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- [LOCAL COUNCIL](#)
OPINION

If you want to govern us, learn to listen

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August 1, 2020 — 8.55pm

To govern well requires unblinkered vision and, perhaps more importantly, the ability to listen.

Last month Randwick Council announced plans to block Coogee Bay Road to install a pop-up entertainment precinct to counter the COVID-19 economic slump.

The proposal, due to go ahead from next Monday, would see the busy beachside thoroughfare transformed into a pedestrian-only zone – like The Corso in Manly.

[Randwick Council has rejected the plan to swap traffic for outdoor dining and entertainment for now. *CREDIT: JANIE BARRETT*]

The idea allowed for outdoor music, dining and consumption of alcohol on the street, temporary lawns, a sand-pit, and a "grass bed" - "great for social media" as council spruiked it to local businesses.

I live on Coogee Bay Road, and like many locals and business people thought this was a bad idea in the midst of a pandemic. One of the few good things about life in coronavirus lockdown has been getting better acquainted with the local small business people on my street: I shop there rather than big supermarkets or malls. None of the local store operators I spoke to thought this was a good idea. At least not right now as we teeter on the crest of a potential second wave of coronavirus.

Creating a “fake” beach next to a real beach was chief among their complaints, along with concern over potential traffic chaos and lack of parking for the elderly who need the services of the village.

Most of my neighbours were opposed to the concept too – fearing it smacked of lobbying by liquor interests, and was simply an opportunity to flog grog outdoors. Encouraging crowds congregating completely flies in the face of state government regulations for social distancing.

This week Randwick Council dropped the idea. The “widespread support” it claimed to have seemed to extend not much beyond the Coogee Bay Hotel. This is a good example of democracy in action; the people have spoken in opposition and the government listens and changes plan.

Like the NSW government’s Powerhouse pivot. Let’s hope the current upper house inquiry into museums and galleries listens to the people of Parramatta in their bid to save the 1886 Italianate villa Willow Grove and St George’s Terrace slated for demolition despite a green ban being placed upon them by the building and construction union, CFMEU NSW.

[The CFMEU says it will put "bodies in front of machinery" to protect the historic Willow Grove. *CREDIT: STEVEN SIEWERT*]

In an interesting twist, the save Willow Grove people have produced their own cloth face masks (protest pivot anyone?)

Will the pleas of the people of the Pymont peninsula be heard in their call for more social housing rather than have their suburb become a "jobs hub" over shadowed by a \$500 million, 51-storey Ritz-Carlton luxury hotel tower at The Star casino as announced by the state government on Friday?

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Perhaps the Berejiklian government listened to their objections as Waverley Council did when locals led a fierce campaign against the redevelopment of the beloved Bondi Pavilion, amid fears parts of it would be privatised. The council was forced to back down on its \$70 million "Bondi Blueprint", the biggest capital expenditure program Bondi had seen since the Pavilion and promenade were built around the 1920s.

We know politicians want to spend on infrastructure to stimulate the economy and create jobs; just as the NSW government built the Sydney Harbour Bridge over the Depression years, and the federal Labor government sunk money into "building the education revolution" which saw us emerge comparatively well from the 2008 global financial crisis.

All levels of government need to be nimble now if they want to get re-elected in this fast changing world we find ourselves in thanks to this virus. But more haste, less speed, I would caution.

Questions remain about the redevelopment plans from \$48 million redevelopment of [North Sydney Olympic Pool](#) to the [24 fast-tracked projects across NSW](#), including six schools and thousands of homes, in a bid to boost the state's economy.

Across NSW development applications are slipping through local councils under the cover of COVID-19. With local newspapers disappearing at an alarming rate, how much scrutiny are these plans getting in their local communities, while our gaze is focused on infection rates and death tolls?

Will our state become littered with white elephants like the Sydney Monorail? Much touted in the early 1980s as a solution to Sydney's CBD transport woes, but labelled "ugly and intrusive", by our lord mayor Clover Moore, before it was torn down in 2013.

Effective local government is key to the success of Sydney.

We don't need more Salim Mehajers, the convicted criminal and Auburn former Deputy-Lord mayor running local councils. We do need more Jack Mundeys – former unionist and conservationist - asking questions. Munday, who died earlier this year saved vast tracts of Sydney from The Rocks to Kelly's Bush at Hunter's Hill, thanks to 54 green bans and standing up to authority.

Over-development and under-regulation are a toxic combination in this city. We need to be vigilant. It's time to voice your protest – like the businesses of Coogee and the people of Parramatta. And fashion your own protest face mask.

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