



16 August 2024

## Ku-ring-gai Council Election 2024 – Candidate Questions

Please return your answers to [info@foke.org.au](mailto:info@foke.org.au) by 5.00pm on FRIDAY 23 AUGUST 2024.

**Candidates Full Name:** Matthew Devlin (“Matt Devlin” as per the ballot), and Beth Scott.

**Ward Standing for:** Comenarra Ward.

**Authorised Campaign Address:** M.Devlin, Pymble Place, 25 Ryde Road, Pymble NSW, 2073.

**Email:** [matt@kuringgai.vote](mailto:matt@kuringgai.vote) **Mobile:** +61 402 998 290

**Website:** <https://kuringgai.vote> **Facebook:**

**Qualifications:** B.Com (Acct & Fin) **Day job:** Project Manager

(I work for a private company that is contracted to the NSW department of Education for the delivery of new and expansion of existing public schools across NSW).

Are you a member of a political party? **YES/NO**

If **YES**, specify:

I have never been a member of any political party

Community/ lobby/ sporting group membership? **YES/NO**

If **YES**, specify:

It was difficult to select yes for this question, as I believe that the question is aimed to determine the likelihood of a candidate to be susceptible to lobbying or to covertly lobby on self-interest if elected. The answer to this is no.

For the record, I am a proud member of the NSW Rural Fire Service, having served the last two years as Deputy Captain of the Ku-ring-gai Brigade. I am also the Deputy Chair of the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai Rural Fire Service Association, having served three-years as the Chair, advocating for improved training, equipment and health protections for firefighters across NSW. Beyond this, I am a member of the West Pymble Bicentennial Club and Turramurra Bowling Club, having served for three-years as a Director of the latter but have stepped away from the Board before contesting this election. Other groups, boards & committees that I volunteer on are all outside KMC and not for profit groups.

Have you endorsed Save Greater Sydney Coalition’s election planning principles? **YES/NO**

I have read the SGSC submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Development of the Transport Oriented Development Program, and support much of the content aimed at achieving change and a rethink to the State Government’s TOD. As is stands, TOD is disastrous and a revised SEPP and LEP should be the purview of KMC and strike a better balance between progress and preservation. We cannot risk damaging the rich natural environment and built heritage of Ku-ring-gai. As for SGSC’s planning principles, I’ve not successfully sourced them anywhere, so I cannot make an emphatic determination.

2016 NATIONAL TRUST HERITAGE AWARDS HIGHLY COMMENDED

2009 NATIONAL TRUST HERITAGE AWARDS HIGHLY COMMENDED

2008 NSW GOVERNMENT HERITAGE VOLUNTEERS AWARD

2000 FOKE, WINNER, NSW HERITAGE OFFICE CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION AWARD

“HERITAGE WATCH OVER OUR PLACE OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE –KU-RING-GAI”

KEEP AUSTRALIA BEAUTIFUL COUNCIL (NSW) METRO PRIDE AWARDS.

Have you signed the YIMBY election pledge? ~~YES/NO~~

Look, I must confess, maybe I'm living under a rock, but I hadn't heard of the 'YIMBY election pledge', must less signed it, until now. I have since looked into it and was disappointed to learn that a fellow Comenarra candidate has signed on. The 'housing crisis' and planning legislation more broadly, is way too complex to be addressed by a simple four-sentence pledge of motherhood statements. Signing on to that pledge is simple dog-whistle politics at its finest. Elements of the broader intent of the pledge do have some merit, but the solution is not simple, there must be balance, Ku-ring-gai cannot stand as an island – free from population growth. That said, the size of that growth and any solution to underpin that growth, needs to be a vision of the future that local residents' want – not what Macquarie Street wants to impose upon us. I shan't be signing the YIMBY pledge.

Do you believe dwelling supply alone will solve the housing shortage and affordability? ~~YES/NO~~

Further to the above, there is no silver-bullet to solve this one. Its as basic as economics gets – 'supply & demand'. Any outcome to address the housing shortage and to improve affordability needs decision-makers to pull on a number of levers.

Do you support Ku-ring-gai Council's legal action against the NSW Government's Transport Orientated Development (TOD) SEPP? **Why or why not?**

Yes, I support the current action to challenge the TOD in court, as the policy imposes a huge influx in housing stock but does nothing to address any local infrastructure issues. The policy is an example of 'governing by press conference' rather than any considered community consultation and local planning. I look forward to seeing how the mediation process goes before any court proceedings.

