

# Narrabundah locals fight to save historic duplexes

By Kirsten Lawson  
Chief Assembly Reporter

Southside residents are fighting to save four brick duplexes in Narrabundah from demolition, saying they are part of a line of classic buildings that deserve heritage protection.

The four duplexes, in two double-storey buildings on Boolimba Crescent, are public housing and the government plans to replace them with nine units.

The Old Narrabundah Community Council has nominated the duplexes to the ACT Heritage Register. It has also appealed the decision to approve the development to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Council chairman John Keeley said the duplexes were unique, planned in the late 1940s and built in the 1950s as the first brick buildings in Narrabundah and "the brand new style of government housing in those days".

"They [the government] have taken no consideration of the streetscape character for these particular blocks," he said. "This corridor of buildings would probably be right up there with the early history of Canberra in a suburb sense."

The buildings pencilled for demolition were part of a line of 14 handsome duplexes (seven buildings, each with two homes) defining the Boolimba Crescent entrance to the suburbs. The entire original streetscape remained intact and most of the facades were untouched. Some of the duplexes were now in private hands, with their owners required to protect the streetscape in their own renovations.

The street was listed on the ACT's register of significant streetscapes, Mr Keeley said. In a nomination to the Heritage Council, he and fellow inner-south resident Anne Forrest said the houses were part of a distinct post-World War II precinct built for tradesmen and their families.

"In contrast to Narrabundah's earlier workers' cottages, these distinctive, red-brick duplexes were built to last," they said. Inside, many had deco features, including quality rendered fireplaces with deco



Old Narrabundah Community Council chairman John Keeley outside the brick duplexes he is trying to protect. Photo: GRAHAM TIDY

mantelpieces, picture rails, built-in timber cabinetry and period opaque-glass entries.

When it approved the demolition and redevelopment this year, the planning directorate said while there was "an interesting frontage and a positive contribution to the streetscape", the duplexes were not registered and there were six others on Sturt Avenue in Narrabundah that were also examples of two-storey duplexes, made of red brick with tiled roofs. The replacement buildings would be two-storey brick-

fronted buildings in recognition of the ones being demolished, it said.

Residents are also concerned about a concentration of public housing in the area, with 10 new public housing units built around the corner in Mandarie Street and a high concentration of public housing elsewhere in the suburb.

Narrabundah architect Stan Bevanda said the suburb was already a "pocket of disadvantage" and the extra units would create a "small cluster", contrary to the government's own "salt and pepper"

policy of spreading public housing throughout the city. "In this little part of Narrabundah, they want to keep adding public housing properties into an area that's already really well peppered," he said. In its planning decision, the directorate said:

"Perceived substance abuse, crime, violence, mental health problems and sociopathic behaviour are not isolated to persons who live in dwellings provided by the ACT government. These issues also occur within the wider community and criminal behaviour is a matter for the

police and relevant authorities to regulate."

A government spokesman said five residential blocks would be consolidated for nine new dwellings on the site. Five would be three-bedroom homes and four would have two bedrooms. The homes would be built so they could be easily modified for people as they aged or for tenants with a disability.

Mr Bevanda also criticised the lack of consultation, which he said should be standard for ACT Housing before planning applications were lodged.