

Submission on the Northern Beaches Local Housing Strategy-

By David Poppleton

Avalon Resident since 1968

Education and Profession include; Environmental Planner, Urban & Regional Planner, Past Medium Density Committee member for the Urban Development Institute of Australia, former Member of the City West Regional Planning Team & City West Design Review Committee, Founder and National Director of Colliers Jardine Residential Project Marketing, Expert on Residential markets and maximising profitability from Residential developments.

Community Positions held - Past – President of the Careel Bay/ Pittwater Protection Assoc, Vice Chair of Pittwater Councils Sustainability Committee, Currently a Director of the Pittwater Environment Foundation (PEF)

1. The local environment –

- a. Pittwater Peninsula is a Unique coastal environment one of the least changed, best protected areas of any urban area on the Australian coast.
- b. Avalon is a charming community Village, end of the line – one road in and out at the absolute extremity of the greater Sydney metropolitan area. A treasure, something to be actively protected and conserve for future generations, a place of enormous environmental Heritage.
- c. Its One of Sydney's most popular day drive destinations to enjoy the quality of the coastal village, the natural environment.
- d. Local action groups have been campaigning for better environmental outcomes in the Pittwater area for over 25 years. The hard work has seen some improvements, but over time we have seen many aspects of the natural environment, especially tree cover and green space on residential lots, slowly decline.
- e. There is nothing in the Draft Northern Beaches Local Housing Strategy to address this decline. Only plans to exacerbate it.
- f. At the heart of this strategy is the State Government's decree that Northern Beaches Council facilitate increased housing density and population in the Northern Beaches local government area, in apparent disregard of the environmental effects.
- g. Already constrained, already impacted by traffic congestion.
- h. 1 road in and out. Travel times to the city at peak is 1.5hrs

2. A 1klm Radius applied to a Narrow Peninsula with 1 road access.

- a. It is ridiculous to apply a state-wide concept of allowing increased densities in a 1 klm radius to an environmentally sensitive peninsula which from the sands of Avalon Beach direct to the sands of Clareville beach on Pittwater is only 1.7klms. This standard usually applies to a "major regional centre"

usually featuring rail infrastructure, multiple road systems and surrounded by a wide and diverse range of suburban development in all directions.

- b. 1km Is most of Avalon and Newport. This would represent the greatest proportion of any 1 place in NSW. And in an environmentally sensitive area. Its incredulous that this would be considered.
- c. In council's own words- *"What we need to consider is more townhouses, terraces and shared housing in our strategic centres, within the 1km radius of those transport and employment hubs."*
AVALON ISNT AN EMPLOYMENT HUB OR A TRANSPORT HUB – we have a small community Village and a regular bus stop. 1 road in and out.
- d. The whole concept of the 1km radius for development is not applicable to a narrow peninsula like Pittwater. PITTWATER MUST BE EXEMPT from this norm.
- e. It is not a "major centre" it's a small coastal village - Any development should be focused in and around the Village proportionate to the size of the village and the surrounding, restricted environment.
- f. There's only one road in and out. It's a peninsula. It's not a typical retail centre where housing – suburbs span out concentrically in all directions, providing a wide and diverse catchment from further out, to move closer to transport and facilities.
- g. Council MUST consider the market dynamics of the strategy and ensure that development doesn't price the community out of the area or degrade the natural environment, and totally disrupt what is currently a harmonious safe and beautiful environment and community.

3. Community Consultation

- a. I'm person well invested in local issues, but only heard of this strategy a few days ago. No one I've spoken to outside the usual community action groups were aware of the plan.
- b. The consultation process for the Avalon Place Plan has been, in contrast rather good, very well publicly advertised. the cynic in me may think it's t been hidden with more attention to Avalon Place Plan. The "look over here" tactic of distraction.
- c. The community knowledge of the consultation on the LHS is stunningly lowkey and insufficient given the gravity of the potential impacts.

4. State Policy – one size does not fit all –

- a. Urban consolidation principles to focus greater populations closer to existing infrastructure, transport networks – bring people closer to the city or to "major regional centres" does not, will not, should not apply to a small local coastal environmentally unique village at the very outskirts of the Sydney region. It totally goes against urban consolidation principals to increase densities at the Cities extremities.
- b. New development will only be quickly snapped up by more affluent people from other areas rather than being a "provision of housing needs" for the local population. To believe otherwise is totally ignorant of market dynamics and what actually occurs. Then with more people in, comes more need to accommodate for their needs, and so the cycle accelerates.

