

Mr Fluffy demolition to take 26 of Canberra's heritage homes

The Canberra Times July 15, 2015 [Kirsten Lawson](#)

They range from humble Ainslie and O'Connor cottages to more stately and solid homes of Griffith, Forrest, Barton and Reid, but each of the 26 heritage homes contaminated with Fluffy asbestos will be demolished, taking with them parts of Canberra's history.

Normally, demolition of houses in the heritage precincts is banned, but the Fluffy demolitions are allowed on the basis of public health.

While new homes built on the blocks won't mirror the originals, they will need the approval of the Heritage Council, and will need to meet precinct rules. For Forrest, Barton, Griffith, Reid and Ainslie, the rules specify only single-storey homes and no closer to the street than the original building line.

Buildings must not cover more than 27.5 per cent of the block in most cases (30 per cent for blocks smaller than 850 square metres in Ainslie), with at least 40 per cent of the block to be retained for planting (so not paved or built on).

Houses must be at least 1.8 metres from side boundaries, and 4.8 metres in total for both sides (wider in Forrest, where they must be at least 2.4 metres away from the boundary on each side and 6 metres in total), and garages are to be towards the rear of blocks.

The rules are slightly different in O'Connor, which has two houses in the Tocumwal precinct, homes that were built at Tocumwal, NSW, for the US air corps then moved to Canberra after the war. In that precinct, two-storey homes and multi-unit developments are allowed if they don't "significantly diminish" the heritage streetscape.

Heritage Council chairman David Flannery said that while the new homes would have to comply with precinct rules, covering the size of the building, garage placement, setbacks and the like, they would not be expected to replicate the original.

"The buildings don't have to be a pastiche ... replica building, but it does still have to use contemporary materials in a way that's sympathetic to the style and the form and the character of the other buildings in the street," he said.

"We're looking for design excellence ... good contemporary design that's contributing to the character of the suburbs, whichever suburb the houses are in.

"We can have a range of materials, we're not limiting people to use of particular materials in any suburb but we're just asking that people try and reflect the character of the housing stock that's around them."

While two-storey and multi-unit development was possible in O'Connor, the proponent would have to demonstrate that the new homes did not significantly diminish the heritage values of the streetscape.

Mr Flannery said the council would assess each plan on its merits, looking at landscaping, materials, design and form.

The council accepted the demolitions must proceed.

"The whole saga is quite tragic and it's affecting the lives of hundreds if not thousands of people," he said. "It's unfortunate that this has to happen, but we're wanting to work with owners and new owners to make sure that we get some appropriate well-designed housing on some of these soon-to-be vacant blocks."

Most of the 26 heritage properties have an extra status as "identified dwellings", which means they contribute to the heritage importance of their precincts in their own right.

Nineteen of the homes are in this category, which normally means extra rules apply prohibiting demolition and requiring the facades to remain intact, but those rules have been overridden by public health in the Fluffy cases.

All of the Reid, Ainslie, O'Connor and Griffith Fluffy heritage homes are "identified dwellings", as is the Barton house and the Deasland Homestead in Nicholls.

Three of the five Forrest houses are identified, but not 75 Arthur Circle or 3A Mugga Way. The Campbell house is not identified, nor are the houses at Tennent, south of Tharwa. Just one of the four Fluffy heritage houses at Hall is identified, the one at 8 Palmer Street.

In Hall, the heritage rules specify single-storey homes, with a maximum site coverage of 25 per cent of the block. Homes are to be set back 12 metres from the front boundary and three metres from the side boundary for blocks of less than 1500 square metres. Garages must be behind the building line.

The owners of the [Deasland Homestead in Nicholls](#) and the Tocumwal in [Quinn Street in O'Connor](#) have spoken to The Canberra Times about the loss of their heritage properties.

The photographs published in this story are of the heritage homes already bought by the government, plus the private demolition in Reid.