

# Hunters Hill faces a new fight over planning panels, warns Deputy Mayor Ross Williams

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*Deputy Mayor Clr Ross Williams campaigned against over development*

**Hunters Hill's Deputy Mayor Ross Williams has warned the State Government's new Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels (IHAPs) are the greatest threat to the municipality's heritage protection laws since the proposed forced merger with Ryde.**

Deputy Mayor Williams told *The Weekly Times* the panels could be "stacked with bureaucrats" appointed by State Planning Minister and Lane Cove MP Anthony Roberts, which will rule on proposed developments of more than five million dollars.

Councillor Williams said the new panels – to be introduced across Sydney in March next year – will comprise Ministerial appointees who do not have to live in the local area.

"The appointees are not elected by our local community and could come from Ryde, Blacktown or any other area," Mr Williams said.

"With members appointed by the Minister, possibly architects or planners, I fear there could be a vested interest right from the outset."

Mr Williams said he is not surprised the "undemocratic" IHAPs were "rushed through parliament" after Sydney's forced mergers were called off.

"It was rushed through State Parliament in a day and there was zero consultation with the community," he said.

“What I believe the government has done is to say, if you can’t merge a council then take its planning powers away, with no guarantee this will stop at the five million dollar mark in future.

“In my view, it is the biggest risk Hunters Hill is facing and poses a significant risk to heritage in Hunters Hill.”

Mr Williams gave the example of a proposed \$4.5 million dollar renovation to a home in Hunters Hill that could otherwise be challenged by the council on heritage or conservation grounds.

He said if the value of the proposed renovation is increased from \$4.5 million to over five million it will be heard by an IHAP, not by the council.

“It effectively removes our planning role as councillors,” he said.

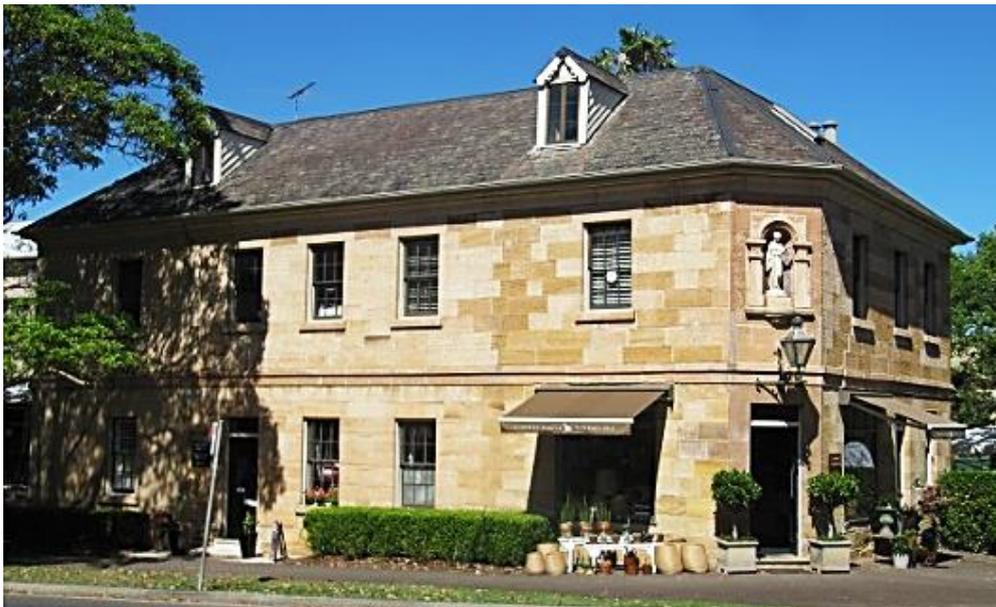
Mr Williams also said he feared Hunters Hill ratepayers will pick up the bill.

“Absolutely I’m concerned councils will have to pay the costs associated with this.”

Councils retain the right to launch a legal appeal, as Hunters Hill did to defeat the proposed forced merger with Lane Cove and Ryde.

Not all councillors are against the IHAP process.

In Ryde, Independent Cllr Roy Maggio favours the IHAP process because it keeps councillors “at arm’s length” from major planning proposals and therefore removes any risk of corruption allegations aimed at councillors.



*The historic Garibaldi Inn in Hunters Hill*