- c. **Pittwater does not have a transit system** – changing a blue bus to a yellow bus (in Mona Vale) does not make a transport system – they are newer and yellow, but that’s about all. Masquerading this as an excuse to allow greater densities is a complete farce.
- d. **Pittwater being a narrow peninsula** – 1.7klms from Avalon to Clareville beaches – means wherever you are your only a max of .85 of a Klm from water. There aren’t “affordable” options where we can provide cheaper accommodation a little further away. Current more affordable options are Warriewood, Mona Vale, Newport where there are existing stocks of older apartments that aren’t attractive to wealthier people making their tree/sea change move to the Peninsula. This is the same for Mosman, nothing affordable on their peninsula, affordable (relatively) are Cammeray, St Leonards, Wollstonecraft etc where there are stocks of older apartments. I’d assume same for Manly Peninsula where more “affordable” property is found further away from the beach, Manly Vale, Balgowlah, Brookvale, Allambie Heights etc.
- e. **However, the older housing stock on the Pittwater Peninsula has always been one of the most affordable housing options of any near coastal area in Sydney, because of its distance from the city and long commutes.**
PLEASE RECOGNISE that by allowing zoning most of Avalon & Newport to Medium Density options will make our old housing stock far more expensive as they become a development site and will price that current “affordable” house option well out of locals reach. IT DOESN’T WORK. Its contrary to the supposed intention of the plan.

5. Seniors Living

- a. The statistics that drive the perceived requirement for “seniors living” relies on the aging population of the Pittwater area.
- b. What the plan doesn’t consider is that the statistics don’t reflect the community needs. The current seniors SEPP (which is outdated and needs to be revised) proposes that being 55yrs qualifies you as a senior?
- c. We retire at 65 or older.
- d. There are no other govt or social reference to, or benefits, or allowances for people of 55 yrs as they’re not regarded as “seniors” so why does the 55 qualify as “seniors living” in a planning instrument?
- e. The average age of people moving to active retirement Villages is 79.
- f. People wish to live in their homes for as long as they possibly can, and the great majority go from home to a care facility when they can no longer do this at home. Pittwater residents don’t become seachangers at 55, sell up and move to the beach..... - **they already live here.** Check the average age that Pittwater residents move from home? If they move from home?
- g. Yes, there’s a huge demand from over 55s for property and apartments in the area but it’s not locals. The over 55s market / buyers on the peninsula are wealthy downsizers, seachangers, people from other areas buying into Avalon. There have never been “affordable” seniors living offered on the Peninsula, its always Luxury seniors living – large 3 bed apartments or townhouses.
- h. It DOES NOT satisfy any local need or change in needs of the community.

- i. We request that Council seek exemptions to seniors SEPP
 - i. to change the entry age to at least 65 – acknowledging local people don't move from their homes here till much later and 55s apartments are only creating further supply for wealthier purchasers from the rest of Sydney, not providing diversity and choice for locals.
 - ii. To limit where they can occur, ie within 500 - 600 meters of the Avalon Village. Real seniors don't walk more than that.

6. Increase supply of apartments and other medium density living to enable Diversity ?

- a. Whilst the concept of needing to provide some diversity of living is a sound objective, (assuming this is to cater for younger families that have grown up in the area and can't afford a house yet?) the theory doesn't work in an area of high demand and high quality in such close proximity to water.
- b. With diversity of apartments, the reality is the more you build the more people from all over Sydney will buy into. IT MUST be recognised that the area will remain a highly, highly regarded place to live from people all over Sydney and internationally. This is one of the ultimate sea and tree change locations where you get all the environmental and coastal village benefits and only an hour and a half out of the city.
- c. Building more for greater diversity is sounding more like an excuse to build. An excuse to generate more stamp duties- NSW govt greatest earner. The demand from wealthier suburbs will always out compete the locals and any theorised assistance with diversity. It WILL NOT or at least is highly unlikely to provide affordable or alternative accommodation for less wealthy or younger locals.
- d. Council and state govt fail to include the provision of and existence of Granny flats as being a very real choice of affordability for young families in the area. The greatest cost, being that of the land, is avoided. This needs to be calculated when council is assessing the future needs- growth needs. As I understand they currently are not, and as such could already have provided the additional "affordable housing that the statistics purport bas being required.
- e. The concept also disregards the Australian Design Guidelines for apartments which is highly restrictive in terms of what can be provided and virtually assures the apartments can't be affordable. You can't build 40 one bed apartments. The developers will build 30 x 3 bed apartments because they'll provided the highest revenues. Its plain property economics that can't be ignored.
- f. So, again, **unless the government can guarantee that any apartments will first be offered to the people who the plan is intended to assist and at a price they can afford- the plan/ strategy is totally flawed from the outset. The intent becomes a fallacy. Just an excuse to enable development.**

7. Exemptions

- a. We agree with Council seeking exemptions from broad based planning policies that will fit other highly developed urban and suburban areas with “major regional centres”.
- b. Planning should be appropriate to the place, to the resource or contribution that place makes to the city. Turning the Pittwater Peninsula into a higher density living area we will argue does NOTHING for the local community and will only destroy what is now a unique place.
- c. We believe the current seniors SEPP is totally inappropriate to the purpose of providing Seniors alternate living in Avalon and only reduces any real opportunity for accommodation when people do get old.
- d. See our call below for exemptions to, or perhaps a rethink of the age for “seniors living”.

