

A ROUGH GUIDE TO THE IMPACT OF THE AMALGAMATION OF RYDE, HUNTERS HILL AND LANE COVE COUNCILS PARTICULARLY ON THE RESIDENTS OF HUNTERS HILL

The prospect of a merged council with Ryde and Lane Cove is now almost inevitable. While Hunters Hill, Ryde and Lane Cove Councils have argued that they should remain as stand-alone councils with a Joint Regional Authority, this proposal is merely an extension of the status quo with some additional shared services and activities thrown in and has been sited by the Boundaries Commission as an acceptance of the three councils of their affinity. The JRA would still have had the same number of councillors and staff as well as the same financial base to pay for them.

Clearly it would be extraordinary if the State Government were to go ahead with all its other amalgamation plans but left Hunters Hill (by far the smallest LGA in NSW) and Lane Cove (another small LGA) out of the mix.

This analysis is an attempt to look beyond the ribbons, rhetoric and Corflute to imagine what impact the amalgamation of Ryde, Lane Cove and Hunters Hill might be on the ordinary property owner, renter and ratepayer, particularly on those who live in Hunters Hill. It is also an attempt to raise questions for discussion and to look at opportunities that might exist in a merged council.

Generally the information that follows has been extracted from the websites of the three councils and from the planning controls listed on the NSW Government website.

SUMMARY

From the time of the Municipalities Act of 1858, Local Councils have only existed under the patronage of the State Government. Unlike local governments in other places (Britain, for example) NSW councils have little autonomy and not much authority other than pick up the garbage, repair the potholes in local roads, administer dog licences, police local car parking and assess some, mostly small scale, local development proposals.

The State Government can proclaim a municipality, as it did with Hunters Hill in 1861, sack a council, impose its own planning controls across the state and carve up existing neighbourhoods for transport routes without reference to local councils. Over the decades since the formation of Trust in 1968, the State Government has continuously increased its powers to the point where local government has been rendered virtually irrelevant.

Many of the smaller inner Sydney councils, some dating back to the 1860s have, over the years, been amalgamated into larger areas. Examples include Vaucluse, Paddington, Balmain, Glebe, Annandale, Drummoyne and Concord to name just a few. That Hunters Hill has for so long avoided this fate may be as a result of its unique geography and that fact that it has only one physical boundary with another LGA.

The impact of the proposed merger of Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove on those living in Hunters Hill and the opportunities for improvements in a merged LGA can be summarised as follows:

Basic council services

- Essentially there will be little or no change to basic services provided.
- It's possible that Hunters Hill residents will benefit from an increased budget for maintenance and the provision of services.
- In a merged council there should be a reduced dependency on external consultancies, and an increase utilisation of internal staff.
- There will be opportunities for improved services across a number of areas.

Planning controls

- In the first instance there will be no change. Some aspects of the controls that are specific to Hunters Hill may need to be brought in line with those applying in Ryde and Lane Cove but these are not major and their impact will not be significant.

Heritage and Conservation

- Existing conservation areas will be retained as will LEP listings of heritage items across all three LGAs.
- A merged council should be able to afford a full time heritage officer, which is something The Trust will be arguing for.

Conservation Advisory Panel

- The continuation of such a panel in a merged council will require special consideration by the new merged council and The Trust will submit that it should be supported.

Council Boundaries

- The removal of the anomalies of two different councils looking after two shopping centres at Gladesville and Boronia Park will be an improvement on the current situation.

Council Representation and politics

- The ratios of residents to councillors will clearly be much greater, particularly for Hunters Hill residents who are used to a very small council.
- Compared to Hunters Hill, a merged council will no doubt be more party political, with the Liberal Party holding power in the merged LGA.
- It is to be hoped that the toxic political culture that has pervaded Ryde Council recently is a thing of the past and will not infect the culture of a merged council.

Residents' access to Council and Council meetings

- Assuming the merged council is located in Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove residents' physical access to council meetings will be more difficult because of distance.
- If the merged council takes its cue from Lane Cove, online access to council meetings will be greatly improved.
- A merged council should consider the Lane Cove protocol for addressing meetings, which would make it easier for people to have their say.

