



### **DEVELOPMENT of ST. JOHN'S PRECINCT CAMDEN: A TURNING POINT FOR HERITAGE?**

**The protection of Camden's St John's Anglican Church Precinct is a watershed in the fight to stop inappropriate over-development of this most historic town, the Macarthur region and elsewhere. If we cannot prevent the development of this iconic Precinct, nothing is safe.**

Historic St. John's Anglican Church Precinct in Camden is at the literal and actual heart of this uniquely historic area. In founding Camden township the Macarthur family, on behalf of the community, gifted land and most of the funds for the establishment of the Anglican Church through legal trusts with specific conditions.

It is very clear that most of the general community of this town was very disappointed by the news that St John's Camden has granted an option to Moran Australia (Camden) Pty Ltd to purchase much of this State Heritage Register Listed Precinct.

While the Moran Australia (Camden) has abandoned the purchase, the enabling sale ordinance is still active, and the Church could try to sell parts of the precinct at any time.

To reiterate, the land was donated by the Macarthur Family to the people of Camden and is held by Charitable Trusts for the benefit of all the residents of Camden. The Church voluntarily entered into legally binding agreements with the Macarthur Family to place the land into Trusts and hold the land for the benefit of the community 'for ever'.

We have questioned the church on their legal authority to violate the trusts. We have correspondence from the Sydney head office of the Church citing a 100-year-old piece of legislation called The Anglican Church of Australia Trust Property Act 1917 as authority for the sale. Reportedly, this Act confers powers on the Church to alter trusts, perhaps beyond those of the courts. In the twenty-first century, the existence of legislation delegating legal authority to a religious organisation is abhorrent. Many wealthy and less well-off citizens have gifted and entrusted property to the Church, but the Church's commitment to honour the donors' trust and intentions seems unreliable at best.

**We call upon all candidates for and members of the NSW Parliament to commit to repealing this and similar Acts.**

Despite the Local Council zoning, the State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021 permits the construction of housing for seniors and people with a disability on the site. It seems possible to cover the whole site with buildings, like the old Camden High School site. **We call upon all the candidates for and members of the NSW Parliament to commit to permanently suspend the operation of all SEPP's in heritage conservation areas and for items listed on the State Heritage Register.**

We have examined the statements and the publicly available documents associated with the sale. There are no publicly available documents giving the local church the authority to use sale proceeds to construct (next to St John's Church itself) a new worship centre, as is its stated intention. Further, church policy documents state the sale of land for the construction of buildings is against church policy. We know the corporate church does not regard Camden as a major focus for development. We fear the sale is an attempt by the Sydney city-based corporate church to redistribute the assets of our local church. We fear the story is like the nearby Forrest Crescent land sale (1968) which saw St John's sell off around 32 acres attached to the Precinct, with the bulk of the proceeds leaving the Parish. The church accounts are exempt from the Australian Accounting Standards, so it is difficult to be precise. In the twenty-first century, public organisations with such extensive assets should not enjoy exemptions to transparency and accountability. **We call upon the Federal Government to make whatever changes are necessary to ensure adherence to the current Australian Accounting Standards by all religious organisations.**

**We call upon community members who value our democracy, including separation of Church and State, to protest about this attempt to bypass local planning and heritage legislation.**

All information and fact checking on the issue is available at <http://www.stjohnscamden.info/> and a DIY petition kit (with instructions) is at <https://www.stjohnscamden.info/Resources/DIYPetitionKit.pdf>

Please be active in the press and on social media especially media Facebook pages and at [www.facebook.com/Save-St-Johns-Precinct-343603152874976](http://www.facebook.com/Save-St-Johns-Precinct-343603152874976)  
[www.facebook.com/CRAGcamdenresidentsactiongroup](http://www.facebook.com/CRAGcamdenresidentsactiongroup)

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