

07th July 2017

Ms. Trudy Rickard
Heritage Advisor
City of Bendigo

Via email: t.rickard@bendigo.vic.gov.au

Dear Trudy

RE: NANGA GNULLE GARDENS – 40 HARLEY STREET, STRATHDALE

Thank you for requesting that Context provide heritage advice on the above property, specifically;

- the cultural heritage significance of the modern gardens, which date from c.1980-1990

It is understood that the principal mud brick residence (Green House c.1973) has been separately assessed and is considered to meet the threshold and criteria for local heritage significance, and is proposed to be included on the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the City of Bendigo.

In preparing this assessment, I have:

- undertaken a site inspection (5th July 2017) with Council's Heritage Advisor and a representative of the property owner;
- Reviewed the citation prepared by Built Heritage, which recommends the house and small curtilage be included in the Heritage Overlay;
- Reviewed the observations on the gardens prepared by Council's Heritage Advisor dated 16th June 2017;
- Reviewed the comments provided by Council's arborist regarding the amenity value of the trees on the site;
- Reviewed the application to nominate the place to the Victorian Heritage Register;
- Reviewed a sample of the objections received in relation to the application to subdivide the land (DS/867/20) [provided by Council];
- Considered whether the gardens meet any of the recognised Heritage Criteria set out in the Practice Note *Applying the Heritage Overlay* (2015);
- Undertaken limited review of other comparative places currently included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the City of Bendigo (based on HERMES database only)

This report provides preliminary advice on the heritage significance of the gardens surrounding the mud brick residence at Nanga Gnulle, 40 Harley Street, Strathdale.

A preliminary assessment against the recognised heritage criteria (known as the HERCON Criteria, and adopted by the Heritage Council of Victoria in 2008) has been undertaken to consider whether there are any indicators of the gardens being of local (or higher) level of significance for specific values (aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or other).

Limited comparative analysis at the local level has been undertaken to test whether the place would meet the threshold for local significance through desktop research, using the HERMES database (a repository for local and state statutory and non-statutory heritage information managed by Heritage Victoria).

Limitations

This report provides an assessment of the heritage values of the gardens only at Nanga Gnulle, 40 Harley Street, Strathdale. This report does not make recommendations on any non-heritage values of the place, nor the future development opportunities or threats, as it has been long understood that neither contribute to the heritage significance or values of a place.

It does not consider or comment on the heritage values of the buildings on the land, which have been previously assessed by Built Heritage Pty. Ltd. The information regarding the history and development of the place has been largely drawn from the assessment and citation undertaken by Built Heritage on behalf of the City of Greater Bendigo.

