

Councillor Bilal El-Hayek
Mayor
Canterbury-Bankstown City Council
PO Box 8
Bankstown NSW 1885

Copied to: Councillors City of Canterbury Bankstown, NSW Heritage Office, National Trust of Australia (NSW), Friends of St Paul's, Extent Heritage.

Dear Councillor El-Hayek,

St Paul's Anglican Church, 459 Chapel Road Bankstown — New Information Supporting Heritage Listing

This letter seeks the support of the City of Canterbury Bankstown to review the decision that it made in 2016 to not proceed with the heritage listing of St Paul's Anglican Church, Bankstown. This request is made on the basis of new information and further analysis undertaken by the signatories to this letter, who in 2016 either undertook or peer reviewed heritage assessments of St Paul's for Council.

In addition to providing confirmation that architect Norman McPherson was responsible for both the Interwar and Post War stages of St Paul's, our new analysis supports higher levels of historical, social and aesthetic values for the Church, including its important relationship with the development of the urban centre of Bankstown.

While we appreciate the importance of Council undertaking strategic approaches such as the Masterplan it is developing, we feel that the recognition of the heritage values of St Paul's via listing will provide for the essential social and urban scale diversity in a vibrant future city of Bankstown which the Masterplan seeks to create.

Background

The history of St Paul's strongly reflects the twentieth century development of central Bankstown. On the back of the construction of the electric rail line in 1909 and associated subdivisions which together drew the centre of Bankstown south from the Liverpool Road area, the Anglican Church purchased land here in 1914, with the church soon operating in what later became the Hall. The rapid growth of central Bankstown just before and after the Second World War is reflected by the construction of the first sections of the current Church in 1938 and its completion between 1958 and 1960.

Community action over many years with grass roots fundraising and volunteering resulted in the construction of St Paul's in stages, but with its form consistently maintained by the engagement of architect Norman McPherson during the entire process.

In 2015 Dr Sue Rosen, the author of Bankstown's Bi-Centennial history, *Bankstown : A Sense of Identity* drew on her understanding of the evolution of the Bankstown LGA when commissioned by Council to assess five properties for listing, including St Paul's, on the Heritage schedule within the Local Environment Plan. The assessment letter, supported by an accompanying Heritage Inventory, recommended heritage listing of St Paul's.

Graham Brooks and Associates (GBA) then submitted an objection to listing on behalf of the Anglican Church, claiming that no heritage criteria were met and that heritage listing would prevent the Church taking advantage from the future development flagged in this area. At the same time as the GBA objection, Sue Rosen Associates were commissioned to prepare a supplementary heritage assessment to advise on the level of significance of the various component parts of the site.

In May 2016 Geoff Ashley, Principal of Ashley Built Heritage, and the second author of this letter, was engaged by Council to prepare a peer review of both Sue Rosen's reports and the objection by GBA. Geoff Ashley strongly supported the heritage listing recommended in Rosen's report, which was then also supported by the Council's own Heritage Advisory Committee. However, Council voted not to proceed to listing.

We understand that a key issue in 2016 for Council in relation to St Paul's was the objection to listing from the Church of England associated with a perceived limit on redevelopment opportunities, rather than whether the Church met heritage criteria justifying heritage listing.

In 2022 Heritage NSW advised Council that community attachment should be considered in relation to progressing the draft Bankstown Masterplan and it recommended that Council reconsider adding St Paul's to the LEP, 'given it clearly has a range of local heritage values'.

St Paul's Historic Association, Aesthetic and Townscape Heritage Values

The rear 1938 section of St Paul's Church with its segmental apse and part nave was designed by architect Norman McPherson and is characteristic of his many 1930s churches – it is Interwar Romanesque in style, with a 'muscular' form and constructed of face brick inside and out, a tile roof, and steel framed windows filled with leadlight glazing.

Following the Second World War St Paul's was completed with a second stage constructed between 1958 and 1960. The GBA 2016 objection to listing claimed that there was no evidence to support Norman McPherson's involvement in the second stage, and since then McPherson's involvement has been questioned by proponents for its 'non-listing' at every opportunity.

In addition to there being a clear consistency of design style to other 1960s works by McPherson, there are now two indisputable pieces of evidence for his involvement in St Paul's second stage. Firstly, the foundation stone for the 1960s work recognises McPherson along with architect David Harrison, who was McPherson's practice partner from 1954. Secondly a *Sydney Morning Herald* article of 23 August 1960 clearly refers to McPherson and Harrison and showing the Church design as it was constructed (see Figure 1).

Norman McPherson practised as an architect from 1923 until the mid-1970s, designing many churches throughout New South Wales. Three of his churches were entered in the 1938 Architectural Exhibition of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and in the post war period he had obtained ten commissions for churches by 1952. In 1955 he designed the National Methodist Church in Canberra. Churches designed by McPherson are heritage listed in Mosman, Narooma and Bathurst. This continuity of association with McPherson provides an historical association value for St Paul's.

