

29 August 2022

Mr Stephen Dobbs
Department of Planning and Environment
Locked Bag 5022,
Parramatta NSW 2124.

Submitted online: <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/gregory-place-build-rent>

Dear Mr Dobbs,

National Trust objection relating to SSD-31179510 Gregory Place Build-to-Rent

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) expresses its strong objections to the proposal for the construction of three separate, large scale buildings with 483 dwellings within the site located at 2A Gregory Place, Harris Park.

This extremely sensitive site is the mid-point between three of the most significant historic houses in Australia, all of them listed on the NSW State Heritage Register and all of them in public ownership in recognition of their important cultural values.

Major efforts to improve the setting of these three houses over time will be severely impacted by this proposal, and possibilities for further improvement of the site and Clay Cliff Creek will be completely destroyed.

The National Trust concerns can be summarised as follows:

- The proposal will completely destroy the historic setting of Hambleton Cottage, removing its ability to be read with a blue sky background;
- The proposal does not consider the impact on the larger setting of Hambleton Cottage, Experiment Farm and Elizabeth Farm;
- The proposal increases, rather than decreases, the built footprint of the current site by extending it westwards;
- The proposal turns its back on Clay Cliff Creek and ensures this key historic watercourse can only ever remain a concrete stormwater channel, not restored as a natural creek that speaks to its indigenous and colonial importance;
- The proposal will fundamentally change the predominant low-rise character of Harris Park;
- The proposal will impact the views and setting from the National Trust's property Experiment Farm and the Sydney Living Museum Property Elizabeth Farm.

Fundamentally, the factory on this site is a poor outcome for this place and should be removed. The way to remove it however must not be by developing the site with close to 500 apartments.

The purported reductions in height, scale and impact are not sufficient to make this an appropriate proposal for this sensitive location.

Significance of the Cottages

This proposal seeks to permanently obliterate the setting of three of the most important historic places in Australia (discussed in more detail in "Setting"). These three places and their setting are all in public ownership, the purpose of which is to protect them in perpetuity.



- **Elizabeth Farm (1793)** – the SHR listing of this palace notes it is of National significance as one of Australia’s oldest standing properties that is on the site of the first British land grant in Australia.
 - It was the first item listed on both the Register of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) and the NSW State Heritage Register, and is the oldest surviving European construction in Australia.
- **Experiment Farm (c.1835)** – the SHR listing of this palace notes it is of exceptional cultural significance to Australia, NSW and Parramatta because:
 - It forms part of the first European land grant in Australia.
 - It is associated with the early agricultural pursuits, including Governor Phillip's "experiment" to determine the period required in which a settler could become self-supporting.
 - Of its visual prominence in the surrounding landscape. The position of Experiment Farm Cottage demonstrates important relationships with the landscape. Situated on a once prominent rise, the current house addresses the north towards Parramatta River and Clay Cliff Creek.
- **Hambledon Cottage (c.1821)** – part of the Elizabeth Farm Estate, the SHR listing of the place notes that Hambledon Cottage, its grounds and associated archaeology have State significance for:
 - Their important and direct associations with the Macarthurs, one of the most influential families in Australian history as well as other figures of state and local renown.
 - The archaeology at Hambledon Cottage and grounds has a high archaeological research potential and is likely to be highly intact and of state significance.
 - Part of a group of colonial era dwellings in Parramatta that include Elizabeth Farm and Experiment Farm. Its later history is representative of the growth of Parramatta through the subdivision of large estates in the later nineteenth century.
 - Has significance as a part of the Macarthur's Elizabeth Farm Estate and because of its setting, which contains trees planted by the Macarthur family, views and vistas to Elizabeth Farm's surviving early tree plantings, nearby Experiment Farm cottage's estate, and the Queen's Wharf precinct on Parramatta River.

Lack of Consultations

Despite purporting to consult widely on this project, we note however that the Consultation list contained in proposal’s Consultation Report **only shows consultation** with one of the three owners/managers of these extraordinarily significant heritage items, namely the Parramatta Historical Society. However it appears that these other two site owners were not consulted:

- The National Trust of Australia (NSW).
- Sydney Living Museums; and

This is an astonishing oversight.

Setting

This proposal seeks to permanently obliterate the setting of three of the most important historic places in Australia, all of which remain with us today in public ownership, and their cultural landscape:

- Elizabeth Farm (1793) – The first item listed on both the Register of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) and the NSW State Heritage Register, and the oldest surviving European construction in Australia;
- Experiment Farm (c.1835) – the site of the first European land grant in Australia and the birthplace of agriculture in this country; and
- Hambledon Cottage (c.1821) – part of the Elizabeth Farm Estate.

