

Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser

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A FAIRFAX COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

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Public anger against the plan to turn our Scenic Hills into a giant 'boot hill'

HILLS FIGHT ON, AGAIN!

"We have received state government consent to use public money for the \$15 million acquisition of a 113-hectare parcel of land..."
Catholic Cemeteries Trust, 2015

"The [Scenic Hills cemetery] will make a significant impact on the shortage of burial space in Sydney."
Former Baird government minister Katrina Hodgkinson, 2014

"A wonderful project."
Former Liberal MP Bryan Doyle, before his defeat at the last state election.

THESE three quotes might explain why so many Campbelltonians are dubious about the Baird government's "independent" review into the Scenic Hills cemetery plan. The government wants it built. And many local critics, including unhappy councillors, see the joint Regional Planning Panel (JRRP) — dominated by state government appointees — as a rubber stamp. Campbelltown Council overwhelmingly rejected the 136,000-plot proposal by the Catholic Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in March 2014, in a clear-cut decision that crossed party lines. Liberal councillor Paul Hawker called it a "bad, bad deal", saying the council would lose \$60,000 a year in rates and sterilisation of the Scenic Hills zone might lead to more coal seam gas mining. However, the Catholic Cemeteries Trust appealed the council's decision to the state government and it will now be reassessed. The NSW Planning and Environment Department last week passed



Over our dead bodies: Labor MPs Greg Warren (Campbelltown) and Anoulack Chanthivong (Macquarie Fields) with councillors and community members such as Father Greg Burke (fourth from the left) are opposed to the cemetery at Scenic Hills. **Picture: Sam Venn**

Campbelltown Council last year rejected a 136,000-plot cemetery in our "protected" Scenic Hills — but the Catholic Cemeteries Trust has used a side door to lobby the government to override the local protests. Can it succeed? **Ben Chenoweth** and **Jeff McGill** report.

the Trust's proposal through its gateway process. That means the \$30 million plan, covering 113 hectares, will now go to public exhibition and be decided upon by the JRRP. Campbelltown Council refuses to be involved — it has already made its decision — and Labor state MPs Greg Warren and Anoulack Chanthivong are also gearing up for a fight.

Mr Warren said the government's active support for the plan "raised some serious doubts of conflict". "The JRRP was established to be independent," he said. "I'll be exploring all avenues and the ICAC and the Ombudsman are two avenues this can be referred to." Mr Chanthivong is also investigating options and last week personally

delivered a hand-written letter to Planning Minister Rob Stokes. "I've called for Minister Stokes to immediately withdraw the application," he said. "The minister has allowed this application to go ahead which is out of touch with the views of the community."

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READERS' COMMENTS

Greg Burke: As a Catholic priest I am ashamed at the way the officials of the Church and the Catholic Cemetery Trust have behaved. The people of Campbelltown need to unite to protect the Hills.
Len Williamson: The Catholic Church, developers & Liberal politicians. What an evil mix of conspirators. As a religious organisation, they will pay NO taxes or council rates, etc. We, the residents and taxpayers, will be paying for council services, roads, water rates, taxes, etc.
Watchdog: Limp wristed protests from MPs won't stop these gravediggers.
Beverly Prouting: I still say a cemetery is better than over 4000 houses, cars.
Greybeard: This is political bastardry. The region rejects a cemetery or any other development in the Scenic Hills. We say no. Our Council says no. So they take the decision out of our hands to be pushed through the government DDAP (Dodgy Detour Approval Process).
Peter Hickey: The battles have been fought before — CSG mining, business park, truck stop and housing developments. Time to wind up the campaign to save the Scenic Hills once again.
Richard Cerveny: A cemetery isn't CSG, it isn't a business park, it isn't a truck stop, and it isn't housing development. Grouping it with those is just plain mischievous.
Clarey Emsworth: The Sydney Catholic Archdiocese, their brand massively damaged by abuse scandals, has now chosen to escalate this culture by the abuse of an entire community! This shows that nothing has changed in the way the church treats its victims. These people need to learn that we are a society, not just an economy, and it will be not an economy but a society that calls evil people to account.
Trish McGill: Why replace this green space which celebrates and sustains life, with a deserted hillside of death? There must be another location.
Damien Anderson: It's dead wrong.

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Ann-Narelle Tattam
Manager

Destroy the hills to protect them

THERE'S nothing wrong with the Catholic Church's Scenic Hills cemetery — except, of course, the fact they want to put it in the Scenic Hills.

