

# FOKE Talk

## Council embeds community asset sales

One has to delve into the Ku-ring-gai Council's Community Strategic Plan's detailed attachments to unearth the basis of the Strategic Plan.

Unfortunately, the Draft Long Term Financial Plan (DLTFP) accompanying the Strategic Plan, highlights Council's objective to sell \$110 million of community assets over the next 10 years.

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 in the Strategic Plan of an interconnected community appreciating our natural and heritage character.

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

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 understand is the current plan. 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 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 finan-



cial 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, libraries and public halls such as the Pymble Town Hall and its car park and the Lindfield senior citizen community hall, affordable housing units and two tennis courts (Lindfield Library site), are just some of the assets to be disposed of by Council for development.

Outlined in the DLTFP was an alternative financial scenario without asset sales which was seen as similarly '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'.

The intergenerational equity of retaining existing assets close to residential areas for use by resi-

dents 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 hundreds new residents with no significant open space for play and recreation within close proximity. With this over-development planning scenario played out for other planned council Hubs in Turramurra and Gordon.

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.

**These community assets, once sold, will be lost forever for the amenity of our ever-growing population.**

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

Unfortunately, we continue to see bad news coming from the Department of Planning in implementing measures which we believe to be in the interests of the property industry not the community.

Since the advent of the pandemic the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has increased its rate of change to the Planning System, with significant new legislation being proposed and/or introduced on a regular basis, often concurrently.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment recently changed its name back to Department of Planning and Environment, to reflect the change of Ministers from Rob Stokes back to Anthony Roberts.

Minister Roberts has, to the disappointment of many, quickly revoked Rob Stokes' Planning Principles "to ensure focus remained on the government's priority of delivering a pipeline of housing supply". Minister Roberts has also stopped the Draft Design and Place SEPP from being implemented following lobbying from the property development industry.

While FOKE believed that the Draft SEPP did not go far enough in providing a robust and visionary planning system for NSW, and said as much in our submission on the Draft SEPP, the SEPP was at least a step forward. Instead, the Minister has taken what FOKE believes to be a step backward in not introducing an updated Design and Place SEPP following the lengthy consultation it received across community, architects and industry.

We thank the members who braved the cold evening to attend the FOKE AGM on the 25 May. Hopefully next year we will be able to organise a Public Meeting with a guest speaker as we have in past years.

A number of the FOKE committee attended the Better Planning Network AGM last month. One of the guest speakers following the close of the meeting was journalist Elizabeth Farrelly. We remain impressed with the work the BPN committee does on behalf of its membership groups in responding to State Government planning issues. BPN now represents over 100 interest groups such as ourselves.

We are pleased that after much lobbying and submissions by the community and FOKE, the Killara Lawn Tennis Club and Killara Bowling Club are now approved for local heritage listing and for rezoning to Private Recreation. This is a wonderful result and we congratulate all those who actively participated in submitting their views.

In June, FOKE submitted our concerns regarding the Ku-ring-gai Community Strategic Plan, which is summarised in this newsletter. FOKE will be preparing a response to Ku-ring-gai Council's Draft Urban Forest Strategy this month.

We enclose a printed copy of the President's Report for 2021. Please do not hesitate to raise matters that you would like FOKE to include in this newsletter or need support to take action as the year progresses.

Kind regards

**Kathy Cowley**  
President

### Lindfield Public School Jean Posen Award

The 2021 Jean Posen Environmental Award goes to a student who exhibits passion, enthusiasm and a general commitment to improving sustainable practices and caring for the school environment.

Last year the award went to Emily Tai. **Congratulations Emily.**

### Join FOKE Now!

[www.foke.org.au](http://www.foke.org.au)

#### FRIENDS OF KU-RING-GAI ENVIRONMENT INC.

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## Gordon Bowling Club public hearing recommendation

A reclassification public hearing has been held for the council owned Gordon Bowling Club. The Gordon community and FOKE have lobbied council to retain the land for public recreation. However, council made the decision to rezone the bowling club to R2 for single residential development. The Public Hearing was held on 24 February 2022 in respect of a Gateway Determination under the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). 63 public submissions were received by the Chair and ten people addressed the public hearing.

A report was submitted to council in April 2022 with the recommendation below:

1. That Council re-evaluate whether to proceed with the reclassification of the site from "Community" to "Operational" land as part of the Planning Proposal or, otherwise retain the site as RE1 zoned land and "Community" land to be developed as a public open space area suitable for multifunctional recreational and community facilities.
2. That this report on the Public Hearing for the reclassification of the site be made available for public viewing.

**Council now needs to formally adopt the recommendation to retain the site as RE1 land suitable for recreation, which is clearly what the community wants.**



Photo courtesy of Julian Andrews, Daily Telegraph

## NSW Planning strengthens power for developers

Along with significant changes to planning in NSW the department is implementing measures to ensure that State significant projects in NSW are supported by what the department describes as measures for "better assessment, better coordination and better engagement" for planning in NSW.