Council wards in a merged LGA

- To ensure more local representation, it is essential that a merged council should be divided into wards with each having its own councillor.

Council Chambers and Council Buildings

- With a merged council the opportunities for adaptive reuse of council buildings should be a priority.
- Neighbourhood Service Centres should be set up in Lane Cove and Hunters Hill.
- With additional finances the imperative for councils to sell off council owned assets should be reduced

Rates

- The impact on residential rates is not clear. However it is unlikely that Hunters Hill rates will be significantly altered.

Other financial considerations

- Clearly there will be a significant cost to initiate the amalgamation process and to allow for redundancy payments of staff, office relocation and fit out etc.
- Only time will tell whether the optimistic figures contained in the Boundaries Commission report in relation to savings will eventuate.

Impact on The Hunters Hill Trust

- The basic aims of The Trust are to preserve the character of Hunters Hill and to encourage high architectural and aesthetic values and these remain whatever the administrative structure of the LGA.
- A new LGA and a fresh start presents an opportunity for The Trust to strengthen these aims.
- Like the other community groups who have weathered the storms of amalgamation, we can look forward to continuing the struggle.

A New Name for a New Council

- If the merger goes ahead, The Trust believes we should take this opportunity to rename the new council *Wallumatta* to honour the original owners of the land, the Wallumettagal tribe.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENT

BASIC COUNCIL SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE 3 COUNCILS

Garbage recycling and green waste

- From the residents' point of view this will not change, as it is already outsourced and shared among other councils.

Footpaths, roads and local traffic

- With a larger council and more money available, there should be an improvement in the level of maintenance of roads, footpaths and local traffic, which, under the current council, is poor.
- A better-funded council might be able to pave the footpath on the Hunters Hill side of the shops at Boronia Park and Gladesville to match those on the Ryde side.
- It may also be able to resolve the parking problems in a number of Hunters Hill's narrow streets.

Playing fields, parks, bush regeneration

- Hunters Hill Council has a poor record in this regard (e.g. the Boronia Park No.3 oval fiasco), so it's possible there will be an improvement on the maintenance and upkeep of playing fields, parks and sporting facilities. As well, the local sporting clubs may not be able to wield the sort of influence they currently enjoy in a larger local government area (LGA), where the competition is greater and where there is a greater need for passive recreation.
- It is also possible that there would be more money available for bush regeneration in Hunters Hill. Lane Cove Council is much more pro-active in this area and runs a Bushcare Program, community nursery, walks and talks, backyard habitat program and a water quality program. Similarly Ryde has an extensive program. The question is whether Hunters Hill would benefit from this or whether Lane Cove and Ryde's programs would be diminished.

Arts and Culture

- Hunters Hill council has a Community Events Co-ordinator and facilitates a number of Hunters Hill-specific events, which include, among others, The Moocooboola Festival, Carols in the Park, A Seniors Morning Tea, HH Art Show, Young in Art and Australia Day Festivities. With 10 other councils, it co-hosts The Guringai Festival. Lane Cove and Ryde councils also run a number of events and activities.
- These festivals are an important part of what makes Hunters Hill different and special, so their loss would diminish the quality of life in Hunters Hill.
- With sufficient local interest, there seems no reason why local groups should not continue to organise such activities.

Library

- The library in Gladesville is run and paid for by Ryde, though Hunters Hill Council contributes a lump sum each year to assist in the running costs. This is mainly due to some intense lobbying a few years back by the Friends of Gladesville Library. Recently there has been argument between the councils as to the extent of Hunters Hill's contribution and Ryde threatened to discontinue funding.
- These arguments should be put to rest with a merged council.
- The inclusion of Lane Cove Library in a merged council should lead to Hunters Hill and Ryde Libraries connecting with the Shorelink Library Network thus improving the access to books for Ryde and Hunters Hill residents.

Cultural diversity

- Lane Cove Council offers a wide range of programs to help recently arrived migrants in language skills and employment, as well as running a Harmony Day. It also works with the Aboriginal Heritage Office to protect indigenous heritage in the area.
- Ryde Council runs a Chinese Culture Festival and also runs a Harmony Day to celebrate the diversity of communities living in Ryde.

