

by extremist he means people setting off bombs and the like.

I'd like to point out though that when I referred to religion as a global problem, I never did mention bombs or terrorists and although they are a problem, I was actually talking about the widespread and growing discrimination and persecution of people by religious people. For example: discrimination against gays and women or people of other or no religion.

I know that Anthony and most people wouldn't regard this as extremism, but if it isn't extreme to discriminate against individuals based on a book written by a 19th century conman, I don't know what is.

So just to clear up the point, I agree wholeheartedly with Anthony that there will always be bad people doing bad things and good people doing good things. Where we disagree is that today, religion is the best way to make good people do bad things, so it should not be encouraged.

Secondly, I'd like to address two terms that Anthony used in this letter: "atheist ideology" and "atheist science". It really needs to be made clear that neither of these things exist. All an atheist is is a person that doesn't have an imaginary friend. There should be no need for the term at all, just as there is no term to describe someone that doesn't believe in Santa Claus. There is certainly no ideology involved; no mandate, no leaders and no scriptures. Referring to an atheist ideology is simply another cynical attempt to make it sound like some new fruit-loop religion like Scientology that's easily discounted.

There is also no "atheist science", there is just science. Science is the practice of looking for evidence and drawing conclusions based on that evidence. Religion (and creationism) is the practice of ignoring evidence and drawing the conclusions that suit you best. Most scientists are rational thinkers, meaning they tend not to be religious, but they don't have some agenda based on some ideological mandate as you're trying to suggest by using that term. Again, cynical, misleading and disingenuous.

So, once again, we aren't addressing the issue that started the conversation in the first place. The

shrine at Dunningham Reserve is illegal and not approved by the council. However, Joe Ingegneri and other public servants have decided, based on their own beliefs, to allow it to remain anyway. They aren't enforcing the law, they aren't doing their jobs and they should be held accountable.

Liam, Coogee

"Science is the practice of looking for evidence and drawing conclusions based on that evidence. Religion (and creationism) is the practice of ignoring evidence and drawing the conclusions that suit you best."

NSW PLANNING (AND BRONTE RSL)

Last week's rejection of the state government's new planning laws along with the (very) recent decision by the NSW Department of Planning to transfer decision making on the Bronte RSL site planning controls to the Planning Assessment Commission leads me to wonder just how real it is for local residents to challenge a development proposal given the apparent weight of odds stacked against them.

Developers do this stuff for a living. This means that they (the developers) are committed to finding ways of getting past and over the hurdles that may exist to their activities. Their pricing and remuneration structure will reflect that. The skills that they employ will support that.

Community residents, however, don't have any of the 'full-time' support and structures that go with being able to challenge proposed development where they may feel compelled to do so. We are a collection of individuals who have chosen – for lots of different reasons – to live and die in the same general region. We all live differently, we all value different things, we all work

in different disciplines and we all have a different view of how we want or prefer to live our lives. So when a developer comes along with a proposal to do something that the community doesn't want, the developer does it knowing that whatever resistance it faces, it has the capacity and the resources to sit things out, and in that way, it has the capacity and resources to wear the community down.

For a community, however, when the system fails to uphold the preferences and desires of that community, they must rely on people who very kindly and unselfishly commit a significant proportion of their spare time to challenging the developer's seemingly endless capacity to challenge and refer their development plans until they get what they want. The particular proposal that I (and many Bronte locals) are increasingly concerned about is a plan for development that goes well beyond the current guidelines for the area – twice the current limits. It (in the form of a development application) has been rejected through the public consultation process (no discernible changes were made); it has been presented to Waverley Council's planners, who rejected the DA due to it not complying with existing guidelines and who, to their credit, recommended a further tightening of some planning controls in a strategic planning review of the area (including the RSL site); and it has been to council chambers, where our councillors unanimously rejected the developer's planning proposal to increase existing limits and unanimously supported the council planners' rejection of the DA at the same meeting.

If you think this is confusing, then you're right (I'm certainly confused). By making the DA worth over \$20 million, the developer ensured the DA would be assessed by the state government, and not our council, at the Joint Regional Planning Panel (JRPP). It was very clear to all that were present at this meeting that the JRPP were appalled by the developer's plans and demands due to it being non-compliant by such a large margin, and this was reflected in their decision, which was a unanimous rejection.