The existing factory on the site is not a heritage item and later alterations to it have been seriously detrimental to the setting of Hambledon Cottage in particular, however the proposal for this State Significant Development increases the built footprint on this site and uniformly increases the height across the site. It will have a



significant and lasting impact on not only these three heritage items but also the surrounding generally low-rise urban fabric.



Figure 1: The proposal significantly increases the built footprint of the site and is at the intersection of arguably the most important grouping of houses in Australia. (Source: SixMaps with National trust overlay)

Views Analysis

The National Trust are extremely concerned that the true impact of this proposal, particularly on Hambledon Cottage, has not been accurately represented in this proposal. The Visual Impact Assessment for this proposal of 483 apartments in one of the most visually sensitive locations in Australia contains only seven views, and most of them are irrelevant.

The Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) for this projects specifically require that the Visual Impact provide a visual analysis of the development from key viewpoints, **including** photomontages or perspectives showing the proposed and likely future development with respect to existing views from the street, nearby reserves and heritage items. Incredibly, however, the visual impact analysis on exhibition:

- Does not contain a single view from within the grounds of Hambledon Cottage;
- Does not include any views towards the development from the adjacent state-listed Experiment Farm or Elizabeth Farm properties;
- Does not include a single view from the Our Lady of Lebanon Co-Cathedral in Ruse Street;
- Does not include a single "public viewing point" from within any of the surrounding public reserves.

The National Trust are so concerned about the misleading way that this proposal has been promoted that we have decided to produce three of our own visual impact assessments (based on our understanding of the documentation). These illustrate some of the true impact of this proposal however more work to further document and understand the true visual impact is required.

We totally dispute the claim in the Visual Impact Assessment (p.15) that the visual impact on Hambledon Cottage is Moderate/Low, and the argument that "Hambledon Cottage is subservient to the existing vegetation of the SHR." Hambledon Cottage, Elizabeth Farm and Experiment Farm are not "subservient" to vegetation. They are (individually and collectively) a rare grouping of colonial landscapes, including houses, trees and



gardens, that together form a distinctive landscape. The tall Hoop and Bunya Pines are there *because* of Hambledon Cottage, not the other way around.

The National Trust's views for Hambledon Cottage are actually taken from within the publically accessible state heritage listed boundary of this property, and clearly show the visual impact of this proposal.

National Trust Recommendation:

The National Trust feel that a proper accurate and legitimate Visual Impact Assessment of this proposal must be produced and the public exhibition period recommenced with this information made available.

As it stands the proposal is not able to be accurately understood in terms of its significant detrimental impact on this important setting.



Figure 2: Viewpoints 1 and 2 from the Visual Impact Assessment – taken from across a road with four lanes of traffic – are supposed to illustrate the visual impact of this proposal on Hambledon Cottage. They are not sufficient for this purpose.

We also dispute the findings of the Statement of Heritage Impact (page 99) assessment of material impact, which states that the proposed project will have a “positive impact” on Hambledon’s significance because it will “Retain Hambledon cottage, its setting, outbuildings, and landscape. Celebrate the early connection of three cottages ... Ensure visibility and appreciation of Hambledon cottage from the public domain.” The images on the following page do not, under any stretch of the imagination, constitute “minor impact” let alone “positive impact.”

The SOHI goes on to assess that the project’s impact on the significance of Hambledon’s setting, (including views and vistas to Elizabeth Farm’s surviving early tree plantings, nearby Experiment Farm cottage’s estate, and the Queen’s Wharf precinct on Parramatta River) will be of only “minor impact” because later subdivision and subsequent development of the area have already obstructed historic distant views and vistas from three heritage listed cottages. The proposed works amplify the impact of the existing factory, they do not negate it. The Trust notes that Heritage NSW’s Guide to Material Impact acknowledges this, stating that cumulative adverse impacts may reach the material threshold and “... can have as great an impact on the significance of a SHR listed place as a major change.”

The SOHI finishes its assessment by saying the “proposed height of buildings *might* have an adverse impact on the established significant views of Experiment Farm cottage northward to the Parramatta River, Hambledon cottage, and Clay Cliff Creek” and that this “*will be acceptable impact* on the established heritage significance of the SHR listed items and the HCAs in the vicinity of the subject site.”



