the final report would come out after the workshops. Jennifer Hill would attend the heritage workshops and the information gathered by her would be the basis for the workshops. FAH asked for a copy of the relevant material produced as part of the heritage assessment and for the workshops before the workshops and were assured that we would receive this material and three weeks notice of the workshops.

The heritage assessment would take a multi-disciplinary approach. Ms Hill had a good deal of experience in Canberra in the designing of the Acton Hotel upgrade and Northbourne housing estate; and was currently working with the ACT government on affordable housing. Her expertise was in heritage consulting, urban design and history. She had been involved in commissions in Sydney including streetscapes in Glebe. Her team members were

- Jennifer Hill – who was a member of the Walter Burley Griffin Society and had a long interest in Griffin issues. Prof James Weirick had consulted for the firm on the Northbourne Ave project; he was not on this team but they frequently had discussions with him.
- Elizabeth Gibson – landscape architect and architect, who had worked in the Castlecrag House/Griffin restoration.
- Nick Jackson – historian
- Dr Robert Varnam – archeologist

FAH sought CVs and were assured FAH would receive these.

Ms Hill had, in a sense a "reverse brief" and the methodology used would be the layered approach. There was a need to understand the chronology of the site. This would not just be related to

the boundaries but to the areas beyond the boundaries. The layers would include indigenous and rural/pastoral occupations. Figure-ground mapping devices would be used as part of this to build the layers. It was noted that different layers could exist without any conflict but there could also be conflict. Some of the development, including in the 1960s, conflicted with Griffin notions. There was a need to define the significance of the layers and the precedence of the layers over each other. This approach would inform the workshops. Historic photos and surveys would be used to see how the layers occurred. And reports – including recent reports and drafts reports. Ms Hill had visited the ACT Heritage Library and would get material from the National Archives.

FAH noted that Albert Hall coexisted with the history of Canberra and was central and crucial to the history of Canberra. The 1930's-1960's was a key period and a crucible in heritage terms. The consultant needed to fully understand the social and political history of Albert Hall and to make judgment calls with a clear understanding of this. The consultant agreed that the heritage significance of Albert Hall has already been established.

It was suggested to the FAH that there had been a run down in Albert Hall use due to the impact of the loss of PLI, and that it was basically used now only for rug sales and had far less value for young people. FAH pointed out the critical significance of Albert Hall to the community for affordable community uses; and the need for the team to understand that these uses were currently taking place and there would be an even greater prospective use when Albert Hall was fixed and if it was affordable. The community wanted community, cultural and civic uses to be the primary uses of Albert Hall. We said FAH would be taking this message to the ACT Chief Minister when we saw him on 31 July. Also there was an incorrect impression about it being just used for rug sales – this was not backed by the facts. There was a great deal happening in Albert Hall which was not advertised on the main road – unlike the rug sales where goods were being sold. We provided copy Jennifer Hill with the program for the 24 May public meeting and indicated the scale and depth of community engagement in this meeting.

FAH dealt also with the implication that the Albert Hall was not used by the young or of interest to them. We indicated the degree to which there were young people now using it and the attachment that many young people had to the Albert Hall – whether because of their own use or the attachment of their parents, which was part of their personal histories. We also indicated that it was important when looking at use records to understand that some of these might not be accurate. We mentioned the inaccuracy of figures used by Minister Hargreaves in the debate in the Legislative Assembly on 6 June and that we had challenged these figures as we knew they were wrong. We suggested that Jennifer Hill get the accurate usage figures and that she understood what was not included in the figures the ACT govt had used.

FAH spoke of the institutional arrangements relevant to the Albert Hall and that these would need to be covered in the report. FAH were advised that these arrangements were considered to be for the ACT government. FAH underlined the importance of understanding the public ownership of Albert Hall and the relevant leasehold arrangements. We underlined in detail the significance of Albert Hall in the history in the nation. This would need to be covered in Ms Hill's report.

FAH were advised that we had provided the consultant with a better appreciation of the Albert Hall and the importance of having the full history of Albert Hall and the groups that used it and would use it. As for those who had used it FAH were asked for information about this. FAH were advised that the consultant would use as a baseline the timeline in the CMLP but if the CMLP did not comprehensively cover the groups that had used Albert Hall then it may be valuable for the FAH to table this information if they think it hasn't already been adequately covered in the existing CMLP. Notwithstanding, the significance of the Albert Hall is accepted as a given for the purposes of consultant's study. It is not expected that the heritage significance of the Hall will be diminished by the findings of the assessment. FAH suggested that Ms Hill get the records of use from the ACT govt for the period prior to the private contractor, but were told that this was unnecessary as it was clear that small community groups should be able to make use of the Hall and there was no need to pursue these records for Hall use.

It was suggested to FAH that things that could be done in the precinct that would make Albert Hall more meaningful and people would be better able to connect to it. FAH indicated that any such uses

would need to be appropriate to the central use of Albert Hall – which would be primarily for community, cultural and civic uses and recognizing that Albert Hall was Canberra's Town Hall.

FAH asked about funding, ACT and Commonwealth and whether the assessment would address this. We pointed to references at the public meeting by two federal senators to their support for Commonwealth funding if the ACT government were to seek this. FAH were advised that the assessment would not be looking at the funding issue.

FAH were advised that there were constraints to the question of policy and these would not be addressed in the assessment. FAH asked what these constraints might be and were advised these might include compliance issues, aspirations of owners etc

FAH raised the importance of putting a value on heritage and having economic advice on the team to allow this to be brought to the assessment. The team needed a quantity surveyor and people who understood the leasehold system. FAH were advised that economic analysis is outside the scope of this heritage assessment and is not considered necessary to ascertain the significance of the site. Financial management may be an issue that can be addressed by the ACT government.

FAH were asked for the Minutes of the public meeting on 24 May and we agreed to provide these; FAH were asked for other visual documentation and a list of the significant groups using Albert Hall and who had used it.

FAH asked about whether the NCA planned to have any joint meeting with the ACT govt on the planning for the Albert Hall precinct. FAH were advised that the NCA would be meeting with the ACT govt in a working group to look at mutual issues and set broad policy. The NCA did not have a statutory obligation to do a heritage study. The NCA had agreed to do this but it was really the responsibility of the ACT govt.

FAH pursued the issue of understanding the economics of the heritage value of the precinct and suggested Professor David Throsby as a possible contact for this. FAH reminded that it was very important to understand the economic significance of heritage and not just accept an economic rationalist argument. FAH also made the point that a heritage assessment should ideally be part of a larger environmental assessment.

FAH indicated the Friends were incorporating and that would become a permanent feature of the landscape for the Albert Hall and its precinct.

Following the meeting FAH has sought:

- *CVs of the consultant's team*
- *The consultant's brief for the heritage assessment*
- *Relevant documents produced for the heritage workshops prior to workshops*
- *Timing for workshops and three weeks notice of these*
- *Information on the planned methodology*
- *Who else was being consulted (an exhaustive list)*

FAH agreed to provide:

- *Record of 24 May meeting*
- *Relevant documents from this (copy of the program and speeches)*

FAH suggested that reliable information on current and past users should be obtained from the current manager and the ACT Govt. The NCA has advised that they do not consider such a record search necessary as "the heritage values of the Hall ...are already well established and, for the purposes of the study, are taken as a given".