

community consultation in this instance appears to have started and finished with circulation of a brochure suggesting that demolition is an inevitable outcome. Ironically it was circulated to Sydenham residents – residents of a community that has already been largely demolished. Hardly surprising that a mere 29 responses were received.

The third request is that the Expressions of Interest campaign, decided upon by Council in December 2008, should be undertaken as decided. Instead of this process going ahead, it appears the view has been adopted that nobody had the financial resources so let's not bother doing it. How did that happen?

Finally, what is the sudden hurry with progressing from ignoring and neglecting the church to 'let's demolish it'? We ask Council to take this old church out of the too hard basket and take a serious and creative look at all the options. Surely demolition has to be the last card in the deck.

Lorraine Beach  
11 May 2010

I intend to speak against the proposal to demolish the church.

Sydenham's only church has stood on this site since 1884.

Before this church was known as the Coptic Church, which it was for 25 years, it was for nearly 100 years the site of Tempe Park Methodist church, firstly for open air preaching before a small church was built, then this current church, built by its congregation in 1901. Its history tells us it was the first site for Methodist preaching in this district, and coincidentally was also home to the first Coptic church outside of Egypt in the late 1960s.

Please do not underestimate the value of this church as part of our heritage. Sydenham was until fairly recently a typical, integrated railway village. It still in part retains some of that history, though sadly no longer integrated. While heritage buildings often rely on the integrity of their setting, the current isolated position of this building has actually enhanced its heritage value – it now provides a stark, iconic reminder of the political battle waged in defence of this once thriving community.

The battle was obviously lost, but the church should be preserved as it is an important link to the past of the suburb of Sydenham, a suburb which has largely been obliterated by the operation of the third runway at Sydney Airport. To demolish this old church would be to sever a further link to Sydenham's past. Unused and neglected for the past 14 years, today perhaps its greatest significance is as a working class community landmark, built by its working class congregation, and still standing despite the decimation of its community. It is a link between the past and the present, and a relic of a community that many fought to retain, for themselves, for past generations of their families, and for future generations.

The demolition of the building would be a final insult to the history of Sydenham, and the people who were part of it.

Its demolition would merely mean more open space in an area where the existing open space is mostly significant because it is so under used, perhaps because it's not a very pleasant place to be. It's a sad reminder of a once vibrant community.

I would like to make three requests tonight.

The first is that Council should reject the recommendation of demolition and should immediately write to the relevant Minister, who happens to be our local Federal Member of Parliament, Anthony Albanese, and request that the Commonwealth provide funding for the building. The Commonwealth handed over the building to Council in 2001 in poor repair, offering no support with funding to maintain it or to improve it.

The second request is to undertake proper community consultation. The church is after all an asset of the whole LGA, and therefore I ask why the whole of the LGA community was not offered the opportunity to comment. The