



## Legislative Assembly Hansard (Extract)

### Avalon Police Station (Public Ownership) Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Friday 17 November 2006.

#### Second Reading

**Mr ALEX McTAGGART** (Pittwater) [10.00 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Avalon Police Station (Public Ownership) Bill is a very important bill for the people at the northern end of the Pittwater electorate. For the benefit of the House, I will lay out a little bit of the history of policing on the northern beaches. My first recollection of policing in Pittwater was in the 1960s when I was a young teenager. Sergeant Joe Gardner, the only police officer in the area, lived in Careel Head Road and drank at both the Avalon and Palm Beach Returned Services League clubs—the only two watering holes in the area. Joe knew your dad and your mum, and your uncles and your aunts. If you came to Joe's attention you got a kick up the backside and a very polite discussion with your father, who subsequently gave you a second kick up the backside.

I remember a major altercation at Palm Beach in about 1965 when the surf lifesaving movement tried to ban a surfing contest. There was a riot between several hundred surfers and about 30 unfit Palm Beach Surf Club members, who tried to confiscate surfboards. The result was a standout punch-up and near riotous behaviour. Then Sergeant Gardner arrived. He calmly walked onto the beach. He identified just about every local who was there, and then he told the rest to shove off. That was Pittwater policing in the 1960s. After Sergeant Gardner we had Constable Gale, whose brother was a golf professional. My recollection is that Constable Gale moved into a house in Hudson Parade and hung a blue police shingle out the front, thereby giving us our first official police station.

Somewhere along the line Constable Gale relocated and I remember all we had then was a black-and-yellow striped telephone box style shed out the front of the fire station on Old Barrenjoey Road. From there, the police moved into the current police station in Avalon Parade. I am grateful to Geoff Searl of the Avalon Beach Historical Society, who has provided me with numerous references to policing on the northern beaches from the *Avalon News* dating as far back as 1953. In November that year, under the heading "Snippets" by R. W. Askin, the member for Collaroy, the paper reported:

Police protection does not seem to be all it could be around the Newport-Palm Beach area and I have made representations in the matter. The local men do their best and are all well spoken of, but there are not enough of them.

Then in September 1954, under the heading "Police Station", the *Avalon News* reported:

Residents will be pleased to learn that a policeman is to be stationed at Avalon as soon as accommodation can be found. A vacant house is required. If anyone can help in this respect, please contact the Editor, *Avalon News*.

In February 1956 the paper was again lamenting the fact that a house could not be found, and reported:

Appointment of a police constable at Avalon was made some time ago. Representation has been made by the Avalon Progress Association and Mr R. W. Askin, MLA, to the Commissioner of Police to consider purchasing a house as efforts to rent one have failed.

Three months later, in May 1956, Avalon still had no resident policeman. The *Avalon News*, under the heading "Here and There", reported:

Avalon district has not yet been blessed with the provision of a resident policeman. The district is growing rapidly and surely we must be in line for a police station.

By December that year the Progress Association was writing to the local member, Mr Askin, asking him to "again make strong representation to the police department for police to be stationed at Avalon". The letter says that association members had tried unsuccessfully to find an "empty dwelling" for the officer, and they now believed it was the police department's responsibility to find suitable accommodation. They stressed the need for a resident officer in light of "numerous robberies in the shopping centre". Mr Askin responded by saying that he would "act immediately and take the matter up with the Premier himself". But in February 1957 the issue was still unresolved. The Premier, Mr J. J. Cahill, replied to Mr Askin's representations saying he had arranged for:

... inquiries to be made into the matter and that the Commissioner of Police had reported that for some time past it had been planned to establish a police station at Avalon and that would be done as soon as a suitable residence could be secured.

Mr Askin said at the time he was "dissatisfied with the delay in procuring a residence". He continued:

The fact of the matter was that police supervision for Warringah Shire was not keeping pace with the tremendous population increase and the development which was taking place.

It would appear not much has changed in the past 50 years. In 1996 the then local member, John Brogden, was expressing concerns about declining police numbers on the peninsula. At that time the electorate of Pittwater was serviced by two police stations—Avalon, north of the Bilgola bends, and Mona Vale, which was then known as Pittwater. Ten years ago, the two stations had a staff of 55 officers. In March 1995, in the last days of the Liberal Government, it had 64, but nine were subsequently transferred out of the area. Why we do not know. In 1996 Mona Vale was a 24-hour station operating seven days a week. Avalon also operated seven days a week, although only between 10.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m., and with just one officer on duty—that is, when one from Mona Vale was available.

When Mona Vale could not supply an officer the station was shut, and even when it was open the solitary officer had to sit behind a desk in the station, unable to respond to calls for assistance. That is what is happening now in Mona Vale. It has one single officer on duty, unable to respond to calls for assistance because the officer is on his or her own. Avalon has been closed for about eight years, and Mona Vale is staffed by just one officer. There was a station at Collaroy but that was closed 10 years ago. So the only police presence north of Dee Why is a single officer who cannot leave the station. Policing on the far northern beaches is now done by way of patrol car. That is despite the dramatic increase in population as a result of unit and townhouse developments, plus the Warriewood Valley land release, which has seen nearly 3,000 people move into the area.

