

GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO EMPOWER COMMUNITY

In the latest instalment of the Bronte RSL site redevelopment saga, as reported by Sarah Healey (The Beast, February 2015), the Department of Planning and Environment (DOPE) has received advice from the independent Waverley Council planners recommending the proposed developer-written rules be rejected on the basis that they have 'no strategic merit'. The report confirmed the overwhelming and consistent community opposition to the developer-written rezone and was unanimously endorsed by all Waverley councillors and our mayor.

It is interesting to note the resulting action, or rather the lack thereof, from the DOPE in response to this advice. In the past, the DOPE has been keen to act quickly to ride roughshod over our community and our council in response to advice it commissions. In February 2014, the DOPE received advice from the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) in favour of the developer. The DOPE immediately accepted the advice

and implemented it literally within hours of receiving it.

Now that the DOPE has received the latest independent advice from our local planning experts, you would expect them to act in a similar way, yet nothing has happened for six weeks and counting. The advice was received by the DOPE on December 23, 2014. What are they waiting for? How long does it take to read a report that simply confirms everything that has been said over and over for the last two years? Our community and council want a development at the RSL site that complies with the current planning rules. This would allow an RSL club, up to four storeys of apartments and a shop of up to 500 square metres in size. We do not want the rules changed for a developer to allow an oversized building on the site.

It comes down to this: the public is sick of being lied to and politicians breaking promises. Before the last election the NSW Liberal Party promised to return local planning powers to communities and their councils. Since being elected, the Liberal government promised to allow councils and their communities to set the rules for development in their local areas. To maintain any credibility and trust with the electorate, the state government should fulfil those promises at Bronte before the coming March election.

Stephen Lightfoot, Save Bronte Spokesperson

How long does it take to read a report that simply confirms everything that has been said over and over for the last two years?

WE WANT TO KEEP THE CLUB ALIVE

Dear Beast,

Last month's Beast had an article about the ongoing battle over the Bronte RSL site. As the article stated, the RSL club's

new board has a clear mandate to have an RSL club continue within a development that complies with existing planning laws. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, the local community has been consulted many times over the last three years and it has made it abundantly clear that it does not want the site or neighbourhood overdeveloped.

Mr Paterson, a director of previous Bronte RSL club boards, continues to call any persons not in favour of the developer's proposal 'anti-development'. This is just not the case. Everyone agrees that the site needs redeveloping. As a longstanding member of the club's board, he had ample opportunity to come up with a viable plan for the continuance of the club. Sadly, the boards he was a member of came up with nothing.

The new board wishes to explore all options to see if there is a way of keeping the club going despite its parlous financial status. To do this it will need the support of the sub-branch. The club is currently working with the sub-branch to achieve a good result. However, with an extremely tight deadline imposed by the sub-branch due to three years passing and previous boards coming up with no concrete proposals, this could be mission impossible.

Mr Paterson's remarks about the wishes of Bronte residents wanting to live in a good neighbourhood (if this is what he means by a "Byron Bay lifestyle") are offensive and off key. As it happens, Mr Paterson doesn't live in this area, so we are left wondering why he has been trying so hard to impose this overdevelopment on Bronte.

The new board is aware of the sentiment that is attached to the club, even though many members were resigned to seeing the club close. The new board is committed to working hard to keep the club going if this is at all feasible and also keeping Bronte a great place to live.

Christine Newman, Director of Bronte RSL Club Limited

BRONTE GOODWILL NEEDED ON ALL SIDES

It's hard to know where to begin in responding to former Bronte RSL Club President Simon Paterson's comments in the last edition of *The Beast*. Having lived behind the club for almost 25 years, we have watched its demise with mixed feelings. It was certainly a local institution; our daughters played in the club's netball teams and once upon a time local schools used to hold functions there. And then the pokie mentality set in, the community by and large felt excluded and the club eventually closed.

I guess we are among the 100 nasty neighbours Mr Paterson refers to in his description of those who oppose a massive overdevelopment on the site. But actually, there are thousands of us if the formal objections and signatures on petitions are anything to go by. And what is nasty about wanting the best for our neighbourhood? Losing a local institution is bad enough, although it seems to be very popular as a gym these days, despite its dilapidated look. But replacing it with high-rise and large-scale retail would be worse for the majority of Bronte residents, not least as we are seeing ongoing signs of retail renewal along the Macpherson Street strip, despite its uncertain future.

As I say, it's difficult to take Mr Paterson to task as his comments reflect a very different reality to ours. I'm not sure that he is a Bronte resident. And although he may understand 'clubland', that might not be a prerequisite for a creative, community-focused solution for the site.

While not on the new board of the club, I have every confidence that those who are will work with the Bronte RSL Sub-Branch to find the best solution for the club's future, if it has one. That will take plenty of goodwill on all sides and a little less name-calling, perhaps. The first step, though, will be a sympathetic redevelopment of the club site, one that involves the locals and respects their wishes. After all, a club needs a community to survive.

Joanna Savill, Bronte

Editor's note: We received over twenty other letters relating to the Bronte RSL development with a similar sentiment. We always try to publish as many letters as we can but unfortunately we just didn't have the space this month...

The Beast

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