

Camden Residents' Action Group

Incorporated

Camden – Still a Country Town

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Meeting 26 April 2017

St Johns Church Camden Sale Ordinance Proposal

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you in regards to this important St John's Camden parish, local Camden community, NSW state and Australian issue.

We wished to meet with you as we fear that the sale ordinance issue is becoming unnecessarily divisive. An "us and them" attitude seems to have developed, and we do suggest this is because of a lack of full information and consultation within both the Church family and the community.

At the start of our meeting we would like to state up front that we are not making demands. We are expressing the issues as they have been conveyed to us from the community's perspective and respectfully making suggestions or recommendations as to how they can be resolved.

It is important to note of course that Parishioners are also usually community members, and Parishioners can also be members of community groups such as CRAG, the Historical Society and Chamber of Commerce. There is no inherent conflict in this. It is quite possible to oppose the sale ordinance and be a devoted Christian and Parishioner of St John's.

We feel it is important you know that, most unfortunately, some Parishioners say they are reluctant to express reservations about the sale ordinance because the Church hierarchy so clearly regard any decision as isolated from general concerns about heritage conservation and impacts on other stakeholders such as neighbours and Camden businesses. It has been conveyed to us that questioning of or opposition to the sale ordinance is regarded as "ungodly" and that at last week's services people who oppose the sale ordinance were referred to as "haters". Of course we assume that there has been some misunderstanding. This is a democratic society that believes in free speech even if not expressed well.

However, it is fact that some Parishioners have told us that they feel they have not been consulted about this important decision and also that they feel very upset and marginalised as a result of their opinions in opposing the sale ordinance.

Church neighbours and the broader community feel they are ill-informed about the Church's intentions. They feel they have been allowed no voice although they too are major stakeholders in any decision to excise for future development a part of the St John's heritage precinct, a precinct that is acknowledged by experts as rare and of great historic significance in Australia's European settlement.

We would like to present two specific community issues that we feel need urgent attention to restore what is usually a mutually respectful and beneficial relationship between the Church hierarchy and community.

Community Issues

1. ***Given the significance of the Sale Ordinance Process no detailed information was provided to the Wardens, the parishioners and community on the heritage significance of the St Johns Church Precinct.***

After the closing date for the submissions to the Standing Committee in late December it became apparent that two significant documents existed that define the standards expected of St Johns to conserve the heritage aspects of the entire site.

These two documents are

- (a) The St Johns Anglican Church Precinct, Menangle Road, Camden, Conservation Management Plan, March 2004, prepared by Clive Lucas, Stapleton and Partners and
- (b) Conservation Management Plan Addendum 2010, St Johns Anglican Church Precinct, Menangle Road, Camden NSW. Prepared by NBRIS and Partners.

In the Conservation Management Plan 2004 it states

“Make copies of the Conservation Management Plan freely available to the public for inspection”

In the Conservation Plan Addendum 2010 it states,

“Make the CMP and Addendum freely available to the public for inspection”

It is felt that because these pivotal documents in regards to the heritage management of the entire precinct were not available to the public at the time the submissions had to be completed this

denied the Parishioners and community members reasonable information to form a considered opinion to support or not support the sale ordinance process.

Recommendation 1.

The church provides the information to the public both as hard copy and on the church web site as required in both plans

2. There has been no appropriate forum as part of the Sale Ordinance process to allow the community, as a group, to ask questions or comment directly to the Minister and Wardens.

No responses addressing the concerns raised by the many community members who lodged submissions with the Diocese have been provided to them. We trust this is merely an oversight, and that responses will be forthcoming.

It was believed, especially given the lack of timely responses to formal submissions and significance of the sale ordinance process in the eyes of the community, that the recent AGM at St John's Camden on Sunday 26th March was a suitable and appropriate forum to ask questions and seek comment on the Sale Ordinance process. It was also assumed that the sale ordinance process would be clarified and the Church's intentions explained. By their attendance the community provided a forum that had not otherwise been organized and expected a spirit of open acknowledgement of their stake in the sale ordinance.

This forum would have included the Minister, Wardens and attending Parishioners and been edifying for all. It would have been welcomed by some Parishioners who wished to know more, ask questions and perhaps express an opinion. The forum potentially avoided the need to set up other mechanisms of consultation and engagement to which stakeholders in many arenas are normally entitled.

During the week leading up to the AGM several different advices, the latest on Saturday 25th March, were given by St Andrews about rules on attendance of community members who were not current Parishioners. The assistance and advice offered by St Andrews is very much appreciated and was seen as a genuine attempt on their part to allow the community a chance to participate in the process.

Non-Parishioners were clearly expected and were admitted as a distinct group to be seated at the back of the hall.

This demarcation of "us and them" was not perceived as welcoming. At the start of the AGM proceedings Reverend Galea indicated that on the advice of the Wollongong legal counsel that the "visitors" were "allowed" in the room. This somewhat conflicted with the advice we were

kindly afforded by St Andrews, as essentially, we were not permitted in the room unless a motion was moved and that did not take place.

Despite that, and at this stage, still not having approval to speak, the community were still of the opinion that at some stage in the meeting the process as advised by St Andrews to allow the community to speak would be invoked by Reverend Galea.

That motion to allow the community to speak never happened. The community remained silent, respectful and the opportunity was lost.

This is in no way a criticism of Reverend Galea. It is believed that both the local Church and community may not have adequately understood the correct process as advised to us by St Andrews.

However it was clear to most at the meeting that the sale ordinance elephant in the room was ignored and that procedures were followed in a way that precluded an important discussion that needs to take place.

Recommendation 2(a)

The community as a group is allowed an opportunity to meet with Reverend Galea, the Wardens, and, if the Church determines, the Parishioners, to ask questions and seek explanation and comment from the Church.

Recommendation 2(b)

That until the previous recommendations are responded to by St John's Camden that the Standing Committee be contacted immediately and a request made to defer the decision on the Sale Ordinance process.