



RESIDENTS MATTER ACTION GROUP

# MEDIA RELEASE

16/02/2018. Reference 3/18. [www.hillsresidentsmatter.com](http://www.hillsresidentsmatter.com)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## RESIDENTS CALL FOR CORRUPTION INQUIRY INTO HILLS SHIRE COUNCIL

**Intervention by the NSW Government to suspend the Blue Mountains Council for serious conflicts of interest has led to similar calls by residents to suspend the Hills Shire Council to investigate major mal-administration and potential corruption.**

Hills residents have cited the huge disparity between public land sold in Castle Hill by Council for \$140M which it up-zoned and approved for development, compared with properties owned by residents near the new metro Showground Station Precinct.

Residents Matter Action Group (ResMAG) spokesperson, Paul Cook, said council land acquired and sold to developers in the Castle Hill North Precinct included a 22 percent increase on the initial height allowance that was approved by Council itself. The \$140M land sale by Hills Council came with no requirement for super-sized apartments or the normal development controls on setbacks between or at the front of buildings that are needed for other developments.

"The comparison between council's actions on selling its own land and what ordinary residents have had to endure in the Showground Station Precinct is shocking.

"The whole deal by council on its public land at Castle Hill stinks to high heaven. At best it's severe mal-administration and a major conflict of interest by council that requires immediate suspension. At worse, it points to potential corruption requiring an investigation into the way the deal was put together, the lobbying that took place and those involved at State and Local level," Mr Cook said.

"Residents deserve transparency. We want to understand how Council can justify stopping every application and development proposal in the Showground Station Precinct for three years. We then want an explanation as to why they feel their quickly approved 23 storey developments are acceptable when all others are not. Council clearly has a major conflict of interest when it comes to development."

Mr Cook highlighted the hypocrisy of Hills Shire Council Mayor Michelle Byrne who on one hand announced: *"Council has been able to consolidate the site (in Castle Hill) over many years, and the sale further enhances council's fiscal position .."* (CBRE Newsletter, September 9, 2015), yet two months later, declared in the Sydney Morning Herald (December 14, 2015) that 'she understood the need for increased densities around stations, *"but I can never support this"* (Showground Station Precinct)'.

"I call on the Minister for Local Government Gabrielle Upton to immediately suspend the Hills Shire Council, and to urgently activate a corruption investigation. The NSW Department of Planning must take over development approvals in the Showground Station Precinct," Mr Cook concluded.

**Further Information: Paul Cook. Phone: 0452 578 845.**

ENDS. 1-/1. Critical Facts & Direct Comparison Chart next pages.

## Critical Facts.

### The comparison between council land sold to developers and land owned by residents:

- The closest point for land sold by Hills Council to the new metro line station at Castle Hill is 400 metres, and at its furthest point, 500 metres. In the Showground Station Precinct, land owned by residents is a mere 60 metres away, and even at the furthest point, only 300 metres away.
- Council sold its land to developers with an initial zoning that allowed a five to one Floor Space Ratio (5:1FSR) or five meters of built form for one metre of land. This represents in practical terms a building height of 18 storeys. However, land owned by residents closer to the metro line were first offered a range of FSRs that effectively limited height to six, eight and 12 storeys.
- Council then approved up-zoning for developers on its former land to a FSR of 5.5:1 or 23 storeys (a 22 percent increase in height). In comparison, the showground precinct suffered decreases in FSR of more than 40 percent with no change in height allowances.
- Hills Shire Council development controls have been ignored for developers of former council land with many non-compliant setbacks between and at the front of buildings. In comparison, Showground Precinct-specific controls now introduced by Hills Council have excessive front and podium setbacks, and huge riparian setbacks.
- There is no requirement for large-size apartments for developers of former council land, however Council has insisted on this for 30 percent of dwellings in the Showground Station Precinct – making development not feasible given there is no market demand for such dwellings because of cost.
- There is no overall limit of dwellings in the Castle Hill North Precinct, but a cap of 5,000 in the larger Showground Station Precinct.
- Council immediately approved development applications in the Castle Hill North Precinct without restrictions, but no proposal or applications have been supported or approved in the Showground Station Precinct.

## DIRECT COMPARISON CHART:

	COUNCIL LAND (SOLD IN CASTLE HILL)	LOCAL RESIDENT PROPERTIES (SHOWGROUND STATION)
Original zoning	Residential (low density)	Residential (low density)
Distance to new metro rail at closest point	400 metres	60 metres
Distance to new metro station at furthest point	500 metres	300 metres
Precinct zoning (initial)	FSR (Floor Space Ratio) 5:1	FSR 3:1, 2.7:1 and 2.3:1
Precinct zoning (current)	FSR 5.5:1. (Big increase)	2.1:1, 1.9:1 and 1.6:1 ( <b>big decrease</b> )
Height limit allowed (initial)	18 storeys	6, 8 and 12 Storeys
Height allowed (current)	23 Storeys ( <b>council allowed 22 percent increase in height</b> )	6,8 and 12. No change but not feasible
Consent (approval) authority	Hills Council	Hills Council
Application assessment time	Immediate	3+ years and <b>still no approvals</b>
Requirement for large-size apartments	Nil	<b>30%</b> of development- NOT feasible and no market demand
Development Controls (setback) by council	Many non-compliant setbacks allowed by council between buildings, front of buildings etc.	Front setbacks excessive, podium set-backs excessive and riparian setback HUGE
Limit on number of units	Nil	5,000 in precinct