

SOS POLICIES

Developer influence

Over the last four years the influence of developers has grown. It is strong in many local Councils, the State Department of Planning and the State Labor government. SOS was set up by people determined to put an end to this corruption of the political process.

SOS has been fighting over-development for the past four years. As the state election draws near other political parties are starting to jump onto the “over-development bandwagon” in a superficial way.

SOS policies are not “feel-good” statements but practical ways of dealing with developers. That is why our policies target developer influence wherever it occurs.

State government/political parties

SOS supports legislation to outlaw the practice of developers donating to political parties or to any individual standing for political office. This includes direct and indirect donations (for example through ‘auctions’, trust funds or politician’s ‘dinners’) and covers local as well as state government.

The Department of Planning (PlanningNSW)

SOS will work for radical changes to this government department. A close relationship has developed between bureaucrats at all levels in PlanningNSW and developers. Individual members of the department work with developers and the department has a strong pro-development culture.

Developers should not be working with bureaucrats to formally advise the Minister on how much development is permitted (as is currently the case with the Ministers’ Advisory Committee).

The current department should be abolished and a small number of its present staff transferred to a new ministry of infrastructure and planning.

This new department should be given the task of ensuring that no increased densities occur unless proper studies of the capacity of the existing infrastructure have been done.

The Minister of Planning’s ability to determine State Planning Policies (SEPPs) without parliamentary approval should be removed. All current SEPP’s should be reviewed and the abolition of SEPP 5 and SEPP 53 ensured.

The existing infrastructure includes the road system, water, public transport and public facilities such as libraries, hospitals, schools, police, nursing homes, parks, sportsfields and open space. Poorly planned development creates far more problems than it solves.

Where infrastructure requires upgrading developers should be required to contribute a reasonable amount to the additional cost. This cost should be based on proper studies of existing capacity of physical/social infrastructure and the amount necessary to upgrade.



Local Government

SOS recognises that developer influence and party politics have produced pro-development and, at times, corrupt local councils. Financial mismanagement, allocation of resources to special interest groups, neglect of basic infrastructure (roads, drainage, sportsfields), ‘ward-heeling’, planning failure and arbitrary decision-making are also matters in urgent need of attention.

The only effective and democratic way of dealing with these problems is through local communities reasserting control over Councils by more effective participation in the political process. SOS will support resident action groups who wish to stand local candidates. It will provide practical assistance with campaigning and policy suggestions for such groups.

Green and Open Space

Parks are part of every Australian’s heritage. A quiet place for the children to go for a swing, to walk the dog or just for a gentle stroll. Yet in many areas across Sydney there is a significant shortage of parks and green space. This shortage is particularly acute in intensely developed areas such as the eastern and western suburbs.

As Sydney’s population has grown so has the need for open space for pocket, local and regional parks. Yet as the number of high-rise apartments grow so precious green space disappears.

SOS will work to ensure that existing green space is protected and land for new parks is acquired.

A pro-active metropolitan open space strategy:

1. Would identify areas where there is a deficiency of open green space, identify all public land and place the details on a register and ensure that any ‘surplus’ government property is converted to open space and appropriately rezoned. Such conversions should permit a range of green space uses from local ‘pocket’ parks to regional parks.

2. Where the land is not suitable for green space, sales should be permitted. To remove the incentive to use such asset sales as a way of funding on-going government programmes, however, all the proceeds of such sales should be committed to a fund which would allow the purchase of private property for green space in areas where there is insufficient green space.

Energy Australia and tree-‘trimming’

Over many years residents and Councils have planted street trees. Part of the general ugliness creeping over Sydney comes from the way that such trees have been butchered by Energy Australia. Councils and local people have been powerless to protect the trees.

SOS will push for a parliamentary inquiry into the mutilation of street trees. This will encompass Energy Australia’s management of sub-contractors, the extent of ‘pruning’, the lack of effective remedies for over-pruning and the role of councils in the process.

SOS will also work to ensure the placing of electricity lines underground. Energy Australia currently provides a small sum to local councils to subsidise the undergrounding of power lines. SOS will work to ensure that this figure is increased.

A long-term plan for the undergrounding of cables is necessary.

Transport

Efficient transport of people, goods and information is critical for a sustainable planning policy. New developments should be designed to maximise the accessibility of destinations using environmentally efficient means such as walking, cycling or public transport.