Do you support making a new place based LEP to mitigate the adverse impacts of the TOD and Low to Mid-Rise Housing SEPP on Ku-ring-gai? ~~YES/NO~~

Yes, it's a no-brainer, and the founding principle of the LEP is in the name – "Local". These instruments should always remain localised and 'place-based'.

Do you support maintaining public Council land for community use? ~~YES/NO~~

Yes, Crown land should remain in Council hands, be managed and maintained for community use. There should also be a balance between conservation and use. Crown land and other land vested in Council should not be hived-off for development or private use.

Do you support listing Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion as a UNESCO GeoRegion? ~~YES/NO~~

Yes, I support these ongoing efforts. I was pleased when the environmental levy grant funding was allocated to support FOKE's project for the development of the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion. If elected, I would promote this project.

Do you support the protection of Ku-ring-gai's Heritage Conservation Areas? ~~YES/NO~~

Yes, I support Ku-ring-gai's HCAs.

Do you support the establishment of a Ku-ring-gai Council Environmental Advisory Group?  
~~YES/NO~~

This is an interesting one. The Council has already established the Sustainable Recreation Advisory Group, which in part focuses on environmental issues, but with the narrow scope to address recreation areas. So, it might worthwhile considering either a revised scope and name of this advisory group to enable it to provide advice on all environmental issues more broadly, or to simply just establish a standalone environmental advisory group. So, after the long way around, yes. I am in favour of an advisory group on the environment, be that either a new group or the repurposing an existing to be more inclusive.

Do you support natural turf on Ku-ring-gai's sports and playing fields; or the installation of artificial turf? ~~NATURAL/ARTIFICIAL TURF~~

I have always been fortunate enough to be able to play and work on well designed and maintained playing fields. The community should have access to high quality recreation facilities for mixed and organised use. To mitigate down time due to weather, the most cost-effective approach has been to invest in synthetic surfaces. However, the jury is still out on the long-term impact of such projects. The alternate options are to have heavily worn-out natural surfaces that risk injury in wet conditions, and thus result in weeks of closures after heavy rains; or, for Council to invest significant public funds into to better drainage and irrigation design. This coupled with intense maintenance would provide top rate facilities, and better environmental outcomes than synthetic turf, but come at a higher cost to ratepayers. Therefore, it is a difficult decision that needs to consider many factors and best information at hand to manage the best outcome for the residents and our environment. At present, I believe the current artificial surfaces (those already in commission or under construction) will provide for the immediate demands within the municipality, and therefore I don't envisage a need for any further synthetic surfaces at this time.

### **Expanded Questions:**

*Please keep each answer less than 200 words (longer answers may be cut).*

1. What motivated you to run for office at the Ku-ring-gai local government elections?

I have always been community-oriented, from my involvement in local organisations and boards through to my membership of the Ku-ring-gai Bush Fire Brigade (NSW Rural Fire Service). So, community service is nothing new to me. It is a proud tradition that has been instilled in me by my family, helping others through service. I have a desire to serve and if elected, I believe I'm well placed to make a difference and bring meaningful change. Local government should improve the lives of those who live and work within the area, rather than merely serve the ego of 'yesterday's heroes'. Comenarra Ward needs fresh representation for the here and now! Representatives who understand the challenges that are going to define our lifestyle in the short-term, and the long-term liveability of the whole area. As a concerned citizen, I have been a regular attendee to Ku-ring-gai's monthly Public Fora and Council Meetings. The conduct of some long-serving councillors has been abhorrent witness. I decided that I would contest this election in order to precipitate their early retirement, in the hope of reinvigorating an era of positive, mature and collaborative decision-making to ensure better and more transparent governance in Ku-ring-gai.

2. What is your vision for Ku-ring-gai?

Comenarra Ward, and Ku-ring-gai more broadly, is the epitome of what we fondly refer to as the leafy North Shore. Council should ensure that this never changes. Ku-ring-gai is surrounded by one of the largest areas of urban bushland in Sydney, it's one of the many features that makes Ku-ring-gai the envy of the rest of Sydney. So, any vision for the future of the area must preserve this natural beauty and rich environment. Likewise, we have a marvellous built heritage that should also be protected from the wrecking ball. That said, we cannot stick our heads in the sand and ignore population growth. My vision is protect what we have long fought for by implementing sensible and sustainable planning controls. We're also a vibrant community, but that doesn't just happen by itself. Council has a vital role to play in supporting local business, cultural hubs, community and sporting groups. Local government is 'not the community', some confuse this with the Council's 'responsibility to support' local communities. My vision is for Ku-ring-gai Council to comprehensively support and provide an enormous range services, whilst responsibly managing ratepayers funds, and residents' infrastructure and public assets.

