

Australian Capital Territory

Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration for Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip) Notice 2011

Notifiable Instrument NI 2011 -486

made under the

***Heritage Act 2004* section 34 Notice of Decision about Provisional Registration**

1. Name of instrument

This instrument is the Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration for Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip) Notice 2011 -

2. Registration details of the place

Registration details of the place are at Attachment A: Provisional Register entry for the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip.

3. Reason for decision

The ACT Heritage Council has decided that the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip meets one or more of the heritage significance criteria at s 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*. The provisional register entry is at Attachment A.

4. Date of Provisional Registration

25 August 2011

5. Indication of council's intention


The Council intends to decide whether to register the entry under Division 6.2.

6. Public consultation period

The Council invites public comment by Wednesday 28 September 2011 on the provisional registration of the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip to:

The Secretary
ACT Heritage Council
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Jennifer O'Connell
Acting Secretary
ACT Heritage Council
25 August 2011

 ACT Heritage Council	AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY HERITAGE REGISTER (Provisional Registration Details) Place No:
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The following is mandatory:

For the purposes of s. 33 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, an entry to the heritage register has been prepared by the ACT Heritage Council for the following place:

Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, 1-30 Barnet Close and 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, and 49 Barnet Close, Phillip

Blocks 1-14 Section 62 Phillip, Block 1 Section 128 Phillip, Block 1 Section 124 Phillip, Blocks 1-30 Section 63 Phillip, and Block 1 Section 125 Phillip, (Part) Block 1 Section 122 Philip Woden Valley.

Adjacent road verges as indicated within the registered boundary

DATE OF PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

Notified: 25 August 2011 Notifiable Instrument: 2011 - 486

PERIOD OF EFFECT OF PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

Start Date 25 August 2011 End Date 25 January 2012

Extended Period (if applicable) Start Date _____ End Date _____

Copies of the Register Entry are available for inspection at the ACT Heritage Unit. For further information please contact:

The Secretary
ACT Heritage Council
GPO Box 158, Canberra, ACT 2601

Telephone: 13 22 81 Facsimile: (02) 6207 2229

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PLACE

Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, 1-30 Barnet Close and 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, and 49 Barnet Close, Phillip

Blocks 1-14 Section 62 Phillip, Block 1 Section 128 Phillip, Block 1 Section 124 Phillip, Blocks 1-30 Section 63 Phillip, and Block 1 Section 125 Phillip, (Part) Block 1 Section 122 Philip Woden Valley.

Adjacent road verges as indicated within the registered boundary

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

This statement refers to the Heritage Significance of the place as required in s12(d) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing is of heritage significance as important evidence of a distinctive design of exceptional interest, for its strong and special associations with a development and cultural phase in local ACT history, for showing qualities of innovation, as a rare example of medium density stepped housing and as a notable example of medium density cluster housing in the ACT.

The planning design of Swinger Hill is of exceptional interest as one of the first medium-density residences in Australia to achieve a density of 40 persons per acre. It retains a high level of integrity which continues to demonstrate the design principles at the time of its planning and construction in the 1970s. Respecting the contours and natural elements of the site and achieving privacy and individuality in each townhouse, it offers alternative approaches to residential accommodation and challenges previous notions of suburban living.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing has a strong and special association with the cultural phase of 1970s planning ideals for medium-density housing and the NCDCs experimentation in providing alternative forms of suburban lifestyles at this time. The concept of Swinger Hill is widely recognised as 'the first major housing development to challenge directly the Australian suburb' (Freestone, 2010: 200), in terms of the combination of medium-density living and the arrangement of units. Its planning and development was in direct response to NCDCs recognition of a need to curtail urban sprawl and minimise an otherwise wasteful use of land resources.

A high degree of innovation is demonstrated as Swinger Hill Cluster Housing was the first medium density cluster housing in Australia to achieve a density of 40 persons per acre, providing an alternative lifestyle and additional housing choices for Canberra residents in the 1970s.

It is a rare example of medium density stepped housing located on a hillside in the ACT. The stepped nature of the housing illustrates the planning response to the site's topography and contours. This distinctive feature is uncommon within the ACT.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing is a notable example of medium density cluster housing, demonstrating the main characteristics of this kind. It is notable as the first medium density housing in the ACT which pioneered the way for later developments.

FEATURES INTRINSIC TO THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACE

The attributes listed below are assessed as features intrinsic to the heritage significance of the place:

- Physical and visual links between residences;
- Individual courtyard design;
- Pedestrian pathways and communal open spaces;
- Orientation of residences to the north or north-east;
- Underground cabling of services; and
- Variety in individual house types, allowing a degree of flexibility and freedom of choice.

APPLICABLE HERITAGE GUIDELINES

The guiding conservation objective is that the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip, shall be conserved and appropriately managed in a manner respecting its heritage significance and the features intrinsic to that heritage significance, and consistent with a sympathetic and viable use or uses. Any works that have a potential impact on significant fabric (and / or other heritage values) shall be guided by a professionally documented assessment and conservation policy relevant to that area or component (i.e. a Statement of Heritage Effects – SHE).