8. Protection of State Significant Precincts

- a. Medium density is totally inappropriate for the area.
- b. I Dispute the assumptions made from population stats and needs assumed from these figures – figures and numbers do not make an environment, nor is there any inherent understanding of the structure of the local community or the impacts of property market dynamics. We’d welcome working with Council to better understand actual local needs rather than statistical assumptions from consultants.
- c. **As a suggestion for serious consideration**, Other areas of Sydney have total bans on any development and are considered “heritage precincts” – large areas of Leichardt, Glebe, Balmain, Haberfield, Daceyville, Paddington, Surry Hills all protected as they have “heritage character” in a common architectural or time/ historical context.
- d. Avalon / Pittwater should be afforded appropriate heritage precinct principals for its continued and historical context, its environmental and scenic attributes, and its perpetual provision of a coastal village destination being a national icon- a highly valued day destination tourism icon/ a unique resource – an environmental experience for all of Sydney – people don’t take day trips to Paddington to relax and experience a relatively unchanged coastal environment. They don’t revel and immerse themselves in historic architectural repetition.
- e. Protection of the area needs to start now. Consider if densities are increased for 2036. If approved now, developers won’t wait till 2036 comes around as they gradually add a development here and there. They’ll be in and developing NOW and will not stop till all opportunities are absorbed. This will only increase prices in the area as developers compete to win the land excluding home buyers.
- f. As is fact, people from other more affluent areas will outcompete the local buyers so there is no benefit for locals, only more people, and potentially higher prices. Then let’s say all developed in five years, then the population has increased, the demand from locals has not been met, there’s the additional needs of the increased population even before 2036 comes round..... then what ? we increase densities again? then and again in ever increasing rates.

g. NO stop now and protect what we all have while we still have it. Make that decision before its too late.

9. Affordable Housing – suggestions – If State Govt is serious about providing “affordable” Housing we suggest -

- a. Council and state govt should consider how actual affordable housing options can be achieved – increased supply in prime but limited areas WILL NOT create affordability.
- b. Ingleside – appropriately planned and developed could include affordable housing options.
- c. Warriewood Valley may still provide some options if supported by govt policy other than increased density.
- d. When you eventually develop Mona Vale Hospital the profits you make could contribute to creating local affordable options (for Locals). Afterall, you’ve taken away an important essential Local asset to create a PRIVATE hospital, seems fitting that this is paid back somehow. (be assured I’m not advocating developing Mona Hospital, just having a crack at the govt past performance.)

But mostly – affordability comes down to govt policy, strategies – incentives and initiatives.

Don’t charge essential services workers stamp duty?

Provide them with low interest govt loans. The investment is secured to property so is both a safe investment and good social investment to enable those people to stay where they’ve grown up or locate close to where they work.

Look for options that can work within the market dynamics as supported by the govt.

Where there are large developments allow provisions for developers to provide some affordable options – examine (and amend) the Australian Design Guidelines to enable some flexibility for diversity, for better affordable contextual – even environmental options – and MAKE SURE THE OPTIONS ARE SUSTAINABLE AND HAVE SOLAR AS WELL AS GOOD ENVIROMNETAL DESIGN PRINCIPALS. Write these into the appropriate development codes so its clear they must be provided – and as such will be accounted for at purchase of the land and not become a financial encumbrance after such purchase.

In summary we totally support Council continuing to have statewide planning policies exempted from unique places and situations where they are unworkable.

The States “low Rise Housing Diversity Code” is commendable for where it can actually work. It doesn’t work and does not have the positive effects it envisages, rather it has negative impacts on affordability and community wellbeing and our unique environment.

We are not on a transport hub.

We do not have an employment hub.

If the state Govt was to compare us to other regional centres, major hubs, then the 1klm radius would be from Mona Vale, our regional centre, with Newport and Avalon particularly as outer suburbs from that circle – and that's not considering the topography and being a small peninsula.

Council MUST reduce the concept of development within 1klm when they are dealing with a highly environmentally constrained area on a small peninsula 1.7klm wide. Subject to topography we'd support a 500m Radius for limited development which does not impact on the local character or tree and ground cover.

The aims of diversity for young families and the aging population are highly unlikely to be achieved by allowing more development.

The community will continue to fight this all the way to the next state elections where we can ensure we have a representative who will represent the hopes and wishes of the local community, its heritage and its future.

We welcome further community consultation on this strategy.