I have a far better location. There's a perfect block of land behind St Greg's College — flat, hidden away, not in a scenic protection zone and, wait for it, it's owned by the church!

Oh, hang on, I forgot. The church sold that perfect site to developers and it's now the suburb of Gregory Hills. D'oh.

In fact, I can think of several profitable housing estates built on church land. Now the church wants the Hills, too. But only because there's a "crisis" in the availability of burial land in Sydney.

[That crisis obviously started after Gregory Hills was sold.] Once the door to development in the Scenic Hills opens, it will be very hard to close.

A conga line of developers and obliging politicians will table all sorts of grand designs, able to argue that the integrity of the scenic protection zoning has already been breached for a burial "crisis", so it can also be used to ease the housing "crisis" or a jobs "crisis".

Pollies love the word "crisis" (whether it's terror, budget or moral) because it gets us all scared and agreeable. Ask a bloke called Tony in Canberra. And what happens when the



EDITOR'S NOTE
with Jeff McGill

cemetery is built? Well, straight away we, the ratepayers, will apparently have to meet a \$60,000 a year shortfall in rates.

Then I predict, in the future, the original promises will be long forgotten and things will start to change: mausoleums, weeds, roads, will all creep in.

Then another burial space "crisis" will mean that all the much-celebrated public parklands set aside in the cemetery will be needed for more graves.

(If land "protected" as open space can be snatched away in 2015, it can happen again. And again. And again.)

The claim by some that a cemetery will ensure the Hills are never buried beneath [supposedly banned] factories or housing estates, might also be described as "destroying the hills to protect them".

Why not also bury our dead in Mawson Park and Koshigaya Park? That will also "protect" them from development.

Of course, none of these measures would be necessary if some politicians simply grew a spine — and respected the middle word in the phrase "scenic protection area".
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READER OF THE WEEK



Sum yourself up: I'm an enthusiastic young woman and live my life with great passion and no regrets. I never let opportunities pass me by. **How did you first get into aerial silks?**

To get over my fear of heights! **If you were mayor of Campbelltown what would be your first order of business?** I would organise a big music festival with local and international acts to bring the community together and promote live music in the area.

How did you get into music? I started learning piano at age six and picked up the guitar at 13, and have been in love with music ever since.

Who would play you in a movie about your life? Scarlett Johansson.

The best piece of advice you've ever received? If you keep comparing your life to someone else's you will never be happy.

What are you most proud of in life? I am proud of achieving many things that I

ANDREA KRAKOVSKA, 23, from Ingleburn, is a graphic designer who dabbles in aerial silks and has formed the Macarthur Music on a Mission initiative [see page 55].

never thought I could do, like doing aerial. I think you should never give up on your dreams.

Three people you would invite to dinner? Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt and Tré Cool from Green Day, my favourite band growing up!

One of Campbelltown's hidden gems? Ingleburn Weir. It's a beautiful riverside setting adjacent to the Georges River, constructed from sandstone in the 1930s as a swimming area for locals. We used it a lot as children.

Your earliest memory? My younger brother being born. He is now 20 and studying to become a doctor which I think is incredible!

How would you spend your last \$10? I would buy flowers for my mum.

Check this out

This Saturday discover the Dharawal National Park and learn about Indigenous heritage on a guided walking tour. Enjoy a wander with a local discovery ranger and discover many hidden gems, as well as a fresh look at the landscape from an Indigenous perspective. Tickets \$5 a person. From 9am. Bookings essential on 4645 4921. Like "Visit Macarthur" on Facebook for more events. — Campbelltown Tourism

MAC CHAT

Online, on fire

The Advertiser has some good news to report from the cyber world. The figures on the Campbelltown-Macarthur Advertiser's website, www.macarthuradvertiser.com.au, show a massive increase in page views — up by a staggering 64.28 per cent between May, 2014 and May this year. Users have also increased by a massive 61 per cent. We want to send out a huge thank you to all our readers, both in print and online for your support now and into the future.

Just a reminder

Anyone unable to get their hands on a copy of the Advertiser for some reason can still read every page of the paper online. Just go to our website and click the orange button on the top left hand side of the screen that says "eEdition".

Worth a visit

One of Macarthur's finest 19th century colonial houses, Wivenhoe, will be open to the public on Sunday. It was built in 1837 by Sir Charles Cowper, NSW premier five times. The Mediterranean-style mansion and its stables are believed to have been designed by architect John Verge, who also designed Camden Park House. Guided tours will be available and the house at 229 Macquarie Grove Road, Camden, will be open from 11am to 3pm, with entry costing \$5 a person. Details: 4655 7057 or visit www.macarthur.com.au.

