

**foke**



FRIENDS OF  
KU-RING-GAI  
ENVIRONMENT INC.

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2007**

This Report comes at a significant and critical time in Ku-ring-gai's history - at a time of great change and loss. It comes when things that should not be destroyed are being destroyed; when a civilised society should preserve what is valuable and worthy of preservation, but is not doing so; and when greed, selfishness and short-term perspectives are prevailing over long-term vision and common good. It comes at a time when some decision makers, including some from within our own elected ranks, are deluding themselves that what is happening is good, right and progressive. Is it ignorance? Blindness? Wilful disregard? Total lack of care and concern?

The changes occurring in Ku-ring-gai mean that the nation is being deprived of part of its precious natural and cultural heritage. On the "List of Losses" are canopy trees, bushland ridges, wildlife habitats, wildlife corridors, heritage homes, historic urban conservation areas and aesthetically beautiful streetscapes. This historic, scenic and natural urban landscape is being replaced by highly visible, alien, monolithic buildings, parasitic on their environment, lacking the qualities they have destroyed, yet boasting those very same qualities in their promotional literature.

The State Government's non-gazettal of Ku-ring-gai's urban conservation areas, its increasingly discredited urban consolidation policies, and the enthusiastic implementation of those policies by developers, are responsible for this change and loss.

Many people do care, and are very concerned and dismayed, even incredulous.

- A member of a demolition squad, on the site of a former gracious family home now denuded of trees and dominated by a towering crane and cavernous hole ready for a five storey development, said: *"I cannot believe we are knocking down such quality places."*
- A builder on a five-storey block of units, reliant on the canopy trees in the adjacent park for its leafy outlook and overlooking a single storey home, quietly broke ranks to say to protesting residents *"I am with you."*
- A member of a road surfacing team, looking at the houses in the tree-lined streetscape of a potential conservation area, said, *"They wouldn't knock down houses like this."* As we know, they are doing so and the trees are not being spared.

If only those responsible for the senseless, destructive, environmentally damaging policies and their implementation had the common sense and wisdom of these three wise men.

In May 2002, The Hon Barry O'Keefe AM QC, Past-President of The National Trust of Australia (NSW) said:

*"Any great city ought to be able to boast an area such as Ku-ring-gai. In many cities of the world the values that are characteristic of Ku-ring-gai would be regarded as the things to be preserved. These values are universal."*

The question therefore needs to be asked: Is this a great city? Or is it a mediocre city made so by the State Government's urban consolidation policies? Researchers have found that urban consolidation policies have failed to deliver on their goals. Apart from the long-term loss of valued and valuable environment, citizens suffer the practical consequences - inadequate infrastructure, lack of open space and affordable housing, and ever increasing traffic chaos. *"The Government doesn't have solutions to all the social problems urban consolidation causes. It's crisis management, the quick fix."* (Former Hornsby Councillor quoted in the article "Opposition must wake up to our crowded urban nightmare." Michael Duffy SMH 26/27. 5 .07).

At the Ku-ring-gai Council Centenary Council Meeting on 8 November 2006, at which *Under the Canopy*, the official history of Ku-ring-gai Municipality's first hundred years, was launched, one of the historians said:

*"I hope.. we have been successful in helping the reader understand what is special about Ku-ring-gai. Allow me to quote from the Council's housing strategy of 2000 as we have done at the end of Under the Canopy:*

*'Past Ku-ring-gai generations have left a legacy to Sydney of a unique blend of tall forest splendour, large areas of natural habitat ... and an extensive architectural heritage. It is incumbent on this generation to preserve and where possible improve upon this legacy for the future'.*

*As someone from the other side of Sydney I would like to emphasise strongly that you need to fight hard to preserve this legacy.*

*...So many times I have driven round this beautiful part of Sydney and been amazed at the wealth of its heritage – this includes individual houses, many with large grounds still; streetscapes where there may be no one item that is special but where the combination of a number of elements makes a significant whole - and of course the glorious urban bushland.*