The public transport network should feature increased frequencies of public transport services. Timetables for train, bus and ferry should be synchronised to reduce times for linked trips. The eventual aim should be to increase frequencies to the extent that timetables are no longer necessary.

A more detailed analysis of SOS policies can be found on the website www.SOS.org.au

Telling signs!

Christine Townend

The sign said it all: ‘For Sale – Development or Investment Opportunity’.

It was another block of Leura land, sliced from a large developed garden of azaleas, camellias and grevillias. The original old ‘Mountains-style’ house would be crowded by a new monster – perhaps one of the large, brick and aluminium project homes, with lots of rooms and double garage – totally ugly and not at all in harmony with the garden landscape and timber ‘Mountains-style’ homes of the street.

The estate agent told me that some people made their money from buying old houses on double blocks and subdividing them for re-sale for homes and, even worse, for villas and townhouses. A uniform and lovely streetscape of single houses in large tree-filled gardens nearby has now been shattered by a set of three villas – new, bald, lacking large trees, and just token shrubs dotted here and there.

I feel a sense of outrage when I see how an out-of-town developer has robbed the street of its beauty. And the value of other houses in the street has been reduced due to the ugliness of the new development.

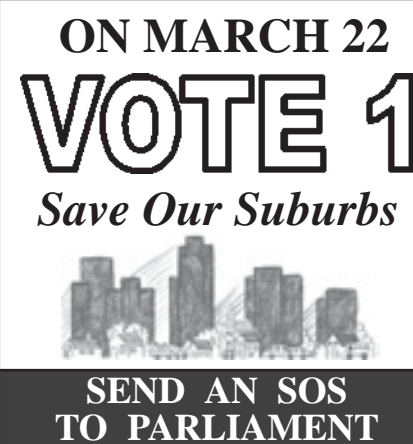
There are two issues at stake: one is the destruction of heritage villages and gardens, and the other is the threat to the world heritage national park which surrounds the Upper Blue Mountains suburbs through an increasing population.

Major threats to the environment result from the introduction of weeds, which spread from backyards into the bush, and from the alteration to drainage systems.

In the bush, many small streams drip over the edges of cliffs, feeding ferns and moss beneath and delicate hanging swamps, and small creeks. When the land surface is covered by cement and tar the run-off is re-directed into drains which become overloaded during rain, and which gush into the bush creeks, creating erosion and washing pollutants into the forest. We can see it very well in our own back garden. During every storm the run-off from our street flows down the gutters, into a drain, and hence into a creek which pours through our back garden, carrying sediment and froth into the bush behind.

Neither the Council nor the State Government would be brave enough to call a stop to further development in the Upper Blue Mountains, but this is what is required.

Editors note: Christine Townend is a Leura resident.



Raping the Central Coast

The State Government’s plan for the Central Coast has been condemned as fatally flawed.

On exhibition until 14 February, Shaping the Central Coast Action Plan – Version II is criticised by SOS member Bryan Ellis for ignoring community concern of overdevelopment. “Since 1994, in a relentless push to force local Government to accept increasing population growth, the State Government has failed to listen to the community.”

“At that time, Australian Council of Social Services representative Chris Dodds warned that *Sydney’s Future*, the draft planning document for the Sydney Region, failed to take adequate account of the disaster which has been created on the Central Coast.”

In 1995 more than 73% of respondents to a Council survey said the City of Gosford was approaching its maximum population. Yet Gosford grows faster than the state average. The State Government plans to increase the Woy Woy Peninsula population by 10,000, Gosford City Centre 5,000, Entrance Peninsula 6,000 and Warnervale a whopping 40,000.

‘Urban Consolidation’ in all its forms, from dual occupancies to high-rise, is destroying the ambience and lifestyle of the Central Coast and is roundly detested by the local residents, according to Mr Ellis. He quotes the 1993 comment made by Australian National University’s Professor Patrick Troy: “Urban Consolidation is a highly suspect, socially inequitable policy, cooked up to justify cutting back public dollars for infrastructure.”

The 1996 Gosford Residential Strategy warned of “a recognised lack of social infrastructure”, stating that “backlogs exist in the provision of community facilities and services.”

Shaping the Central Coast, widely referred to as “Raping the Central Coast”, offers no studies to justify its recommendation for more population growth, yet curiously claims that “Sustainability is a key theme of the Action Plan.”