

Date: 8th July 2020

Re: SSD-10444 Blue Gum Community School

(Proposal to convert historic residence at 1 Rosemead Rd, Hornsby NSW 2077, into a K-6 school and long day care centre)

Name: Rena Friswell

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Declaration: I have not made any reportable political donations in the previous 2 years

Purpose: I write to OBJECT to the proposal in development application SSD-10444 for the reasons detailed in this submission.

I am writing to object to the proposal outlined in SSD-10444 to convert 1 Rosemead Rd, Hornsby (Mount Errington house) into a preschool and K-6 school (including provision of before and after school and vacation care)¹.

There are significant problems with this proposal that make it untenable. These include:

1) Inappropriate selection of a residential location for this commercial undertaking

The property sits on Rosemead Rd, Hornsby between Dural St and William St. It and the surrounding streets are zoned R2 Residential. All the surrounding and nearby buildings are residences and almost all are freestanding houses. Existing neighbourhood residents have chosen to live in the area because it is quiet, low density, and treed; that is they define the amenity of the area in these terms. The school proposed at 1 Rosemead Rd would significantly reduce this amenity by increasing noise, human and vehicle traffic and reducing tree cover.

The surrounding roads to access the property are not adequate to service any business which requires many people (students, parents, staff, maintenance providers, and delivery drivers) to visit the site each day. Both Dural and Williams Streets, the primary access roads to the property, have narrow pinch points which constrict the flow of traffic into and out of the area. Indeed, one pinch point is at the entrance to Rosemead Rd at Dural St on the northern fence line of 1 Rosemead Rd and another is at number 63 William St on the southern fence line of 1 Rosemead Rd.

Most of the surrounding and nearby residents are older adults with adult or teenaged children. There are very few children in the neighbourhood of an age who could attend the proposed school. This means the negative impacts of the school would be borne by people who can derive no benefit from it.

2) Undermining heritage value

Hornsby Shire Council has recognised the historic, architectural and social significance of the house and grounds. The functional and physical changes proposed in the DA will undermine any heritage value of the property and of the broader Mount Errington precinct. Turning a celebrated historical residence into a commercial operation will devalue the property. It will no longer be a graceful homestead resting in peaceful gardens, but instead it will become just another converted house hosting a stream of cars, children, parents and staff. Whatever was special will be lost in this functional change.

The physical changes that will be required to change the function will also diminish the charm and character of the property. These changes include, but are not limited to, the widening of driveway, the relegation of the heritage gates to a vegetable patch at the rear of the property, removal of the large Cabbage Tree Palm and the massive Bird of Paradise plant near the entrance, installation of metal bar fence completely out of character with the building across the entire Rosemead Road frontage of the house, and addition of a paved playground and shade awnings on the southern side of the property. At the back a large fire escape must be added to serve the new function, again, completely out of keeping with the building.

¹ All uses will be referred to collectively as the 'school' throughout this document.

The heritage vista will also be diminished by school signage and traffic management signage on site and on the surrounding streets. Any NSW government requirement that school speed zone flashing lights be installed on the street will similarly detract from the streetscape of the heritage precinct around the house.

3) Traffic and parking

The proposed school is estimated to serve up to 80 children and 8 staff. This will have a significant effect on local traffic. There are three main issues – traffic congestion, parking congestion and safety.

Because the immediate local area has very few young children, students would be travelling to the school and it is unlikely they will do so on foot. 1 Rosemead Rd is a significant distance from the Hornsby train station and bus stops for young children to walk. I measured the pedestrian distance from the western entrance of the Hornsby train station concourse to the driveway at 1 Rosemead Rd as 776m using the route via Dural Street and 977m, almost a kilometre, using the route via William Street. (Google Maps distance estimates of 774m and 975m, respectively, confirmed the measured distances.) In addition, all the access roads (Dural St, William St and Rosemead Rd) approach the school up hill which will deter pedestrian transport for parents with young children and older children travelling alone from the station. Instead, it is very likely the majority of children will be driven to the site and the number of vehicles using local streets will increase. The original traffic report provided with the DA to Hornsby Shire Council estimated a fourfold increase in vehicles between 7am and 9am and a doubling of vehicles between 2:30pm and 6pm.

That traffic report was problematic because traffic measurements were only taken in front of the property on Rosemead Rd but the report did not assess the traffic on William St which is likely to be most affected by the proposed school because:

- i) William St is already overwhelmed with local traffic combined with parked commuters (because there is insufficient commuter parking available at Hornsby Station),
- ii) the school exit will tend to channel vehicles leaving the school left toward William St,
- iii) any vehicles that exit the school in the direction of Dural St will be diverted back onto William St at Lisgar Rd, because there is one-way entry into Dural St between Quarry Rd and Lisgar Rd, and
- iv) right turns into Dural St from Peat's Ferry Rd are illegal between the hours of 7am-9am and 3pm-6pm which will push incoming parental traffic approaching from the north onto William St as well.

