

Architects join outcry over campus site plan

Lisa Pryor

Plans to transform an acclaimed university campus into a housing development have been attacked by top architects, who have joined protests against a move to sell the site.

The proposal for the University of Technology campus in Lindfield was described as "cultural vandalism" by the leading architect, Glenn Murcutt, who is the president of the Australian Architecture Association.

"The measure of any society, in its cultural values, can be seen by the built environment," said Mr Murcutt.

"If we're interested in pulling down our best buildings, what sort of culture is that?"

Protesters gathered at the campus last night for a public meeting condemning the university's plan to have the site rezoned so it could be sold off for medium-density housing.

The proposal, which went on exhibition yesterday, would retain the award-winning buildings and add more than 500 dwellings to the site, including at least seven four-storey unit blocks and three five-storey blocks.

When the complex won the Sulman Award in 1978, the jury praised the way the David Turner and Bruce Mackenzie-designed development capitalised on its setting and views with lift shafts and roof decks.

The president of the NSW chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Caroline Pidcock, said even if the complex itself was retained, that relationship with the surrounding bushland could be lost.

"I think it's very difficult to understand how a sensitive redevelopment of the site can happen without having a very significant impact on both the landscaping that was done and the significant values that have been retained as a result of that landscaping approach," she said.

Ms Pidcock has written to the State Government and the Heritage Council requesting an in-



terim heritage order over the site, to prevent demolition or rezoning.

It was the pre-eminent large-scale public work of the Sydney School style of architecture and indigenous landscape design in Australia, she said.

The UTS site is not the only Sulman Award-winner under threat. There are fears for the Warringah Library in Dee Why, which won in 1966 and could be demolished to make way for a hospital.

Mr Murcutt said the "marvellous" Col Madigan-designed library was a great influence on him and it would be a disgrace if such a building were lost.

"I used to go out there on weekdays and weekends and just stand in the space and look at the incredible light," he said.

"From the delicacy of the steel detailing to the refuge created by the solid wall, it taught me a lot, that building."

Six Sulman Award-winning buildings have been demolished since the award started in 1932, including the Manly Surf Pavilion and the Florence Bartley Library in Kings Cross.

Under threat ... the library at the University of Technology's Lindfield campus.

Photo: Jon Reid