



Blue Gum High Forest in Ku-ring-gai

Tower of Power

The National Trust estimates that 692 family heritage homes of some heritage significance are threatened with demolition in favour of medium to high density development if the latest plan for Ku-ring-gai goes ahead. The independent position paper released by the National Trust of Australia (NSW) in August revealed that 79 per cent of homes within the National Trust Urban Conservation Areas in the Ku-ring-gai town centres will be razed if approved by the Minister for Planning.

Within the National Trust Urban Conservation Areas alone, 373 houses will be or already have been torn down. The natural environment is similarly threatened by the erosion of the remaining 5% of the critically endangered Blue Gum High Forest and Ironbark-Turpentine Forest contrary to the intent of the national *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Entire garden suburb streetscapes would be replaced by medium to high density units. Streets impacted include that of the former home of Ms Annie Wyatt, founder of the National Trust who fought so hard to protect New South Wales' heritage.

The Ku-ring-gai town centres' exceptional heritage significance are derived from three critical attributes. Ku-ring-gai represents the:

1. finest examples of early twentieth century housing, especially the inter war period;
2. model application of the garden suburbs planning movement in NSW; and
3. greater part of the remaining stands of critically endangered Blue Gum High Forest as well as substantial areas of the Turpentine-Ironbark Forests. Less than 5% of the original forests are intact with both listed as critically endangered ecological communities under the national *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The draft Ku-ring-gai Plan will facilitate the creation of between 13,000 and 18,000 new dwellings. This is up to almost double what was proposed in the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy and the subsequent North Sub-regional Strategy (max: 10,000).

The present estimated population is approximately 108,000 residents. If approved, the latest plan for Ku-ring-gai will therefore effectively result in a 25% to 33% increase in population.

A significant proportion of this increased population will be housed in high rise apartments. The National Trust maintains that development of this intensity is inconsistent with the character of Ku-ring-gai's villages and is entirely detrimental to the region's sense of place.

The draft Ku-ring-gai Town Centres Plan does not appear to form part of any recognised strategy for Sydney. The Sydney Metropolitan Strategy clearly designates St Ives and Turrumurra as villages while Pymble, Lindfield and Roseville are listed as small villages. The construction of between seven and nine storey buildings in

these centres surrounded by four to six storey apartments does not accord the Metropolitan Strategy prepared in consultation with the community and remains in complete contradiction to the established character of the area.

The Minister for Planning has argued that the areas to be cleared only account for 6% of Ku-ring-gai. The National Trust maintains that this reasoning is seriously flawed on two accounts. First many of the homes of heritage significance were built within walking distance of the railway stations.

These buildings are not merely representative of the period but are often the finest examples of early to mid twentieth century housing. Every Sulman Award Winner for Domestic Architecture between 1940 and 1956 was built in Ku-ring-gai. Between one third and a half of Sydney's architect-designed houses in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s were built in Ku-ring-gai.

Second, it is disingenuous of the Minister for Heritage to talk about proportions affected. It is certainly the case that The Rocks represents less than 6% of the City of Sydney. Similarly Callan Park represents less than 6% of their neighbouring marginal electorate yet the Minister did not suffer apartment construction there. The Government would not countenance unsympathetic development in these significant heritage areas and yet is imposing an undemocratic agenda on a community in complete disregard for the region's outstanding natural and cultural value.

Those family heritage homes and forests which are not outright demolished will be towered over by apartments like bullies in a playground. In felling Ku-ring-gai's canopy in favour of flats, Sydney risks being transformed from the Emerald City to the Egg Crate City.

The National Trust's Position Paper *Strip Minning Sydney's Heritage* presents seven recommendations. The Trust has approached the NSW Minister for Planning and the Federal Minister for the Environment for a commitment to protect NSW's heritage including the remaining 5% of critically endangered forests under threat from inappropriate development.

Accordingly, the *National Trust is opposed to the draft Ku-ring-gai Local Environment Plan (Town Centres) 2008* on the grounds that the planning instrument facilitates development that fundamentally conflicts with the region's outstanding heritage value while entirely discounting public opinion. Ku-ring-gai is the next chapter in Sydney's architectural narrative as a twentieth century extension of the story begun in The Rocks, Paddington and Glebe. The plan proposes to tear down this city's heritage, threaten critically endangered forests and irrevocably despoil a community's sense of place.

The proposed plan is all tower and power. It would speak volumes of any Government that approved this travesty.

by **Scott N. Woodcock**

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To view *Strip Minning Sydney's Heritage* visit www.nationaltrust.com.au



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