The 'Heritage Guidelines - Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip', prepared by the ACT Heritage Council provide detailed guidance on conservation measures for proposed works and development in the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing and should be referred to for specific conservation advice.

REASON FOR PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing, Phillip has been assessed against the heritage significance criteria and been found to have heritage significance when assessed against five criteria under the ACT Heritage Act:

- (a) it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches;
- (c) it is important as evidence of a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function that is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest;
- (f) it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness
- (g) it is a notable example of a kind of place or object and demonstrates the main characteristics of that kind
- (h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history

ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Pursuant to s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a place or object has heritage significance if it satisfies one or more of the following criteria. Significance has been determined by research as accessed in the references below. Future research may alter the findings of this assessment.

- (a) it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches;**

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement by showing qualities of innovation and an exceptionally fine level of application of existing planning techniques.

These qualities are demonstrated through being the first medium density cluster housing in Australia to achieve a density of 40 persons per acre, and in the NCDCs success in its experiment to provide an alternative lifestyle choice to the suburban norm. In doing so, the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing provided an innovative departure from established suburban planning, providing greater housing choice and affordability, and providing alternatives to the perceived wasteful land consumption of typical suburban sprawl.

The Swinger Hill Housing Cluster meets this criterion.

- (b) it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group;**

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing does not meet this criterion.

- (c) it is important as evidence of a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function that is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest;**

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing is important as evidence of a distinctive design of exceptional interest.

The distinctive design of which Swinger Hill is evidence is that of the NCDCs planning in the 1970s towards medium-density developments offering alternative approaches to residential accommodation, challenging previous notions of suburban living.

The Cluster Housing is important as evidence of this design as the first of its kind in Australia to achieve a density of 40 persons per acre. The planning and design of Swinger Hill is of exceptional interest as it showcases the NCDCs willingness to experiment with medium density housing in the 1970s.

The concept of Swinger Hill is widely recognised as ‘the first major housing development to challenge directly the Australian suburb’ (Freestone, 2010: 200), in terms of the combination of medium-density living and the arrangement of units.

The design and planning of Swinger Hill provides an amalgamation of stepped housing, cluster development, medium-density living, and an alternative to the suburban lifestyle. It allowed for low cost living, and the design of the courtyard homes with minimal garden freed up time for other pursuits.

In their site planning, McKay and Partners paid great attention to topography and orientation, to take full advantage of the hillside site, with views over the Woden valley, and the northern sun. They also incorporated other aspects of site planning in their design, including elements of vegetation, parkland, and pedestrian pathways.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing meets this criterion.

- (d) it is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations;**

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing does not meet this criterion.

- (e) it is significant to the ACT because of its importance as part of local Aboriginal tradition**

Not applicable.

- (f) it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness**

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing is a rare example of medium density stepped housing located on a hillside in the ACT.

Although there are other good, intact examples of medium density housing in the ACT dating from the same period as Swinger Hill, including Urambi at Kambah and Wybalena Grove at Cook, the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing is the only one which demonstrates site planning on a hillside location.

The stepped nature of the housing illustrates the planning response to the site's topography and contours. This distinctive feature is uncommon within the ACT.

The Swinger Hill Housing Cluster meets this criterion.

- (g) it is a notable example of a kind of place or object and demonstrates the main characteristics of that kind**

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing is a notable example of medium density cluster housing, demonstrating the main characteristics of this kind, including semi-attached and attached dwellings, low maintenance yards, courtyards, and exterior communal space. Other common aspects of medium density planning which are evident in the cluster include the consideration given to site selection, orientation, community, privacy and identity.

It is notable as the first medium density housing in the ACT which pioneered the way for later developments.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing meets this criterion.

- (h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history**

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing has a strong and special association with a development and cultural phase in local ACT history.

It is associated with the development and cultural phase of 1970s planning ideals for medium-density housing, which achieved a prominence from this time in response to a need to contain urban sprawl and minimise an otherwise wasteful use of land resources.

This cultural phase reflects the NCDCs attempts to maintain the ideals of suburbia – the aspiration to own one's own house on a private block in a tree-lined street – while providing medium-density residential housing units capable of catering for different housing tastes and preferences. Swinger Hill is one of a number, and the earliest of its kind of medium-density developments undertaken during this cultural phase and was used as an experiment by the NCDC.

The association of the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing with the cultural phase of a move towards medium-density residential development in the 1970s is strong and special as one of Canberra's first total medium density residential developments, as one of the NCDCs first substantial moves towards alternative housing developments and one of the most ambitious medium-density housing projects of its time in Australia.

The concept of Swinger Hill is widely recognised as 'the first major housing development to challenge directly the Australian suburb' (Freestone, 2010: 200), in terms of the combination of medium-density living and the arrangement of units.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing meets this criterion.

- (i) it is significant for understanding the evolution of natural landscapes, including significant geological features, landforms, biota or natural processes**

Not applicable.

- (j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site**

The Swinger Hill Housing Precinct does not meet this criterion.

