

MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic Cemeteries Trust reneges on support for state heritage listing of Varroville cemetery land

The owners of state listed Varro Ville Homestead, along with the NSW Heritage Council, have been sent to the Independent Planning Commission to justify the recommendation to state-list further land at Varroville as part of a curtilage (boundary) extension for the Homestead to protect its state heritage significance. This came after the Catholic Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (CMCT), which now owns the land surrounding the Homestead, withdrew its support for the extension when it appeared it might not be able to develop its proposed cemetery at Varroville (Macarthur Memorial Park) in the way it wanted.

'When the CMCT took an option on the land surrounding the Homestead in 2013, there was a pending Heritage Council investigation into a curtilage extension. The CMCT agreed to the curtilage extension across most of its land as part of its rezoning proposal and again during the Heritage Council's investigation in 2016/17 leading to its recommendation on 31 October 2017 to the Heritage Minister (Gabrielle Upton) that the land be placed on the State Heritage Register.'

'Now, in a significant breach of ethics and public trust, it would appear that the CMCT, a developer for the Sydney Catholic Archdiocese, is trying to move the goalposts: In its rezoning application it stated it would support this curtilage and preserve the 'colonial landscape', but it now seeks to remove this impediment at the DA stage so that state heritage identified within the expanded curtilage can simply be recorded and then destroyed to make way for the cemetery.'

'We feel that the Heritage Minister has assisted this outcome, though whether she's acting alone is hard to know.'

'Under s.34(1) of the Heritage Act 1977 within two weeks of receiving a recommendation to list, the Heritage Minister must make the decision or send it to the Independent Planning Commission.'

'The Minister, in breach of her own legislation, has been sitting on the recommendation for more than a year, allowing the Varroville cemetery DA for the same land to progress through the system unimpeded by a heritage listing. With an election coming up she's then sent it to the Commission 'out of time' for a review, further delaying her decision and giving the CMCT the opportunity to reverse its position.'

'The Commission sent the Minister its curtilage report on 22 February but the Minister still did not make the decision as required, and on 1 March the government went into Caretaker Mode. We have asked the Commission to now postpone its assessment of the DA to allow the curtilage extension to be resolved, but the Commission is pushing ahead with the cemetery DA, with a public meeting to be held on the first business day after the 2019 NSW election, raising questions about the role of the Commission at this time.'

'We felt we were on trial at the Commission for trying to protect state heritage and uphold the Heritage Act. The Heritage Council had to defend its position as well. It was a horrible process for no result. And now we have to go through it again for the DA. It's hard to feel there's any integrity left in the system.'

Photos next page.

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Varro Ville Homestead looking across Charles Sturt dams from St Andrews Road. Photo by Geoffrey Britton.
Curtilage Study, Varro Ville by Orwell & Peter Phillips, May 2016



Agricultural 'trenching' attributed to Dr Robert Townson the original grantee. Photo by Geoffrey Britton.
Curtilage Study, Varro Ville by Orwell & Peter Phillips, May 2016