

I am writing to object to the project “Residential flat buildings at 142-150 Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba”. I was born and raised in the Blue Mountains, and have lived here for a total of approximately 30 years. I hold a Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) and a Master of Environmental Management.

I am absolutely dismayed at the scale of this proposal that is completely incongruous with the surrounding built and natural environments. The area is zoned R3 Medium Density, with a height limit of 8 metres (two storeys), and yet this proposal is for a four-storey high nine-building complex. By using the Housing Delivery Authority pathway, this overrides the Local Environment Plan (LEP) that is the result of decades of careful planning and community consultation. The provisions of the LEP ensure developments are appropriately designed, sized and located for the Blue Mountains’ unique and precious natural environment and aesthetic values as one of only two cities globally within a World Heritage Area. This high-density, 4-storey high, urban-style complex would be a terrible out-of-place eyesore that would be visible from within the Blue Mountains National Park and World Heritage Area and from a large area of Katoomba, significantly degrading the outstanding natural beauty and distinctive village character of the area. The Blue Mountains National Park is the most visited in NSW and attracts millions of visitors from all over the world each year who are drawn by its unique World-Heritage-listed ecosystems and breathtaking cliff-lined vistas. The Blue Mountains Council and community are the custodians of one of the most special places in the country, and have and continue to take extraordinary care to live within it respectfully and sustainably, in a way that minimises our impact on the landscape both environmentally and visually. This proposed development flies in the face of all those years of constant effort and vigilance to protect and preserve the unparalleled scenic beauty of the Blue Mountains for all the world’s people and for future generations to enjoy and appreciate. As such, it is a disgraceful affront to the people of the Blue Mountains as well as to the countless visitors who travel vast distances to experience one of the few remaining places in the world where the built environment has been kept in modest and respectful proportion to the wider environment it exists within.

This proposal seems blind not only to the priceless visual amenity of the local environment, but to the ever-increasing danger that lies beneath its beauty - bushfire risk. The site is in an area of high bushfire risk from the neighbouring National Park, and the Blue Mountains is one of the most bushfire-prone areas in Australia. There is only one main evacuation route leading to the Great Western Highway which is vulnerable during bushfires due to its close proximity to the surrounding bushland. Such a large high-density development would acutely increase the population and associated traffic congestion in this high-risk area, which is serviced by narrow

local roads flanked by bush that are already inadequate and unsafe for the high volume of tourist and resident traffic. This would increase the risk to life posed by bushfires, particularly during evacuation, and hinder the ability of emergency services to respond. As a close witness and survivor of a particularly intense bushfire in 2001, I completely agree with the position of Blue Mountains City Council that housing more people in high bushfire risk areas is reckless and dangerous. These risks will continue to escalate as climate change intensifies. As such, this proposal is utterly irresponsible and short-sighted.

I am gravely concerned that this cynical use of the Housing Delivery Authority pathway in the Blue Mountains to bypass local development controls and community consultation would set a precedent that may be irreversible. This would effectively open the door to similar high-density developments across the Blue Mountains LGA that could disregard and ride roughshod over planning controls, community concerns, environmentally and visually sensitive design considerations, bushfire risk, social licence, and heritage character. Such inappropriate developments would seriously damage the area's unique aesthetic, cultural, historic and natural values, resulting in significant impacts to the vital local tourism and hospitality industries, to sensitive ecosystems, and to community pride, wellbeing and sense of place.

The website for the HDA states, "The NSW Government is committed to providing the homes that young people, families and workers need through reforms that are designed to streamline planning approvals for major housing developments. To accelerate the delivery of much needed homes and help meet our target under the Accord, the NSW Government established the Housing Delivery Authority (HDA)." What young people, families and workers need most are homes that are *affordable*, especially in the current economic polycrisis of housing affordability, cost of living, fuel cost, inflation, interest rate rises, insecure employment and wage stagnation. Yet this proposal includes only 15% of units designated as "affordable housing", whatever that means, while 19.5% would be serviced apartments, appealing only to wealthy investors who would use them for short term holiday rentals to wealthy visitors. A nine-building complex that includes 52 serviced apartments, three restaurants and a cafe, a wellness and arts hub and wellness centre, conference facilities and an art gallery, with views across an ex-golf course, situated on some of the most highly valued land in Katoomba close to the escarpment, sounds like a very high-end development indeed, one designed for well-off retirees, highly-paid professionals who can work from home, and elites looking for a holiday unit, weekend getaway, investment property or air bnb. It hardly sounds like a development designed to provide affordable accommodation for young people, families and local workers. Katoomba is too far from employment centres in Sydney and Western Sydney for most workers to commute from, and the economy of the upper

Blue Mountains is highly dependant on the tourism and hospitality industries which offer mostly low-paid precarious work. Most workers in these industries, and most young people and young families in the current economic climate, would struggle to afford to frequent this development's restaurants, purchase art from its gallery, attend conferences at its facility, or enjoy services at its wellness centre, let alone consider purchasing an apartment there. These amenities are clearly intended for those who can afford to stay in the short term accommodation of the serviced apartments or to purchase an apartment at prices that would likely be out of reach of most young people, young families and local workers. The serviced apartments and amenities of the proposal would require numerous local hospitality workers to service them, who would need to live nearby due to early and late shifts, but the proposal does not include any staff accommodation for these low-paid workers and does nothing to alleviate the difficulties they face finding affordable accommodation in the area. Many of these workers would be forced to drive to work, as the bus service doesn't provide for early starts and late finishes, and it is a 40-minute walk and 20-minute bus commute to the train station. This would limit the accessibility of employment and increase the cost of commuting.

For these and many other reasons, I strongly oppose the proposed development, and the use of the Housing Delivery Authority (HDA) pathway in the Blue Mountains. I request that the Blue Mountains LGA be explicitly excluded from the HDA and SSD pathways in recognition of its unique position within a World Heritage Area, and its heavy economic reliance on the tourism generated by its scenic beauty and cultural character. I implore the Consent Authority to visit the proposed development site and the surrounding visitor destinations and environmentally sensitive areas, to experience and comprehend the impacts this incredibly inappropriate proposal would have.