

Catherine Otto  
Dept Planning NSW

by email

18 February 2009

Dear Ms Otto

## **PROPOSED RETIREMENT VILLAGE AT OXFORD FALLS**

As a former member of Warringah's LEP Community Advisory Committee, I have contributed to the development of provisions within the LEP to encourage dwellings for aged and disabled persons whilst retaining Warringah's bushland and semi-rural areas and protecting the catchment of Narrabeen Lagoon and other waterways.

It is therefore of great concern that a huge retirement village complex has been proposed for the Oxford Falls valley. This proposal is totally out of character with the locality statement for Oxford Falls and it threatens the highly sensitive Middle Creek catchment of Narrabeen Lagoon. In this regard, the State Government's Review paper on SEPP 5 (2000) recommended that "SEPP 5 applications must demonstrate how the design will ensure compatibility with adjacent development and *the character of the local area...*". *Clearly the proposal does not meet this criterion.*

I also have concerns about the concept of geographically isolating aged people from the general community. There are no community shops or facilities within reasonable distance of the proposal and it is clearly being promoted as a self-contained "resort". The reality is that such a concept is flawed and many residents will, in a few years, find themselves financially trapped in a location that does not suit their needs, particularly as they age and are no longer able to drive. The State Government *Guide for councils and applicants - Housing for seniors or people with a disability* (2004) points out that "...*Moving is not the preferred option for most seniors. Seniors generally wish to stay in their own neighbourhood rather than move to an 'old people's home' where care may exceed their needs...*"

Stormwater run-off from this scale of development will damage the sensitive Narrabeen Lagoon waterways. In the 1990s I pointed out to the State Government serious deficiencies with the stormwater controls for the Red Hill residential developments. This week of heavy rain proves the point that *retention devices and holding ponds are totally inadequate for preventing fine silt and pollutants from reaching the waterways under the deluge conditions that are typical on a coastal escarpment.* The engineering standards for these developments are inadequate for protecting Narrabeen Lagoon.

Finally there is the bushfire threat. It is clearly irresponsible to locate retirement villages on the edge of bushland. The Oxford Falls Valley is at the south-east corner of a large areas of bushland that includes Garigal National Park. As a long-time resident of Beacon Hill I have seen several major bushfires sweep across this area and they typically are driven by hot north-westerly winds. So *Oxford Falls is in the worst possible location for these fires.*

In January 1994 Warringah was struck by devastating bushfires. The RSL Retirement Village had to be evacuated. I have attached some press clippings of that event. Virginia MacLeod wrote a book about these fires "Burnt Out? Experiences of January 1994 Bushfires in Warringah and Pittwater". Here is a quote from that book about retirement villages:

"Many older residents were evacuated from retirement villages, either because of direct threat of fire..or in other instances *because of the smoke...*

At the "War Veterans", Collaroy Plateau all the 1600 residents were evacuated in a major operation involving taxis, buses, cars and ambulances. The dementia patients were the last to leave with flames licking at the tyres of their bus. Here fire threatened the village directly and three units were burned..."

Many of these residents were severely traumatised by this event and never fully recovered. Of significance is that bushfire smoke is a life-threatening risk to older people and so evacuation is the only safe option. *Talk of safe havens from a bushfire within a retirement complex are nonsense.*

It would be irresponsible to the safety of potential residents and irresponsible to the ecology of Narrabeen Lagoon to approve this development.

Yours sincerely



Michael Paine

STATE BURNS

# Operation heartbreak

## Scramble to save 1700 in RSL village

IT was heartbreak stuff. As an urban conflagration threatened to engulf the RSL Veterans' Retirement Villages in Narrabeen, some 1700 residents - many of them infirm and frail - were being hurriedly evacuated in something that closely resembled an apocalyptic battle.

By LIZ VAN DEN NIEUWENHOF

"This brings back many strange memories," muttered an elderly man being escorted by nurses to one of 15 waiting ambulances.

Those not requiring assistance were hurriedly bundled into the 20 taxis and scores of buses that had been rushed to the scene.

While all the residents waiting to be evacuated tried to remain calm in the community hall, firefighters - many of them from South Australia - tried desperately to keep the 50m-high flames from threatening the hall.

A weary firefighter from Millicent in South Australia - who fought the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983 - said he had never encountered a situation so grave.

"I think we're in for a very, very hard time," he noted ominously.

At this stage it is not known how many retirement homes in the village

have been lost but the damage is expected to be extensive.

Mary Henry, the hotel supervisor, found an occasion for some wry humour. "I guess I'll find I won't have a job on Monday, I don't



An elderly man is carried from Narrabeen Nursing Home



Police carry an elderly man away



Paramedics move another patient



Smoke was already becoming a problem for some



Fear showed in the faces of others

think the hotel will be left standing."

For two days she and her staff had prepared themselves for this emergency.

Residents were taken to nearby Narrabeen Surf Club and the Harbour Diggers Club.

However, many of the elderly needed medical attention after they were overcome by the thick black smoke.

Said Bill Youll, a long-time resident: "I'm not only a war veteran but a bush fire veteran as well. I've seen them come roaring through here before. There was one three years ago and another 11 years ago."

"But this one takes some beating."