- Hunters Hill residents may benefit from easier access to and inclusion in these programs.

Youth and Children's Services

- The Hunters Hill Council website has various links to external sites for children's services, none of which are Hunters Hill specific. The major children's programs are shared with Ryde at the library.
- Ryde runs its own *Paint Ryde Read* early literacy program, which has started a number of projects specifically for kids as well as a range of holiday programs for kids.
- Lane Cove also has a range of children's programs, and also operates a youth 'drop-in centre' (the '*Synergy Youth Centre*') for adolescents
- Amalgamation may well benefit Hunters Hill children and youths by providing a greater range of activities.

Citizenship Ceremonies

- The three councils all run such ceremonies and presumably a merged council would continue to run them.

Graffiti Removal

- On the Hunters Hill website there is a link to an external site.
- Lane Cove runs its own program, as does Ryde.
- Hunters Hill residents potentially may benefit from faster graffiti removal.

Older People

- Hunters Hill Council's website has links to other sites and to local services already provided in association with Ryde Council etc.
- All councils run limited activities for seniors, with Lane Cove perhaps being the most active.

Sustainability

- Lane Cove Council has a Sustainable Advisory Committee and a Sustainable Action Plan.
- Ryde has a number of projects relating to sustainability including guides to households, transport, a sustainable art prize and a sustainable home challenge.
- Hunters Hill has an Environment and Sustainability page on its website with links to other pages which contain information. Hunters Hill council has received environmental grants for funding of the restoration of bushland and waterways along the Lane Cove and Parramatta Rivers.

Electoral Structure

- Hunters Hill Council has a 'popularly elected' Mayor.
- Lane Cove and Ryde Council's Mayors are elected every year by the councillors.
- If a merged council is to have a popularly elected mayor, the voting procedure will need to be renegotiated, possibly by referendum.

Online services

- All three councils have websites and online services and provide access to council meeting minutes and reports.
- The websites of each council are quite different and ease of navigation varies. Ryde's is the most difficult to navigate. Hunters Hill's is marginally better than Ryde's.
- Lane Cove's website is superior in terms of functional integration with business practices, and affords a superior platform for future incorporation into operational business processes
- Lane Cove Council meetings are webcast live. The webcasts are available to the public for 24 months after the meeting date. This ensures accurate understanding of the detail of the meeting, which is a great improvement on a written summary in the minutes.

DA tracking

- The websites of larger councils, such as Leichhardt and the City of Sydney allow for the viewing of development documents online, which is very helpful for neighbours etc. and could be incorporated in a new merged council website.

PLANNING AND HERITAGE

Standard Instrument Local Environment Plan (LEP)

Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove have Local Environment Plans (LEPs) that have fairly recently been revised to comply with the State Government's Standard Instrument, which sets out development standards in relation to a range of parameters including (among other things):

- Foreshore Building Line (also covered by the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan – Sydney Harbour Catchment)
- Heritage and conservation
- Floor space ratio
- Height of buildings
- Lot size
- Land Zoning
- Bio-diversity
- Riparian and Waterways
- Riverfront areas

Planning Controls

With certain exceptions, planning controls are standard across the three LGAs. There are some differences between Hunters Hill and the other two councils in the controls that relate to low-rise residential housing (R2 - the main form of building throughout the three LGAs). These are:

- *Floor space ratio (FSR)* - In Hunters Hill the density of R2 residential development is determined by its garden area rather than ratio of a building to its site. This allows for a greater green area than the FSR.
- *Minimum lot size* - Generally the minimum lot size for an R2 subdivision in Hunters Hill is 700m². On waterfront blocks to the east of the overpass the minimum is 900m². In Lane Cove the minimum R2 lot size is 580m² and in Ryde 550m² with no distinction for waterfront blocks in either LGA.
- *Maximum building height* – In Hunters Hill the maximum building height for low-density residential development is 8.5m. This compares with 9.5m in Ryde and Lane Cove.
- The recent State Government planning reforms that allow dual occupancies and so-called affordable housing on existing lots of prescribed minimum areas can override these controls.

