

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2009

"I was gob smacked by the scale and intensity of the proposed rezoning of Ku-ring-gai. The area is already staggering under the impacts of \$1.7 billion of development." This was the reaction of Ms Catherine Cusack MP, Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, after her visit to Ku-ring-gai in March this year.

Ms Cusack said: *"The threat to Ku-ring-gai compares with the significance of the plan to demolish the Rocks or building a freeway through Paddington. In some senses it is worse because the scale is even larger. We must avert it. Ku-ring-gai's iconic tree canopy that connects through to the National Parks will be shredded like waste paper. Threatened species such as the critically endangered Blue Gums will almost certainly become extinct and wildlife will shrink due to loss of habitat. The community and environmental values of the municipality will be torn, and that damage to Sydney as a whole will be irreversible.*

With regard to the Town Centres Plan, I have never seen anything so inappropriate and politically vindictive. A serious debate needs to occur about the design of new dwellings, because much current design does not enhance the feel of Ku-ring-gai."

A notable Town Planner, who has also visited Ku-ring-gai, has joined Ms Cusack in criticising the Plan, particularly regarding the very inadequate provision of open space to service the increased densification, and regarding the density in St Ives, which is serviced only by road and will suffer increased car traffic in the absence of adequate bus services.

Even developers are condemning the Plan. At the Ku-ring-gai Planning Panel Meeting on 5th November 2008 a developer, said: *This is an overly aggressive approach to the rezoning. The floor space ratios are... quite excessive; contingencies would appear to be ridiculous; the extent of the proposed rezoning is excessive.... It is just far too great and is not required for the proposed 10,000 additional dwellings; I have seen through my development colleagues, a significant lack of demand; this is not an area that the growth population in Sydney will be moving into. (There is) significant lack of road and rail infrastructure in place to support the increased densities. I am extremely disappointed with the work I have seen. The results of this Plan will result in a patchwork quilt and missing teeth."*

Despite opinions such as these, and despite unanimous opposition from the capacity-filled Council Chamber (with approximately 40 speakers denouncing the Plan), the Panel still resolved to place its Town Centres Plan on exhibition.

Increasingly, professionals are criticising the reasons given by the State Government for pushing urban consolidation as its solution to planning dilemmas. They maintain that, contrary to the Government's stated reasons for densification, infill development places considerable additional loading on existing services and facilities, including water, sewerage, roads and public transport, which are already at or near capacity. They contend that the costs of maintaining such services in infill locations are much higher than for greenfield locations. Further, they refer to recent survey work which suggests that 85 per cent of those who live in an apartment want to live in a dwelling with a nexus to the ground. They conclude that in order to make our cities work better we need less – not more – urban consolidation. (Residential Developer January 2009).

With widespread negative publicity from Talk Back Radio (Alan Jones) and banner headlines such as The Rape of Ku-ring-gai (Stateline); Urban Insanity and Horror Storeys (The Sun Herald); and Concrete raiders of a stately Eden, Democracy that leaves people's views out of the equation, and To save the city, first they destroy it. (Sydney Morning Herald), the pillaging of Ku-ring-gai is widely recognised. What is happening in Ku-ring-gai is a loud and clear warning to other areas of what may well happen to them if the State Government persists with its aggressive urban consolidation policy in the metropolitan region.

FOKE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

In Ku-ring-gai, the loss of its heritage is, and will be, measurable by reference to FOKE's photographic record entitled "A PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF SITES AND STREETSCAPES IN KU-RING-GAI, IMPACTED BY LEP 194/200/202/204/207 RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY STAGE 1." The record contains over 2,000 photographs and highlights the plight of our nationally-recognised and National Trust classified Urban Conservation Areas. Of the rezoned homes earmarked for 5 storey development, 75% of these are situated within these Urban Conservation Areas. One quarter of these Areas has already been destroyed.

Since publication of the Photographic Record in 2008, it has been used in FOKE presentations to the Director General of the Department of Planning and to the NSW Heritage Branch. Copies of it have also been tabled at meetings with Planning Minister Kenelly and Shadow Minister Cusack, which were facilitated by Jonathan O'Dea MP.

To further publicise and broadcast the lack of heritage protection and planning issues, the Record has also been presented, both in hard copy and electronic form, to the following: the NSW Parliamentary Library, the State Library of NSW, The National Trust of Australia (New South Wales), Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Ku-ring-gai Council, Ku-ring-gai Council Library and the Ku-ring-gai Historical Society, and in electronic form to other interested parties. It is available on request in electronic form.