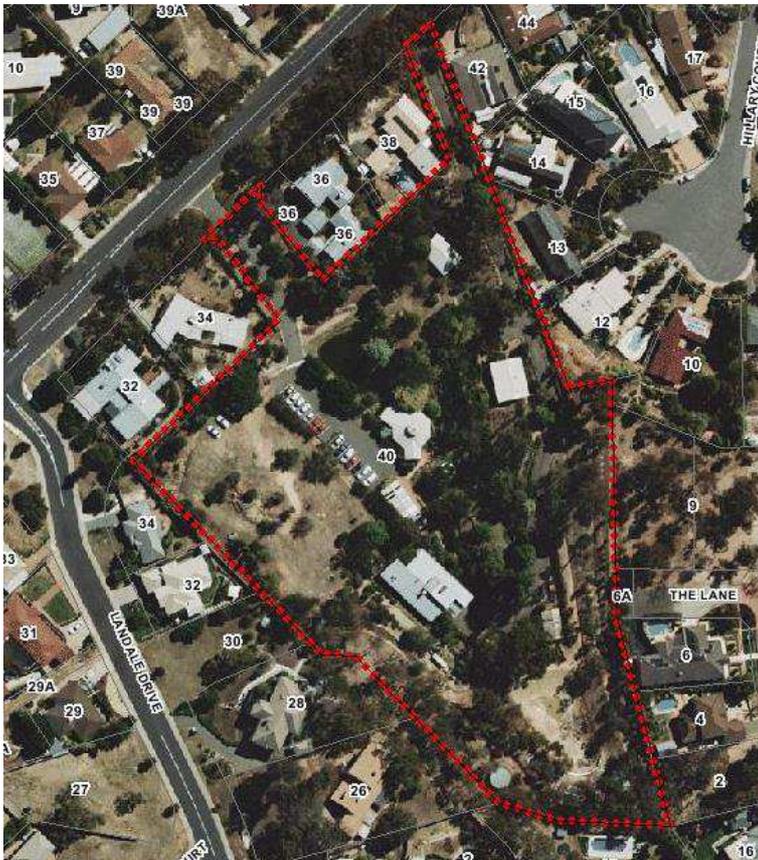


Figure 1 40 Harley Street, Strathdale – property boundary shown by red dotted outline
Source: LandChannel (accessed 7th July 2017)

Discussion

The gardens surrounding the four mud brick buildings on the site are varied in the intensity of their planting and development, and can be loosely divided into four or five 'character' areas (see figure 2).

The gardens display sections of intensely developed, engineered, landscaped and planted spaces along the water course (immediately north east of the main residence, no shading); through to areas of largely undeveloped land with sparse, sporadic native tree and shrub plantings (to the north west of the site, shaded purple). There is also an area of woodland style planting (yellow shading) and native and indigenous trees and shrubs planted on the higher ground and ridgelines (green shading).

The majority of the landscape does not appear to have been formally designed, rather, it appears to have organically evolved over the course of a generation (around 30 years). The area immediate to the watercourse and residence (with no shading) is the exception to this, and displays an attractive, vernacular design, planting style and layout typical of the late twentieth century.



Figure 2 Character areas - unshaded - the highly ornamental mainly exotic gardens c.1990; purple outline = largely undeveloped/limited plantings and open space; Green = native plantings along ridgelines and higher ground c.1970-1990; yellow = woodland area and later native planting around residences.

The whole garden is an attractive aesthetically diverse space proving a pleasant experience for the visitor. The natural valley landform and watercourse between the two ponds creates a sense of intimacy and seclusion, which is emphasised by the stone terracing, manicured lawns, moving

water and exotic trees focussed around the central planting between the main residence and the polygonal mud brick structure to the north east. The contrast between the ornamental section of the gardens, and the less structured parts of the garden enhances the ‘oasis’ like feel of this area, which appears to be a focus of some objections to development.

A mature Lemon Scented Gum, located at the apex of the valley (south of the main residence) is particularly striking, and has a dominant presence in the garden due to its placement and form. There are few other individual trees which demonstrate aesthetic amenity value, although the Ironbark plantings along the ridgelines and dense groves of exotic trees and shrubs, the white Cedar walk and Woodland plantings contribute to the aesthetic experience of seclusion. While there is a defined sense of place, and an aesthetic value to Nanga Gnulle gardens, this aesthetic value is not the aesthetic value defined in HERCON Criteria used for assessment of heritage values. Rather, it is an aesthetic amenity value.

The hard landscaping and built elements have been well executed, with quality materials, and are attractive and inviting but do not have any design interest beyond that of a large residential garden. Similar design elements, planting, features and materials could be found in a similar composition and form in many other gardens.

Many private gardens have been re-purposed for semi-commercial purposes, such as use as part-time function centres and exhibit a similar design aesthetic, but very few are considered to have heritage value. Similarly, there are numerous beautiful and attractive residential gardens, including those which were invited to participate in the Open Garden Scheme. Very few are considered to have heritage value.