Exempt and Complying development

Over the last few years, the State Government, in an effort to speed up the development assessment process, has introduced “exempt” and “complying” development. Exempt development applies to mostly small works such as aerials, air-conditioning units, awnings, balconies, decks, cabanas, cubby houses, driveways etc. Complying development, which requires a certificate issued by a certifier (either private or council), applies to much larger structures such as alterations and additions to houses and new single and two-storey houses. These controls already apply across the three LGAs and will continue to apply across any merged council.

Conservation Areas and Heritage

Exempt and complying development does not apply to heritage-listed buildings or to buildings in a conservation area. A development application has to be submitted to council for assessment.

Large-scale development

As Hunters Hill residents will be well aware (e.g. The Gladesville Shopping Village development), local councils have been virtually excluded from the assessment process of large-scale development. Developers now go straight to the Joint Regional Planning Assessment panels or to the Minister of Planning. They can now present so-called Planning Proposals to by-pass any existing planning controls.

The newly formed Greater Sydney Commission, which enjoys cross party support, will have even greater planning powers with the authority to redraw development plans submitted by local councils.

IMPACT OF AMALGAMATION ON PLANNING AND HERITAGE

LEPs and DCPs

Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove have recently spent considerable amounts of money to revise their LEPs and DCPs to fall in line with the requirement from the State Department of Planning that the “Standard Instrument” should apply across the state.

Consequently it is highly unlikely that these existing planning instruments will be revised. In other recent amalgamations, for example when Glebe, formerly in the Leichhardt LGA, became part of the City of Sydney – the existing LEP and DCP were retained as the planning controls for this area.

Amalgamation will not in itself be the cause of any zoning changes that might allow increased high-density development. Any such changes will come from the State Government, its Panels and Commissions.

Conservation Areas

Existing Conservation Areas will not change. In the longer term as, for example, in Leichhardt Council's Development Control Plan (DCP) and as exists in Hunters Hill's DCP for bushland areas and riverfront properties, specific character areas should be identified across the merged LGA and these should have their own specific controls designed to preserve their unique character.

Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP)

Hunters Hill Council's Conservation Advisory Panel meets once a month to consider development applications and have preliminary discussions with applicants in relation to developments in Hunters Hill's two Conservation Areas and/or proposals relating to heritage listed items or which are in the vicinity of a heritage item.

The panel has been meeting for more than 3 decades. It was formed in response to an initiative of the Hunters Hill Trust. It was the first such panel in NSW and has become the model for other such advisory bodies in other LGAs. Leichhardt has recently formed a Planning Panel, which consists of five members some of whom drawn from a pool of experts. Unlike Hunters Hill's CAP, which only advises, the Leichhardt Panel makes determinations, which are not able to be reconsidered by council or council staff.

This is a significant departure from the powers of Hunters Hill's CAP, whose advice in the past has been ignored by councillors on a number of occasions.

Because CAP is only an advisory panel, because Hunters Hill Council's powers to enforce its own DCP are limited and because Council has a limited budget for legal proceedings, it relies significantly on being able to convince applicants to do the right thing. With fewer and fewer property owners interested in doing the right thing in Hunters Hill, its success in preserving the character of the municipality has diminished.

CAP only deals with developments in Hunters Hill. If such an advisory panel were to survive amalgamation it would need to expand its horizons and possibly take up Leichhardt's example and have a Planning Panel capable of making independent decisions.

COUNCIL BOUNDARIES

Hunters Hill's boundaries

Following the passing of the 1858 Municipalities Act in NSW, according to Beverley Sherry's book, *Hunters Hill – Australia's Oldest Garden Suburb*; "It was inevitable that the same people who had invested in the land and worked to get a church and school and transport, should also be campaigners for the municipality". "All that was needed to establish it was for at least fifty residents to sign a petition to the Governor requesting the formation of a municipality".

This was not a simple task, as there was disagreement as to what should be included in the new LGA and a number of different petitions from different groups were submitted to the Governor. Eventually a petition written by Didier Joubert with sixty signatures, including those of the most successful property developers of the time, was successful and the boundaries of what is now the Municipality were set.

