

Weir Phillips Heritage and Planning

24 June 2020.

Attention: **The General Manager**

Ku-ring-gai Council
818 Pacific Highway, Gordon NSW 2072

Re: **6 Springdale Road, Killara**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The following concerns the proposed heritage listing of No. 6 Springdale Road, Killara as a heritage item of local significance by Schedule 5 Part 1 of the *Ku-ring-gai Local Environmental Plan 2015*. The site is currently subject to an Interim Heritage Order (IHO 152 gazetted).

Council notes in its Preliminary Heritage Assessment, undated, that, to “protect the property from deleterious changes that will greatly impact on the cultural significance and relative intactness of the house,” an Interim Heritage Order be sought from the Minister. That the building might be in danger, is not in any way substantiated by the actions of the owner or by the statutory protection already afforded to the building, which is as follows:

- The house lies in the Springdale Conservation Heritage Area. As such an Interim Heritage Order has been issued by the Minister as the house is currently afforded protection by the Conservation Area and an IHO cannot be issued by Council.
- The owners submitted an application to Council, openly seeking to carry out certain works. Council are at liberty to refuse such an application or work with the owners to seek a satisfactory outcome in relation to the Conservation Area.

Council chose the heavy-handed alternative of seeking an IHO causing considerable distress to the current owners, who were seeking permission from Council for some simple works that in no way threatened the house, when there was the option of consulting with them.

Ku-ring-gai Council commissioned Robertson + Hindmarsh to carry out a heritage assessment of the property. The subsequent report prepared by them is dated 16 April, 2020. This report has been reviewed, together with additional information provided by the owner of the property, including a heritage assessment commissioned by the owner and prepared by Patrick Wilson dated 6 March, 2020.

The owner of the property has also provided information from Mrs. Margaret Eastment that was not available to Robertson + Hindmarsh. The Eastments commissioned Ken Woolley, who was a friend and colleague, to design the house and occupied it until its recent sale. The late Mr. Barry Eastment was a builder and was responsible for construction of the house. Mrs. Eastment has stated that the building works did not involve participation by Ken Woolley as supervising

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architect and that many of the detailed design decisions were made by the Eastments. This alone diminishes the Woolley design when compared to other houses and buildings designed by him and for which he fully supervised construction.

The following concerns are raised with regard to the conclusions drawn in the Robertson + Hindmarsh report:

1. The comparative analysis in the report is not sufficient to draw the conclusion that the property is a fine example of the work of Ken Woolley. The report provides a list of houses designed by Woolley, but no descriptions or illustrations of these houses to enable meaningful comparisons to be drawn. It is noted that the site has not been identified in any previous heritage studies carried out by Council, notably the *Review of Ku ring gai Potential Heritage Items from the Post War Period* (2011), which included a number of Woolley houses. It was also not mentioned in the assessment for the creation of the Conservation area in 2015. In that process houses within the conservation area were not categorized as Contributory, Neutral or Intrusive.

Given this omission, a more thorough process to establish the status of Woolley's work and to enable the significance of No. 6 Springdale Road to be fully understood is required. This would include a comparison in greater depth to the award-winning examples listed by Robertson + Hindmarsh in their report and considered by his peers to be the best examples of his work. Where the theme of listing is the work of a particular architect, a survey should be made of as many of the buildings by that architect that are known. Based on such a survey, a full and informed comparative analysis can be made. With regard to a particular architect, such a survey should not be confined to a particular Local Government Area. There is no real understanding where No. 6 Springdale Road sits within the lexicon of Woolley's work.

The house is described as being a 'Sydney School' house. Accepting that there is discussion as to whether this is a particular style of architecture, I concur with the analysis provided by Patrick Wilson that the house lacks the

'...crucial site-hugging quality illustrated by exemplars of the 'Sydney School. The nature of the subject allotment- only faintly undulating and historically deriving from the landscape grounds of 4 Springdale Road in a highly suburban/established streetscape- prevented any authentic attempt on behalf of the designer to harmonise with or sensitively response to a 'natural setting.' This lack of a challenging site for the design to tackle and blend into poses a major impediment to an interpretation of the subject building as being a worthy example of the 'Sydney School.' Such a facet is intrinsic within all of its celebrated examples. It cannot be said that this design was meaningfully influenced by the qualities of the site.'

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The fact that the house backs onto a tennis court, previously part of the heritage-listed No. 4 Springdale Road, makes the rear elevation awkward and without the finesse created in those examples where the rear of Woolley's houses look down into a bushland gully.

2. The information provided by Mrs. Eastment calls into question the extent to which Woolley was involved beyond the initial Application phase. Mrs. Eastment states that Woolley was not involved in the construction. The house needs to be compared to those commissions that Woolley saw through to completion. How this lack of involvement beyond the initial design phase impacted upon how complete an example it is of Woolley's work and whether the houses that he oversaw the construction of better are examples of his work should be thoroughly questioned.
3. If the listing for No. 6 Springdale Road should proceed, the current owners should have the opportunity to provide input into the information and conclusions drawn by the listing sheet, as this will become the document that guides the future management of the site. There are some concerning conclusions as to what should and shouldn't occur to the house in the Hindmarsh + Robertson report. For example:

- The report places great weight on the retention of the face brickwork. Among the information provided by Mrs. Eastment is that it was intended by the Eastments and by Woolley to paint the brickwork, as opposed to leaving it face brick as indicated by the only available plans that survive. While common bricks could have been used to save money, no builder building his own house would accept the quality of the brickwork, notably the use of chipped bricks and a lack of random placing of "doughboys", bricks with a dark red heart. These bricks appear in concentrated areas on the front elevation as opposed to being randomly mixed into the brickwork. Those houses designed by Woolley where it was intended that the brickwork remain exposed show a higher level of craftsmanship in the execution of the brickwork regardless of the use of common or face bricks.
- The report also places weight on the use of mission brown stain to the woodwork. The original documentation is not so prescriptive and states:

'If the weatherboards are not western red cedar or Canadian redwood, treated with a heavy body stain, they are to be painted with a pigmented paint and not oiled, stained, varnished or similarly treated.'

The original exterior timber work was replaced by the owner in 2015 with pine and stained. Woolley's houses demonstrate the use of other colours, the importance being their tonal relationship with their, usually, bushland settings.

- The original plans specified a brick fence on the front boundary up to 6 ft in height. Such a fence is consistent with the range of fences in the area and has the two practical aspects of providing safety in the front yard for children and preventing headlights from penetrating the front bedroom on an otherwise busy corner.

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The owners respectfully request that the process of listing their property at No.6 Springdale Road, Killara be deferred pending Council carrying out a proper survey and comparative analysis of the work of Ancher Mortlock and Woolley (in its various guises) and of Ken Woolley in particular to determine the precise status of the Eastment House in relation to the other works of both the architectural firm and that of Woolley himself. Such a study should include direct contact with Mrs Eastment as original owner of the house to establish the roles of owner and architect in its design and construction. It is our understanding that Mrs Eastment is quite happy to participate in such an undertaking.

The owners are also happy to provide any information that is at their disposal.

Should you have any questions, please call me on (02)8076 5317.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Phillips', with a stylized flourish at the end.

James Phillips
B.Sc.(Arch.), B.Arch., M.Herit.Cons.(hons)
Director