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'A time for renewal'

Interview by Nigel Wall

After more than a year of consideration, Avalon community identity Robert Hopton has committed to running for Council as part of the new Northern Beaches Community Alliance of independents.

Mr Hopton is a 16-year patroling member of Avalon Beach Surf Life Saving Club. Along with two past Presidents – his wife Christine and her successor Richard Cole – he spent six years driving the refurbishment of the Club, in close partnership with members, the community and the Council.

"I am a positive and proactive supporter of the Pittwater community and believe I have the skills to help protect this wonderful part of the world and bring new blood to the Council," he said. "The Northern Beaches Community Alliance provides

an umbrella for like-minded independent candidates to stand under, share ideas, marketing and electoral issues."

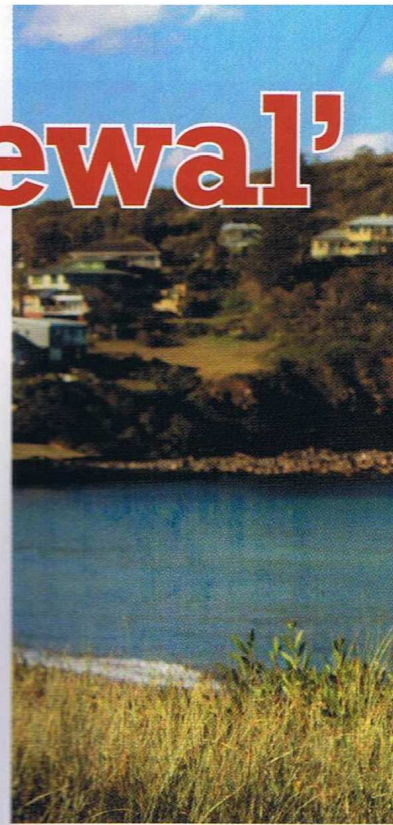
Professionally Mr Hopton has worked in design and architecture for more than 40 years, leading the development of several major projects, including the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Clinic, hospitals, urban planning projects for townships and local neighborhoods plus office buildings and retail projects both in Australia and overseas.

With the Council Election on September 9 fast approaching Mr Hopton spoke to *Pittwater Life* about what the new generation of local independents hoped to achieve if successful...

Pittwater Life: *Why are you standing and what attracts you about the NBCA ticket?*

Robert Hopton: My business experience and community

engagement means I can represent the residents' interests in council, bringing focus, clarity and dedication to ensure that Pittwater is protected and that our aspirations as a community are heard and acted on by the Northern Beaches Council. I believe that it is our responsibility to ensure that when we are finished, we have improved and enhanced our habitat for the next generation. Being a Councillor will provide me a platform to do just this. I had been thinking about running for some time before the amalgamation, sharing my thoughts with several people from different parts of our community to see if they thought that I had something to offer. I was overwhelmed with the positive reaction to my suggestions and I am now stepping up. I have been fortunate to have two mentors in my wife Christine and Alex McTaggart. Alex has



convinced me that there is a need for renewal if the new Council is going to serve the community well. Alex has spent the past 24 years in politics and is concerned that the representation on the new Council

News

McTaggart forges new Alliance

Former Pittwater Mayor Alex McTaggart will stand as an Independent under the 'Northern Beaches Community Alliance' banner in Pittwater Ward at the upcoming Council election, alongside well-known Avalon Beach SLSC identity Robert Hopton.

And former Greens candidate Dr Conny Harris will run as the Alliance candidate in Narrabeen Ward, he said.

Mr McTaggart, who served on Council for 13 years, said original councillors and community representatives who delivered a successful financial and representative council were fading with age

and that it was "time for renewal".

"There is a need to ignite the passion in our younger generation to preserve and enhance our unique natural environment and carry on the aspirations of our predecessors," the 67-year-old said.

"Council is now an \$800 million business - the area takes in three and a half state seats and two federal seats... it's no longer a place for well-intentioned amateurs.

"We need serious candidates, and not individuals using Council as a political step ladder."