The Municipality of Hunters Hill was proclaimed in 1861 and a Council composed of most of those same property developers set sail (one wonders how often the those original aldermen were required to declare an interest in matters being determined back then). The Hunters Hill Municipal boundaries were marked by the Lane Cove and Parramatta rivers to the east and the road that ran from the northern suburbs to the wharf at Gladesville to the west. Pittwater Road, part of Victoria Road and Punt Road Gladesville are the western boundary. These have remained unchanged up until now.

Since 1861, the practicality of the original boundaries and the integrity of Hunters Hill has been compromised by, most significantly, the construction of the Burns Bay Rd expressway and the new Gladesville and Tarban Creek bridges in the early 1960s, which have physically cut off the narrow peninsular of Woolwich and half of Hunters Hill from Gladesville, Henley and Huntleys Point.

The shopping centres at Gladesville and Boronia Park are split between Ryde and Hunters Hill, which has led to the somewhat farcical situation where each side of the road reflects the differing priorities and capacities of the two councils.

COUNCIL REPRESENTATION AND POLITICS

The numbers

According to 2014 Census figures, Hunters Hill LGA has a population of 14,689 and has 7 councillors, so there are 2,098 residents for each councillor.

Ryde, with 12 councillors and a population of 114,598 has 9,550 residents per councillor.

Lane Cove has 9 councillors for a population of 34,807 and therefore 3,867 per councillor.

The Merger Proposal put out by the Boundaries Commission Review suggests that the merged council of Ryde, Hunters Hill and Lane Cove would have one councillor for every 13,675 residents and compares this with Blacktown City Council, which has 325,139 residents and 15 councillors so that there is one councillor for every 21,676 persons.

Clearly, with its disproportionate level of representation compared to the rest of Metropolitan Sydney, Hunters Hill will be less well represented arithmetically.

However, is such arithmetic the best way of measuring the efficacy of one's representation on council? The City of Sydney, inarguably the most progressive Council in NSW, has a population of 198,331 and 10 councillors, or one for each 19,833. At the state government level (the real powerhouse of planning) Anthony Roberts alone represents 65,243 people and at the Federal Level, Trent Zimmerman represents 148,091.

Surely it's much more about the quality of one's representatives? Who can forget attending Council meetings at Hunters Hill and noting one's ward councillor tearing open the massive agenda paper's envelope only when they had sat down at the table?

Political affiliation

Lane Cove, Hunters Hill and Ryde LGAs are all represented by Liberal party members at State and Federal levels. The Mayor of Hunters Hill is a member of the Liberal Party and has stood unsuccessfully for pre-selection. The Mayor of Lane Cove was previously the president of the Loungueville/Northwood branch of the Liberal Party.

The Mayor of Ryde, Jerome Laxale, is a member of the Labor Party, which an anomaly. There are six Liberal councillors (half the council) and only two Labor councillors in Ryde. Mayor Laxale came to the position when his name was drawn out of a hat.

The chances are that the Liberal Party will dominate a merged council. This is somewhat ironic since so many Liberal councillors appear to be leading the fight against amalgamation. Of course all current councillors across NSW, no matter what their politics, have an interest (and clearly, in some LGAs like Auburn, a vested interest) in maintaining their positions if only to avoid the dreaded RDS (Relevance Deprivation Syndrome).

A majority Liberal Council would appear, on the surface, to be a change for Hunters Hill where most councillors claim to be independent. With the exception of the Mayor and Councillor Zac Miles, who is a Liberal Party apparatchik, only the cognoscente knows the political affiliations of the remaining Hunters Hill councillors.

Residents' access to council and council meetings

Hunters Hill residents have relatively easy access to the council chambers to do business, attend meetings and art shows etc. At this stage, no one is talking about where a new council might be located,

but the chances are it will be at Ryde, which is a fair way from the east end of Hunters Hill and even further away from Lane Cove. Another option could be having meetings in rotation at differing locales.

With only one councillor for 21,676 persons, statistically Hunters Hill and Lane Cove residents will be less likely to run into your local councillor at the shops or on the street – this could be either a good or a bad thing.

If the merged council adopts Lane Cove's system of providing live streaming and video recording of council meetings, public access will be greatly improved for Ryde and Hunters Hill residents.

