

# Challenge to proposal to allow Hunters Hill council staff to approve heritage demolition

**A PROPOSAL to give a senior Hunters Hill Council officer the power to approve the demolition of local heritage is being questioned by the Convener of Hunters Hill's Conservation Advisory Panel, Cllr Ross Williams.**

The proposal being put to Hunters Hill's Local Planning Panel by Director, Development and Regulatory Service Steve Kourepis seeks panel approval for him to determine whether or not proposed demolition of heritage items are minor and can go ahead under his delegated authority.

Delegated authority is possible under Section 2.20(8) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act which allows a local planning panel to delegate any function of the panel under this or any other Act to the General Manager or other staff of the council.

The Section does not specifically rule on how a senior staffer can determine heritage signifi-

cance but the proposal being put to the panel by Mr Kourepis requests:

"That the Hunters Hill Local Planning Panel delegate its functions with regard to the determination of development applications for minor demolition works of heritage items including buildings and/or removal or pruning of trees, that will have no more than a minimal impact on the integrity of the item in the opinion of Council's Director, Development and Regulatory Services excluding development applications otherwise required to be determined by the Panel to the Director."

While some heritage items proposed for staff demolition ap-

proval may be as minor as knocking down a sandstone birdbath, Cllr Williams fears the powers sought by Mr Kourepis council could encompass hundreds of "small but significant" items the community values and feels it has entrusted to the council for protection.

Mr Kourepis has also identified hundreds of items.

"Council has over 770 heritage items within the municipality and the referral of applications to the Panel for development with minor impacts on heritage items may unreasonably delay the assessment process where there is limited community objection or environmental impacts," his proposal to the Panel notes.

"These applications include internal alterations and additions, tree pruning and rear additions.

"Delegation is sought from the Hunters Hill

Local Planning Panel to Council staff of certain development applications that involve minor demolition works of heritage items.

"This would apply to development that will have no more than a minimal impact on the integrity of the item in the opinion of Council's Director, Development and Regulatory Services."

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**Councillor Williams told The Weekly Times the planning panel should reject the proposal "on principle" because no council officer - however senior - should have the power to determine what is a minor work when it involves the loss of local heritage.**

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"The wording of this is very concerning," Cllr Williams said.

"Heritage cannot afford to be lost because of one person's point of

view that it is of minor consequence and I can't see how a council in Hunters Hill, where heritage protection is of the utmost importance, can put such a proposal to a planning panel," he said.

"I would argue very strongly that every item of heritage that is being put forward to be demolished is significant for our community and should be open to public scrutiny and community discussion.

"Even the little things are important for the community to decide on because if you start to lose a lot of little things you end up losing a lot of heritage."

He said this is also an issue about local democracy and while some residents will welcome a move to remove "red tape" on developments other residents feel that red tape is crucial to conservation.

What Cllr Williams argues is that both cases should have a right to be

heard by the Panel on a case by case basis.

"Hunters Hill is all about agreement and involvement and this is especially the case when it comes to heritage."

Phil Jenyn OAM is known for his lead role in the Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition and he shares Cllr Williams concerns.

"I strongly object to the proposed delegation to Council staff of development applications that involve so called minor demolition works of heritage items," he writes in a letter to the Panel.

"These are matters that are and should remain to be dealt with by the Hunters Hill Local Planning Panel because those matters are sensitive and the consequences serious."

Both Cllr Williams and Mr Jenyn urge panel members to take "community views" into account and reject ap-

proval.

"The community looks to the Panel to protect and preserve our heritage, which in fact is the nation's heritage," Mr Jenyn said.

"It is an obligation that has been placed squarely on the shoulders of the Panel because of the significance of heritage to this nation and specifically to areas like Hunters Hill."

Both Cllr Williams and Mr Jenyn argue that the loss of heritage means the loss of Hunters Hill's character and identity.

"The heritage of Hunters Hill lies at the heart of this municipality and it has formed who we are as a community," Mr Jenyn said.

"What may appear minor to one person is seen by another or objectively as not minor at all.

"To demolish, whole or part, means that it is gone, destroyed forever."