- (k) for a place—it exhibits unusual richness, diversity or significant transitions of flora, fauna or natural landscapes and their elements**

Not applicable.

- (l) for a place—it is a significant ecological community, habitat or locality for any of the following:**

- (i) the life cycle of native species;**
- (ii) rare, threatened or uncommon species;**
- (iii) species at the limits of their natural range;**
- (iv) distinct occurrences of species.**

Not applicable.

SUMMARY OF THE PLACE HISTORY AND PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

HISTORY

Medium density housing in the ACT

Early in the 1970s the NCDC recognised a need to provide a wider range of residential dwelling types, particularly medium density housing (Judd and Dean, 1983: 36). As a result, they undertook a great deal of experimentation in the field of suburban planning (Tanner, 1976). The NCDC sought to 'provide Canberra people with single family homes on individual plots of land situated in picturesque surrounds as a means of creating a model community in Canberra' (Brown, 2008: 178).

The NCDC developed several exhibitions of new dwelling styles, including the Swinger Hill town housing, the Burnie Courts at Lyons, and a Radburn development at Fisher (Judd and Dean, 1983: 36).

At the time, questions were being raised about the very wasteful land consumption of the individual house and acceptable alternatives were being sought to the three bedroom/two bathroom/double garage/plus garden house, which had become the norm in Canberra (Tanner 1976).

Medium density housing has its origins well before this time, in both our own and other cultures. In nineteenth century Australia, medium density housing was initially introduced as row houses of English terraces in Melbourne and Sydney. These soon became regarded as slums, before the rehabilitation of terraces in the 1960s which brought about a new respect for medium density housing designs (Judd and Dean, 1983: 5).

In exploring options for alternative housing, the NCDC 'acknowledged that there were those with more absorbing interests, which generally excluded gardening who, whilst still wanting a detached house, exhibited preference for a more urban housing environment. Notwithstanding a desire to maintain the ideals of suburbia – the aspiration to own one's own house on a private block in a tree-lined street – the NCDC began considering the idea of developing a medium-density residential housing unit capable of catering for different housing tastes and preferences' (Brown, 2008: 193).

To test this theory, the NCDC conducted a survey of housing characteristics and attitudes in Canberra. The survey indicated there was a growing demand for alternative types of accommodation, including town houses (Brown, 2008: 195).

It was within this context that Swinger Hill was developed in the ACT in the early 1970s.

Development of Swinger Hill

Swinger Hill is a coordinated design for housing on 60 acres in Phillip, close to the Woden Town Centre. This was one of the first developments of conjoined medium density cluster housing in Australia with an estimated population of 2,400 people and 700 dwellings including courtyard, row, atrium and clustered stepped houses. It was one of the first alternatives to suburban living to achieve 40 persons per acre in Australia. The scheme was a staged development, with houses arranged in courts of 10-50 each, around a private car and entrance way.

The first two courts in Barnet Close, totalling 39 houses, were designed by the architects Ian McKay and partners as a prototype to test design principles and as a demonstration project for private enterprise.

Brown (2008: 197) argues that McKay sought to incorporate the natural environment in his design and planning, with McKay himself stating in 2008 that orientation 'is the very beginning of everything I do, or have done' (Brown, 2008: 197). Each unit was sited to take advantage of the best solar and topographical orientation and 'to maintain a good relationship with the main open space system of the area' (Brown, 2008: 198).

Brown (2008: 198) further argues that 'one of the primary aims of the McKay and Partners scheme was to achieve a closely knit but comprehensive living environment and to illustrate that a scheme of this type permitted a variety of house designs conducive to social contact while at the same time preserving individual privacy'. The ability of all buildings to blend together to form a total environment was also a critical factor in McKay's designs.

The NCDC stressed the importance of early and large scale planting to ensure the timely creation of a pleasing environment (Brown, 2008: 198).

Only relatively small fragments – in Barnet Close and Rowe Place – were built to McKay's design with the remainder being taken up by private developers. With 100 percent vehicle access mandatory for all dwellings, McKay had to find a way to get roads and vehicles into the extremely tight groupings of mostly single storey houses that were required to achieve the high overall site density (Metcalf, 2003).

The first five of the first group of 39 houses were opened to the public in April 1972. Housing construction had cost the NCDC from \$15,000 to \$18,000 plus land.

In April 1972 the NCDC prepared a brochure for the Swinger Hill Housing Development exhibition. The brochure provides plans for the cluster and for individual house plans (See Attachment 1). It states that the housing density is 40 persons per acre, compared with about 13 persons per acre in detached housing subdivisions, resulting in economies in the use of land and provision of services, and providing a different living environment favoured by an increasing number of people (NCDC, 1972: 3).

The NCDC (1972: 3) also states in this brochure: 'the commission's main aim in providing sites for this type of accommodation in Canberra, has been to increase the variety of housing types available, so, providing greater choice of house and living environment'. Each cul-de-sac was intended to operate as a pleasant, effective environment within the scheme through different stages of development.