At Hunters Hill and Ryde Councils, members of the public may address council (for a period of 3 minutes) at the discretion of the Mayor and after formal permission has been granted. At Hunters Hill Council they are encouraged to restrict their presentation to matters on the agenda and are asked to provide an outline of what they want to say. Sometimes they are even required to submit the full text of their presentation prior to approval to speak being granted.

At Lane Cove Council, any member of the public can address the council at the beginning of the meeting (for a period of 3 minutes) on any topic. They only need to notify council of their intention to speak.

Council wards

The idea of creating separate wards within a merged LGA, each with its own councillor, has been flagged by the Minister. It is essential that the ward system is adopted as a way of ensuring local representation and The Trust has a vital role to play here in lobbying for this to happen.

COUNCIL ASSETS

Council Staff

Spare a thought for existing council staff, whose livelihood is in question and two General Managers will have to look for work in a much reduced jobs market. As well, Hunters Hill residents will have no doubt developed connections with staff members from the General Manager through to the parking ranger that will be lost in the amalgamation.

Council buildings

When Glebe was subsumed into the City of Sydney, Council set up a Neighbourhood Service Centre in the Glebe Library with resident planning staff etc. Glebe residents can do all their council business there. While the fate of 10 Cowell St is no doubt already sealed, it is interesting to speculate whether a more financially robust council would have been so quick to sell it off.

It will be essential that Hunters Hill's Council Chambers and offices be retained to house a Neighbourhood Service Centre, and for relevant uses to be found for its existing publicly owned halls.

With potentially less need to use The Priory as an income stream for the cash-strapped Hunters Hill Council, it may be possible to revisit the plan to lease it out to private business and to adaptively reuse it as a community facility.

A name for the merged Council

When the Victorian Government amalgamated councils, new names were chosen for the merged LGAs. Ryde, which is the third oldest settlement in Australia after Sydney and Parramatta was originally known by its aboriginal name of Wallumatta after the Wallumettagal tribe. This could be a great name for a new merged council.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Residential Rates

It's hard to tell what impact the merger will have on Hunters Hill. Rates paid on an individual dwelling are based upon the value of the land per square metre as calculated by the NSW Valuer General. The average value of Hunters Hill properties is higher than the averages for Lane Cove and Ryde.

In 2009/10, of the three LGAs, Hunters Hill had the highest average rate of \$1,234 (this is also the highest average in NSW) Lane Cove had an average rate of \$969 and Ryde \$596.

The average property value in Hunters Hill is almost twice that of Ryde but, as far as I can tell, the rate in Hunters Hill (0.001286) is similar to Ryde (0.001212) but less than Lane Cove (0.00184).

Figures from 2011 show that Hunters Hill has 5,072 dwellings – 64% separate houses, Ryde 41,677 with 51% separate houses and Lane Cove 13,279 with 48% separate houses. High density housing in Lane Cove and Ryde represents a greater proportion of housing than Hunters Hill.

Whether Hunters Hill rates go up or down remains to be seen.

Other financial considerations

The Boundaries Commission report is full of figures that support the idea that the merger will save money. The first dot point in the Executive Summary states that there will be a financial benefit of \$86million over a 20-year period as a result of the merger. This looks like a large figure, but it is possibly less than the cost of a house bought today for \$2million.

The report claims, with little supporting evidence, that things will be better as a result of the merger but is light on the details of how this may be achieved. The report has virtually nothing on how the proposed amalgamation will impact on local residents.

In the Hunters Hill LGA, there is a higher proportion of land (schools and their playing fields, parks, hospitals etc.), which does not attract income through rates. This creates an increased financial burden on the ratepayers as a whole. As an amalgamated council this burden will be distributed across a greater population thereby diluting the encumbrance.

IMPACT OF AMALGAMATION ON THE HUNTERS HILL TRUST

Ironically, the success of the Trust in preventing the demolition of beautiful old stone and timber buildings for the construction of ugly 3 storey walk-up units in Hunters Hill in the 1960s can be measured in the massive rise in property values for individual houses in the municipality. This has meant effectively that only the very wealthy can now buy into Hunters Hill, particularly on the riverfronts and the peninsular east of the overpass.