The presentations of the Record have been accompanied by comparative photographic charts showing the alien nature of the replacement buildings to their contexts. They stand in stark contrast to the entry which won the Urban Development Institute's 2008 Medium Density Housing Award. The Award went to a three level development "which fits seamlessly into its environment... a development that sits comfortably in its neighbourhood".

I am also both pleased and proud to report that FOKE's Photographic Record won a 2008 Department of Planning NSW Heritage Branch Volunteers Award, and a Highly Commended Certificate in the 2009 National Trust Heritage Awards.

The Photographic Record documents the character of Ku-ring-gai's heritage homes, the attractiveness of its streetscapes and the beauty of its landscape settings before the impact of Stage 1 of urban densification. The replacement buildings – most of them square; bulky; monolithic; slab sided; concrete; out-of-context; uncharacteristically flat-roofed – are also now being photographed and recorded by FOKE.

Many of the replacement buildings mock the statements made by a key NSW Planning Department spokesperson responsible for implementing urban consolidation. He was quoted in an article entitled "Tree tops to be limit for boom town apartments" (Sydney Morning Herald July 2005) as saying that he favoured "four-storey garden apartment buildings, no taller than the mature height of native trees planted around them." and "Within the canopy of the trees we can get buildings that are shaded and protected and the feel will be back again of the garden city.... You can keep it leafy and what that's good for is you can lower the temperature."

In many instances power hungry air-conditioning units have replaced the bulldozed carbon-absorbing and shade-providing trees including the critically endangered Blue Gums. The "pop-top" glass penthouses above the tree canopy are devoid of protective eaves. One application in Pymble has sought 145 air-conditioning units –one on each of the 145 balconies. The excavations on the construction sites, many near railway stations, resemble open cut mines to accommodate the massive, permissible, underground car parking facilities, the overwhelming majority providing considerably more car spaces than is required under LEP 194. Yet one of the basic tenets of urban consolidation is for decreased car usage. Is this rational and sustainable development?

Stage 1, and Stage 2 which is to follow, are occurring in a heritage vacuum. Despite its heritage significance, Ku-ring-gai is one of very few Local Government Areas in NSW not to have any conservation areas. The State Government's failure to confer heritage protection in Ku-ring-gai is a disgrace and a planning tragedy of national significance. Not only is the core of Ku-ring-gai's heritage being blitzed and its context ignored, but

the replacement buildings are a huge mismatch with the aims and objectives of the planning documents that are meant to promote positive outcomes.

Against the background of what is happening in Ku-ring-gai FOKE readily identifies with the Historic Houses Trust's recent exhibition Lost Gardens of Sydney, and its previous exhibition Demolished Houses of Sydney 1999, and with the State Library of NSW's 2008 exhibition "Impact: a changing land"- an exploration of the controversial history of our relationship with the environment over the past 200 years. Ku-ring-gai sadly and tragically provides material for repeats of all exhibitions.

THE DRAFT LEP TOWN CENTRES PLAN

The Planning Panel's Draft Town Centres Plan provides for massive increases in height, bulk and scale of developments, ignoring basic planning principles and the State Government's own published documentation. The Chair of the Ku-ring-gai Planning Panel is reported as saying, by way of explanation, that only 5% of the Municipality is affected by the Plan – a very disturbing and disappointing comment given the Plan targets the central elevated ridge of Ku-ring-gai and impacts aggressively on its core heritage-rich areas. The statement shows very little connection with, and understanding of, appropriate place-planning – in this case Ku-ring-gai, and is at odds with planning which is recognised by the Urban Development Institute as worthy of its awards.

Of significant concern is that the Draft LEP for Ku-ring-gai Town Centres has been exhibited without the benefit of a Local Environmental Study. The Draft Plan gives every expression of having been prepared, as if it were to be applied to a green field site, with little evidence to suggest that the Metro Strategy Key Directions namely "protect the natural environment of the subregion" and "protect the cultural and heritage elements of the subregion" have been adequately taken into account, or taken into account at all.

The Public Hearing process in relation to the Reclassification of community lands (unable to be sold) to operational lands (can be sold).