Features of the development, as stated by the NCDC (1972: 3) are that:

- *'the site is closely related to the Woden Town Centre, the Mawson shopping centre, primary and high schools.*
- *The total scheme design has been organised to provide a high degree of individual privacy, safety and convenience.*
- *An integrated design has been achieved by close attention to building forms and garden walls, materials and colour selections, service locations and landscaping. The design has further been enhanced by the undergrounding of all telephone and electrical services.*
- *All house sites have been provided with north or east aspects to catch the winter sunshine and summer breezes while at the same time facilitating protection from the prevailing winds.*
- *Garden courtyards provide supervised play space for small children; the car courts provide play space for older children while levelled broader open space provides space for outdoor games and adventure play.*
- *Convenient and safe traffic circulation routes have been provided in the total scheme avoiding the hazards associated with through-traffic.*
- *Gradually ramped pedestrian walkways will link the open space into a traffic-free system.*
- *The variety in individual house types will allow a high degree of flexibility, giving considerable freedom of choice. Some houses may be extended.*
- *Carports to accommodate two cars have been provided for each house, plus storage cupboards. Off-street visitor parking has also been provided.*
- *Service piers store garbage cans from view as well as providing facilities for milk and mail deliveries'.*

The original lease conditions provided to tenants included the following clauses:

- (1) The area of extensions shall not be permitted to exceed 400 square feet.
- (2) External colour and finish of existing walls, roofing and timbers must be maintained.
- (3) Outbuildings are to be below the line of screen walls and constructed of approved materials.
- (4) Alterations and extensions will be required in materials, colours and finish to match those of the existing building.
- (5) Roofs to extensions are to be pitched to match those existing (approximately 18 ½ degrees).
- (6) No external plumbing will be permitted.
- (7) Clothes drying facilities are to be located within service courts and adequately screened (Department of the Interior, Commissioner for Housing, 1972).

Analysis and critique of the Swinger Hill development

In response to planning proposals for the Swinger Hill development, in an article in *Architecture in Australia*, prominent architect Robin Boyd (1970: 78) refers to the proposed Swinger Hill development as 'the first substantial revolt against suburbia ever to be made in Australia with, virtually, a built-in guarantee of success... the guarantee is in the sponsorship. It is not being done by a private company

that might eventually collapse under the strain of pioneering an unfamiliar concept... Private enterprise will be invited to contribute to it, but the initiative and direction comes from the NCDC’.

Boyd (1970: 83) further states that ‘the plan achieves its unity by reliance on strict orientation: irrespective of contours and curves in the streets, all buildings will run due north-south or precisely at 45 degrees to that, which gives it the jet-set fashionable diagonal look. Contrary to this, the building units have a simple indigenous character. Individually the house units are close relatives of the houses on the Woden hills behind... The stepped houses, which are near the town centre, are even more adventurous. The roof of each of these units is the landscaped and walled courtyard of the one above¹. But most of the rest of the dwellings are familiar, recalling in plan and style various good commercial project houses.

‘Practically all that is different is the fact that they are coordinated, physically linked by brick fences and paving and visually linked by the consistency of the design details. If they lose in lawn-mowing space, they gain in the attention given to orientation: windows towards the mild north-east; blank walls and fences towards the nasty north-west; privacy obtained by the careful placing of windows and screen walls. Resting peaceably together on a knoll beside the Woden valley floor, they will make a compact place, a strong and identifiable place with which its people will, or should be, proud to identify. If this identity can indeed be achieved, then this section of Phillip will have proved an important point of its own. It will show that suburban malaise can be cured for internal treatment rather than surgery’ (Boyd, 1970: 84).

Boyd was full of praise for the designs of Swinger Hill, stating that the proposal provided ‘an exciting alternative, offering a popular acceptable substitute for the suburban dream’ (Brown, 2008: 202). Despite his praise for the planning of Swinger Hill, Boyd died on 15 October 1971, six months prior to the public opening of the first stage of the development.

In a later critique of the development, Freestone (2010: 200) states that ‘the shift towards higher densities was in part to promote housing choice and affordability’. Freestone uses East Lakes in Sydney and Swinger Hill in Canberra as examples of ‘noteworthy schemes translating these two trends into coordinated medium density neighbourhoods, albeit in quite different ways’.

Brown (2008: 192) argues that Swinger Hill is significant as one of Canberra’s first total medium density residential units, as one of the NCDCs first substantial moves towards alternative housing developments and one of the most ambitious medium-density housing projects of its time in Australia.

She also states that the Swinger Hill development is unique in that unlike most other suburban developments of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the McKay and Partners’ plan for its development sought to work with the contours and natural elements of the site (Brown, 2008: 219).

In 1972 a number of articles were published in the *Canberra Times* on the perceived ills of Swinger Hill, including issues of faulty and substandard features (Brown, 2008: 219).

Mixed responses are given by recent and current residents regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the cluster, with some residents believing the area to be efficient and environmentally sustainable, while others consider the development to be sub-optimal for a range of different reasons.

