

## **Dear Lord Mayor, Councillors**

Thankyou for the opportunity to speak to you today about an issue that affects all who live in Brisbane – what do we want our city to be? Most would want a city that is forward thinking, has a shared vision of its future, that exudes an all-pervasive sense of community and belonging, that respects our natural environment and our heritage, that addresses the challenges of climate change, future pandemics and other threats to personal and public health, that blends green space and parkland with architecturally appealing and properly spaced buildings that people enjoy living in, that allows freedom of movement and expression, that displays a love of charm, culture and modernity – in short a cosmopolitan city that exudes a village atmosphere and one that can be ranked among the most liveable in the world. Is that what we have, or aspire to?

Sadly, in Kangaroo Point, the answer is definitely NO. But we who live there are not alone. The cancer that is well advanced and killing our suburb is spreading to all parts of the city. No suburb is immune. That cancer has a diagnosis: unbridled overdevelopment by rapacious and arrogant developers who are merely driven by profit and are taking us, the ratepayers, and you, the Council, for a ride. We are both victims to forces seemingly beyond our control.

For the Council, there never seems to be enough money to pay for all the services and facilities that the public expects. The urban sprawl imposes transport and infrastructure costs that need to be contained. The answer, it appears, is to cram as many people as possible into a 5km radius of the CBD. The problem is compounded, according to Councillor Adams, by the State government demanding 188,000 new dwellings be established in south-east Queensland over the next few years to meet expected population growth. Whether these projections made some time ago still hold true and why most of these new dwellings have to be located in Brisbane are not clear to us. As far as Kangaroo Point is concerned we are already the most densely populated suburb in Brisbane, 7000 per sq km, we have several high rise buildings half or completely empty despite being completed more than a year ago, we have no less than 26 development applications approved or pending within our boundary, with more than half concentrated around Lambert Street which will deposit an additional 1000 apartments into an area with winding narrow streets, no shops

or retail outlets, no schools, little transport after 7pm, and no room for greenspace or setbacks from the river. Kangaroo Point already has the lowest amount of parkland per resident in Brisbane, we have very few pre-1946 buildings left which are supposed to be protected, the promised Riverwalk link from Mowbray Park to Dockside has been put off into the never never, and the green vein which will link the new Green Bridge to the eastern suburbs along Lambert Street will be filled with more traffic and congestion, with consequent risk to cyclists and pedestrians. Is this what liveable Brisbane is supposed to be?

Now perhaps this sorry state of affairs was never intended by Council. Here again we are both victims of forces and vested interests who have little or no community respect. I speak of the twin evils of the 2016 Town Planning Act and the 2020 Kangaroo Point Neighbourhood Plan, both of which need to be revoked and started all over again. The Town Planning Act established code assessable – a code which allowed a developer, if they met certain rules, the virtual right not to have their application rejected by the council's planning assessment unit, and with no requirement to consider the impact of that development on the amenity and living standards of the surrounding community. We, who have to live with the impacts of these developments, long after developers have taken their profits and departed the scene, are locked out of the approval process. What's more, even if the development does not fully meet the stated rules, approval can still be granted if it comes close and some other concessions are made under so-called performance criteria. But these are often lip service concessions when really what they should mean that if you want to go wider or deeper, then you go shorter, if you want to go higher, then you go narrower and shallower.

Prior to 2016, development applications were impact assessable, which gave the community a real voice into the approval process and avoided ratepayers – including some in their 80s and 90s - from having to participate in street marches, public demonstrations and mass petitioning, simply to let the council know just how much they oppose a particular development. And then when the council does have the gumption to refuse an application, it ends up in legal wrangles and court proceedings with the developer, costing all of us time and money that could be better spent elsewhere.

