

**Submission
No 237**

**INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE
HOUSING**

Name: Ms Lyn Maciver

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The Director
Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Director and Members of the Committee,

I am making this submission on behalf of the residents of Ivanhoe Estate at Macquarie Park in Sydney. Macquarie Park is now deemed, by those who seek to profit by its demolition, to be too valuable as real estate for the housing of people for whom Ivanhoe has been home for more than twenty years in some instances.

Sydney, as playwright David Williamson has described it in his play "Emerald City", is Australia's first and largest capital city, once the birthplace of this Australian colonial nation, but increasingly characterized by material values of the most crass and opportunistic nature.

Sydney has become a place better known for its obsession with property values than its cultural depth. Its "high society" has become an aristocracy of those who can turn a fast buck and for whom the only thing of concern is how to turn anyone and any situation to personal advantage.

Conversation around the dinner tables of the rich and famous is more likely to be about how to turn a sliver of land into an economic bonanza than how to create a caring, decent and democratic society.

I became involved with Ivanhoe and its residents in Easter 2012, as a concerned citizen who lives in the neighbouring suburb of Epping, also a once beautiful and quiet place now also being transformed by the same greed and political expediency masquerading as planning and infrastructure projects and plans for Urban Activation Precincts.

This designation of UAPs all over Sydney has been created by an unholy alliance between ambitious politicians and greedy development interests in all guises, from the real estate sharpies to the legal eagles who draw up the contracts and make it all "legal".

By attending endless Claytons consultations at Ivanhoe and elsewhere, as an Independent Community Observer, I have had the sad experience of observing some of the worst conduct by politicians and bureaucrats that I have ever had the misfortune to experience in my lifetime.

It has been a passing parade of those whose main aim and sole purpose has been the dispossession of the people of Ivanhoe. To say it has been a disgusting experience for me would be an understatement.

I have watched the greatest examples of hypocrisy and sheer lack of care and concern for fellow human beings that I have ever experienced in almost 70 years of life in Sydney, regional NSW, and overseas during a number of my ventures to all continents of our earth, since first venturing forth to India as a nineteen year old university student from Sydney University in 1964.

I have experienced and observed a great deal in my lifetime, as is said "the good, the bad, and the ugly", all of which have been in evidence in my observation of the residents of Ivanhoe, and their ongoing interactions with those who should be demonstrating a duty of care for them, but have demonstrated in most instances the opposite, with few exceptions.

Unfortunately, what I have observed has been the ongoing pretence of community consultation by many of those from NSW Government whose main aim has been to deceive and dupe vulnerable people, many of whom have already experienced ill health, limited access to Education and Health services, dislocation from their homelands due to wars not of their making, generational unemployment and general disadvantage.

In making the following points and the subsequent recommendations, I am attempting in the strongest way possible to highlight the positive aspects of my ongoing association with Ivanhoe and my reasons for stressing in the most sincere way that the Ivanhoe Estate is a unique and valuable community which must be allowed to remain as it is, and where it is, but enhanced by intelligent and creative sustainable improvements to lower maintenance.

Any future efforts by NSW Governments, of any political Party, must be viewed as a cynical exercise in bullying and intimidation of some of the gentlest and most disadvantaged residents in Sydney. The Ivanhoe Estate is special. It is a quiet, caring and co-operative community.

In the past two years, a number of research studies have been conducted by a range of consultants and students of Psychology and Sociology, some hired by Government to support the unsupportable desire to evict and disperse the residents of Ivanhoe to destinations not of their own choice, and, to locations undoubtedly less cohesive and caring than the Ivanhoe community now demonstrates to even a casual observer.

It is not my intention here to present a research project or community consultation. I have read and sat in on a range of meetings over the past two years. Some have been genuine and sincere, but many have been bogus and based on deception and duplicity.

Some meetings have disgusted me so much that I have had to speak out and make my very serious concerns felt. Some have given me hope that democracy and decency will prevail in what has been a very sad and shabby example of the worst that some human beings in power positions can perpetrate on their less powerful fellow human beings.

