

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 29 April 2009**

During this, its 84th year, Castlecrag Progress Association has continued to “*do everything possible to promote and further the interests...of Castlecrag..., and to conserve the natural and human heritage of Castlecrag for the benefit of future generations*”. (Constitution, cl 1.2).

There have been several Willoughby-wide and State-wide issues impacting on our 1030 households and their 2800 residents, particularly the roll-out of NSW Planning 'Reforms' and the reduction in residents' ability to protect their locality's special features. Council elections in September resulted in Sailors Bay Ward councillors becoming Trevor Morgan, Adrian Cox and John Hooper, while Mayor Pat Reilly was re-elected with a clear mandate. Since then, Councillor Morgan has resigned and a strongly-contested By-Election will be held on Saturday 4 May.

At a local level, community members have generally been fortunate to withstand the worst of world-wide economic recession. Special thanks go to those who have unobtrusively helped neighbours and friends. Thanks also to all who have taken to heart CPA's exhortation to '*Think local; Shop local; Employ local*' and diligently patronised our local shops and businesses through tough trading times. In turn, we thank those businesses who have reciprocated with advertising, and special donations to the much-anticipated Community Fair on 31 May. The Progress Association has supported the establishment of the new Northbridge & Castlecrag Chamber of Commerce, which remains at a fledgling stage. We have worked closely with Northbridge PA in its efforts to prevent over-development of Northbridge Plaza retailing which might attract away from our own shopping area's special ambience. Unfortunately, in my view, the well considered process for exploring options, including much-needed accommodation near shops and transport, has been shelved for the present.

Three General Meetings at the Community Centre enabled residents to congregate and share views on Castlecrag's future directions and meet new friends. The August meeting featured sociologist and author Hugh Mackay who used research for his recent book *Advance Australia ....Where* to highlight local trends. The October meeting hosted Council's Director of Environmental Services Greg Woodhams presenting his assessment of 'Changes to NSW Planning Legislation': even before he presented it to Councillors! This was an opportunity to thank Council's officers for their efforts and to urge even stricter adherence to Council-endorsed planning instruments. The February gathering welcomed rural scientist Bob McKillop who explained the Global Food Crisis as serious 'food for thought' for us all.

These meetings have been concisely reported in *The Crag* along with local news and views. Thank you to all contributors, especially its editors Bob McKillop and Margaret Chambers, and to Robin Phelan for its design, typesetting and printing. The Progress Association continued to cooperate closely with other local community groups, in particular the Conservation Society, the Castlecrag Sustainability Street Group, the Haven Amphitheatre, the Griffin Reserves Advisory Committee and the Walter Burley Griffin Society.

The number of local Development Applications (DAs) remained high despite the economic downturn, with over 80 DAs lodged for Castlecrag sites for the year to May 2009. While many DAs were for refurbishment and/or extensions that maintained proportionality to their surrounds, some proposals have been of such bulk and visual intrusion as to breach planning laws, and adversely affect neighbours and the wider community. In accordance with our DA policy (as published on our website), the CPA commented on approximately 23 per cent of DAs. Representatives of the CPA made presentations at Ward Councillor site meetings and council meetings during the year, but happily the majority of the DAs on which the CPA had concerns have been resolved amicably with owners/developers. Mostly our concerns involved non complying developments, the majority being for excessive height, number of storeys and bulk, view loss, overshadowing and unnecessary loss of mature trees. In particular, excessively large and bulky home unit style developments on adjoining sites in Sugarloaf Crescent threaten to dramatically alter the landscape in this sensitive location. We applaud Council's resolve to fully apply its planning instruments and to accept the legal costs of standing up for the community in this and similar cases.

We encourage residents to comply with the planning laws as far as possible and to be mindful of neighbours and surrounds. Initial discussions with Council, instructing your planner or architect to comply with planning laws and showing initial plans to affected neighbours often achieves the optimum development in the shortest time at the lowest cost. 'Crash through or Crash; strategies by developers are increasingly failing. We owe special thanks for James Fitzpatrick's architectural knowledge and Jill Newton's legal and writing skills, and all the thought and research that they devote as the Progress Association's DA Sub-Committee to finding a constructive response to problems. Their submissions have attracted high commendation from councillors and officers. We hope that they, with assistance from other CPA members with planning and architectural experience, will lead our submission on the new Willoughby Local Environmental Plan (LEP) soon to be placed on public exhibition.