It is also worth noting that former police Ministers have never made a case for closing Avalon and selling off the site. They have never explained why we would be better off with the northern beaches command concentrated in Dee Why, which is closer to Parliament House than to Palm Beach. I acknowledge that statistics indicate a low level of major crime in Pittwater. While there has been a 122 per cent spike in the incidence of break and enter to dwellings, and while the increase in malicious damage to property on the northern beaches is 13 per cent, the increase in Pittwater is 35.8 per cent. And there are incomprehensible anomalies in the way resources are allocated. According to the NSW Police web site, Manly Local Area Command, which mirrors the Manly local government area [LGA] with a population of 38,886 and an area of 15 square kilometres, has a police strength of 102.

The Northern Beaches Local Area Command, which includes the LGAs of both Warringah and Pittwater, has a total population of 196,980, with 139,626 in Warringah and 57,354 in Pittwater. The command covers 241 square kilometres—150 in Warringah and 91 in Pittwater—but it has a strength of only 198. So Manly, with a population of fewer than 40,000, has 102 officers and the northern beaches command, which covers an area 16 times greater and a population that is five times the size, has just 198 officers. That does not make sense. Basically, there is no police presence north of Dee Why, yet we have a growing population with either greater population dictated by government in coming years with the Ingleside land release, which will see up to 15,000 new residents in the area. That was announced publicly by the Minister for Planning about a month ago.

Mona Vale police station, which could easily be transformed into a fully staffed, fully functioning police station, lies virtually derelict and abandoned while Avalon is scheduled to be sold off, presumably to developers. That is not what the community of Pittwater wants. It wants and deserves a police presence and a functioning police station in the area. That is why I am introducing this bill: to guarantee that the Avalon police station site remains in public ownership, with its use restricted to policing or emergency service operations. The proposed sale has caused consternation, anger and confusion in the community, and is seen as symbolic of the Government's abandonment of policing at the far northern end of the peninsular. Yet there is an opportunity for a reorganisation of policing on the northern beaches.

As I said, Mona Vale could easily be turned into a fully functional police station. Its land size is currently underutilised. The station accommodates one officer. Part of the site is also used on a part-time basis for tactical response group training and gun handling. It has a large holding yard for vehicles, a forensic investigations facility and storage facilities for the Broken Bay water police who are based at Church Point. Preliminary discussions I held with departmental officers who deal with assets and ministerial advisers indicate that the ample land size would be sufficient to accommodate not only a police station but a multifunctional police precinct to service the northern commands.

Our community is completely opposed to selling off the Avalon police station site. As a north ward councillor in Pittwater, I initiated a rezoning application for the Avalon police station site to have it changed from residential 2A to essential services. That application was then opposed by the police Minister. We need to hold onto the Avalon police station site, not only because we need it to house police but because there is a drastic lack of

government infrastructure north of Newport. The Government owns a significant amount of Crown land on the peninsular but it is all contained in either beach reserve or steep escarpment and is unsuitable for development. Until 2004 the Government owned three assets north of Newport: Avalon fire station, Avalon police station and Avalon ambulance station. I exclude the three schools from this.

In 2004 the Department of Health opted to sell off the ambulance station site for development and use the funds for recurring costs. Now the Government wants to sell off the police station site, which will leave us with just one remaining asset, the fire station site. That means that when a future government needs critical infrastructure for a growing population it will have to purchase land and build, which is much more expensive than retaining and maintaining the existing infrastructure. I might add that land values in Pittwater are extremely high.

The Avalon Police Station (Public Ownership) Bill will ensure that the Avalon police station site remains in public ownership and that use of the site is restricted to police and emergency services. It will prohibit the site from being sold, transferred, leased or otherwise alienated. The bill specifies that any development must only be for the purposes of police services or other emergency services, and will prevent any development from becoming a project to which part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 applies. It also specifies that Pittwater Council is the consent authority in relation to any development of the site. I turn now to the essence of the bill, which states:

### **1 Name of Act**

This Act is the *Avalon Police Station (Public Ownership) Act 2006*.

### **2 Commencement**

This Act commences on the date of assent of this Act.

### **3 Definitions**

(1) In this Act:

***Avalon police station site*** means the land comprising Lot 76, DP 9151 and known as 75 Avalon Parade, Avalon, and includes all buildings and other fixtures situated on that land.

***emergency services organisation*** has the same meaning as in the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* ...

### **4 Objects of Act**

The objects of this Act are:

- (a) to ensure that the Avalon police station remains in public ownership, and
- (b) to limit the use of the site to police and emergency services.

### **5 Avalon police station site not to be sold**

- (1) The sale, transfer, lease or other alienation of the Avalon police station is prohibited.
- (2) However, subsection (1) does not prevent a grant, transfer or sale to a statutory body representing the Crown if the statutory body is subject to the direction and control of a Minister.
- (3) This section applies to any part of the Avalon police station site in the same way as it applies to the whole of the Avalon police station site.

### **6 Development of Avalon police station site restricted to police and emergency services**

- (1) Development of the Avalon police station site may only be carried out for the purposes of police services or emergency services that are provided by an emergency services organisation.
- (2) Any development (such as development for a residential purpose) that is not allowed by this section is prohibited at the Avalon police station site, despite any other Act or any environmental planning instrument.
- (3) The council of the local government area within which the Avalon police station site is situated is the consent authority in relation to the carrying out of development on the site.

### **7 Part 3A of the EP&A Act does not apply in relation to Avalon police station site**

In promoting the issue of increased policing for my electorate, I sympathise with members representing country electorates who have much greater distances to travel. But I reiterate: this metropolitan area is 25 kilometres from the Sydney central business district. The people of Pittwater deserve reasonable access to policing. I urge all honourable members to put aside party differences and support this bill, which has been introduced at the request of the Pittwater community. I commend the bill to the House