Fortunately, there have also been examples, mainly from the residents of Ivanhoe, of the best in human nature. I have witnessed, especially in the resident leadership, great examples of extreme self sacrifice and concern for fellow residents.

In some cases this has come at the price of ill health resulting from the prolonged stress this NSW Government initiative has caused to those residents who have taken action on behalf of their community, and especially on behalf of the aged, frail and vulnerable, and those whose first language is not English, and who have been largely unable to understand what has been happening, or the likely consequences for their lives.

The resident leaders, most notably Marie Chase Sillars and Vicki Newstead, have gone above and beyond their unpaid and voluntary capacity, to protect the interests of other residents.

They have been tireless in their efforts, but they are both exhausted by the protracted "consultations" and deliberate efforts by some public servants to do the bidding of their political masters, regardless of the damage this may incur to the health and well being of the residents.

For me, watching all the anxiety and struggle from the sidelines, it has been an experience the like of which I hope I will never have to experience again. To watch one group of politicians and public servants take advantage of another less powerful and vulnerable group of fellow human beings has been very distressing at times.

During my lifetime I have travelled widely, including to many developing countries, where life hangs by a thread for many, and to many countries torn by sectarian violence and conflicts which are the reason many residents of Ivanhoe are living in social housing.

Many residents have escaped conflict in many various forms, be it domestic violence at home, or civil, political and religious conflicts in many other countries from which residents have fled to Australia seeking peace and contentment which many have found at Ivanhoe amongst the trees and caring neighbours.

It is my strong conviction that Ivanhoe provides a sanctuary for many. It is far too valuable to be swept away by the greed and lack of concern of developers and investors acting with the assistance of equally insensitive and mindless politicians and bureaucrats. These same powerbrokers in State Government and elsewhere should, by rights, have a duty of care and moral responsibility for all fellow Australians.

Too many decisions are now based on materialistic, spurious arguments in the interests of those who can turn a fast buck into their own private pockets. Australians have observed in recent times the corruption which has become a sad indictment of political life in the State of New South Wales and in other parts of Australia.

It has to be opposed and it has to stop. Integrity must be the basis for political decisions, not expediency. It is not too fanciful to assume that the same forces are at work behind the scenes in the ongoing drama between the questionable intentions of the NSW State Government and the residents of the Ivanhoe Estate.

It has been one of the most disturbing displays of both covert and overt bullying, surreptitious intimidation and sheer opportunism that I have ever observed in both my private and professional life which has spanned more than half a century. To say that it has made me ashamed of the lack of common decency and integrity on the part of the State Government and its bureaucratic outreach would be an understatement.

I would like to conclude by making the following recommendations for the serious consideration of the Committee

Recommendations

1. That the residents of Ivanhoe Estate be allowed to remain in their existing homes and that any further incursions and interference be ceased immediately so that residents have a chance to rest and recover from the past two years of uncertainty and the various spurious engagements they have been subjected to in the name of "community participation".
2. That all properties on the Ivanhoe Estate are immediately to have all gutterings cleared of leaves and debris for safety and fire protection purposes.
3. That all basic and necessary maintenance be carried out to all units which require the same. Being one's own handyman is not always possible for those who do not have the skills to do so. The fact that residents have been living in limbo for the past two years has not contributed to their sense of ownership or the desire to expend limited financial resources on their home maintenance.
4. That all legitimate concerns of residents be immediately and honestly addressed and that all residents be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.
5. That every effort be made by Government in a public information campaign to change the negative stereotypes and media misrepresentations of those who live in public housing.

For too long those who are the victims of disadvantage and rapid social change have been made to bear the stigma of their unfortunate circumstances.

Sadly, conservative, ignorant and self-serving politicians and complicit sensationalizing media have relied on such stereotypes to justify all sorts of dubious relocations and miscarriage of justice.

6. That political policies be made in the interests of all Australians not just the privileged, especially in the critical areas of universal Education and Health services.