After so many official multi-governmental rejections, you would

think that justice and good sense had prevailed and the community's wishes had been respected. Well it doesn't stop there.

Following our council's unanimous decision to reject their proposed rule changes, the developer has submitted its planning proposal to the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure. They have done so with a view to having the planning controls altered to allow their original development (that no-one in the community wants) to go forward. Having now sat on that for several months, the Department of Planning has referred the developer's proposal to the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC). It's worth noting here that the PAC has no community level representation on it and the community has no ability to be involved in the PAC review.

Is there no end to this? How is this community consultation in action? How is it reasonable that people who don't live and die in our suburbs are making decisions about what's right for us as a community? This has got to the point now that the people making these decisions are so far removed from the reality of the decision that they might as well live on another planet. In all honesty, would Mr Hazzard or Mr O'Farrell or any of the members of the PAC, or even the developers themselves, approve of a community rejected development if they lived near it? I dare say that this is highly unlikely. And yet here we are. A community that has committed significant amounts of its spare time, fairly and squarely challenged a developer, sought to work with a developer (only to be ignored) and then rejected a developer's proposal, is being asked again to pull on the boots – unpaid – to continue the fight. Years this has been going on! And yet, despite all the promises of returning planning decisions to the local communities, we continue to have to fight a group of faceless people who have no vested interest in the community that we live in.

The current NSW state government came into office following years of inept government. It also came in on a promise that communities deserved, and would get, a greater say in how development in the communities would be considered and evaluated.

Last week's rejection in the upper house of a bill to amend the state's planning laws are pro-community ONLY in the sense that if the community wants and approves of a development, then it will be fast tracked through the process. Beyond that, there is little else that delivers on the promises made by state government ministers that communities will have a greater say. We have layer upon layer of referral and appeal when decisions are not granted to developers. Community volunteers are required to commit – unpaid – their time and energy for years on end, only to have decisions endlessly referred or appealed by those who earn a living from just such an approach.

If you think that it can't happen to you and your community, think again. EVERYONE in NSW should be very nervous about what's happening to planning in NSW and EVERYONE should be watching very closely what is currently happening in Bronte.

Developers are just waiting for the opportunity to put something in your backyard that you don't want and probably don't need. And guess what? While we all need to be prepared to challenge those plans in our spare time, developers are doing it as a full-time job. There is something very wrong with the balance of development and local community in NSW and the current government is on track to completely overturn a bunch of promises it made to NSW communities.

Simon Lewis, Bronte

JAMES VESPER IS AN INSPIRATION

Dear Beast magazine, I wish to comment on the letter posted by James Vesper in your October 2013 issue, which asks why Ryan Clark is on the cover of the magazine instead of James himself?

An event I witnessed the other week shows this James Vesper character is truly a champion bloke. It was a wicked, rainy day at Bronte Beach a few Sundays ago – definitely not a beach day. I was privileged to witness James lead a team of Bronte SLSC members in a training session, possibly for the Bondi to Bronte ocean swim? The training swim was carried out in the Bronte Bogey Hole and James was an inspirational standout.

He positioned himself in third after the first lap, only to catch the leaders after the water got knee deep and they had to wade. He came home in a tight photo finish, but James, ever the modest type, declared it a three-way draw.

It's good to see a young man such as James continuing to motivate a whole new generation of lifesaving club members with his relentless domination of the Bronte Bogey Hole.

Anthony, Inspired Bronte Nipper parent

"There is something very wrong with the balance of development and local community in NSW and the current government is on track to completely overturn a bunch of promises it made to NSW communities."

RESTORING THE FAITH

Dear Beast, For all of the grumblings about the local councils, I wanted to share a good news story.

My now husband and I were due to have our wedding ceremony in Marks Park, Tamarama on Saturday, October 19 and ensured we had the appropriate permit from Waverley Council to do so. We were granted the permit, worth \$120, with ease in July and spent the remaining months organising the wedding, including the function at Icebergs; we were so excited about our guests being able to walk around the cliffs from the park to the function after we were married.

On the Thursday before the wedding, I got a frantic call from my dad to say I had better get down to Marks Park. On arrival, we found it was a construction site full of semi-trailers and half-constructed sculptures. Yes, they were in the setting up phase of Sculpture by the Sea and there was no way we could get married there. The place was a mess and we were panic stricken