

Ecotourism, Hindu Temples, and WTF is a Housekeeping LEP?

## Description



On Tuesday night, Council resumed for 2020 and half way in, the meeting descended into chaos. A massive thunderstorm killed the power at a crucial juncture, forcing a second postponement, much to the frustration of a full gallery. The meeting had already been held over one week after flooding shut the Hawkesbury's three major bridges. It wasn't an auspicious start.

Before the storm, Council were able to consider several motions of condolence relating to the bushfire emergency that occurred during the recess.

It also approved a motion I brought which sought an extension of the public consultation period about

the Pitt Town Hindu Temple proposal, and directs Council's involvement in a public meeting which will go some way to addressing the community's concerns about it. I raised this after representations from members of the Pitt Town community, and the vote was a victory for common sense.

default watermark

**Item: 021**

**NM3 - Pitt Town Hindu Temple**

---

**Submitted by:** Councillor Zamprogno

**NOTICE OF MOTION:**

That Council Staff attend or convene a public meeting

1. Provide information related to DA0513/19
2. Explain how public submissions will continue consideration of this matter before a Planning

**BACKGROUND:**

A development application was lodged on 21 November for a religious worship complex at 95 Old Pitt Town Road, Pitt Town.

The proposed development is for a multi-story, architectural complex and which will host religious and cultural events year round.

The exhibition of this development application, which will be held over Christmas, but also during a period of considerable bushfire risk to the Community with bushfires.

I have received representations from the community since the exhibition. Many of those who are aware have concerns about the development at that site, citing traffic, noise, loss of amenity, parking and a similar facility granted nearby at McGraths Hill in 2016.

Later, what we were debating when the power went out was something called a “Housekeeping LEP”, and it’s more important than it sounds.

Council’s LEP, or [Local Environmental Plan](#), governs what zonings prevail in various parts of our city. This in turn governs what can be built and where.

It was last fully updated in 2012 and is *vastly* in need of an overhaul. We were promised that it would be totally renewed in this term of Council, but the process has dragged on so badly it will fall to the next Council, elected in September, to get the process done. Part of the delay is the refusal of the State Government to properly resource our Council to do the necessary preliminary work, even though other Councils have received State funds for the job.

This is frustrating for many reasons: Changes to planning law mean that [Planning Panels](#) — unelected, unaccountable and bureaucratic bodies, have taken on the job of assessing Development Applications, which used to be what your elected Councillors did in the chamber. The Planning Panels in turn interpret Council’s stated policies such as our LEP (and our DCP – the [Development Control Plan](#), which defines things like the scale, shape, quality, aesthetics and building materials that can be used in constructions), to get a sense of what is permissible or desirable.

That Planning Panels are making these decisions with no formal input from your elected Councillors, while drawing on an ancient LEP which does not reflect our current values and expectations, is not good.

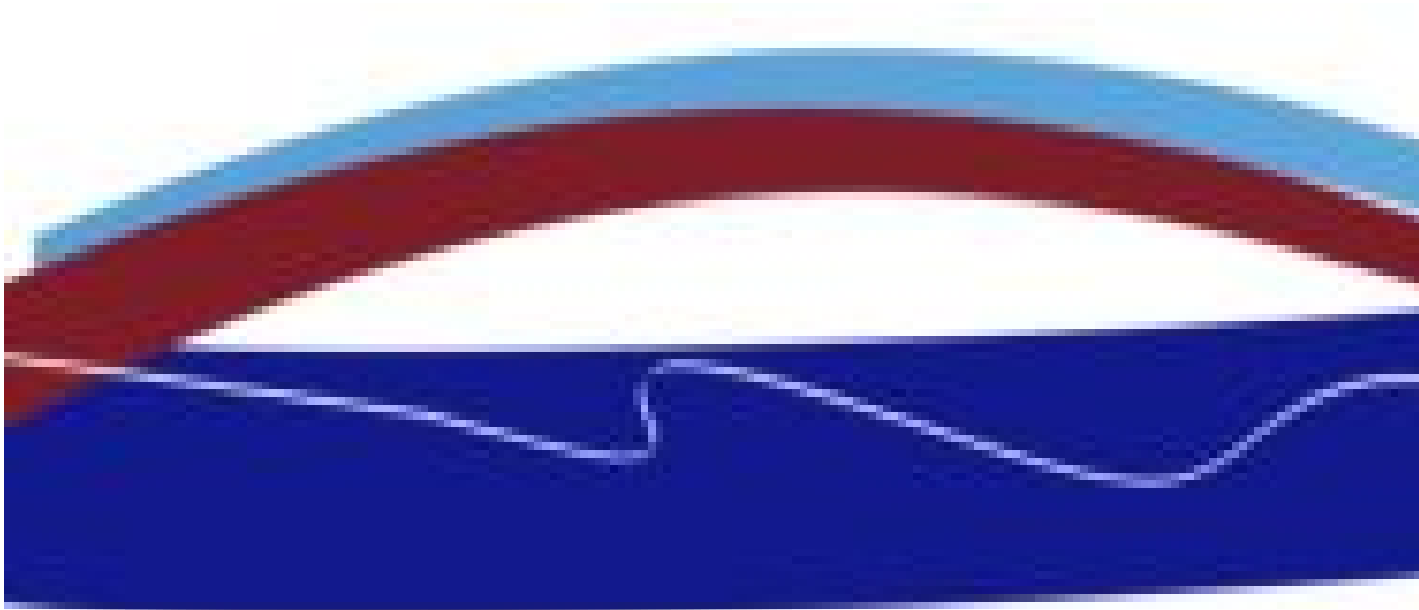
In my opinion, the conduit for executing the community’s desire for a particular style or scale of development, via elected Councillors, through their limited input into infrequently updated planning instruments, and thence to the interpretive whim of Planning Panels, is now so torturous and diffuse as to be impotent.

