

Anoulack Chanthivong MP

Member for Macquarie Fields



Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

It is my privilege to represent more than 60,000 people in the electorate of Macquarie Fields.

I have been a public representative in this area for 15 years – firstly on Campbelltown City Council and now as the Member for Macquarie Fields.

During this time it has become abundantly clear that this community wants to protect the Scenic Hills.

This development application, like all other proposals and ideas before it, threatens everything that we value in the Scenic Hills. I will speak more on this point shortly.

I want to make it clear from the beginning that I am appalled by the timing of this public meeting.

The Liberal Minister referred this development application to the Commission in June 2018 – apparently to ensure the assessment and determination of this proposal was not delayed.

And yet it has taken almost nine months for this public meeting to be held.

I called for a public meeting in July 2018 so the Commission could hear first-hand the devastating impact this cemetery proposal will have on the Scenic Hills.

I was informed in August 2018 that the Commission was yet to determine the format of public consultation.

Six months later the Commission finally made a decision to hold a public meeting.

The fact we are sitting here two days after the State Election is atrocious.

The Liberal Government was conveniently shielded from public outcry against the destruction of the Scenic Hills ahead of the election - an issue of utmost importance for our community. It is no wonder people are so cynical about 'public consultation'.

And believe me, there is public outcry on this issue.

Local residents have been desperately trying to preserve and protect the Scenic Hills for decades.

I have been fighting against the destruction of the Scenic Hills since my election to Campbelltown City Council in 2004. I have continued that fight as the Member for Macquarie Fields since 2015, a point I made in my inaugural speech.

We are fortunate to have inherited a unique environmental landscape bordered by the Scenic Hills starting from Hurlstone's school farm at Glenfield, with the green corridor stretching past Varroville to the west and the Georges River and its surrounding national park to the east.

The Scenic Hills is an essential green space buffer in the face of out-of-control urban overdevelopment.

The Scenic Hills has long been cherished and valued area of land deliberately set aside for public enjoyment for decades by the Campbelltown community for existing and future residents to enjoy.

The Scenic Hills not only provides a unique and beautiful backdrop to the City of Campbelltown – it has major heritage significance and provides valuable open space for our growing and vibrant community.

The need to protect this environmental asset is a long-held view of the community.

The need to preserve the Scenic Hills has previously seen unanimous support from all sides of politics on Campbelltown City Council.

I look forward to Council publicly reiterating its long-held position that the Scenic Hills be protected from development.

I note that from the current list of registered speakers Council is absent. I am disappointed that Council has missed the opportunity to publicly stand up for our community.

I cannot be forceful enough in my argument to this Commission that the Scenic Hills need to be protected, now and forever.

Anything less will further destroy this community's faith in our planning system.

A 136,000 grave site on the Scenic Hills will forever destroy the heritage value and unique environmental landscape in metropolitan Sydney.

Panel members need to know that the development application before them is the beginning of the end for the Scenic Hills.

Should the Commission take the disastrous decision to approve this cemetery, a devastating domino effect will begin.

This cemetery proposal undoubtedly has the potential to unlock a tidal wave of new development applications across the Scenic Hills, with the green rolling hills set to be further swallowed up by an extensive road network, function centre and cafes.

The insidious incremental nature of this development will forever destroy the Scenic Hills not enhance it.

The only way to enhance the Scenic Hills is to protect them from development. The true value of the Scenic Hills is not from development but the fact that it is free from it.

The appalling inaction of the Liberal Government has made this protection increasingly difficult to achieve.

The NSW Heritage Council has strong views on the heritage value of the Varroville Homestead and its surrounding curtilage.

In September 2017 it recommended listing an extension to Varroville's curtilage on the State Register.

This would be a worthy recognition of Varroville's historical significance not only to south west Sydney but also to the State's colonial history.

The Minister for Heritage Gabrielle Upton has a strict obligation under heritage laws to act on the Heritage Council's recommendation within 14 days.

The recommendations made to the NSW Heritage Minister were clear and unambiguous. A decision is yet to be made.

I note that the Minister referred this matter to the Commission for advice in October 2018.

They provided that advice on 25 February 2019. Conveniently a week before caretaker conventions came into place.

We did not hear a peep from the Minister before the Liberal Government went into caretaker mode ahead of the election.

I implore the Commission: do not make a decision on this development application until the Minister meets her legislative obligation to make a decision on the heritage listing of the Varroville curtilage.

It makes absolutely no sense to decide a DA before this important heritage listing process is complete.

In fact, finalising this DA before the heritage decision could be seen as circumventing the heritage listing process.

Furthermore, ignoring independent statutory advice makes a mockery of our planning system and further erodes public trust.

Residents in my electorate are deeply impacted by decisions made by our planning system.

They deserve to have utmost confidence that the system will listen to their concerns and protect what they value.

Last year I undertook a campaign to find out exactly what this community values when it comes to development and what it fears about overdevelopment.

Every household in my electorate received my Stop the Squeeze survey and the response was overwhelming and emphatic.

- 98 per cent of people said it is important to retain our areas of green open space and suburban charm
- 98 per cent of residents said they had had enough of development in their suburbs;
- 96 per cent of people think developers have too much power in the planning system;
- 88 per cent of respondents believed the Liberal Government would not listen to their concerns.
- Residents listed the loss of green open space, traffic jams and general overcrowding as their top three concerns about overdevelopment.

This is overwhelming evidence that residents in my electorate are fed up with the obliteration of our green open spaces. First it was the sale of the Hurlstone's valuable educational farm to developers, than the rampant overdevelopment of our area and now the destruction of our Scenic Hills.

People are feeling disenfranchised knowing that the system is stacked against them and they have little or no say on planning decisions.

I've had the privilege of calling the local area home for decades and over time I have seen the slow creep of development change the face of our suburbs.

My community and I have seen too many masterplans, glossy brochures and well-designed marketing presentations, all of which had the intention of preserving environment and heritage in DAs. I have yet to see one come true.

Sadly, in the last few years that slow creep has morphed into a stampede that is now out-of-control.

The Scenic Hills is one of the last remaining open spaces in our area.

This Commission must abide by the wishes of the community and protect the Scenic Hills from this development application.