

Mr McKee,  
General Manager  
Ku-ring-gai Council  
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30 May 2022

Attention: Integrated Planning Team

Dear Mr McKee

RE: Ku-ring-gai's Community Strategic Plan

We wish to make the following submission in response to the public exhibition of Ku-ring-gai's Community Strategic Plan.

We submit the following points below for consideration by council in reviewing and in finalising the Plan:

1. Community Consultations, as stated in the background paper had protecting natural environment as top priority. With the highest issues relating to loss of the local character, environment and heritage, while managing development. (Page 26 Background paper). FOKE supports these issues.

2. FOKE supports the community vision: Page 7 Community Strategic Plan.

**3. The Community vision priority is for an inclusive and connected community, where our natural environment and heritage are valued, working towards a sustainable future.**

The community Strategic Plan's focus areas, objectives and targets need to be improved for the areas:

- a. P1 Preserving Ku-ring-gai's unique character. (page 32)
  - i. P1.1 Ku-ring-gai's unique visual character is maintained, with 86% of residents considering important or very important. The community plan states the target should be 'maintain'. This should be changed to 'increase', as per other objectives in the natural environment focus areas with similar progress indicators.
  - ii. It is essential that we continue to increase the community understanding and appreciation of our unique visual character as our community changes with increased population.

iii. Please change the Target Indicator to “Increase”.

b. L1. Leadership

- i. It is clear from the low levels of resident satisfaction, 67% satisfied on opportunities to participate and 75% satisfied with Council’s advocacy on matters affecting Ku-ring-gai, that a lot more work needs to be done in engaging and communicating with residents before the next plan review.

4. One aspect not included anywhere in the Community Strategic Plan document is the emphasis on selling community assets to maintain a positive Operating Income as highlighted in the Draft Long-Term Financial Plan (DLTFP).

c. On page 4 of the DLTFP it states:

- d. “There is \$111m in revenue from property asset sales included in the budget to fund new capital works and infrastructure renewal. If asset sales are not achieved significant remedial action will be required to maintain a satisfactory financial position. Efforts to date in planning for asset sales have been contested and delayed.”, and
- e. “Council has insufficient funding in the LTFP to sustainably manage and improve its existing infrastructure assets and meet community expectations.”

FOKE continues to stress that the sale of community assets remains detrimental to the long-term amenity, health and character of Ku-ring-gai. With the impost from NSW Planning to demand further population increases in Ku-ring-gai, the loss of the community assets that could be utilised as playgrounds, ovals, open space and community services buildings is negative to the vision espoused for Ku-ring-gai of an interconnected community appreciating our natural and heritage character.

Nowhere in the details or scenarios within the DLTFP has the option been explored to sell 828 Pacific Highway Gordon to pay for the shortfall in funds to meet the maintenance requirements for Ku-ring-gai.

Going back to the early 2000’s it was understood by the community that the Council Chambers and council’s car park would be proposed for a ‘Gordon Hub’ not 828 Pacific Highway which we now understand is being proposed within council. We believe the house blocks adjoining council’s car park bought by council for a park on the west side of Gordon adjacent to the shopping precinct, are now a potential additional council asset being considered by council for sale and redevelopment.

Community assets are not an ever-ending source of funds for Council. Continuing in this manner to maintain a sustainable budget will eventually spell financial disaster, while undermining the key elements that make Ku-ring-gai such a wonderful area to live.

Though the early years of this financial plan highlight spending on park development, this quickly dissipates in the outward years. Very few new parks are planned while community assets such as bowling and recreation clubs, 3 libraries and public halls e.g. the Pymble Town Hall, car park and Presbytery, and Lindfield senior citizen community hall, affordable housing units (‘Arrunga’ self-care units for the aged and infirm) and two tennis courts (on the Lindfield Library site) are proposed to be sold or re developed, in part or whole, with additional residential units - just some of the assets to be disposed by Council. We believe assets amounting to \$100 million in value are to be sold off by Council most of which will never be returned to the community.

The DLTFP is heavily supported by the sale of assets, without the mention of the largest asset of 828 Pacific Highway which has been very much underutilised to meet council or community needs.

5. Outlined in the Scenario Planning section (page 15), two scenarios with and without asset sales are presented. The DLTFP states 'Both scenarios are financially sustainable in terms of maintaining a balanced budget, sufficient unrestricted cash and available working capital, sufficient cash reserves and a permissible debt service ratio over the medium term but Scenario 1 will achieve higher asset sustainability ratios.' Scenario one being the inclusion of asset sales to fund the current projects.

The determination of 'underutilised assets' (assets which have for years been deliberately allowed to run down by council) for sale will continue to be an area of concern for residents both for the short and long term as these sites, once sold will be lost forever as an amenity for our ever-growing population. Using asset sales is an easy short term decision, but not intergenerationally beneficial for Ku-ring-gai and its residents. Other options will need to be sought as these asset sales will continue to be contested by a concerned community.

On page 28, Council states "Council's outstanding debt at the end of 2022/23 stands at \$53 million. This includes the existing loan (\$18.9m) from the acquisition of Council's investment property at 828 Pacific Highway, Gordon. The building has currently been leased out (although we understand a new lease sign has appeared recently in front of 828) and will generate enough revenue over the life of the Plan to discharge the outstanding debt in future years. This principle aligns with Council's current funding strategy and the matching concept of "intergenerational equity".

FOKE completely disagrees with this statement, as the intergenerational equity of retaining existing assets close to residential areas for use by residents into the future should be council's primary purpose. The office block at 828 Pacific Highway should be the first asset to be sold as it does not add to the amenity of residents in terms of community services, recreation or engagement.

Council's own Open Space Program highlights numerous areas where parks and playgrounds need to be built or expanded, such as in West Roseville and Lindfield west of the Highway. The Lindfield Hub will allow for approximately a thousand new residents with no significant open space for play and recreation within close proximity. We also see this overdevelopment planning scenario played out for other planned council Hubs in Turramurra and Gordon.

We thank council for the opportunity to make a submission and hope our submission will be considered in the review of the Community Strategic Plan.

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Cowley

PRESIDENT

cc Mayor and Councillors

cc The Hon Jonathan O'Dea MP Member for Davidson

cc The Hon Alister Henskens SC MP Member for Ku-ring-gai

cc The Hon Paul Fletcher MP Member for Bradfield