Increased congestion on William St will adversely affect all residents in the valley to the west of Rosemead Rd who use Rosemead Rd and William St to exit the valley.

Local parking in surrounding streets is very competitive (under normal, non-lockdown conditions) and the school will add to the problem, especially if parents also seek to use the local streets as convenient commuter parking after dropping their child at the school.

A traffic impact assessment commissioned independently by local residents reported a range of traffic issues that would be exacerbated by the proposed school including congestion on Peat's Ferry Road at the intersection with William Street.

The property location also poses traffic dangers to school patrons and local residents. The corner of Dural and Rosemead is a 2-lane curve not far from the school entrance where vehicles would enter and exit, and where pedestrians enter and children and parents cross the road. The location is unsafe.

4) Emergencies and evacuation routes

The property is less than 150m as the crow flies from bushland. In the event of a fast moving fire or other emergency, children and staff will have to be evacuated via Dural St or William St adding substantial numbers of people to already congested escape routes. Escape south down Rosemead Rd is unlikely because this leads into the valley bushland. The eastern entrances of William St and Dural St on Peat's Ferry Road are currently traffic pinch points that are inadequate even for existing peak time traffic volumes, and will certainly impede escape in the event of an evacuation. Adding considerable numbers of small children and staff to this area will further reduce safety.

It is noteworthy that fire hydrants are situated on the corner of Rosemead Rd and Williams St, at the entrance to Rosemead Rd at Dural St, and in front of 1 Rosemead Rd. In the event that fire trucks use these hydrants during firefighting, their presence will further restrict the main escape routes.

I also note that large residential and commercial developments on Peat's Ferry Road have been touted, and that a 21-storey residential and retail block has recently been approved by the Sydney North Planning Panel to be built at the entrance to Dural Street on Peat's Ferry Road. If that and other developments proceed, efficient emergency evacuation along Peat's Ferry Road of people from the 'west side' of Hornsby including from the proposed school would become impossible. Peat's Ferry Road is narrow with many traffic lighted intersections and it will be overwhelmed very quickly by evacuating traffic.

Next door to the 1 Rosemead Rd is a small retirement village with elderly residents who use ambulance services relatively often. When ambulances are parked outside these premises the sight lines at the corner of Rosemead Rd and Dural St are reduced posing further risks.

5) Noise

The applicants provided an Acoustic Assessment report that concluded there would be minimal impacts on noise experienced by neighbours from additional street traffic, children playing and working outdoors, and cars using the internal driveway and parking area and that a lapped paling fence would be sufficient to mitigate noise. However, the report did not adequately assess the impact that increased traffic would have on noise for William St residents particularly for those of us situated at the corner of Rosemead Rd and William St where cars are braking and accelerating around the T-junction corner. The report conclusions about the adequacy of a lapped paling fence to adequately abate the noise from children and vehicles for neighbours is questionable and the proposal to use a lapped 2.1m fence on the boundary with 1a Rosemead Rd to control noise will significantly impair the quality of life of the residents at 1a. An Acoustic Impact report commissioned independently by these local residents suggested the noise impacts of the proposed school on neighbours could be significant.

The proposal to provide before and after school care means noise will not be limited to business hours and, indeed after-hours school functions could extend the times when there will be school noise.

6) Trees and garden

Contrary to council's stated objective of increasing tree cover in the shire, the DA proposes to remove a cluster of trees (including five *Eucalyptus pilularis*; Blackbutt) in order to provide on-site parking without tree canopy. We note the owners have already removed a mature *Angophora costata* (number 38 on the Survey Plan and T84 on the Landscape plan). This tree had been safely managed for the 17 years I have been in the area and I question whether its removal would have been needed if not for the plans to develop a school on the block. Indeed, the trunk of the felled tree was not observed to be structurally unsound.

As property blocks in Hornsby Shire and across Sydney become smaller and the number of subdivided blocks grows, the number of blocks that can host large habitat Eucalypts is shrinking so it is vital that larger properties protect their larger trees. The reduction of tree cover in the neighbourhood reduces the amenity of the area for all local residents.

7) Lack of local community acceptance

The proponent's Scoping Report for the proposal outlines the previous consultation process undertaken when the application was submitted to Hornsby Shire Council for consideration as DA/1119/2019. The proponent's Scoping Report notes that 99 unique submissions were made to the Council by members of the community in response to that Development Application (DA). However, the proponent's Scoping Report fails to note that almost all of the 99 submissions were OPPOSED to the DA. It is, perhaps, a sad irony that the proposed school is called the Blue Gum Community School yet the local community is overwhelmingly opposed to it. (On a positive note, the previous Council DA consultation process provides a benchmark for the current SSD consultation process such that the extent of local community response to the current SSD proposal should be at least of a similar magnitude to the Council DA consultation if the SSD community consultation has been effective.)

To conclude, 1 Rosemead Rd, Hornsby, is an inappropriate location for a preschool/school development and the SSD-10444 should be rejected accordingly.