Mr McTaggart sees himself as the



link between the past and the future and intends to work to strengthen local community groups to support the new Council in the decision-making process.

"This new council with 270,000 residents is a huge step forward," he said.

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future of the bigger Council?

RH: Staying as Pittwater was not put forward as an option. I voted that the three electorates were split into two, as I thought that the one, large council would create issues at a local level.

As a reminder, the Northern Beaches Council as it stands now has a turnover of over \$800m per annum. It looks after some 270,000 people who generate some \$13.5 billion each year in revenue. This is a large and incredibly important part of the fabric of Sydney and indeed NSW. With only three Councillors representing Pittwater, we must have the ability to shine a spotlight on things that are wrong, to articulate and reason with focus and clarity, and to be able to negotiate with the other councillors. It is imperative that alliances are made and forged, with the three Pittwater Councillors forming an alliance where decisions impact Pittwater. The elected Councillors must have strong connections to Pittwater and be able to bring skill sets to the process, in planning, in community awareness, in business and to help provide surety to the process of local government. Councillors will need to think globally but still respond and act locally.

PL: What's your opinion on the 'Protect Pittwater' push to reverse the amalgamation?

RH: The Protect Pittwater Group is a part of the community that feels disenfranchised and are disillusioned about the process instigated by the State Government. They are concerned that there will be a return to the old Warringah days where Pittwater was largely ignored. Success-

ful Council candidates must be representative of the whole community and ensure that the best of the "old" Pittwater Council policies are carried over and continue to be implemented. We need to ensure that there is continual consultation and communication to all parts of our community to instill confidence in the new council. The Northern Beaches Council is a reality. I don't believe that this will be reversed in the short term. The fact remains that we will have three Councillors to represent the Pittwater [Ward] community, to provide a consistent and clear line of communication between the residents and the Council. These Councillors will need to be able to deal with the other Councillors on the myriad problems and issues that arise in the NBC. Being a single-issue Councillor in my opinion will not provide a full representation for the people of Pittwater. We are concerned about the quality of life, our pristine environment, our rates and services, our youth and the provision of opportunities for employment through the establishment of centres of excellence connected to universities, colleges and businesses.

PL: How important is it that the issues and needs of the former Pittwater Council region are articulated?

RH: There is a real concern amongst the community that Pittwater will slip back in time to when Warringah ruled and we were ignored. Our elected Councillors need to have a strong and articulate voice at the 'boardroom table' to ensure that the community voice is heard and to ensure that there

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may not adequately represent Pittwater should a block from other wards have the power.

PL: If elected, what can the residents of Pittwater expect from you on the NB Council?

RH: I will be the community's voice on all issues. I will vigorously debate, apply rigor to the decision-making processes, look for alternative options to be put forward by the Council and make the Council Staff accountable to their Key Performance Indicators. I will protect and enhance our community and our environment. All volunteer organisations are integral to our community - I will use my best endeavors to ensure that they are fairly and accurately represented where needed. Regarding the Surf Life Saving community, I will fight against any proposal to introduce paid life guard services to

our beaches, which will minimise the opportunities for our volunteers. I will actively lobby with the Northern Beaches Branch to the State Government for funding. I will focus on our youth and endeavour to ensure that we have support structures in place for any of the disaffected. I will endeavour to provide a pathway for start-up incubators as centres of excellence where we can gain employment and experience, without having to commute to other parts of Sydney. I will encourage the arts community, to build on what already is a vibrant and exciting space; and I will provide a sounding board and a way forward for our sporting community, especially where sports such as netball are in dire straits for playing fields.

PL: What's your opinion on the Council amalgamation and the

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Election Countdown

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is a continuity of the best processes and policies from the 'old' council. I will remind the Council that the Council staff are accountable to the elected Councillors and that major decisions that impact on our way of life that have not been ratified cannot/should not proceed. Our community has ownership, albeit for a relatively brief period, and we need to ensure that we don't waste this opportunity to provide surety for our community.