It has also meant that, after the expense of buying into Hunters Hill, new householders do not have the extra cash available for a bespoke design and resort to constructing project houses to replace the existing cottages they have demolished. This practice is rampant west of the overpass.

These days many of those living in Hunters Hill do not necessarily share the commitment to preservation and conservation and a love of gardens and trees shared by Trust members, particularly those passionate advocates who founded The Trust back in 1968. Many newer residents are also unaware of the history of the area and seemingly oblivious to what makes it special.

For example, an architect (who should have known better) for a recent development application to demolish a fine brick and slate house in Vernon Street argued that the existing house was uneconomic because it did not fully utilise the intrinsic dollar-per-lineal-metre value of the length of its frontage to the Lane Cove River. Another recent application proposed the complete makeover of heritage-listed Windemere with new columns, roof form and huge new outbuildings.

This influx of wealth has had an immensely detrimental impact on the character of Hunters Hill. When it comes to the crunch, as Bob Dylan has written, “Money doesn’t talk – it swears”.

Despite all this, The Trust remains a vibrant community group and we can take heart from a number of other community groups that have experienced amalgamation and survived, like the Glebe Society, The Paddington Society and The Haberfield Association.

THE TRUST’S POSITION ON AMALGAMATION

The Hunters Hill Trust is aware of the argument that there is no firm evidence that larger Councils perform better than smaller ones and, as a conservation group, The Trust naturally has a tendency to support the historic form and geographic boundaries of the existing Municipality of Hunters Hill. This is one of the aims and objections of The Trust’s constitution, which are:

To maintain the unique and historical character of Hunter’s Hill. To fulfil this aim, The Trust has the following objectives-

- i) To limit the spread of home units, high density, industrial and commercial development within the Municipality;*
- ii) To preserve all features of Hunter's Hill having beauty, architectural and historical value;*
- iii) To ensure that any planning of Hunter's Hill should pay full regard to protecting and improving the amenities enjoyed by residents; and without limiting the generality of the foregoing;*
- iv) To encourage high architectural and aesthetic standards within the Municipality;*
- v) To maintain the integrity of Hunter's Hill as a separate Municipality;*
- vi) To cause to be maintained a planning committee of the Hunter's Hill Council responsible for conservation and policy matters, which includes nominees of the Hunter's Hill Trust Committee and*
- vii) To maintain the declaration of Hunter's Hill as a protected historic area.*

The Trust committee is in the process of looking at the Constitution with a view to bringing it into line with the realities of what has happened in the 47 years since it was first drawn up. Some of these aims and objectives have been overtaken by events, for example:

- i) To limit the spread of home units etc.* This is no longer something Council can do anything about, as the State Government has mandated that Hunters Hill Council must plan for a specific number of dwellings. The Government has also mandated a number of other planning requirements such as The Standard Instrument LEP, Exempt and Complying developments, Dual Occupancies and Affordable Housing and, of course, it has legislated to allow large-scale developments to by-pass Council assessment altogether.
- vii) To maintain the declaration of Hunters Hill as a protected area.* This was on The Trust's original wish-list but was never achieved because the State Government was not prepared to sign off on the idea that the whole municipality should be a conservation area. They were prepared to allow the two conservation areas we have today.
- vi) To establish a Planning committee etc.* This was achieved with the formation of the advisory panel, which is now CAP.
- v) To maintain the integrity of Hunters Hill as a separate Municipality.* This objective needs to be read in the context of objectives *ii) Preserving Hunters Hill's beauty, architectural and historical value, iii) Protecting the amenity of residents, and iv) Encouraging high architectural and aesthetic values.*

One needs to ask whether an underfunded tiny, stand-alone council is able to achieve these objectives. An objective analysis of Hunters Hill Council's record over the last couple of decades suggests that it has not been up to the task. As well, in the context of a very popular State Government, which appears strongly committed to the amalgamation of Councils, it seems more realistic to face up to the reality of a merged council and consider ways The Trust can best pursue its aims and objectives under such a body and to examine how The Trust can have an impact on shaping the new council.

Tony Coote
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 25 January 2016