

*St John's Church, Ashfield – built 1840 (170 years old) –
One of Sydney's oldest churches and Ashfield's oldest authenticated church*



Dear

Re Development Application No. 10.2013.063 - 74 Bland Street, Ashfield Lot 1 DP 208481

We would like to express our concerns regarding notification of the above development application from Ashfield Council dated 23rd April 2013. This D.A. is for a new Ministry Centre to be built on the historic site of St John's Church between Alt and Bland Streets, Ashfield, NSW. Following are facts about the site:

1. **The church building** - founded in 1840, on land donated by Elizabeth Underwood, is the oldest authenticated surviving building in Ashfield. It is also the first church built along the route which linked Sydney and Parramatta. The earliest remaining parts of the building are one of the first Sydney designs by the colonial architect Edmund Blacket, who later became renowned for his ecclesiastical architecture.
2. **The cemetery** – the expansive church grounds contain a cemetery with remains of many notable Ashfield residents. First Fleet convict, John Limeburner, had been transported for stealing clothing to the value of about one pound, and died in 1847 aged 104. Several members of the Wilkinson and Underwood families were significant in the early European settlement of the Ashfield district. Thomas Walker, a banker and philanthropist who owned and developed Yaralla Estate, Concord, is in a family grave with his wife Jane, and daughter Eadith's ashes.
3. **The surrounding grounds** – the charming setting contains very old trees which attract native birds and possums and a memorial garden. There are many graves which are surrounded by decorative wrought iron fencing and a stone wall along Alt Street which were built in the 1920s. There has been mention that the site has been used in the past as a film location.
4. **The memorial** - Australia's only memorial to Australian Air Force Cadets occupies a prominent position near the entrance to the church.
5. **The heritage listing** - listed on the **Local Environment Plan Heritage Schedule** and the **Register of the National Trust of Australia**. The National Trust Register denotes the site as being of rare historic aesthetic and social significance and is an important group of ecclesiastical structures in a fine and highly evocative setting.

Background to the Development Application

- A. St John's Church D.A. comprises a proposed new Ministry Centre of two levels of a total area 668 square metres over two levels for multi-purpose use in addition to an amenities block and outdoor terraces.
- B. This new structure will be attached to the church and will obscure views to the church from Alt Street. It will compromise the heritage significance of the building and surrounding site.

We are very concerned about what the future holds for the preservation of the historic site for the following reasons:

1. Ashfield Council has rezoned the church grounds from **‘Special Uses (Church)’** to **R2 (Residential two storey)**. This proposed change to R2 has yet to be approved by the NSW Government. The church objected to the R2 zoning and requested a zoning of **R3 (Residential three storey)**. This was rejected by the Council.
2. The Christ Church Inner West ‘Masterplan’ (2012) representing St John’s Church states future development plans which include:

“A possible, and perhaps even better, alternative is to build an apartment block for student accommodation, along the lines of the St Barnabas Terraces. They would offer affordable rental places for international and local students, and feed into the St John’s congregations.”

If the integrity of the heritage site is compromised by any development it will be lost to the community forever. The site is an example of a valuable item of Sydney’s history. Historic places are important to keep for the future and they contribute to the unique character of Ashfield. Not only does this property have historical and architectural significance but aesthetic and social values to the community of the Inner West of Sydney. It is a historical attraction, also, for students both local and overseas. Therefore, it is an important and authentic piece of Ashfield’s past that should be conserved as part of our cultural heritage. This rare parcel of land which has remained intact (and escaped subdivision for 170 years) is now under threat. The site could be impaired forever if the proposed D.A. were to be approved.

We believe it is our responsibility to acknowledge our forebears for what they have contributed and achieved in the past which has helped to shape our community today. We should be proud of our heritage and conserve it for generations to come.

Yours faithfully,