

Canberra Times, Letter to the editor, 4 May 2015

Our fabric unravelling

Like the careless leaves of golden autumn, the fabric of this town is becoming unstuck. High-rise buildings blank out blue mountain vistas; the Sydney and Melbourne buildings stand neglected; serene avenues in old Canberra, north and south, become clogged with parked cars; gracious 1920s houses, in designated heritage areas, disappear overnight, to be replaced by greedy fence-to-fence McMansions, or faux-old constructions; plans are made to overshadow the old brickworks and modest Yarralumla cottages with brutal high-rise apartments. Downer, Dickson, Campbell and Braddon face a similar fate.

A light rail system, nominally reflecting the vision of Walter Burley Griffin, hardly disguises the developer's dream of lining Northbourne Avenue solidly with high-rise. Even the integrity of the elegant Dunrossil Drive to Government House is under threat. Canberra's spirit also flags.

A hallowed cafe, Tosolinis, beloved of public servants, writers and poets, closes its doors; a hallowed institution, Jack Waterford, ceases his lordly oversight; and the lights of Electric Shadows Bookshop are dimmed forever. Triumphant beacons of creative heritage remain – the Albert Hall, saved by heroic citizens; the Hyatt Hotel; the Hotel Kurrajong, home of Chifley. The National Trust endeavours to save the Northbourne flats. Roy Grounds' brilliant Academy of Science (now Shine Dome) shelters modestly in the shade of Hotel Hotel, like a turtle under a cliff.

But a whole-of-Canberra vision is needed, and a whole-of-Canberra discussion, lest what our community most values about our past and present is swept away, in the twinkling of an eye, by our proposed future.

Ann Kent, Forrest