

Hunters Hill under attack again – Local Planning Panels

To The POINT
with ROSS WILLIAMS



Ross Williams is Deputy Mayor of Hunters Hill Council

Under recent changes to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, rushed through Parliament, Local Planning Panels (also known as IHAPs) will become mandatory for councils in the Greater Sydney Region and for Wollongong City Council, including Hunters Hill from March 1, 2018.

This outrageous action by the NSW Government will see elected councillors have no say in determining development applications in the communities in which they live.

This ill-conceived legislation is justified by Minister Roberts as to address the risk of corruption?

Or is it just another attempt by the State to circumvent local democracy so as to put development before community?

This will create a serious challenge as to how we continue to protect the unique built and natural environmental heritage, character and sense of place of our municipality.

The State Government has failed to consult or to make a case for mandating these panels.

Most councils including Hunters Hill already have in place robust systems to assess Development Applications in an effective and transparent manner.

Councils that currently have voluntary IHAPs are shocked by the interference in what should be a locally determined process being taken over by the State and out of the hands of local communities.



Anthony Roberts MP local member for Lane Cove and Minister for Planning

Hunters Hill Council wrote to the Minister requesting the Government repeal this legislation and that he explain these changes, but Minister Roberts continues to refuse to consult with Hunters Hill Council.

He has not given any justification for his Government's actions nor to my knowledge the courtesy of a reply.

What this legislation does is to prohibit our elected representatives from taking any part in Development Applications and handing the decision to an unelected panel, comprising three members appointed by the Minister and one community representative appointed by the Council.

The panel will not be accountable to the Hunters Hill community but to the State Government.

The situation is made worse by these Government appointees, such as architects and town planners, being drawn from the development industry.

How can these so called 'technical experts' be considered as impartial or independent?

The forced introduction of Local Planning Panels will create unnecessary additional bureaucratic process and will introduce additional professional and administrative costs on councils and their rate payers.

By the Government's own 'Fact Sheet' these costs could be \$100,000 to local communities (in Hunters Hill it is estimated to be \$60,000).

This is money that could otherwise be spent on local community priorities.

At the last week's Local Government NSW Conference involving all councils from across the state, a motion was overwhelmingly passed 'calling on the NSW Government to revoke the legislation that mandates IHAPs (Local Planning Panels).

Further the President of LG NSW has written to Ministers on behalf of NSW councils expressing strident opposition to Local Planning Panels (IHAPs) and denouncing the erosion of local democracy with the imposition of these Panels.