Those which are considered to have heritage value meet one or more of the established heritage criteria at the local (or higher) level. They may demonstrate a similar aesthetic amenity value to Nanga Gnulle, but (for example) they also:

- contain an important or rare botanical collection, and demonstrate scientific (heritage) value; or
- were designed or laid out by an important designer, whose work has been recognised by their peers and the community at large, and the garden is an excellent, intact example of the designer’s work; or
- demonstrate or represent an important phase, period, movement or event which is considered to be important to the development of the locality as a whole; or
- have ongoing, current and demonstrated use or connection with the place by a particular identifiable community for specific purpose a long period of time.

Consideration of Criteria

In accordance with the ‘Applying the Heritage Overlay’ Practice Note (2015), heritage places are identified as meeting either the threshold of ‘State Significance’ or ‘Local Significance’.

Places of Local Significance can include places that are important to a particular community or locality. Some of the places of local significance may also be important to the entire municipality, but this is not essential to meet the Local Significance threshold.

The Heritage Council of Victoria produced an excellent guide for the assessment of cultural heritage places which can be used to assess the significance of a place or object at both the state or local level. This document, entitled *The Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines?* (2014) has been used in consideration of the heritage significance of Nanga Gnulle.

The Practice Note advises that assessment of whether a place meets the local or State threshold should be determined in relation to model heritage criteria (also known as the HERCON Criteria).

A brief assessment of Nanga Gnulle against each of these criteria is set out below:

Criterion A: Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

The history of the development of the Nanga Gnulle gardens from a bare paddock to its current state is interesting and has some incidental connection with some important themes which relate to the history of Bendigo more broadly (such as water, its use and capture; development of residential gardens).

However, there is no clear association between the place and its fabric and an event, phase, movement, period, process, function custom or way of life which is key in the development of Strathmore or Greater Bendigo.

Does not meet Criterion A

Criterion B: Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

Not applicable – there are numerous other residential vernacular gardens on a large scale from the late twentieth century within the municipality.

Does not meet Criterion B

Criterion C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).

Not applicable – generally relates to archaeological sites

Does not meet Criterion C

Criterion D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

Nanga Gnulle is a good local example of a large-scale vernacular residential garden from the late twentieth century. It displays many of the features and elements typical of this type of place, from this period, and is generally representative of its class.

However, this ‘class’ of place (large scale residential garden from the late twentieth century) is not associated with an event, phase movement, period, process, function custom or way of life which is key in the development of Strathmore or Greater Bendigo.

Does not meet Criterion D

Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

In considering whether a place meets this criterion, the term ‘aesthetic’ is not synonymous with ‘beauty’. Instead it implies a judgement against various qualities that may or may not include beauty.

The Heritage Council (2014:13) states that “...aesthetic characteristics are the visual qualities of a place that invite judgement against the ideals of beauty, picturesqueness, evocativeness, expressiveness, grotesqueness, sublimeness and other descriptors of aesthetic judgement. The visual qualities of a place lie in the form, scale, setting, unity, contrast, colour, texture and material of a place or object.”

Nanga Gnulle does have identifiable aesthetic qualities, but these experiential aesthetic qualities are not sufficient to satisfy Criterion E in this context, nor warrant the application of the Heritage Overlay. The aesthetic qualities of this place are not considered exceed those of the general large vernacular garden of the late twentieth century, and although it is recognised that Nanga Gnulle gardens are an attractive and peaceful place, designed around an interesting landform, this is insufficient for the purposes of satisfying this criterion.

Does not meet Criterion E

Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

In order for Criterion F to be met, a place has to demonstrate (through its fabric) creative or technical achievement for the time in which it was created, and that it retains a high degree of integrity.

Nanga Gnulle gardens does not demonstrate a technical or creative achievement for the time in which is was created. The use of gravity fed water is not uncommon for the period and had been used in other applications for decades, nor was the planting of native and indigenous shrubs and trees, or an ornamental garden.

I have seen no evidence to support that the gardens demonstrate particular creative or technical achievement for the period in which they were created (c. 1970-2000).