Traffic management, parking and pedestrian safety issues that arose during the year included revisiting the right-hand turn exit from Edinburgh Road, and calls for traffic calming options, as well as the need to secure a

second emergency egress from the eastern end of The Bulwark. Special thanks here to Bob McKillop for his contributions to traffic issues, as well as his work in managing our ever-evolving website: [www.castlecrag.org.au](http://www.castlecrag.org.au)

Wider issues across Willoughby City as a 'city-within-a-city' also impact Castlecrag. The Progress Association has continued to give political and financial support to the Civic Place project and we look forward to its on-time, on-budget completion in 2011. Your Committee enjoys excellent professional relations with Councillors and Council's officers enabling early contribution to Council plans and operations. We particularly thank past and present Ward Councillors for listening to all sides of contentious matters and tackling difficult problems. Our active involvement in the Federation of Willoughby Progress Associations has ensured cross-fertilisation of ideas and a united voice.

At State level, we are concerned that the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment Act 2008 undermines community consultation and participation in the planning process, flouting one of the central objects of the original 1979 Act, viz. '*to provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment*'. Major changes include: (a) establishment of a Planning Assessment Commission instead of the Minister for 'State Significant Projects'; (b) establishment of Joint Regional Planning Panels for residential development over \$50 million, commercial/retail over \$20 million, and major Council DAs, Crown development or private infrastructure over \$5M; and (c) provision for Planning Arbitrators. (The re-allocation of portfolio from Minister Sartor to Minister Kenneally is noted.) These changes may undermine the role of the Land and Environment Court when developers go 'forum shopping. While the Court is open to the public, has clear procedures, inbuilt safeguards and independence, the new 'Exempt' and 'Complying' development processes for single and two-storey dwellings without notification are of major concern for residents in western part of Castlecrag.

**Finances:** For the year ended 31 December 2008, income-minus-expenditure was about \$2200 (up 50%). Total income was about \$9400, nearly half (\$4200) being advertising in *The Crag*, plus \$2300 from the Milston clearing sale (a donation to the Association by the Milston family). It is noted that two outstanding advertising accounts were 'written off' as bad debts during the year. Expenditure was about \$7200, of which 80 percent (\$5700) was printing and delivery costs for *The Crag* (reflecting larger issues and increased materials costs). Our membership increased by some 18 per cent to 127 this year. Now we need each of you to recruit one more member each.

Current (and total) assets are about \$21,500 (up 11%) with about quarter of this being from Community Fairs. Liabilities are negligible. Of course, these dollar figures do not include some 3000 hours donated by our hard-working committee members who contribute their professional knowledge and skills for the benefit of the whole community.

Celebrations are an important part of both family and community living. The original Cabaritia Hospital and the Castlecrag Sports Club both celebrated 80 years of contributions to the community during the year. Our next big event is the biennial Castlecrag Community Fair on 31 May, which promises to be great fun, thanks to our generous local sponsors and the organising team of Simone Selby, John Steel, Lorna Sinac, Kate Westoby and Jill Newton. Farewells are also important: we mourn the passing of Ron Bowra, a high-respected community member and accountant from The Rampart, and Danny Batterham, the noted cameraman and movie photography director, son of Castlecrag stalwarts Joyce and Bob Batterham.

For the next 12 months, it will be more important than ever that Castlecrag be an example of standing united, under the Community Centre's banner '*Together We Grow*'. We eagerly await the launch of a unique Native Plant Brochure for the Community Fair on 31 May, and we will be contributing to the 'Life in the Australian City' exhibition at National Museum of Australia. The Association will also continue to advocate better traffic management plans, improved Council policies on height poles and photo montages, encourage sustainable development, recruit younger residents into community leadership roles, and explore opportunities for betterment and beautification of our suburb in general, and its Edinburgh Road entrance in particular.

I submit this Annual Report for your consideration and feedback, thank my fellow Committee members, and ask that you show your appreciation to all twelve Executive Committee members.

***Bruce Wilson, President, Castlecrag Progress Association Inc., 29 April 2009***