Council's external legal advice found that the statutorily-required Public Hearings for its 2008 public land reclassification process were deficient. This is the second time. Its 2007 Public Hearings were also found to be deficient. We have yet to learn what Council proposes following this latest legal advice. The overwhelming majority of submissions to both the 2007 and the 2008 Public Hearings were opposed to the reclassification of public land. We predict this is unlikely to change with a third process. We should keep in mind the comments of the President of the Local Government Association, Ms Genia McCaffrey, that community land should not be sold, as there is so little of it.

FOKE WEBSITE

It is with great pleasure that we announce FOKE's website. We are deeply indebted to Graham Lewis for making this a reality. Graham's diverse talents, his generosity of time, good humour and patience never cease to amaze. We thank Graham for all the work he has put into the website. The Pillaging of Ku-ring-gai is now a message that can be spread even further on the internet. It can be accessed on www.foke.org.au.

ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT MATTERS

It has been an intense year, with FOKE being very active in pursuit of its aims and objectives. I will highlight some important areas in which FOKE has also been involved in the past year.

• Bad Developer Awards

FOKE's nominations of developments in Ku-ring-gai were recognised at the Greens 2008 Bad Developer Awards. Not surprisingly FOKE nominated most of the high-density apartment buildings for the categories of • The Most Environmentally Destructive Development • Crimes Against Amenity • The Worst Residential Development. FOKE supported the nominations with a PowerPoint presentation showing contextual photographs and "before" and "after" photos.

• Forums

During the year FOKE supported the following:

- The Planning Sustainability and Democracy Community Forum held at Lindfield in July 08.

- The National Trust convened Forum opposing the changes to Part 3A of the Planning Act held in the CBD in August 08.
- The Bio Diversity Conservation forum Our Future is the Natural World held in Turramurra in September 08.
- The Rally Against Inappropriate Development (RAID) held in Hyde Park and outside Parliament House in October 08.

● **Education**

FOKE responds to requests, both from school and university students, seeking information relating to urban consolidation, and to invitations to address schools and community forums on the same topic. Speakers with PowerPoint presentations are available to speak to your community organisations.

● **Generally**

On planning and development matters, FOKE members have written submissions to Council, and to State and Federal Governments; supported Council by attending Land & Environment Court hearings; assisted with leaflet distributions in areas to alert residents to specific developments; and assisted residents in providing “How to respond to a development near you ” kits. FOKE members have also attended a State Government Planning Forum, and seminars and community rallies convened in other areas affected by the unpopular planning policies. FOKE Members have attended "Ward Summit" meetings conducted by Council where ward issues were discussed, and have attended and addressed both Ku-ring-gai Council meetings and Planning Panel meetings.

NEWSLETTERS

During the year FOKE has produced four Newsletters informing and urging our membership to act on behalf of the FOKE cause. Through the mutual exchange of Newsletters, important links with other community groups are maintained.

POPULATION

Population is an issue of concern to FOKE membership and fellow community groups. Population is inextricably linked to the carrying capacity of our land, the size of our cities, and the downstream effect on our suburbs. Our Governments must address the disturbing exponential population growth and its effect on our environment and on the sustainability of our resources and lifestyle.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT THE FOKE CAUSE?

A single voice can achieve a lot. We are reminded of the following – nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little.

Thank you for your membership renewals and donations. We are most appreciative of, and indeed dependent on, your membership fees and donations. However 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 and Planning Panel meetings to observe proceedings, address the meetings when appropriate, deliver leaflets, write letters, and recruit new people to FOKE or encourage them to join their local community group.

THE FOKE COMMITTEE

Committee members have been extraordinarily hard working. Despite being the Davids in a battle with the Goliaths, they have met the challenges with dedication, creativity and determination. On behalf of the FOKE membership I extend my deep appreciation to the 2008-9 Committee – a team of inspirational, hardworking and caring people – Kathy Cowley, Janet Harwood, Jill Johnston, Janine Kitson, Jan Langley, Rhondda Maltby, Katrina Pickles, Jean Posen, Dinah Warner and Malcolm Galloway. We acknowledge the retirement of Rebecca Morden shortly after her election due to an overseas posting. Janine Kitson will not be seeking re-election in 2009 due to other commitments. Thank you Janine for your dedication to the environment and heritage of Ku-ring-gai. Your enthusiasm, work and creative ideas have been greatly appreciated by us all.

Anne Carroll OAM
President