

Dear Friends,

Our December meeting and ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held on Monday, December 1 at 7:00pm at the Writers Centre in Callan Park.

At the end of the meeting there will be some Christmas drinks and a celebration of our 10th birthday – we were formed on December 11, 1998 at a meeting in the same Writers Centre.

The AGM will elect office-bearers and members of the executive. If you would like to be an office bearer (President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer) or be part of the executive, you can nominate by return email or on the night itself.

Hope you can make the meeting,

HALL GREENLAND

President 0408 643 786

PS Can I also give advance notice of the CALLAN PARK TASKFORCE meeting on Wednesday December 10 at 7pm at Leichhardt Town Hall? Leichhardt Council is inviting all those interested in the future of this site to attend.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2008

How we did it – again

WHAT A YEAR. It ended with another victory and many celebrations. Everybody got in on the act. As the old Chinese saying goes: defeat is an orphan, but victory has many parents. In a way that axiom is right: it was the public campaigning that achieved our victory.

Many wiseacres wanted to attribute the defeat of the university plan to the fact that Balmain is a marginal seat. But that's to confuse cause and effect. **Balmain is a marginal seat because of Callan Park.** In the 1998 state election the Labor's primary vote was 54%; in 2003 it was 42%. What happened in the intervening period wasn't some sudden demographic revolution, it was the Callan Park issue. Labor tried to sell off parkland and there was huge campaign against it. An opinion poll in 2002 showed Labor's support down to 31%. Despite Labor's late abandonment of the sell-off, it was not enough to recoup all their lost support. The seat had been made marginal which in turn makes the government more susceptible to public pressure..

Others wanted to attribute the victory to the Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002. But this Act too was another result of that earlier battle. It is a terrific Act and its introduction and passing marked the previous capitulation of the state government. It

was the shoulders we stood on this time round.

Clearly thanks to that earlier campaigning we were always in a better situation this time around. Even the battle fatigue that the government was probably counting on didn't manifest itself. New people came forward and our meetings doubled and trebled in attendance. The executive reached record proportions. The army of letter-boxing volunteers never flagged.

We had the same wider coalition of support as always. The Greens on council and in the Upper House never gave up backing the people. The state Opposition remained solid too. And in our leaflet war with Frank Sartor, Verity Firth and SHFA, our printer **Michael Sherman** was as indispensable as ever. The mainstream media were on side with the government but the local press gave us a fair run and Alan Jones continued to be the scourge of the government on their appalling failures on mental health.

IT WAS CERTAINLY A LONG YEAR. It started in July last year when Frank Sartor announced the Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Sydney to take over Callan Park. We called an immediate (and overflow) public meeting in Balmain Town Hall as there was enough in the MOU to indicate that this proposal would ruin Callan Park and deny it forever for mentally health. This

prompt calling together of the citizenry is a great tradition initiated by the late, great **Nick Origlass** who introduced Open Council to Leichhardt. His shade smiles on all our victories.

The meeting overwhelmingly rejected the MOU (despite Verity Firth's spirited support for the Sartor scheme at the meeting) and battle was joined.

THEN CAME THE LONG NIGHTS of the official "community consultation" which the Friends joined in – not because we were silly enough to believe it was fair dinkum, but so that we could open up the whole bodgie process to the public and learn more of the government's and university's intentions. *During these difficult meetings we received huge support from Councillors Rochelle Porteous and Michele McKenzie – such support from elected representatives is always heartening and reassuring.*

This "consultation" was followed by the public exhibition of the Land Use Plan over summer. With the Council majority wobbling, the Friends took over the major role in letting people know what was going on and how to make a submission. **Sartor, Firth and SHFA spent tens of thousands of dollars public money** to advance a cause that had little or no public support (a Leichhardt Council commission survey put support at 6%!) As usual the Friends were able to meet this propaganda offensive thanks to a generous and reliable flow of donations.

When the public exhibition period closed on February 22, **over 3000 people had objected** to the Land Use Plan.

AS USUAL THE GOVERNMENT TRIED to give the impression of a "done deal" to dishearten the public. Sadly this involved closing Rozelle Psychiatric Hospital in April. The response of the Friends and the community was strong with **two public protest meetings in April** indicating the public's continuing support for the hospital at Callan Park.

Then there came a long silence. The Department of Planning's report on the Land Use Plan has never seen the light of day. One of the local papers said its evaluation was "dire" which may explain its non-appearance. Meanwhile the Friends kept up their stalls, their leafleting and held the successful Teddy Bears' Picnic.

Council wobbles

We had one rearguard battle to fight too – one that ran over three monthly Council meetings

from May to July. The then mayor, deputy mayor and key staff at Council brokered a deal with the university over the use of sporting fields at Callan Park. But for the Friends intervention this deal would have been signed. We made it quite clear that it would be an election issue in September if the deal was signed. In the end, the Councillors voted overwhelmingly to reject the deal with only the mayor and deputy still mumbling their support. *Wavering Councillors would have noted two things during this side battle. First was the increasing numbers of Friends who came to Council meetings. Second was the vocal and strong support we received from residents in the gallery who had come to the meeting on other issues.*

The government gives way

THESE LOCAL DIFFICULTIES for the government were compounded by its internal battles over power privatisation. When the dust settled on that, we had a new premier in **Nathan Rees** who promised a more responsive government.

The first fruit of this was the Callan Park reversal. Verity Firth says that when the new Premier told Cabinet of his new "listening" approach, she immediately raised Callan Park and Rees agreed to the backdown and the handover to Leichhardt Council of the bulk of the site. Before he did, he visited the Sackville Hotel for the great debate with **Barry O'Farrell**. There he could not help but hear how strong the local feeling was on Callan Park. Pressure was also piled on by the Greens introduction of the Callan Park Trust Bill which was on the verge of being passed in the Upper House with Opposition support.

And now?

And so we now go forward without ruinous threats hanging over Callan Park. Sure there are problems of money for upkeep and improvements. The Health Department could ruin the Broughton Hall precinct without Council and public intervention. There is also a queue of opportunists knocking on the gates.

AND THERE REMAINS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM OF ALL: the government still resists returning Rozelle hospital to the site despite an admission by the new premier that the government "has dropped the ball on mental health". **With the Council just about to embark on the first-ever genuine planning exercise for Callan Park, we need to remember that.** - *Hall Greenland*