7. That the justification for demolition of Ivanhoe to make way for rapidly constructed high rise development is not in the interests of the residents of Ivanhoe, or the surrounding neighbourhoods of low and medium density homes.

The rapid rezoning for high rise development is clearly in the interests of those whose illegitimate rights to occupy the Macquarie Park precinct are no more valid than the rights of those who are currently resident on the Ivanhoe Estate.

8. That the notion that poorer and less privileged residents are to be consigned to the outer rims of the sprawling megalopolis of Sydney and only the wealthy can remain in the inner and more convenient parts of Sydney is quite simply based on elitist and misguided notions of entitlement.

This is reminiscent of the same misguided notion of entitlement adopted, along with the similarly misguided notion of "terra nullius" by our colonial forebears who dispossessed the indigenous owners of this country. This earlier arrogant and ignorant dispossession of indigenous people here as elsewhere has been reverberating for more than two centuries.

9. That the Ivanhoe Estate provides a unique opportunity for the State Government to build on the existing Estate to enhance and provide an example of best practice public housing by upgrading the existing buildings with solar panels, water tanks, extensions of the existing community gardens on vacant land adjoining the Estate.

10. That a degree of creativity and imagination be applied, without constraints, to allowing for the development of the fuller potential of the Ivanhoe Estate to become an example of an ecologically sustainable village and a bright beacon in a sea of largely ugly and uninspiring high rise development. To apply the term "village" to a 20 storey high rise, as has been done to the proposed development on the Stamford Hotel site, is ludicrous

I could reiterate a number of the statistics from the CRED Report commissioned on the Ivanhoe Estate by the State Government largely to justify the unjustifiable, or the more recent research project by final year Psychology students at Macquarie University which I had the privilege to hear presented by the students at the most recent CRG meeting in the Community Meeting Room at the Ivanhoe Estate on Thursday 20/2/14.

This psychological study which called upon recent and relevant research, and in particular Attachment Theory which states that children form a special relationship with their primary caregivers and is about developing healthy trusting relationships later in life especially when children belong to a safe and supportive community as is the case at the Ivanhoe Estate.

Within such a community, persons feel free to express themselves and feel confident that others accept them as they are. This feeling of place attachment can result in a desire to avoid being separated from the community in which those persons who live there feel safe and supported. Attempts to separate people from their communities can cause feelings of anger, loss, depression and displacement. The relevance of Attachment Theory to the residents of the Ivanhoe Estate and other strongly bonded social housing communities must be taken into consideration in a world where finding a safe and secure place to live is becoming more problematic for many people.

My understanding is that the CRED Report will be included as a submission in its own right, as will the research report of the Psychology students at Macquarie University, so it is not my intention to expand on either of these in my submission. I hope that I have been able to shed some light on the situation at the Ivanhoe Estate as I have experienced and observed it over the past two tumultuous years of potential change and threat to the residents, who deserve to be allowed to remain in their homes with the certainty that these are their homes for life, and they have an unalienable right to be there.

This experience has made me very concerned for the future of my fellow Australians and members of the younger generation of my family and others who will have to live with the disastrous short term and unimaginative thinking of our elected political leaders. Self promotion seems to be the name of the game and it is becoming increasingly obvious to many Australians that many of our leaders are not people of whom we can be proud.

In fact, many of them are not too far distanced from the carpet baggers with bags full of enticements for the naïve and unwary, promising everything and delivering very little. What needs to be realised, however, is that many Australians are now very well educated and much more aware of self-serving liaisons which are not in the ultimate interests of this country, or its multicultural population. We want a country of which we are proud and leaders whose motivation is beyond self.

Many Australians still cling to notions of common decency and a fair go for their neighbours, including the residents of Ivanhoe, disadvantaged as many may be, I have observed the efforts of many at Ivanhoe to care for each other. They actually do try to uphold positive and worthwhile values and practices in their personal and community lives which are life affirming and caring. These are the people to be admired, not those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing, and who would sell their birthright and their neighbours for a mess of potage.

Yours sincerely,

Lyn Maciver

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