The second stage of St Paul's is a very good example of Post-War Ecclesiastical style architecture. The simple and strong Modernist aesthetics of this style, with the rectilinear bell tower and vertical detailing (Figure 3) sit very comfortably with the forms and materials of the earlier Interwar Romanesque section (Figure 4) – a very well executed combination that also provides visible evidence of the staged history of the church and more broadly that of Bankstown during the twentieth century.

In relation to urban heritage values, similarly to the low scale Bankstown Council Chambers, the low scale and warm texture of St Paul's provides significant townscape value by denoting a community place which also acts as a foil and relief to higher adjacent development in urban Bankstown. The open landscaped corner setting of St Paul's with its diagonal pedestrian path reinforces its role as a community focused place (Figure 2).

St Paul's Strong Social History and Community Values

St Paul's was constructed in stages due to the Depression era and wartime shortages, with each step the result of community fundraising and volunteering. The church is a memorial to the founders of modern Bankstown — the people who feature in its history and who shaped the district. The contribution of members of the community to St Paul's is also prolific and a great deal of evidence of this can be found recorded in the fabric of the structures and grounds. For example, in the garden beds there are plaques where the ashes of parishioners have been placed, including the prominent Englisch family.

The strong community association with St Paul's is reflected in the tangible evidence within its interior that results in an almost 'museum like' quality, with names and plaques and objects as strong evidence of this community association. The doors and windows in the church were donated by parishioners, often to memorialise loved ones — there are 25 windows and some 72 other items in the church that document the community's involvement. Furniture was also donated by parishioners, including pews, bookshelves, noticeboards. A good example is the brass plaque for the sanctuary chair which reads:

To the Glory of God and in cherished memory of Allan Richard Maunsell AB RAN who succumbed to injuries received in enemy action on HMAS Australia on 21st October 1944. A scholar, Sunday School Teacher and communicant of this Church. This chair is the gift of his comrades and fellow members of the church. L. Bramble AIF, J. Cross RAN, N. Marshall RAN.

This historic and physical evidence of strong community attachment to St Paul's is, in our opinion, directly reflected in the ongoing and sustained community action of the *Save St Paul's* group.

Conclusions

As experienced heritage consultants we are firmly of the opinion that St Paul's Anglican Church, Bankstown, is worthy of being listed as heritage item. We urge the City of Canterbury Bankstown to reconsider its 2016 decision based on confirmation that the well-known ecclesiastical architect Norman McPherson was involved in all stages of the Church's construction, as well as the additional social, historic and aesthetic values that we have outlined.

St Paul's is a beautiful example of the mid-century development of Bankstown. It has aesthetic and townscape values reflected in both of its pre and post war stages, and strong social values representing both the history of Bankstown's community and the contemporary church community that includes members with diverse multicultural backgrounds, for which Bankstown is proudly known.

The Church has a museum like quality reflecting its internal aesthetic qualities and for the large number of building and furniture components directly funded by community members, as well as plaques in memory of community members, including those who have died during conflicts.

While heritage listing should be made for the whole site, listing would not stop consideration of future development via a valuation of site components in a conservation management plan and a

heritage impact assessment. As noted above in relation to the draft Masterplan, Heritage NSW has asked Council to consider adding St Paul's to the LEP, 'given it clearly has a range of local heritage values'.

While we believe that St Paul's easily qualifies for heritage listing based on NSW Heritage Criteria, it is the love for St Paul's that is strongly demonstrated by the Bankstown community that should now be listened to.



Dr Sue Rosen
Sue Rosen and Associates
26 October 2023



Geoff Ashley
Ashley Built Heritage
26 October 2023

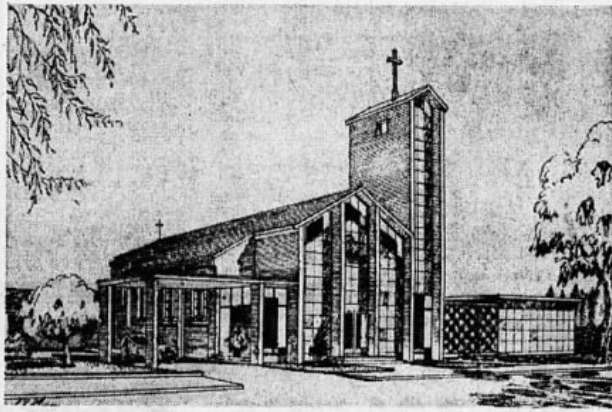


Figure 1 View of St Paul's shown in the Sydney Morning Herald article titled *Builder, Architect are Together Again*, 23 August 1960 p3.



Figure 2 The landscaped corner setting of St Paul's provides an urban and public value.



Figure 3 The second stage Chapel Street frontage of St Paul's is a good example of Post War Ecclesiastical architectural style.



Figure 4 The interior of St Paul's looking east to the original 1938 sanctuary