*Sometimes I feel local people need an outsider to remind them that there is indeed a special heritage in Ku-ring-gai that is an important element helping to make Sydney the diverse, dynamic city it is."*

The destruction of Ku-ring-gai's tall *forest splendour, large areas of natural habitat ... and... extensive architectural heritage* is a planning tragedy of national significance. In an initiative backed by The National Trusts of Australia, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Museums Australia and Engineers Australia (Historic Section) marking World Heritage Day (18 April 2007), The National Trust of Australia (NSW) nominated "Ku-ring-gai's Urban Conservation Areas within the context of the Original Blue Gum High Forest" as one of the Top 10 Heritage At Risk places in Australia. The Threat is described as "Destruction" and carries the highest possible rating.

But the nomination also provides a simple solution:

*Development within the area (particularly urban consolidation) should proceed on an orderly basis balancing the needs of more accommodation with the conservation and protection of the area's scenic, landscape, social and architectural significance. All bushland remnants of the Blue Gum High Forest should be transferred to the care and management of the National Parks Service as Nature Reserves or private owners should enter into conservation agreements with the National Parks Service. Development should have particular regard to the appropriate design which protects individual trees or tree stands of the Blue Gum High Forest community.*

State and Local authorities responsible for planning should heed this message. It is wrong of the State Government to refuse gazettal of urban conservation areas which should be gazetted. Urban conservation area status does not preclude development but does require it to be in context with its surrounds. It is bad planning to have 5 storeys overhanging single storey homes, particularly single storey homes which lie down hill of a development on its northerly aspect. It is bad planning to have heritage homes isolated and walled in by 5 storey developments. In this time of climate concern, it is bad planning to permit landscapes to be denuded of their canopy trees.

I will now highlight some of the important areas in which FOKE has been involved in the past year.

**NEWSLETTERS:** During the year FOKE produced four Newsletters. These publications have raised many issues and asked many questions in relation to over development, over planning, developer donations to major political parties and developers' exceedingly healthy viability margins. The latter was illustrated with a case study of a company which has emerged as a major developer in Ku-ring-gai.

**COMMUNITY INFORMATION DAYS:** Under the umbrella group Rally Ku-ring-gai, FOKE joined other community groups to host Information Days aimed at informing the community of the enormity of Council's Town Centre development proposals and their traffic ramifications. Common sense tells residents that no margin of increased retail and residential yield as high as that proposed by Council can possibly be reasonable. Council should not be surprised that its current approach is generally seen by residents as excessive; in the interests of developers rather than of residents; and likely to significantly and adversely affect the amenity of Ku-ring-gai, its streetscapes and heritage. Furthermore, five of the Town Centre developments involve as their main street, Metro Road 1, the Pacific Highway, notwithstanding that it already struggles as a major transport route. No one seems to be taking responsibility for the cumulative affect of the increased traffic that proposed higher-density residential and retail developments will have on the overall functioning of metropolitan Sydney.

**INDEPENDENT HEARINGS ON LAND RECLASSIFICATION:** FOKE members were amongst those who appeared before the Hearings convened to examine Council's proposed blanket rezoning of significant amounts of community land to operational land. The reclassification of community land is at the core of the proposed Town Centres' rezoning/planning. Residents claimed there were deficiencies in Council's procedure and a lack of transparency caused by its provision of inadequate information to the public. The Director General of the Department of Local Government advised Council to start the process "afresh." Council has obtained Advice from Senior Counsel that it does not need to do so. This Advice is currently being considered by community groups.

