

Anthony Roberts rejects Hunters Hill's claims

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Lane Cove MP and Planning Minister Anthony Roberts has rejected claims made by Hunters Hill Council that the new, mandatory planning panels would strip councillors of existing planning and heritage protection powers.



Hunters Hill Council voted last Monday to oppose the mandatory panels and call Mr Roberts to a council meeting to explain why the new Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels – which will become mandatory on all Sydney councils from March – will stop councillors determining development applications of more than five million dollars.

The new laws do not prevent councillors or residents lodging an objection or a supporting statement for any local development before the panel and Mr Roberts further stressed that Hunters Hill and other council (staff) will still process most applications for individual houses or alterations to existing houses.

He said Hunters Hill and other councils will also retain the right to determine development controls.

“By making IHAPs mandatory, local councils will be able to focus on providing strategic plans and development controls for their local areas,” Mr Roberts said.

“The IHAPs have become mandatory for all councils in Sydney to guard against corruption and lead to better local planning decisions.

“It is essential the Government has a transparent and accountable process in place when assessing Development Applications of significant value, when there is a conflict of interest for the council or developer, or when they are of a sensitive nature.

“Mandatory IHAPs will bring expertise, transparency and integrity to the assessment of Development Applications at the local level.”

Mr Roberts refuted claims by Hunters Hill Councillor Justine McLoughlin that the new panels will not eliminate corruption but internalise it.

“The panel members themselves will be subject to statutory rules such as a compulsory code of conduct and operational procedures for the panels.”



Cllr Justine McLaughlin



Minister Gabrielle Upton

Local Government, Gabrielle Upton assured the community the Government will set clear criteria for development applications to go to the panels.

“Introducing IHAPs, we will provide additional safeguards, expertise and transparency into planning decisions,” Ms Upton said.

“We expect these panels to give communities and ratepayers greater certainty about planning decisions.”

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