Does not meet Criterion F

Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

Evidence has been presented to demonstrate that those who have either been the focus of, or involved in various 'life event' ceremonies (such as marriage, christenings, funerals) or events in the gardens at Nanga Gnulle have a particular attachment and connection to the place. Neither the connection to the place, nor importance of the place to those individuals is questioned. However, in assessing Criterion G, there must be evidence of a direct association between a place and a particular community or cultural group. In addition, the association between the community or cultural group must be strong or special.

The Heritage Council (2014:17) provides a definition that a community or cultural group is "...sizable group of persons who share a common or long-standing interest or identity." The 'strong or special' association must be "...evidenced by the regular or long-term use of/engagement with the place/object or the enduring ceremonial, ritual, commemorative, spiritual or celebratory use of the place." (Ibid.)

Although the group of individuals who have raised concern regarding the proposed development of the Nanga Gnulle gardens are collectively a 'group', the group has a loose sense of identity, and is not formalised in any manner. They appear to be connected by their common objection to development of the place rather than being a particular community or cultural group. Their interest in the place as a group or as part of the identity of the group is not established. Similarly, those who have had or attended special events at the place do not constitute a 'particular community or cultural group'.

The assertion that the place is of social value because of the numerous weddings and other key life events which have been held there over time demonstrates that there is a strong and special association with the place for many individuals, who have had unique 'one off'

experiences (which are undeniably important to their lives) at Nanga Gnulle. It does not demonstrate the requisite strong or special association with a particular cultural group or community as there is no regular or long-term use or engagement demonstrated.

Does not meet Criterion G

Criterion H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

Criterion H relates to those places or objects which are significant as they have a direct association with a person or group of persons who have made a strong, notable or influential contribution to the history of the locality or municipality, and the place demonstrates that contribution.

The Heritage Council (2014:19) sets out a series of statements which must all be demonstrated in order to meet this criterion (*Italicised text*):

1. *The place/object has a DIRECT ASSOCIATION with a person or group of persons who have made a strong, notable or influential CONTRIBUTION to the course of the locality or municipality's history*
2. *The ASSOCIATION of the place/object to the person(s) IS EVIDENT in the physical fabric of the place/object and/or in documentary resources and/or oral history.*
3. *The ASSOCIATION: directly relates to ACHIEVEMENTS of the person(s) at, or relating to, the place/object;*

Or

4. *Relates to an ENDURING and/or CLOSE INTERACTION between the person(s) and the place/object*

Nanga Gnulle gardens has had a clear and direct association with Peg and Rob Green, who developed this garden over several decades, first as a residential garden and setting for their home, and later (c.1990-2014) as a setting for their function venue, Nanga Gnulle. The association between the Greens and the place was clearly enduring and close.

While the Green family were clearly involved in the community of Strathdale and Bendigo, first as residents who were actively involved in their community, and later as the owners of a commercial venture and participants in the Open Garden Scheme, no evidence has yet been presented that would demonstrate the contribution which the Greens made to the course or pattern of Strathdale or Bendigo's history which could be considered strong, notable or influential.

Does not meet Criterion G

Thresholds

Comparative analysis is an essential step to determining if a place or precinct meets the local (or State) threshold for heritage significance. The 'Applying the Heritage Overlay' Practice Note (2015) advises that:

... some comparative analysis will be required to substantiate the significance of each place. The comparative analysis should draw on other similar places within the study area, including those that have previously been included in a heritage register or overlay.

Comparative analysis is considered particularly important in deciding if a place is of rarity value in a given area, but can be applied to most place types to determine their relative importance in a locality or wider area.

Comparative analysis is usually undertaken to support the identified values of a place. In this process, it is usual to compare similar places (in terms of construction date, place type, and/or use/theme) already included in the local Heritage Overlay as 'benchmarks' to provide a basis for comparison. Where there is an absence of solid comparative examples places which have been previously identified but not assessed can be used as 'benchmarks'.