I’ll give an example why we need an update: The 2012 LEP made *very little mention* of Ecotourism. It was there in the LEP dictionary, and section 5.12 even laid out some standards. But the words “Ecotourist facilities” were missing from the land-use tables to permit it in any zonings. Meaning, there is presently no permission for this form of economic activity, one our city ought to be promoting as an appropriate and desirable land-use. Ecotourism ticks all the boxes – it aligns well with the Hawkesbury’s tourism strategies, it enables a productive use of land that may be unsuitable for other purposes, it encourages environmental awareness and good stewardship, it confers a halo effect on other parts of the local economy, and an Ecotourism framework in the LEP will regulate the sector, providing checks & balances for near neighbours, and certainty to those wishing to invest in those businesses.

Recognising the interminable process of getting a wholly new LEP, Council conceived getting some of the changes we’ve put off into a *Housekeeping LEP*, a kind of mini-LEP update, like a software patch issued between major revisions of an operating system.

Here's a slide from a Councillor briefing we received in **February 2017** reminding us that the Housekeeping LEP process began in **July 2015**.

default watermark



default watermark

- **31 July 2015 –**
- **24 Feb 2016 -**  
advising to proc  
dwellings and o  
to concern rei

And here we are, *five years later*, and we're *still* no closer. Unbelievable!

[Fifty such changes were identified](#) for inclusion, including a provision for Ecotourism.

Sadly, a lack of will and strangulating bureaucracy has eroded even this limited proposal for endorsement by the NSW Minister for Planning. The watered-down Housekeeping LEP falls maddeningly short of what I and my fellow Liberals had hoped for .

We had hoped we could make good on our election commitment to permit Detached Dual Occupancies. But it's been removed from the draft. Ditto a more generous definition of Secondary Dwellings (effectively granny flats). And Ecotourism? Included in an earlier draft, but now recommended for elimination based on an apprehension that the Minister will scuttle the whole thing because of dangling threads. *This is not good enough.*

Complicating public debate is a protracted campaign by feuding millionaires with Polo properties down on the Richmond Lowlands. One of them opposes both the function centre and the ecotourism provisions of the Housekeeping LEP, citing the risk of flooding on the Lowlands. And while that's probably a valid point, the only reason you're reading about this via full-page ads in this week's Gazette and the Courier is because these millionaires [loath each other](#) and just want to cause grief for one another.

The simple fact is that even if the Housekeeping LEP is ratified in full, individual DA's for proposals (say) on the Lowlands would still be subjected to a raft of other merit-based assessment criteria. Flood liability may still rule such developments out, but they would be assessed on an individual basis.

On Tuesday, the Liberals were key to an amendment to direct Council to submit the fuller version of the Housekeeping LEP to the Minister, with Ecotourism included. That amendment then became the motion, and based on the same numbers, was likely to pass.

Then, at the key moment, the power went off.

Will it pass when the meeting [resumes](#) on Tuesday night (25th)? Let's see.

## Category

1. Uncategorized

## Tags

1. Planning panels

## Date Created

February 20, 2020

## Author

councill