The name *Swinger Hill* follows the pattern of calling local trigonometrical points after the surveyor who surveyed them. Louis Walter Henry Swinger (1901-1943) worked in this area and surveyed the trig point. A plaque commemorating this has been installed on a nearby rock. Swinger joined the staff of the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) in Canberra in 1927 and for three years was actively engaged on surveys connected with the development of the National Capital. In 1934 he was appointed by the Commonwealth Government as Surveyor to the Administration of Nauru Island where he remained until shortly after the outbreak of war with Japan. On his return to Australia he spent two years as a staff surveyor in the Department of the Interior in Canberra (Menzies 1998).

¹ This planning never eventuated.

DESCRIPTION

This citation refers to the first 39 houses planned and developed in the Swinger Hill Cluster Housing – Stage 1.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing forms a group of attached and semi-attached cluster housing unified by similar materials, colour and detailing. The first 39 houses in Stage one are mostly brick and generally have gabled or shed roofs of tiles and some skillion pergolas.

They include a variety of individual house types which allows a high degree of flexibility and provides freedom of choice. Each residence has a private courtyard.

The houses all face north or north-east and are sited on a hillside overlooking the Woden Valley.

Vegetation includes some mature eucalypts and other introduced species on private land.

Conceived as a tight network of densely packed private spaces, the housing lines the street spaces with high garden walls and carports, and has minimal public presence.

Pathways through the housing lead to communal open space areas and playgrounds.

All telephone and electrical services are located underground.

The Swinger Hill Cluster Housing at Barnett Close is located at the northern end of Swinger Hill which is separated from Hindmarsh Drive with an acoustic and air pollution barrier provided by a perimeter bushland setting.

REFERENCES

References

Boyd, R., 1970, 'Waking from the Suburbia Dream: Australia's first substantial revolt against suburbia' in *Architecture in Australia*, February 1970, pp.73-87.

Brown, S., 2008, 'Imagining Environment in Australian Suburbia: An environmental history of the Suburban Landscapes of Canberra and Perth, 1946-1996', thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Western Australia, Discipline of History, School of Humanities.

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Tanner, H., 1976, *Australian Housing in the Seventies*, Ure Smith, Sydney.

Wright, Bruce 2000 *Cornerstone of the Capital – A History of Public Housing in Canberra*, ACT Housing, Canberra.

The Canberra Times, Friday April 7, 1972 pg 1. (kindly supplied by Dr Robert Boden)

Oral history respondents Mr & Mrs B Coghill, and Ron & Holly Hourigan, Narrabundah (2005).

Letter from Rod Menzies, Chief Surveyor, ACTPLA to residents 10/7/1998. (Kindly supplied by Dr Robert Boden)

RAIA Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture citation number R043.

MAPS AND SITE PLANS



Site boundaries as indicated by solid red line.



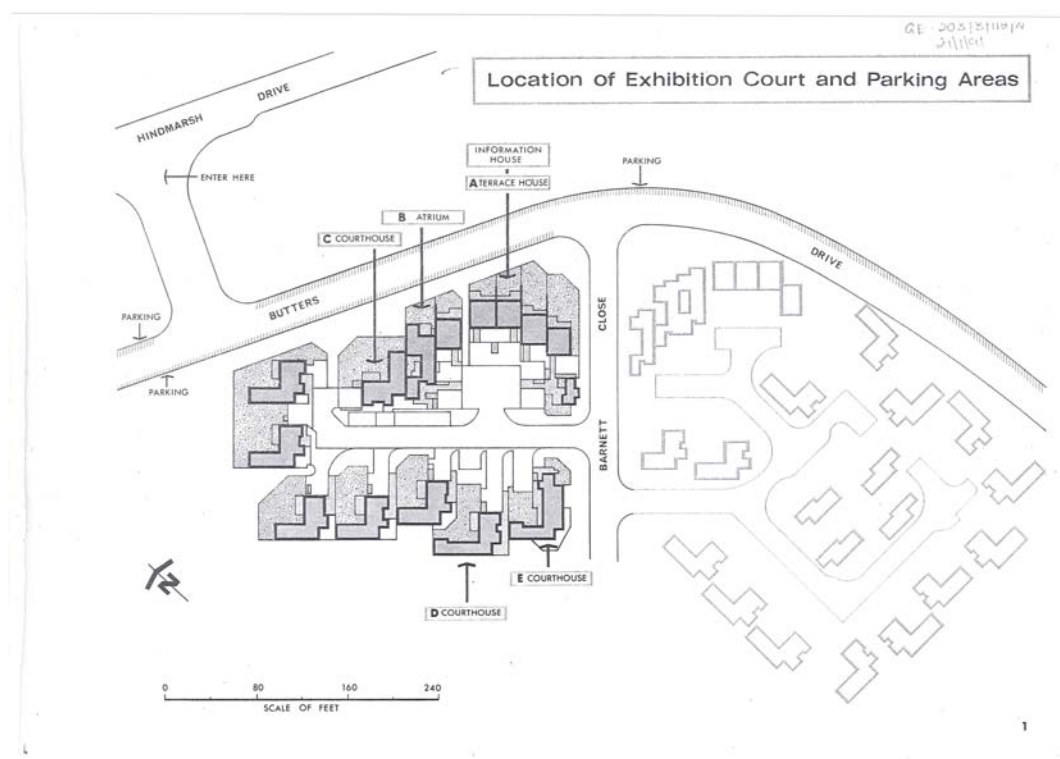
Red hatching clearly shows the registered area