There is an absence of comparative examples to the Nanga Gnulle garden on both the Greater Bendigo Heritage Register or in the HERMES database (the repository of data for local and state identified heritage places managed by Heritage Victoria).

This is not unexpected, as gardens from the 1970s and 1980s, unless exceptional are not generally considered to meet the criteria or threshold for local significance. There are some rare cases where for botanical interest, or technical (design or scientific) values, a garden from this period might be added to the local Heritage Overlay or, more rarely, to the Victorian Heritage Register.

Comparative Analysis

The mud brick house designed by environmental designer Alistair Knox (1912–1986) is set within a large garden. The garden spans a valley and has a mixed aesthetic that combines Australian plants with a large proportion of introduced plant species, and is loosely divided into a number of character areas. Having regard to the mixed aesthetic and the overall plant composition, the Bendigo garden does not resemble the typical landscape settings that were designed in response to Knox's environmental architecture.

Over an approximately forty-year period, Knox built many innovative mud brick houses, in Eltham where he lived from the 1950s and elsewhere around Victoria. Knox's houses have been described as seeming 'to grow from the earth' and to have 'demanded gardens to suit'. (Latreille, 2002:348)

As post-WWII Eltham began to be consolidated as an outer Melbourne suburb from a country town, its bush environment also became home to a community of like-minded architects, landscape designers, artists, musicians, potters, writers, and artists. Among them was a group of landscape designers, many of whom worked with Knox designing gardens to suit his houses, and who subsequently became instrumental in leading the development of a natural Australian garden aesthetic or style, such as Ellis Stones (1895–1975), Gordon Ford (1918–1999), Peter Glass (1917–1997). Plants, stone, water, timber, and other features tended to be used by these practitioners in their designs for private and public gardens in an attempt to recreate a natural bush aesthetic; their designs influenced by considerations of space and light, mass and void, and the sculptural effects of the plants, towering trunks, and large boulders. Places such as the 'Tantoon' house and garden (c.1959) at 75 John Street, Eltham (HO91, Shire of Nillumbik), the Downing-Le Gallienne residence and garden (c.1948-1964) at 12 Yarra Braes Rd, Eltham (HO172, Shire of Nillumbik) are good local examples of the significance of the building and landscape complimenting each other.

At the same time, more Australian gardeners were becoming interested in Australian flora were beginning to include Australian plants in their gardens, sometimes exclusively. Their efforts were supported by a growing body of knowledge about Australian plants made increasingly accessible in gardening books for the general public, among them Ernest Lord's *Shrubs and Trees for Australian Gardens* (1948), popular gardening journals like *Your Garden* (from the early 1950s),

specialist nurseries which began to form from the 1940s, and through groups such as the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria and the Society for Growing Australian Plants (established 1957).

The breadth of interest in Australian native plants and their use in gardens that developed from this period and the momentum this gathered have resulted in the subsequent decades being described as a native plant movement.

Conclusion

It is my conclusion that the Nanga Gnulle gardens at 40 Harley Street, Strathdale **do not** meet the threshold for local (or state) cultural heritage significance, either as an individual place or as a contributory element of the larger place, Nanga Gnulle (also known as The Green House, c.1973).

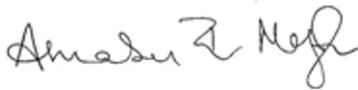
Proposed subdivision

The proposed subdivision of land seeks to create a 14-lot subdivision accessed by a central public road and court, with possible future links through to 'The Lane', located east of the site. The c.1972 residence is proposed to be retained on Lot 10, and a Heritage Overlay is to be applied to the house and an area of land 5m from each side to 'provide setting'.

The proposed curtilage for the Heritage Overlay is limited and will provide the minimum of context to the building, but is adequate to conserve the significant fabric.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries about this report.

Yours Sincerely



Annabel Neylon

ASSOCIATE
Context Pty. Ltd.

References

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