PL: What are your opinions on things like development of more than three storeys in Pittwater, protection of trees, Mona Vale Hospital...

RH: We need to continually enhance our community, to renew and re-invigorate, but this needs to be relevant and within the established and agreed guidelines. If there is a proposal to provide a new urban plan for Mona Vale, you don't put a completed plan on the table that shows parts of Mona Vale having six-storey buildings without consultation. Of course this will create

angst and concern amongst the residents! There is always a need for continual, clear, community consultation... we are the owners. I am firmly against the idea of having the height restrictions lifted to accommodate six storeys. I am firmly for the renewal of our major business hubs in Pittwater ward (Mona Vale, Newport and Avalon Beach) so that they attract and retain businesses,

'With only three Councillors representing Pittwater, we must have the ability to shine a spotlight on things that are wrong.'

people and tourists to share our wonderful place in the world. I believe that the 10/50 ruling on trees should be revisited - too many of our trees are being taken down, destroying the very fabric of our community. The Mona Vale Hospital precinct has been fought over for many years. The Community has exerted pressure over an extended period to ensure that the area will remain as a health precinct, but we need to keep the pressure on to ensure

that it has the facilities that we, the community, need. Long term, it could be connected to a university and develop into a centre of excellence for health and science, whilst continuing to provide outstanding services to the community.

PL: What about the B-Line?

RH: State issues overlap and impact continually on our lives. We need to ensure that we have

of enhanced public transport; I am not in favour of the lack of consultation and the lack of communication by the Minister of Transport and his people. The perception in many cases is because we are a peninsula we are at the "end of the line" and the issues of running bus routes and servicing people does not make any economic sense, therefore it will not be considered. This is not good enough.

PL: What's your parting message to the mums and dads and the 'new' Pittwater residents, as well as the long-term or multi-generational resident?

RH: We should remember that we are blessed to live in such a wonderful part of the world and to enjoy the magical surroundings; look after it and look after yourselves. Especially the young - let them grow strong and free, let them explore the waterways and the National Parks and encourage them to find themselves amongst this magical place. We are a special community in Pittwater; be part of it, give back to it and enjoy your life here.

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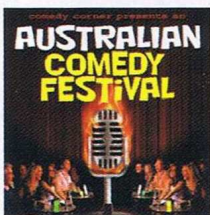
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Biodiversity protection push

Protecting the biodiversity of Pittwater's unique environment will be Northern Beaches Community Alliance candidate Dr Conny Harris' priority should she be elected to Council in Narrabeen Ward.

A former Deputy Mayor of Warringah, Dr Harris (*right*) says she will build on her track record which to date includes convincing Kimbriki Tip into eliminating e-waste from its landfill and her research into roadkill which led to the installation of the wallaby fence along the Wakehurst Parkway.

"It's crucial that inappropriate development proposals be red flagged," she said. "Our environment is under threat. Huge roadworks and high-rise developments are spoiling the Northern Beaches."

Dr Harris said she wanted the region to be more liveable and sustainable, with less car dependence, more accessible

public transport, and a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian network.

In her past Council life Dr Harris chaired many committees, including the Traffic, Narrabeen Lagoon, and Waste committees.

"Experience and knowledge will be invaluable for the transformation period ahead, She told *Pittwater Life*. "Good governance by the first elected council requires strong ties to the community, an ability to listen, an understanding of how to operate local government and independence from developers and political parties.

"Patterns of work, education and even our climate are changing," Dr Harris continued. "This means we will have to adapt and improve the ways we do things too - I am determined to make the Northern Beaches a healthy, sustainable and intelligent community where people and their families can work and enjoy life." - *Lisa Offord*

Continued from page 18

"Pittwater Ward will have three of 15 representatives - we need councillors who can think globally but act locally."

Mr McTaggart was Mayor from 2005 to 2007 and the Independent member for Pittwater in the NSW Parliament from 2005 to 2007 (*photo p18*).

Whilst serving on Council he chaired the Corporate, Legal, Community Services and Natural Environment Portfolios.

