

SPEECH TO NSW PLANNING FORUM

Presented by
John Lightfoot on behalf of the NPA
to the NSW Planning Forum on 22 July 2011

The Northbridge Progress Association has been operating continuously for over 90 years, has almost 500 members and a newsletter that is distributed to 2500 residences.

The primary objective was and still is “to support the advancement of the community comprising the suburb of Northbridge”.

From the beginning, planning and Infrastructure has been the major issue. In 1938 the problems of transport, sewerage, roads etc. were paramount.

Since then there have been enormous changes to the suburb but the issues we are dealing with remain much the same: infrastructure especially traffic and parking.

We are a pleasant peninsula suburb on Middle Harbour, with one major artery down the spine of the peninsula.

Since this Planning Act was introduced our suburb has doubled in size. Not only are there more houses, there are bigger houses as pre war bungalows are demolished and replaced with larger family homes. Large blocks have been subdivided or given over to dual occupancy. To compound this car ownership has gone from less than one per residence to almost 3.

When I came to Northbridge 20 years ago, the local Primary School did not have enough students and was being considered for closure. Now the student population has doubled, there are eight new classrooms and students are flocking to the school from nearby areas.

In the same time a private Primary School 400 metres away has also doubled in size and a new private Preparatory School has been built less than a kilometre away.

There is limited public transport. Many children arrive by cars that bring them in and take them out along the one access road. The process is repeated at the end of the day and the suburb is a traffic nightmare with four peak hours every school day.

This growth has occurred with no additional infrastructure. There are no more roads or public transport, less parking and no plans to do anything about it.

There is a new LEP currently going through the approval process that aims to increase density in the Willoughby LGA. It will allow 4 story residential apartments in large areas of the suburb and was strongly resisted by a large proportion of residents. It does not include any changes to roads, public transport, public parking or other infrastructure.

I recently attended a JRPP meeting that considered a 116-bed nursing home development planned for Northbridge. It had been rejected by Council as it did not

comply with State Government and Council controls for height, floor space ratio and landscaped area. We were not impressed when the Chairman of the Panel said that they were not bound by such matters.

When it was pointed out that there was insufficient parking for staff let alone visitors and the traffic implications had not been considered, the response was “just like the rest of Sydney”.

We were not against the nursing home per se. We know there is a community need for such a facility. But what is the point of having a SEPP or LEP if it is not binding? A process that allows changes by precedent, without consultation or consideration of wider issues, is not a transparent or appropriate process.

We know there is a shortage of good-sized medium density dwellings available for empty nesters who want to downsize but stay in the area. However, the “social engineers” in government and Councils have imposed planning restrictions on parking places. Controls that allow only one car parking space for two one-bedroom apartments ignore the needs of residents. We believe cars should be moved off the street and adequate parking provided for residents and visitors.

We have so far unsuccessfully sought a comprehensive traffic study for our suburb. Such information is critical to understanding the traffic implications and infrastructure needs of new developments.

The single biggest issue for struggling shopkeepers and small business outside of major shopping complexes is public parking. If they are to remain a vital part of the community, planning has to take account of their needs and include adequate public parking nearby.

In conclusion, we are not a no-progress association. What we want is progress with planning which takes into consideration the legitimate needs of residents; we want it to be agreed through a genuine consultation process and then stuck to; we want to see an end to the over ruling of agreed controls by unelected bodies.

We want a suburb that the community can enjoy and not a place of high-rise buildings choked with traffic.

So what would a good planning system look like?

It would be simple

It would be subject to review at regular intervals not 30+ years

It would ensure meaningful consultation with community groups

It would ensure processes were transparent

It would take account of current & projected demographics

It would require infrastructure to be part of the plan

It would be binding