Figure 3: Current (left) and proposed (right) views of Hambledon Cottage show the true impact of this proposal. It in no way can be considered Low/Moderate as claimed by the Visual Impact Assessment. The Trust call for an accurate and comprehensive view impact assessment to be produced.

Finally, although the SOHI states that it meets the SEARs requirement that the project is compliant with the relevant Conservation Management Plan (SEARS, section 19 – Environmental Heritage), it does not in fact include an analysis against the CMP. The SOHI references the CMPs of the three cottages in its historical analysis, but it does not demonstrate that it has assessed the project’s compliance with any of the CMP Conservation Policies.

Efforts to improve the setting

The Concept Design Report (p.19) notes that “the Cottages were once surrounded by a parkland setting that has diminished over time”. While this is of course true in some respects, it ignores the significant efforts by the community and government over many years to, in fact, **increase** the parkland setting of Experiment Farm and Hambledon Cottage. Experiment Farm Cottage was acquired by the National Trust (NSW) in 1961 and was the



first property to be bought by the Trust. Since that time, the National Trust and Parramatta City Council have acquired several adjoining lots to the north and south of the cottage, and demolished the later houses that had been built on those blocks to allow for open space surrounding the house, ensure an appropriate setting was established and to protect important viewlines.

As a result of these efforts, public land now extends immediately to the north of Experiment Farm which reflects the original land grant and setting of this property. This land immediately abuts the current proposal which will significantly destroy the setting of this building and its public curtilage.



Figure 4: Image showing the setting of Experiment Farm in 1943 (left) and in 2022 (right) showing the substantial increase in parkland setting to this place. (Source: NSW Government Spatial portal with National Trust overlay)

This is a core National Trust objection to the current proposal – that the proposed project amplifies the impact of intrusive developments and directly opposes the active work of government and community to protect and enhance the setting and views of these three places.

Archaeological Assessment and Recommendations

The Trust does not agree with the findings of the Historical Archaeological Impact Assessment that has been tabled in support of this project.

The documentation concludes that there is very little potential for significant archaeological resources due to the ground disturbance of the existing factory. However, the report does not provide detail of the construction and subsurface works of the factory to support this statement. Nor does it take into account the propensity of developments in Parramatta to often, in fact, reveal substantial, intact remnant archaeological features. No reference to this comparative data has been supplied.

The report relies on the detailed assessment presented in the Parramatta Historical Archaeology Landscape Management study (GML Heritage, 2000) which assesses archaeological significance of this 2 Gregory Place



Harris Park to be likely be of potential “local” significance and therefore recommends no further archaeological works. However, PHALMS was written and published when the NSW Heritage Act did not distinguish between local and state archaeological heritage value – it required archaeological permits for works to both types of sites. Specifically for 2 Gregory Street, it recommended test pits and further re-assessment before work can be planned or approved.

Given the high presence of early European occupation in archaeological deposits in Parramatta in general and the high potential significance of archaeological remnants related to these three early cottages and their story, we consider that the works should trigger the need, at a bare minimum, further archaeological assessment including test pitting. No approval of the project should be undertaken until this work is done.

Comment on Nature of Proposal

The subject site has been subject to a number of proposals over a number of years, and this is outlined in the submitted documentation. This latest proposal is seeking to promote its public benefit by making it an “affordable housing and build-to-rent” proposal. However, the nature of the proposal is not of relevance in this extremely sensitive site. At the end of the day, this is a proposal by a developer to maximize return, no matter who the purported end user may be.

Whether it is affordable housing or luxury developments, the impact will be the same – a terrible outcome for one of Australia’s most important historic landscapes.

Conclusion

The National Trust are greatly concerned about this proposal. It undermines the setting for three of the most important heritage sites in Australia, destroys the visual setting of Hambledon Cottage, and extinguishes any possibility for the restoration of Clay Cliff Creek.

Most concerning, the actual nature of the proposal has been deliberately misrepresented and the documentation placed on exhibition does not allow the impact of the proposal to be understood by the public.

The Statement of Heritage Impact states that “the proposed development, therefore, is considered sympathetic to the adjacent heritage items” (p.119) and the recommendation that “the consent Authority should have no hesitation, from a heritage perspective, in approving the application” (p.125). We are at a loss to understand how this assessment could be made with such clear disregard for the heritage values of these important places. The purported economic, commercial and social benefits of this modification do not outweigh its considerable, negative effects.

The Trust object in the strongest possible way to this proposal and call for it to be rejected.

Yours sincerely,

David Burdon
Director, Conservation