

Hi Gavin -

Thanks for your email regarding the benefits to Pittwater of the proposed Special Rate Variations.

I will ask our financial controller to provide a breakdown of any infrastructure or services in which Pittwater would be likely to benefit from a Special Rate Variation, however, I note these would be subject to budget discussions by councillors.

In the meantime, I have attached a file for you that I requested from staff for listing all the assets on the Northern Beaches in poor or very poor condition. You can see those in Pittwater on the list. Assets are rated from 1 to 5, with 1 representing excellent condition, 4 poor, and 5 very poor.

These assets have been run down over recent years because the council hasn't had the funds to maintain them at a higher level. Stormwater infrastructure is a major problem, followed by roads and footpaths. I am also concerned about major assets like our rockpools, many of which need upgrading, and without extra funding we are likely to have to close some of them in the future.

Not listed in the assets are Pittwater's bushland reserves and parks, which are becoming overgrown with weeds because we don't have enough funds to maintain them. The wet and hot weather of recent years has exacerbated the problem. Unfortunately council accounting systems don't depreciate them, yet they are a highly valued Pittwater asset. Similarly, we do not have enough funding for tree management - including routine inspections and pruning. This is an area I am particularly concerned about but the situation will not improve without increased funding.

The Warringah Aquatic Centre, which is in Frenchs Forest Ward, but which is used by many Pittwater residents, is also in a very poor condition and becoming dangerous with chunks of concrete falling out of the ceiling. Staff have advised councillors that we are likely to have to close it within the next couple of years unless we secure funding to upgrade it.

In terms of services, fundamental to protecting Pittwater (as elsewhere) from inappropriate development, illegal tree removal, parking infringements and offleash dogs amongst other issues, are environmental compliance officers and rangers. We have trouble filling these difficult jobs and I believe higher wages are needed to attract workers to them. But we also need to increase the size of the team.

A number of projects that the community is calling for in Pittwater that are unfunded at present are: the remainder of the Coastal Walkway, particularly along Whale Beach Road; extension or rebuild of the Newport Surf Club (I don't support the current proposal to extend it along the front of the foredune where the building is already subject to coastal erosion, but the surf club premises need to be enlarged); and the Mona Vale Cultural Precinct.

I'd also like to mention that our council is not alone in its financial woes. I went to the NSW Local Government Association conference last month and funding shortages were one of the major issues discussed. In fact, the problems are nationwide and the federal government is currently holding an inquiry into the issue. The NSW government reported on its own inquiry into the financial sustainability of councils two weeks ago. The report includes a set

of recommendations, including changes in accounting for councils to make their finances more transparent. However, the chair begins the report with the statement:

*“... it is clear that local councils face significant revenue raising and cost pressures to adequately meet the needs of their communities. The evidence showed that the financial challenges councils are experiencing cannot be overcome through fiscal discipline alone and are threatening the long-term sustainability of the sector”.*

See:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/3040/FINAL%20-%20Report%2052%20-%20State%20Development%20-%20Ability%20of%20local%20governments%20to%20fund%20infrastructure%20and%20services.pdf>

Finally, I know we were promised that amalgamated councils would be much cheaper to run by the NSW government at the time of the mergers. I believe Northern Beaches Council's financial position shows this has not occurred. The Demerge NSW Alliance has discussed this issue and the work of conservative economist Joseph Drew, a Local Government specialist and former UTS professor - who says that there can be economies of scale in smaller amalgamations but for those like NBC, costs rise.

I hope this is helpful. Please let me know if you would like any further information.

Cheers,  
Miranda

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