

Independent takes on Planning Minister

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Doug Conway

Former Hunters Hill Mayor Richard Quinn has quit the Liberal Party to run as an independent against Planning Minister Anthony Roberts in the March state election.



Mr Quinn acknowledges he faces a tough battle to unseat the long-serving Berejiklian government minister in the safe Liberal seat of Lane Cove. But he has accused Mr Roberts of going “missing in action” on many local issues and rates himself a definite chance.

“At the 2017 local government elections the Liberal Party lost control of all of its councils in northern Sydney except Hornsby and its primary vote in many areas plummeted to as low as 30 per cent.

“That tells you what people think,” he said.

“I think there is a chance – a tough chance (of winning). It’s a big task but I’ll give it a shot.”

Mr Quinn led Hunters Hill Council as Mayor from 2012 to 2017 throughout the council amalgamations debate, strongly criticising the NSW government’s ultimately failed policy of forced mergers.

Both Hunters Hill and Lane Cove councils were successful in the NSW Court of Appeal, which ruled in July 2017 that the merger proposal was invalid and ordered the government to refund over \$1 million to them in legal costs.

“We’re all still waiting for the NSW government to obey the court’s directions and pay the two councils’ costs. But who is advocating for us? Mr Roberts should be acting in our community’s best interests, but has been silent.

“In fact, during the forced mergers debacle, he led the NSW government’s agenda and strategy in parliamentary debates, in his capacity as Leader of the House, contrary to the very strong views of many in this community.”

Mr Quinn was an independent mayor, although a member of the Liberal Party. He faced expulsion, and was ultimately warned, for supporting independent candidates in the 2017 local government elections.

He quit the party last month.

He said other “hot topics” in the upcoming state election included overdevelopment in areas such as St Leonards South, lack of action in cleaning up the former radium processing industrial site in Hunters Hill, and the government’s Complying Development Code allowing the state to override local planning controls.

But Mr Quinn, a development director at St Joseph’s College who has lived in the area for 30 years, singled out lack of local advocacy, saying: “There’s a perception that we have a government representative in the community, rather than a community representative in the parliament.

“Successive NSW governments have taken us for granted for too long, because Lane Cove is regarded as a safe Liberal seat. It’s now time for a change.”

Mr Roberts has held Lane Cove since 2003, and won at the 2015 election with a whopping 27 per cent margin despite a nine per cent swing back to Labor candidate Andrew Zbik.

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