**2007 NATIONAL TRUST FESTIVAL "WHAT HOUSE IS THAT?"** FOKE supported the 2007 National Trust Festival by participating in a series of three talks on House Styles in Ku-ring-gai. Held at the Gordon Library, the evening talks were warmly hosted by Library Staff. We are indebted to our speakers - prominent Sydney architects and heritage consultants, Mr Ian Stapleton (Federation and Arts & Crafts Styles), Mr Scott Robertson (Interwar Housing) and Professor Harry Margalit (Modernism) for their expertise and time. FOKE's photographic record of Ku-ring-gai's homes illustrated the talks and was on display for the duration of the Festival.

**GRANTS:** FOKE received two grants this year. First, a \$500 grant under Council's Grants program to assist in financing production of a photographic record of the houses on Ku-ring-gai's rezoned sites (the State Government Gazettal of LEP 194 /200) and the interface sites adjoining these rezoned sites, together with their contextual streetscapes. This record of approximately 600 photos, arranged suburb-by-suburb and street-by-street, will be a vital historical record of these areas, already changed/soon to be changed forever by medium density developments.

A second grant of \$3,000 under the Australian Government's Volunteer Small Equipment Grant program enabled the purchase of a portable display system which tonight shows the Nomination of *Ku-ring-gai's Urban Conservation Areas within the Context of the Original Blue Gum High Forest* for Australia's Top Ten Heritage At Risk List.

**RESIDENTS' KITS:** In response to requests, FOKE has made available copies of each of its three practical Kits, formulated to help residents deal positively with applications for (1) a single dwelling development; (2) a dual occupancy development proposal; and (3) a multi unit development. Residents can make a difference and achieve a more appropriate and amenable development outcome for their neighbourhood.

**EDUCATION & AWARENESS:** During the year, we have found there is nothing quite like a site inspection to appreciate the impact of an inappropriate development. Consequently, as part of "broadcasting" the devastating affects of urban consolidation in Ku-ring-gai, FOKE has developed a program that provides a briefing followed by an escorted tour. We will extend an invitation to the Premier of NSW, The Hon Morris Iemma MP, Ministers, Members of Parliament and Departmental Officers and the media to visit and see first hand the adverse affects of the State Government urban consolidation policies on this priceless area.

**FOKE MEMBERSHIP:** Where planning issues were the topic, FOKE members have attended debates, forums, law educational sessions and rallies convened in other suburbs and the CBD.

Membership fees have not increased since our inception in 1994 when we opposed "McMansions/Monstrosities". This type of development has now have been universally discredited. Whilst the issues of environmental damage that we now face are similar, the fight is more complicated, the antagonists more greedy and powerful yet still possessive of the same short-term vision. We are therefore most appreciative of, and indeed dependent on, your membership fees and donations accompanying your renewals. Thank you. We need *you* to be more active if you currently are not. Please offer your services, your ideas and your expertise to the Committee, attend Council meetings to observe proceedings, deliver leaflets, write letters, and recruit new people to FOKE or encourage them to join their local community group.

**THE FOKE COMMITTEE:** Julienne Blunck and Valerie Bray will be retiring at the AGM from the Committee. Julienne who joined the Committee in 1999 has made a special contribution, particularly in her defence of Ku-ring-gai's natural environment. FOKE would also like to thank the Blunck family for our handsome banners. Valerie Bray was one of FOKE's founding members in 1994, returning to the Committee in 2005. Whilst stepping down from the main Committee, Valerie will remain pivotal to the very important work of the photographic Sub Committee. Valerie's photographic skills have contributed greatly to FOKE's work. To Julienne and Valerie I extend FOKE's sincerest appreciation. On behalf of the FOKE membership I extend my appreciation to the 2006-7 Committee - a team of amazingly thoughtful, caring, creative people, generous with their time and talents - Kathy Cowley, Julienne Blunck, Valerie Bray, Malcolm Galloway, Janet Harwood, Jill Johnston, Janine Kitson, Jan Langley, Katrina Pickles, Jean Posen and Dinah Warner.

Anne Carroll OAM

June 2007

.....  
*We do not inherit the earth from our forebears, we borrow it from our children.*

South American proverb.