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Anger mounts over 'lack of democracy'

Campbelltown councillors are becoming increasingly frustrated with planning processes established by the state government. Before being elected premier in 2010, Barry O'Farrell announced he would hand back planning powers to local councils to "give people a real say on issues affecting their local community". That never happened. Joint Regional Planning Panels — made up of two local members, usually councillors, and three "independent" but government-appointed

experts — act as the decision-makers for developments exceeding \$20 million, or those considered regionally significant. Cr Rudi Kolkman (Labor) said the under-representation of local members on the panel was of major concern. He was on the panel when an application for an apartment building in Tyler Street in Campbelltown was lodged. "I said it's a tiny cul-de-sac and Tyler Street wouldn't cope," he said. "It's gone from a street with 27 homes to 217 apartments and three or four individual houses." Crs Meg Oates (Labor) and Fred Borg and Sue Dobson (both independents) have also been vocal critics of the panels.

Cr Dobson went so far as to call for the panels to be disbanded, while Cr Oates believed a restructuring with local members holding the majority of seats would be appropriate. "The current structure is unfair and that's the point," Cr Oates said. Cr Kolkman said council planning powers had significantly diminished since the creation of the JRPP. "The council, in consultation with the community, should determine how the community grows," he said. "If locals can't have a say in what their community will look like in five, 10, 15 years from now, what's the point? That's not a democratic way of proceeding."

Hills fight is on again

FROM FRONT PAGE

"The message in my letter could not have been clearer," Mr Chanthivong told the *Advertiser*. "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." Planning Minister Rob Stokes rejected a heritage order on the proposed cemetery site in 2014, as former environment minister. Jacqui Kirkby, of the Scenic Hills Association, is gutted. She owns the heritage-listed Varroville House which would eventually be surrounded by the gravesites. "This is something that will destroy me and my husband," she said. "The gateway process is a totally corrupt process and I believe the Planning Minister Rob Stokes knows that." A spokesman for the Catholic Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust — who acknowledged it had the support of the state government — believes the Scenic Hills are an ideal site. He said due to expected population growth, supply would outweigh

demand unless the cemetery was approved. "All major Crown cemeteries, of which the Trust operates five across Sydney, will exhaust the current number of burial spaces in Sydney by 2043," he said. "All existing burial space in the Macarthur region will be depleted within the next 30 years. "The predicted shortage of burial spaces is expected to be most keenly felt in Sydney's fastest growing area, the south-west region, where the number of people are expected to grow by 737,000 by 2038, with the annual deaths forecast to double to 77,000.



"The development of this cemetery will provide an additional 80 years of burial space for the local communities of Campbelltown, Liverpool and Camden." The spokesman defended the trust's decision to push ahead with the development despite objections from residents and council. "The zoning of this land currently permits much more intense usages than a cemetery," he said. "These usages include jails, sewerage plants and electrical substations together with schools and public buildings. These other uses would impact on the landscape in a much greater way and close the land to public use." One of the biggest fears over the cemetery being given the green light is that it will open the door for other developers in the remaining parts of the so-called scenic protection zone. In recent times, threats have ranged from proposed housing estates and business centres to a major truck stop.


Left: Camden Council is building new housing estates right up to the western boundary of Campbelltown Council and within a decade or two the Scenic Hills zone will be left an island of green surrounded by suburbia.



It's a broad church of opinions

MANY local Catholics have contacted us to stress that they are strongly opposed to the Catholic Cemeteries Trust proposal for the Scenic Hills. Catholic nuns and friars of the Varroville Carmelite monastery (pictured) are among them and Father Greg Burke said the cemetery would be "the beginning of the end of the Scenic Hills". This week, Father Burke wrote to the *Advertiser*, saying he was ashamed at the way the officials of the church and the trust had behaved. Many of the Campbelltown councillors opposing the development are also Catholics, including Cr Fred Borg, who is furious that the trust is getting a side-door reconsideration after being so soundly rejected by the democratically-elected councillors: "Yet another case of a government interfering with our local decisions." There has also been anger expressed by the community that the Catholic Church is targeting the Scenic Hills for a cemetery, while making profits from housing estates on other land. An example of this is the large portion of church-owned land surrounding St Gregory's College that was sold to make way for the Gregory Hills housing estate.

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