The Rapid Assessment Framework is a suite of reforms that are designed to make major project assessments quicker and more efficient.

However, FOKE questions whether this new system will improve assessment quality, engagement standards and customer service, as claimed.

Better Planning Network (BPN) has summarised some of the adverse impacts of the new rapid assessment framework.

BPN believes that standardising application procedures to improve process efficiency should not come at the expense of statutory requirements.

Importantly, the current plan that the proponent would decide the level of assessment required for the project will encourage the same problems that have occurred in residential developments in NSW.

A key objective of the reforms is that of Community Engagement, however that is immediately undermined as there exists no requirement for applicants/proponents to seek the community's views by way of public exhibition of their draft Environmental

Impact Statement (EIS) or any other means such as public hearings. The reforms only stipulate an 'expectation' that this will occur.

The level of community engagement must be determined and defined in the State Significant Development Guide and the Engagement Guide, and not by the proponent.

The Department must provide the parameters for community engagement, not allow the proponent to "innovate".

The Environmental Assessment certification process is a fundamental problem. To avoid the problems experienced in NSW highrise development, it is essential that the Registered Environmental Assessment Practitioner (REAP) be on a rotational basis, rather than selected by the proponent.

Similarly, the REAP that has prepared the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS) must not be the same person to certify it.

Assessing cumulative impacts in these reforms in separate streams undermines the concept of 'cumulative' itself. Any assessment of whether a cumulative impact assessment is required must take into account impacts from projects undertaken in the past as well as future plans for an area. Clear guidance is required in this critical area.

FOKE remains concerned that these reforms will allow 'interpretation' by the proponent in the areas of community engagement, environmental assessments and certification.

**There is a reduction in the rights of third party objectors which will combine to reduce community input and influence, to the detriment of the public interest leading to poorer planning outcomes.**

## New Federal Environment Ministry

The new Labor Albanese Government has promised it will do better on the environment to tackle the environmental crises we face.

Chris Bowen, the new federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy has signed onto the Paris Climate Agreement promising to lift emission reductions by 43 per cent by 2030 to achieve net zero by 2050.

Tanya Plibersek, the new Minister for the Environment and Water, promises to implement the recommendations of Graeme Samuel's review of the Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act that he condemns as "not fit for purpose" because of its failure to halt extinction for too many native species.

Tanya Plibersek will soon be releasing the 2021 'State of the Environment Report' that is expected to paint a very serious picture of environmental loss and decline.

Labor has also promised to establish an independent environment protection agency to enforce national conservation laws and collect data on the health of wildlife.

The Australian Parliament now has a supersized crossbench in the wake of the "teal wave" of independents and an increase in Greens candidates elected into Parliament. It is expected to put pressure on Labor to deliver more ambitious policies on climate action.

Professor Tim Flannery, Chief Climate Councillor of the Climate Council says "There is no

more time to waste, the 2020s are our make or break decade for climate action. **Make no mistake: right now we're on a crash course to climate catastrophe.** That requires a sharp correction. Australians know it and they deserve a federal government that recognises the scale of the challenge before us, as well as the pace of action that's required. We can not afford to waste a single day more."



## Lindfield's 'Godfather of Corals'

The outstanding natural beauty of Hornsby's, Ku-ring-gai's and Willoughby's trees, forests and bushlands have inspired many of its residents to become passionate environmentalists.

One such person is Professor John 'Charlie' Veron who as of the world's most respected and acclaimed marine scientists sounded the alarm bells warning of the dangers that climate change was causing to the survival of coral reefs. He alerted the world to the risks that rising global temperatures posed because of how they led to mass coral bleaching events, including to our own World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef.

Known as the 'Godfather of Corals', Dr Charlie Veron was an avid naturalist growing up in Treatts Road, Lindfield. He attended Lindfield East Public School before moving to Barker



College. He explored the surrounding national parks as well as the rock pools at Collaroy's Long Reef where he loved observing its marine world. Today Charlie is one of the world's most authoritative experts on coral reefs

In 2009 renowned naturalist documentary filmmaker David Attenborough invited Charlie to speak at the Royal Society in London on whether the Great Barrier Reef was on 'death row'. There he outlined his research on how rising ocean temperatures is driving increasing emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and

ocean leading to mass bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef.

Charlie Veron regrets that so much of the Great Barrier Reef as he knew it as a young man has now gone. His fears for increasing global temperatures destroying coral reefs is exacerbated by the knowledge that the ocean's chemistry is changing as more carbon is being absorbed into the oceans with climate change inextricably linked to mass extinction.

Charlie Veron continues his relentless mission to safeguard the Great Barrier Reef calling for drastic emission reductions. He is also working on a coral biobank project as well as planting thousands of trees on his Daintree property.

**His hope for the future is that the young people of today will have the courage, imagination and resilience to find new ways to protect the remarkable wonder of life as we know it today on the planet.**