Proposed scheme for Swinger Hill, NCD, 1972
Credit: NLA Npf 728.312099471 S978



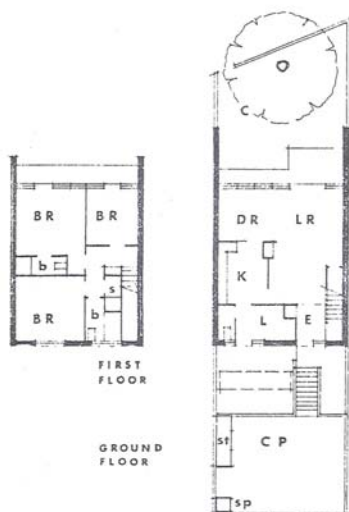
Aerial view of Swinger Hill
ACTMAPi, accessed 15 October 2010



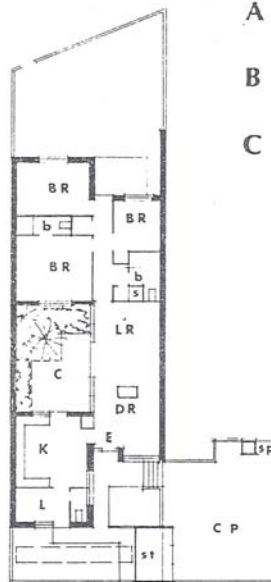
Swinger Hill, NCDC, 1972
Credit: NLA Npf 728.312099471 S978

Exhibition House Plans

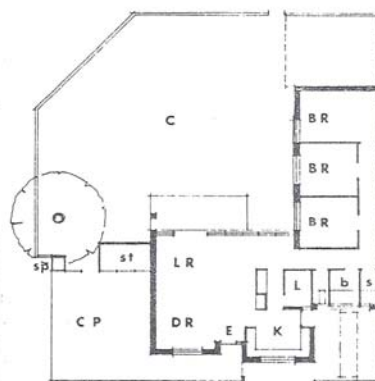
These three plans and the two on the next page are the plans of houses on display.



A

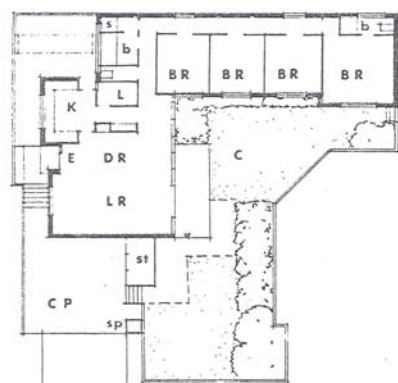


B



C

- A TH 2 TERRACE HOUSE:** Area 1,416 sq. ft.
This two-storey terrace house contains three bedrooms and is sited to maximise the view. The living area opens onto a garden courtyard.
- B A 2 ATRIUM HOUSE:** Area 1,342.6 sq. ft.
A three-bedroom, elongated house, it is designed so that the living areas look out onto an atrium courtyard.
- C CH 4A COURTHOUSE:** Area 1,300 sq. ft.
A three-bedroom L-shaped house built initially with three bedrooms and allowing for a fourth bedroom as an extension.



D

NATIONAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

ARCHITECTS

Ian McKay & Partners, Sydney

BUILDERS

George Wimpey & Co.

EXHIBITION HOUSE FURNISHERS

House A: J.B. Young Ltd.

B: Ken McCarthy Interiors Pty. Ltd.

C: McCallum's of Canberra Pty. Ltd.

E: David Jones (Canberra) Pty. Ltd.



E

D CH 4B COURTHOUSE: Area 1,522 sq ft.

Similar design to the CH4A type, but has four bedrooms. The house is designed so that all rooms look out onto a garden courtyard.

E CH 3 COURTHOUSE: Area 1,655 sq ft.

A three-bedroom house incorporating a study, with the additional feature of an open fireplace as well as the standard gas heating.

