

# Knox Planning Scheme Amendment C141 - Upper Gully Strategic Plan

Submission to Panel Hearing, Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November - Carolyn Ebdon

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I'm speaking today as President of the Dandenong Ranges Branch of the National Trust and committee member of the Save the Dandenongs League, but my association with the hills began a long time ago. I first moved to Upwey in the 1970s and lived there for 30 years. During the past 10 years I have resided in both Ferntree Gully and Upper Ferntree Gully. I feel I know the area very well, therefore I feel I am also speaking on behalf of the many friends and acquaintances I have in the community who couldn't be here today. During 2014-2015 I attended all the Consultation Workshops for the Upper Gully Plan, which I felt gave people a great opportunity to have input into the future planning of their township. The question of increased height limits in and around the activity centre was discussed and overwhelmingly opposed. Everyone I spoke to at those workshops felt that anything higher than two storeys would be completely inappropriate for the area.

Upper Ferntree Gully, at the foothills of the Dandenongs, has been looked upon as the Gateway to the Hills for more than 100 years. It is my understanding that it is not part of any designated urban growth corridor. I do not understand how 12 metre high buildings can possibly be considered good design or complement the existing neighbourhood character.

The historic Royal Hotel, with its Streamline Moderne style façade attributed to the prolific art deco architect Harry Norris, provides a focal point on the Burwood Highway directly opposite the Railway Station. It is an impressive building in a prominent corner location in the middle of the township. Over the past 125 years it has been part of and contributed to the growth and development of Upper Gully.

From a 2015 Heritage Assessment by Context, the Royal Hotel is protected under Knox's Heritage Overlay. "Its architectural significance is attributed to 1930s period of development. It contributed to the development of the tourism industry in the region from the 1890s to the 1930s."

Remodelled during the 1930s, its modern architectural design, with clean geometric lines, up to the minute styling and elegant interiors would have given the local community a sense of pride and confidence in the progressive nature of their township. This history should be preserved and respected.

The integrity and appeal of the Royal Hotel would be compromised should adjacent properties be developed with conflicting architecture and 12 metre roof heights which would diminish the scale of this imposing building.

Upper Ferntree Gully is the interface where suburban development meets the vegetated hillsides of the Dandenong Ranges.

The Knox Planning Scheme Municipal Strategic Statement describes the eastern side of Knox as forming an important edge to Melbourne's expanding suburbs. It specifically states that maintaining a balance of tree cover and development is a matter of metropolitan significance within this sensitive area. The intent of the Dandenong Foothills local planning policy (Clause 22.01) is to ensure that development within the area is limited and managed so that it complements and respects the landscape features most valued by the wider community and protects the sensitive ecological balance.

Sustainable design, according to the aims listed in the Municipal Strategic Statement, should, among other things, ensure that development maintains the character of the area as a natural bush environment dominated by indigenous vegetation where the treed slopes rise above the suburbs.

Well, it is important to note that if buildings are allowed to be up to 12 metres high along Burwood Highway, the treed slopes and hillsides will completely disappear from view.

The importance of Upper Gully in the history of settlement throughout the Dandenongs is well known and understood. This history should be respected.

Since the opening of the railway line and the Royal Hotel in 1889 Upper Ferntree Gully has provided a stopping place for residents and tourists alike. During bushfire emergencies, Upper Gully has been the gathering place for emergency services to launch their plan of attack, and for residents further up the hill to escape to.

At other times, it is a busy thoroughfare, providing excellent shops and services for the local community. This local community, many of whom attended the Upper Gully Plan workshops, have clearly expressed their opposition to any increase in building heights above two storeys.

I personally am not against development. There are a number of sites in and around Upper Gully that can and should be developed. But let it be done sensitively and in moderation and with respect for the opinions and desires of the people who call Upper Gully their home.