

Good character is built on firm foundations

Magic Moments

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An unexpected letter from local authorities brought a confusing twist to the promised excitement of knocking down an old home.

It looks like our spoilsport council is going to forbid us from demolishing our house, for the next 12 months at least. This is a great pity, as we had Whelan the Wreckers all primed and ready to swing their wrecking ball and bulldozer blades through the joint, reducing the sandstone walls, stained glass windows and iron veranda to a pile of rubble.

We were inspired by Mr Whelan's website, showing an orange bulldozer ripping into a century-old church of some description by the looks of the photo, and efficiently making it disappear into the back of a large truck. Old churches. Who needs them?

It all looks like terrific fun, this demolition business, and we quite had our hearts set on having the orange bulldozer grinding across our front garden, reducing the lawn and shrubs to a beige Axminster. But all this promised excitement has now been knocked on the head by those killjoys, our local council,

working in cahoots with the State Government. We received a letter last week from the City of Unley, a council that has gaily signed off on the demolition of dozens of historic homes in the last few months, informing us that we were not to demolish our house.

Time to come clean. We were not really planning to knock our house down. The thought has never crossed our mind. Our house has been standing on its precious patch of dirt for more than 100 years and for all those years it has been loved and well maintained by its owners. It is not a "character" home, because that word implies that newer houses have no character and this is not so. Adelaide's red and cream brick, tiled and tin roof homes are beaut and if anything need to be protected from the dreaded render make overs. But our really old houses have seen off many indignities and stand as tangible links to the earliest days of our suburbs.

Last week's letter from the council warned of changes to Unley's development plan including controls over demolition of buildings and new renovations: *"To avoid development contrary to the intentions of the Development Plan Amendment, the amendments to the Development Plan have come into immediate effect for a period of 12 months, during which time a consultation and review process will be conducted,"* it explains. Confused? Join the club.

It seems the council is saying this: "We are planning to amend our development plan and those amendments will ban the demolition of some old houses, so we are putting the planned amendments into action immediately for 12 months while we consult you about our planned amendments". It should all be perfectly clear now.

The council says it wants to protect the city's village and heritage charm while better man-

aging development "to ensure we have a vibrant, stylish and sustainable city responsive to changing community needs". The rest of the letter is unintelligible, unless you are a student of council planning gobbledegook.

Over the last few months, we have seen an orgy of demolition applications, with our councils rubber stamping the destruction of hundreds of old homes as developers, individuals, businesses and even schools rushed to beat the looming new rules. Now the same councils send out letters stopping us from demolishing our houses because they want to protect the city's "village and heritage charm". The words horse, stable door and bolted spring to mind.

What do you think? Leave a comment on Matthew Abraham's blog at www.easterncourier.com.au. He can be heard on 891 ABC Adelaide from 8.30am each weekday.