

Council Meeting 10 May 2016 **Camden's Heritage Significance**

Concerned Camden citizens and community groups have always campaigned vigorously against what they perceive as inappropriate developments in the old town of Camden, which is legislated as a Heritage Conservation Area with a 7 metre limit under the LEP 2010 for good reasons.

The community, including the business community, rightly understand that as well as being a cultural asset for current and future generations, the uniqueness of Camden township provides economic benefits. These benefits include significant opportunity for tourism, especially as visitors can make day trips from Sydney, and competitive advantages for businesses associated with differentiation.

The Chamber of Commerce is quite aware that its members rely on the special ambience of Camden to attract customers and to compete in a market that has many large, modern and mall style developments, particularly at Narellan and Campbelltown.

Camden has a remarkable sense of place and character. Many colonial town centres have been completely rearranged by later planning and although towns such as Windsor, Campbelltown and Penrith retain substantial buildings of the colonial period, whatever spatial relationship their town centres had with the surrounding land is being or has been developed away. Camden is intact which is most unusual given its proximity to Australia's largest city.

Camden Residents' Action Group has undertaken a heritage study of Camden bringing together the wealth of writings that its character has inspired.

In summary the research study shows that Camden is special and unique because:

- it was an unofficial town founded in 1836 on Camden Park land, first granted in 1805;
- Camden Park is the birthplace of the nation's wool industry and was also instrumental in founding Australia's wine and horticultural industries;
- Camden was laid out to the first town planning principles of NSW established by Governor Darling in 1829;
- The grid pattern of streets remains exactly as laid out in 1836;
- Camden is one of very few Australian towns planned in the pre-gold-rush period which survives in its original layout;
- Camden is the only extant original private town in NSW, and probably Australia.
- Camden is described as the best preserved town on the Cumberland Plain
- Camden is associated with the prominent historical figure of John Macarthur and there is no other town that is known to be continuously associated with its founding family
- Camden town, with the help of Surveyor-General Thomas Mitchell, was designed by James and William Macarthur. The Macarthurs were well educated with a highly developed sense of landscape aesthetic.

- Their use of aesthetic vistas and symbolism, such as St John's Church overlooking the town, gave the planning process a degree of social sophistication rarely found in Australia.
 - The human-scale of the town, screened by exotic and native vegetation, with the focus of St John's Church and its spire rising clearly visible from the floodplain of the Nepean and historic pattern of the colonial estates around the Nepean River, presents an inviting village profile of rare character in Australia.
- Camden exemplifies not only our colonial past but also the agricultural way of life. Picturesque rural landscapes around Camden tell the story of the Cowpasture patriarchs and Australia's farming heritage, as does the town itself which interfaces abruptly on three sides of the street grid with rural open land including the town farm, and contains livestock sale yards, the old Macarthur milk depot building and agricultural outlets. This is highly unusual within a town with such a long history and so close to Sydney's developmental pressures;
 - There would be very few and probably no locations in NSW that have two listed endangered ecological communities in good condition located adjacent to a central heritage precinct. Kings Bush (endangered River Flat Eucalypt Forest) was originally part of the St John's Church estate, and intergrades into endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland.

Proposed developments such as the Milk Depot and the decked car park suggest a lack of understanding of the significance of Camden and arguably are contrary to the spirit of the LEP and DCP.

For instance DCP 2011 principles about compatibility of new work require that it be

- based on, and sympathetic to, an understanding of the heritage significance of the place and significant characteristics of the conservation area as a whole;
- be designed reflecting the general form, bulk, scale, height, architectural elements and other significant elements of the surrounding heritage items and heritage conservation area

and that existing informal and irregular pattern of rear property building alignments and pattern, pitch, materials and details of original roof forms are to be retained

In both cultural and economic terms Camden is an extraordinary asset and one that should be treasured not threatened by inappropriate development.

Recent testimonials from eminent historians contributed to the Heritage Study agree:

Quotes:

Professor Emeritus Alan Atkinson Sydney University 2016

The town was laid out with its current dimensions on the assumption that buildings would never go beyond a certain height, customary for the period. Height and distances were carefully balanced, and are integral to its heritage value. Therefore to introduce buildings and structures of a different scale would seriously compromise in an overall physical sense the original harmony of the town within itself and within the surrounding landscape. It is to make do with bits, instead of trying to retain the whole, and so shows an ignorance as to what the whole really signifies.

Associate Professor Grace Karskens University of NSW 2016

*Camden is an astonishingly intact survival of early colonial Australia. Camden and its surrounding rural landscape clearly have national as well as state significance because of their links with vital developments in the early colony, including foundational contacts between Aboriginal people and settlers, early breakthroughs in the cattle industry, the strong association with the illustrious Macarthur family and the wool industry. The town itself is beautiful. It remains in its 1836 planned form and is also important for its early history as a private town. Camden is precious. **Its historic, natural, social and aesthetic significance should be acknowledged and protected from unsympathetic development.***