It would be far better to consult the community beforehand and work with us to see what can be reasonably negotiated with developers. For our part, we are not against development per se, but it must be responsive to community opinion, and it must invigorate and complement our urban landscape, not destroy or disfigure it. Big money and political power vested in a few must not override what the majority wants. That is what a democracy is all about. And the inadequacy of community consultation and the undue influence of developers also blights the development of neighbourhood plans. In the case of the 2020 Kangaroo Point plan, which raised building heights from 10 to 15 stories and made other changes to the joy of developers, there were fewer than 214 community submissions to the draft plan, less than 2% of the population. Why so few compared to say West End where more than half of the population responded to their draft plan? Are we so much more apathetic compared to anyone else? When we ask our fellow residents - did you know about this new plan, the answer is – no, we did not. But there is another, perhaps bigger flaw in how this plan came about – the ability of developers and their associates to sit on the Community Planning Teams that were tasked to develop the plans. If this is not a major conflict of interest, what is? Councillor Adams argues that, as a lot owner, a certain developer had as much right to be on the Kangaroo Point team as a local resident or shop keeper or small business owner. But this developer did not live in a house or conduct a business on this lot, and the lot was one of several that he was acquiring in order to amalgamate them into a parcel of land on which he intended to erect 3 apartment towers, initially of 10 stories with 199 apartments, but with the change in plan, he then applied for 15 stories with 300 apartments. His potential to profit from influencing the plan was in the stratosphere compared to your local small business operator. This developer and others in his employment should never have been part of the planning team. By welcoming his input and largesse, you now have a plan that has bred 108 Lambert Street – a development the community hates - indeed the most hated in Brisbane - and for which you now, quite rightly and to your credit, find yourselves fighting in court on our behalf. In other words, you created a rod for your own back, and as we are locked out of these court proceedings, we cannot support you in the fight. What's more, if or when they get their way, developers have a habit of leaving a trail of inadequately met infrastructure needs behind them for which you, the council, and we the ratepayers have to pick up the tab in setting right. Recently, the Lord Mayor quite rightly rebuked Facebook for removing council weblinks off

their platform, citing it as an example of cyberbullying. Well, developer bullying is just as malicious and potentially of much greater and enduring impact.

But what is playing out in Kangaroo Point is playing out in many other parts of Brisbane, from West End, Kuiralpa, Toowong, and South Brisbane to Newstead, New Farm and elsewhere. In politics, perceptions are important, and the perception is growing of a council that is disconnected from, and unresponsive to, its constituents. If the council's excuse is that it is being driven to do unpopular things by acts and forces beyond its control, then it needs to fight back, and in that you will have our strong support. The state minister for town planning must be informed that the BCC is not beholden to him to cram as many apartments as possible into 5km of the CBD, that the Town Planning Act is failing to protect the Council and ratepayers from unwanted developments, and that his department and the Council should work together in supporting exemplar projects for the city. In letters to the Lord Mayor, we have outlined suggestions as to what reforms could be taken. Lets finish with an historic example: Lord Mayor Clem Jones and State minister Llew Edwards working together created Southbank, a cultural and recreational icon that transformed Brisbane from a big country town into a modern city – one that continues to draw admiring tourists from interstate and around the world. I daresay these gentlemen had developers lined up outside their door wanting to build high-rise right to the foreshore.

In closing Lord Mayor, a book I would strongly urge you and your councillors to read a recently released book titled 'Killing Sydney – the Fight for a City's Soul' by Elizabeth Farrelly, an architect and former city councillor, in which she laments the gradual erosion of civic responsibility of councils to preserve what Sydneysiders love most about their city. In contrast to Sydney, the Brisbane City Council has the advantage of being a single governing entity for Greater Brisbane, not a pack of separate tribal councils that can be picked off one by one by developers or state politicians. So use your power to effect change, knowing that you will have the support of many civic-minded people and organisations that also want change in eliminating the constant threat that their street, their village, their community will be next to be slain by profiteers. Don't just take the easy option and roll over. If you do, we run the risk of inner Brisbane becoming an unsightly and unwelcoming conglomerate of mediocre cookie-cutter high rise buildings separated by narrow wind-swept canyons. You

are the protectors of the public good, this is your duty of care to the ratepayers of this city. So don't squib it. Don't let the killing of Brisbane become the lasting legacy of your administration.

I thank the Lord Mayor and the council for their attention.

Then loud applause from the gallery!!