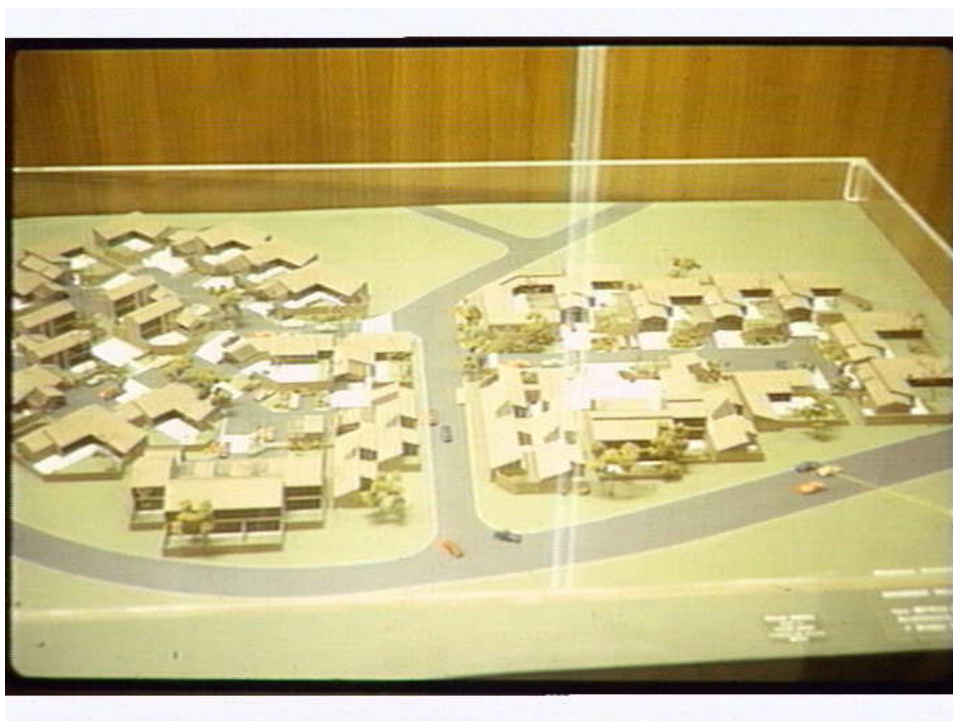
Swinger Hill, NCDC, 1972
Credit: NLA Npf 728.312099471 S978



Construction of Swinger Hill housing in 1971
ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection 006180



Swinger Hill housing in 1975
National Archives of Australia A6180, 28/7/75/24



Swinger Hill township at Woden, Ian McKay's 1969 model
State Library of Victoria H91.244/3582

August 2011



Images taken 23 September 2010

NON-STATUTORY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Australian context - medium density, stepped and clustered housing of the 1960s and 1970s – comparable Australian examples

In the 1960s and 1970s legislative changes in Australia saw the introduction of strata and unit title acts.

In 1969-1970 Merchant Builders' 'Elliston community' experimented with group housing based around common parkland with high quality landscaping at Rosanna in Melbourne. Half the site was retained as open space and the balance was oriented to parkland through cul-de-sacs and loop roads. The Victorian Heritage Database (accessed 15 October 2010) states of Elliston:

'The Elliston Estate is representative of the prevailing town planning and the architectural ideals of the late 1960s which aimed to integrate the private or personal living environment into a broader community context. This has been effectively achieved at Elliston where the estate layout, creekside public open space, Australian native landscape and the reticulation of services have been combined to create a visually harmonious communal environment.'

The principal design philosophy for the estate was the integration of the building and architectural professions to provide an integrated residential environment. Limited heterogeneity was stressed with personal home owner identity being expressed by house plan and finish selection, within a given framework. Housing estates in Columbia, Valencia and Reston in the United States and New Ash Green in England were cited as international precedents.

Ellis Stones stated the landscape philosophy ... 'Existing trees in the estate will be left wherever possible ... and any new trees planted will be native Australian trees. It will be a very informal design with no formal flower beds. The landscape must be strong and simple with one continuous flowing feeling.'

The City of Heidelberg, as the electricity supply authority, assisted the landscape concept by providing underground power reticulation and selected street lighting for an estimated extra cost of \$600 per block. The former club house, situated between Pickworth Court and Von Nida Crescent was demolished and house construction commenced early in 1969. A display area between Cremin and Bachli Courts and a site office at the corner of Finlayson Street and Bachli Court were completed by November when The Age provided a special supplement on the estate entitled 'Unorthodox Elliston'.

The concept embodied by Ellis Stones and the consulting architects was also not dissimilar to Walter Burley Griffin and Frank Lloyd Wright's planning philosophies, emphasising integration of built form and landscape. Full height glazing and courtyards were intended to integrate interior and exterior. The desire to eliminate footpaths by extending the united front garden to the kerb, relates to residential planning designs by Burley Griffin who conceived that front gardens should be communal parks to soften the impact of the built form as viewed from the road.

The cul-de-sac street form, limited materials and design choice, integrated with architect consultation and a limited range of materials were also concepts embodied in the Jennings' Beaumont Estate of 30 years before.

Natural stained finishes, clinker bricks and heavy beams continued the Wright influence at Elliston, which had been popularised in Victoria by Charles Duncan. The vogue for private courtyards, either fully or semi enclosed, was another repeating theme. Additional features embodied into the design of dwellings include wide overhanging eaves, pergolas or slatted sunshades, and full height windows facing north'.

Soon after (1970-1974), Merchant Builders developed Winter Park at Doncaster in Melbourne, designed by David Yencken, Graeme Gunn and Ellis Stones. This is considered an innovative scheme with

common parkland areas, car and pedestrian separation, and the planning of homes in harmony with each other and the surrounding environment (Freestone, 2010: 195). However, the density of this design was the same as a standard subdivision. Winter Park has 20 detached houses on six acres (Victorian heritage database, accessed 14/10/2010). Each dwelling has a private garden in addition to a large central communal open space. Landscaping was undertaken by Ellis Stones.

