

# FROM THE SIDELINES

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## Scenic Hills betrayal

CAMPBELLTOWN was master-planned. It might not feel like it at times, but it *was*.

And, I've gotta say, there's nothing wrong with the plans ... they're excellent.

The 1973 *Three Cities Plan for Campbelltown, Camden and Appin* was a pioneering piece of city planning that (shock horror) actually took things like landscape protection into account.

One of the biggest supporters was the great Clive Tregear, who was the mayor of Campbelltown when I was a kid in the 1960s and 1970s and my great mentor as a reporter in 1980s and 1990s.

Clive always told me that tiny Campbelltown Council (as it was) only had a limited budget re planning, so he was thrilled when it was handed access to "the best planning minds in Australia".

It was a master plan born of the Whitlam era, as Gough (who was also a local MP) wanted a cutting-edge modern plan for Campbelltown.

Unfortunately, after Gough was deposed in 1975, successive state governments treated Campbelltown as an unloved dumping ground for badly-designed 'houso' estates while ignoring all the bits in the master plan about quality infrastructure.

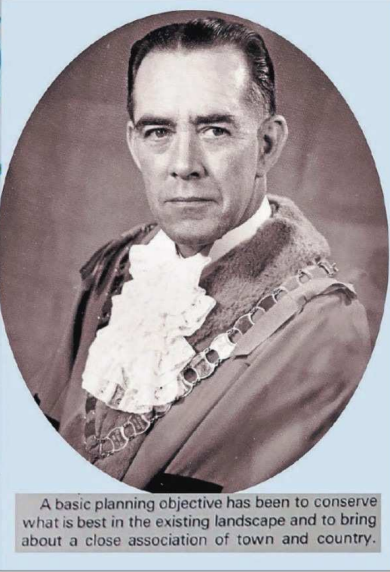
But, for all that bad treatment, Clive Tregear kept his faith simply because the bedrock remained sound: a cityscape that was surrounded by natural landscape.

This involved four pillars:

1. **A Scenic Hills zone:** preservation of agricultural/open land to the west.

2. **The Georges River Scenic zone:** bushland gorges and reserves to the east.

3. **A special uses zone at Hurstone:** a symbolic strip of farmland separating us from



**MASTER PLAN, MASTER BETRAYAL:** Original maps and plans for Campbelltown's Scenic Protection zones, and the great Clive Tregear who lived in hope our governments would respect the plan. He was, unfortunately wrong.

Sydney's sprawl to the north.

4. **Gilead:** farmland, clearly marked as a "scenic protection" zone, to the south.

A huge new city needed its breathing spaces. Today, we might call them cool places to ease the heat island effect.

So, how are those four key pillars going today?

Hurlstone's farm (which this state government vowed to protect) and Gilead are both being handed to developers for squished-up rooftops. The river bushland is not protected as a Koala National Park (that was a Labor promise, and they lost), and a key koala corridor in Airds has just been bulldozed.

And ... last week ... the gov-

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The government has systematically dismantled foundation stones of our city's green quality of life.

ernment has just rammed through a big new Rookwood cemetery in our Scenic Hills.

That means kilometres of concrete roads, car parking for 350 vehicles, and function centres, etc. So, of course, the artists' impressions instead show gardens, flowers, lakes, trees: the only thing missing is cellophane flowers of yellow and green and the girl

with kaleidoscope eyes.

The Catholic Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust, you see, has long argued that there is a burial "crisis" in Sydney.

I argue back that if there is truly a "crisis", the Catholic church owned a massive slab of land behind St Greg's that *could* have ended that crisis for the next century. Instead, it sold that land to developers

for profit, and drew up a plan to use our scenic protection zone instead.

As Anoulack Chanthivong said, this will also set in motion a devastating domino effect of new development applications in the hills.

And, as Sydney's "burial crisis" gets worse in the future, all of the new cemetery's promised parklands, etc, will vanish under more graves and ugly mausoleums.

Critics might refute me by pointing to plans guaranteeing all that *can't* happen.

That's OK. I can also point them to (older) plans guaranteeing that things like giant cemeteries *can't* be allowed in our Scenic Hills. Hmmm.

## Not much holy in tactics

FROM the start, the Scenic Hills cemetery push has been a failure of transparency.

Campbelltown Council rejected it in 2014 because it betrayed the scenic zoning.

That didn't go down well in Sydney's corridors of power where it was known the cemetery was a "done deal".

The council was stripped of its planning powers and, after saying there would be a full and fair review process, the government stated the cemetery "could not be put at risk". Yeah, sounds fair.

Sure enough, we got loaded statements, outright lies, and stacked hearings. The government, in breach of its own legislation, sat on expert recommendations to protect Varroville House, enabling the plan to progress unimpeded by a pesky things like more heritage constraints.

The Independent Planning Commission (appointed by the same government that wants the cemetery built) has now directed the Sydney Western City Planning Panel to approve it. Done deal.

Mayor George Bricevic calls it "against any sort of natural justice or democracy principles". He's right.

So, what do our great moral guardians - the religious bodies - have to say about this assault on natural justice? It's a great result. Wonderful. Praise the Lord.

I can only quote from a book: *If you see the perversion of justice and fairness in the government, do not be astonished...* (Ecclesiastes 5:8).

Seeing it one thing. Cheering it on is another.

- JEFF MCGILL

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