He was also the President of SHOROC - the regional group of four councils made up of Manly Pittwater, Warringah and Mosman - driving the transformation of the Kimbriki recycling facility to a community-owned company

allowing it to evolve into a 21st century waste recovery facility.

He said if elected, Alliance members would play an important transition role on the new Council.

"We'll help with the handing over of the 'corporate' knowledge of the local community, the issues and the personalities," he said. "The community position on a particular issue doesn't come out of an IKEA box, it is always generated out of history, participation and exposure. This is the knowledge we can pass on.

"And the 15 councilors as a 'board of directors' will be hard to manage - the sheer size of the budget, land size

and staff will lead to a lessening of community contact... the easy access of the former Pittwater council will be lost."

The Alliance would offer stability and continuity in a bigger Council, he said.

"These two adjoining wards hold the bulk of the environmentally sensitive land and have a common catchment in Narrabeen Lagoon, with all of the environmental and flood issues attached," he said.

"Plus, both wards have relatively low building heights and densities - the previous Councils accepted and supported views. The residents will want to see no change in council policy.

Mr McTaggart said candidates standing along party

lines was an unhelpful and unwelcome addition to the Local Government process.

"Political parties vote in a block on issues - sometimes the vote has nothing to do with the issue and is more about a political position," he said. "Independents bring a different mindset to the table and that should be a good thing.

"If you ask any previous independent councilor they will tell you they came to council because of an issue that affected them and they decided to get on council and right the wrong... this new council will generate plenty of these disaffected residents.

"They start out as single-issue councilors but someone

News



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Greens trio launch bid



Defending Pittwater from over-development whilst fostering sustainable initiatives will be the mission of any Greens candidate successful in the upcoming council election.

Clareville resident Miranda Korzy (*right*) will head their three-candidates ticket for the Pittwater Ward, along with Avalon's Pru Wawn and Mona Vale's Andrew McIntosh.

Ms Korzy, a journalist whose family has lived in Avalon since the 1960s, aims to champion the Pittwater community and environment on the new council.

"We are at a turning point on the Northern Beaches," she said. "Our quiet villages and beautiful bushland are under threat from a huge push for development by the state government.

"We need Pittwater councillors who will stand up for the community to ensure concrete, high-rise and multi-lane roads don't take over."

She said with their tradition of grassroots democracy, the Greens would listen to residents and make sure everyone's voices were heard.

"We will also stand up for our community, our bushland and beaches at state level, so that local planning - whether for homes, hospitals, public transport or roads - is carried out for all of us, rather than in the interests of developers."

An active member of P&C associations at her kids' local schools from 2001 until last year, Ms Korzy is also secretary of the Protect Pittwater Association - set up earlier this year to campaign for the restoration of Pittwater Council.

Party colleague and visual arts teacher Pru Wawn went to Newport Primary School and was in the first year to graduate from Barrenjoey High School.

"I swim at Avalon Beach all year round and love the trees and the bush," she said. "Such a



beautiful place deserves to be protected and that will happen most effectively at a local level.

"I want to support options on council for sustainable living and local community initiatives."

Andrew McIntosh said he was concerned about the impact of climate change locally, adding he would like to use his professional expertise as an accountant to align council policy with sustainable goals.

"Like anyone with young kids, I want to ensure we can hand over this area we're entrusted with to the next generation intact," he said.

"That means we need to use sound financial management to make it happen.

"The Greens will make sure council policy is designed to benefit the community and the environment - rather than developers."

- Lisa Offord

smart enough to get elected soon adapts to the bigger picture.

He said the community held fears about governance under political party lines.

"The Liberals want control to promote their development agenda," he said. "Michael Regan wants to promote his personal political ambitions and the Greens want to promote their NSW political agenda.

"And while the councillors fight over side issues, the staff push through their unelected agenda - that's why you need independents.

"At 67 and with six grandchildren I am not seeking a further life in politics - my mission is to hand on the baton." - Nigel Wall

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