The Victorian Heritage Database (accessed 14/10/2010) states that Winter Park is 'the prototype cluster housing development project in Australia – an experimental attempt to present an alternative to the existing subdivision pattern of the quarter acre block'.

In the 1960s and 1970s Merchant Builders pioneered the introduction of energy efficient, environmentally friendly, architect designed project homes in Victoria. 'Some of the many innovative design principles and features they pursued included pergolas, exposed brickwork and timber beams, passive solar energy and the use of indigenous materials' (Victorian Heritage Database, accessed 14/10/2010).

The ideas of Winter Park informed the planning of a third cluster housing development by architect Graeme Gunn together with Merchant Builders (architect Rob White) at Vermont Park in Victoria in the late 1970s under the flexible siting and open space standards facilitated by the new Victorian *Cluster Titles Act* of 1975 (Freestone, 2010: 195).

Freestone (2010) considers comparable examples in the ACT to be the Urambi Village Housing Cooperative in Kambah and the Cook Housing Cooperative at Wybalena Grove, both designed by Sydney architect Michael Dysart in 1974.

In an *Architecture in Australia* article by Robin Boyd in 1970 Pettit and Sevitt in Sydney and Merchant Builders in Melbourne are cited as being popularly understood to represent the contemporary alternative to the traditional (Boyd, 1970: 73). Boyd goes on to state that 'there have been numerous attempts to build groups, coordinated estates, model suburbs, or company towns with souls. All of them have suffered to some extent the fate which overtook the bravest and most ambitious of them all: Griffin's Castel Crag' (Boyd, 1970: 74). However, Boyd also believed that 'at this time some enlightened attempts to build coordinated housing developments are achieving success. There is already one of merit in Woden: the comparatively modest development of 100 house units by Harry Seidler for the Australian National University, done under the direction of the NCDC'. At the time 'nearly every Australian city has something of the kind going' (Boyd, 1970: 74).

Other trends in housing developments within Australia and Canberra in the 1960s and 1970s included the establishment of Radburn housing precincts. Radburn principles aimed to segregate pedestrian and vehicular movement, and oriented houses towards neighbourhood open space. In Canberra, a precinct of 130 homes in Curtin was planned in 1961-62 and developed between 1966 and 1968. In 1970 the Fisher Government Housing Group was developed, and in 1973 the same principles were applied to the new development at Charnwood.

Comparative analysis

Site planning for medium density, stepped and clustered housing of the 1960s and 1970s

In the 1970s, cluster housing schemes were pioneered, allowing developers to depart from traditional house-and-garden layouts to better respond to natural settings and provide effective common space (Freestone, 2010: 195).

Commonly, fundamental aspects of medium density housing, including clusters, include site selection, community (including facilities), privacy and identity.

Site selection is considered important as 'the site must have some quality and offer the occupant some real alternatives of lifestyle. This may be its close proximity to the central business district or it may be a site offering views and aspect which low density housing does not achieve' (Judd and Dean, 1983: 10).

Pike (1977) also argues that 'implicit in the design of cluster housing is the assumption that the end result will provide an alternative to the typical suburban development'.

Judd and Dean (1983: 14) also state that the most obvious physical considerations for medium density housing include the orientation of the buildings and their aspect, recognizing that these can sometimes be in conflict.

Pike (1977: 13-14), in his book titled *Site Planning: Cluster Housing* refers to the importance of orientation, privacy, circulation systems and communal space. He states that, in regard to orientation 'in the simplest terms, buildings with their long axis oriented east-west and with the minimum of openings on the east and west sides can minimize solar heat gain in summer and maximize solar heat gain in winter... In the design and location of buildings, care should be taken so that spaces adjacent to buildings provide privacy and at the same time provide maximum micro-climate advantages for the residents'.

Pike (1977: 16) continues on to argue that 'the vehicular and pedestrian circulation system should be clearly defined, easy to follow and have a hierarchy of importance'. In addition, 'in a planned residential development the public open space should be thought of as an open space network which can tie the different parts of the site together... It should include space for activity areas and social areas' (Pike, 1977: 21).

Similar principles of housing and residential design were widely acknowledged by at least the early 1960s. In 1962 American author Kevin Lynch in his book *Site Planning* writes of the importance of orientation, privacy and views, private outdoor space and divorcing the car. Lynch refers to the importance of orientation paying respect to sun and wind. He also states that 'no principal window should be closer than 20 feet away from any public way' (Lynch, 1962: 304). Lynch (1962: 303) further states that small outdoor spaces should be intimately related to the unit, with a suitable slope and good orientation'.

In this book Lynch also refers to the notion of cluster housing, whereby units are concentrated and surrounded by open space. Lynch (1962: 311) states that 'a number of recent developments (in America) have used this principle to conserve a handsome piece of landscape. The most difficult problem is likely to be the interrelations between individual buildings, in terms of privacy and the use of adjacent land'.