

18 August 2020

Mr Peter and Ms Liz Skerrett
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Our Ref: 20-0226lsc1

Re: 91 Lauderdale Avenue, Fairlight—Initial Heritage Assessment

Dear Liz and Peter

As requested, this letter has been prepared to provide a summary account of the inspection of the above site—and its existing residence Sunnycliff—by GML Heritage Pty Ltd (GML) on Monday 29 June 2020 and the conclusions reached about the nature and degree of its potential heritage values. Through this process, the letter specifically addresses concerns raised by Northern Beaches Council (NBC) in its Pre-lodgement Advice Memorandum to you (PLM2019/0239) about whether the existing site structures are of heritage significance and whether there would be adverse heritage impacts from the proposed development.

The site is not currently identified as a heritage item in the relevant Local Environmental Plan (*Manly Local Environmental Plan 2013*).

Approach

The initial inspection of the site sought to identify key attributes and components that could contribute to its heritage significance the extent to which they provided meaningful evidence of historic, architectural/aesthetic, social and/or scientific/technical values (in accordance with state government standard guidelines). Issues of the degree of integrity/intactness of the site and the rarity and/or representativeness of its features were also considered, as well as overall condition, particularly in the context of council's PLM (2019/0239) that: 'Despite some outwards signs of dilapidation, the structures appear to be intact and have not been altered since construction'.

In the following account, descriptions of site components are based on the north–south orientation of the lot, with Lauderdale Avenue marking the north boundary and Esplanade Park to the south.

Findings

Generally

The most immediately obvious and notable attribute of the site was its extremely dilapidated physical condition throughout, including the exteriors and interiors of the two buildings—a single storey cottage and small garden shed—as well as landscape elements and ground conditions. So significant was the damage

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to and/or deterioration of major site elements that many areas/elements were unsafe to enter, walk on and/or get close to.

Because of the modest scale of the site, however, as well as sufficient access to key areas of the interior of the residence and outdoor areas to the north, east and south, an adequate account of the character and condition of the landscape and building components was able to be compiled to inform the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

Setting and Streetscape

The existing site is essentially located below the level of Lauderdale Avenue frontage (which marks its north boundary, as noted above) with the ground level falling away steeply to its southern boundary which lines the public walkway north of Esplanade Park. As the main building is set down on the lower level of the site to the south, it is not visible from the public thoroughfare—the roof ridge (at RL 19.10) lying more than 1.5 metres below the kerb of Lauderdale Avenue (RL 20.71).

The masonry wall along the street boundary is sufficiently overgrown as to obscure most of its fabric as well as views down into the site. Its main feature is a pair of masonry gateposts (also overgrown) engraved with the name 'Sunnyside' marking the pedestrian entry. No evidence remains of a gate.

The narrow stone-paved landing and stair along the east boundary (to the level of the house) are currently in poor and unsafe condition. These landscape elements, as well as other random-stone retaining walls and paved areas around the site, appear to have been built and altered at various periods over the life of the building, some in a rather ad hoc manner. None of these elements displays more than the informal/domestic character and basic skill levels of the home-built gardens characteristic of most modest cottages of the interwar period—to which the site development appears to date.

A small kidney-shaped swimming pool is sited in the southeast corner of the lot and is surrounded by a modern aluminium pool fence.

Overall, the somewhat ad hoc character of the site is consistent with the modest scale and workmanship of the original site features, including the residence, and reflects a pragmatic and economical approach to their design and construction. Later changes and additions are generally of poor quality and execution.

No vehicular access is currently available to the site from the street/northern frontage.

Site Structures

The two structures on the site include a small 'garden shed' in the northwest corner of the site and a modest single storey residence occupying most of the remaining area.

The **shed** is a simple rectangular structure with rendered brick walls and a tiled, gabled roof. Because of its unsafe condition, close inspection of the building interior was not possible. Externally, the character and fabric of the structure is similar to the main residence/cottage—including brick walls with pebble-dash render, timber-framed roof, windows and doors and red terracotta roof tiles. More generally, it is an unremarkable structure of standard, traditional construction. The structure and fabric of the shed are currently in a highly dilapidated condition, with most areas/elements showing significant decay and loss of original fabric as well as evidence of various ad hoc repairs/alterations in the past.

The **residence** is essentially a modest sized, single-storey cottage with pebble-dash rendered masonry walls and a gabled roof of red terracotta tiles. Numerous alterations and additions have been made to both the exterior and interior of the building, though it is still possible to identify key features, but certainly not all,

of the building's original character and detailing. What is most evident is that the present building can make no claim to being 'intact' or 'not ...altered since construction', either externally or internally.

Surviving elements of the original cottage form, architectural character and fabric identify the structure as dating to the interwar period, with a range of stylistic influences including Arts and Crafts and Californian Bungalow. More generally, the building's amalgam of stylistic features together with its modest size and the simplicity of its elements, materials and detailing suggest it was the work of a builder familiar with the various styles of the period rather than an architectural designer.

Based on the surviving evidence of the interior layout and external character, the original residence appears to have been a two-bedroom cottage with modest sized living, dining and service areas (kitchen and bathroom). Because of the extensive nature of subsequent alterations and additions, however, as well as the loss of original features/fabric, both the layout and architectural expression of the cottage as first built cannot, in its current form, be accurately determined.

On both the original front/north elevation of the cottage and the rear/south elevation, tapered masonry columns supporting the ends of the original porches are finished with pebble-dash render decorated with small projecting stones. While these elements reflect the influence of interwar Californian Bungalow design, as do the use of wide eaves and oversailing rafters, the building more generally is essentially a simple traditional cottage with a sample of contemporary stylistic features rather than an integrated design. Arts and Crafts style influences are, for example, reflected in the use of leadlight windows and glazed french doors, added as decorative components.

External Components and Condition

Alterations to change the layout and/or increase the size of the building's accommodation appear to have been carried out throughout its life, the works generally being of poor-quality design and construction. A key example is the addition to the northwest corner of the building—visible at the north end of the west elevation—and associated rearrangement of the internal layout and fittings of the kitchen, bathroom and associated spaces in this area. Key changes include the removal and addition of walls, changes to the location, layout and fittings of kitchen and bathroom facilities as well as alterations to original finishes (ceilings, walls and floors). Alterations to extend the roof over this are in very dilapidated condition, resulting in significant water damage and decay affecting the roof, interior finishes and floors.

Both the front and rear porches have been infilled with varying degrees of appropriateness. On the front elevation, what appears to have originally been a semi-enclosed verandah (possibly a sleep out) seems to have been enclosed early in the history of the building, with original timber-framed window sashes re-used, but installed as sliding rather than casement sashes as elsewhere. The modern aluminium-framed glazing enclosing the rear porch is clearly of more recent vintage and more crudely installed.

Surviving groups of original timber-framed windows on the north/front and east elevations provide evidence of the building's early character with simple leadlight patterns and decorative motifs. The original glazed french doors, however, have been removed from their original locations and left in broken sections in different parts of the site, potentially the result of vandalism also evidenced in the interior of the building.

More generally, apart from a few individual components such as window sashes, the whole of the exterior of the building showed significant physical damage, deterioration and loss of original features and fabric. Rising as well as falling damp was significant around the whole of the building—the result of its location and failure of drainage systems—resulting in deterioration of both external rendered masonry elements and

timber framing to floors and door and window framing. In many areas the ponding of water against the base of the building (on each elevation) and associated mould growth pointed to deterioration of potentially all the timber framing of the subfloor area—a conclusion supported by the inspection of the interior.

Interior Components and Condition

Internally, as noted above, the changes to the original layout of the cottage have resulted in an awkward and ad hoc arrangement of spaces with the introduction of new walls and openings and the closing of previous connections. This obscures the original spatial layouts and interrelationships. In addition, very little of the original character or features of the interwar cottage remain evident, other than a couple of high-waisted timber panelled doors and the surviving windows (noted above). In the main living room, the changes have been considerable including replacement of the original fireplace surrounds with a reproduction Victorian marble chimneypiece and the installation of a decorative ceiling rose (again in the Victorian style). The original leadlight doors to this room have also been removed (as noted previously) and the opening enclosed. In short, other than the now dilapidated fibrous plaster ceiling and rotted timber floor, none of the original fabric of this space remains and certainly no indication of its original character. The remaining two rooms on the south side of the cottage, which open onto the infilled rear porch, are essentially bare spaces without distinguishable features or evidence of interwar detailing.

The northern half of the interior is characterised by more intrusive additions and alterations as well as more significant damage/destruction of the building structure and fabric. Evidence of fires and significant destruction of building elements (including wall plaster, timber floor framing and ceilings) also point to active vandalism as suggested by the level of damage to components on the outside of the building (noted above).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The existing cottage at 91 Lauderdale Avenue, Fairlight, is a seriously compromised and damaged structure, without potential for either a residence or meaning as a heritage item.

The original modest scaled cottage has essentially been so substantially altered and damaged by deterioration, as well as more active destruction, that it provides no basis for meaningful identification as either a potential or listed heritage item.

The parlous state of the existing site components, as well as their compromised physical character, would also negate meaningful conservation—in accordance with current informed practice based on the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter guidelines and approach—because of the absence of adequate evidence of the original.

Yours sincerely,
GML Heritage Pty Ltd



Jyoti Somerville
Associate

Attachments:

- Photographs of existing site features and components



Figure A.2 Northeast corner. (Source: Skerrett, 2020)



Figure A.3 West elevation addition. (Source: Skerrett, 2020)



Figure A.4 Northwest corner with damaged and reused door to altered kitchen area. Rising damp throughout. (Source: Skerrett, 2020)



Figure A.5 Southeast corner with leadlight and replacement windows. Rising damp typical of all walls. (Source: Skerrett, 2020)



Figure A.6 Living room with reproduction chimney piece and fallen rose (not original). Unsafe floor and ceiling. (Source: Skerrett, 2020)



Figure A.7 Structural collapse and possible vandalism in north (breakfast?) room. (Source: Skerrett, 2020)



Figure A.8 Former kitchen and breakfast (?) room in northwest corner with later additions and alterations. (Source: GML Heritage, 2020)



Figure A.9 Modern refurbished bathroom inserted as part of alterations and additions at north end of west elevation. Damage to original door is typical of vandalism throughout. (Source: Skerrett, 2020)