3. What life experiences and professional experiences do you bring that will serve in your role as a councillor?

Professionally, I have a background and qualifications in accounting and finance before he further specialising in supply chain logistics and project management. Starting out in corporate finance at a top-tier multinational advisory firm. After brief sojourn playing out my passion for agriculture and regional Australia, I then moved into commercial & industrial property and asset management for an ASX listed global leader in supply chain logistics.

From these career opportunities and lived experience, I have gained a great deal of expertise in managing complicated financial matters and overseen the delivery of high-quality, sustainable infrastructure. More recently and by way of satisfying my passion for education & public infrastructure, these days I work with my team to deliver new and expanded public schools for the Department of Education. This has provided me with further experience and knowledge of public sector funding as well as addressing the needs and concerns of multiple community stakeholders.

Beyond this, I have spent over a decade on the boards and management committees of several not-for-profits, ranging from local Clubs to registered charities. I've coached and administered rugby & rowing clubs, served as an active member of the NSW Rural Fire Service and chaired the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai RFSA advocating for the health & safety of our volunteer members. I have served as Deputy Captain of my fire brigade, and have previously been a member of Marine Rescue NSW. So, all in all, I think that I've had a pretty active insight into community life, and stand well qualified to represent and advocate for the community as Councillor and conduct the business of local government.

(This is 266 words. Sorry, I tried!).

4. What do you see as the key issues facing Ku-ring-gai?

Well, whilst I have a list, it is more important to ensure that any discussion of the issues facing Ku-ring-gai includes community views and feedback. Time and time again, residents and local businesses have wanted to discuss their concerns on TOD (notably ugly & forced development), as well as the protection of our rich & beautiful natural environment and the preservation of the immense built heritage of Ku-ring-gai. Many residents have expressed their concern about the availability recreational space and associated facilities, how their funded and maintained, as well as Council's investment in cultural centres and ventures from libraries to the arts. These are all issues where I share the community's concerns.

5. How do you propose to address those issues if elected?

Therefore, based on the above, I believe that it is vital for the next Council to act swiftly to address these issues. I would like to be a part of a proactive approach to supporting our local cultural endeavours, nurturing our youth in their social and sporting activities, and to fight hard for sensible planning that ensures the rich fabric of our Ku-ring-gai is safeguarded for generations to come. We can and should do something about social and affordable housing and to accommodate for those who want to downsize and remain locally. However, the answer certainly doesn't fall within the current intent of the 'one size fits all wrecking ball'. We need to do our part as the population increases here and elsewhere (we cannot simply just push the problem somewhere else), whilst retaining our currently way of life

6. How will you ensure community engagement, and participation?

Firstly, I intend to remain engaged through active participation across the community. The best way to have one's finger on the pulse, is to be out and about, bumping elbows with people, talking with residents to learn about and understand what is important to them – and advocating for that at Council. This is one of the most fundamental principles of community representation. In the coming days, I will be adding an additional page to my website that lists all the things that have been requested of me. This list will remain on website following the election, and will be continually updated throughout the next term. It will serve as a form of public disclosure, as well as providing an opportunity to for the community to hold me to account by seeing what I have delivered upon, and what Council is yet to adopt.

7. What do you consider are key issues in your Ward?

Much like my earlier response, as a Comenarra resident I certainly have views on key issues in this Ward, I have been buoyed by the fact that many residents and local businesses have also expressed similar concerns. These have ranged from residents seeking advice around footpaths and a connected community (Comenarra deserves its fair share of funding), thought to the bushfire risk that exists along our expansive urban interface with the Lane Cove National Park. It is great to see that there is such a broad understanding around the planning ramifications of recent changes by the NSW Government, and residents have been expressing interest on how this might impact them, from those in the impact zone around the rail corridor through to dual occupancies further afield (which is much more applicable to the Comenarra Ward). There are local traffic issues around known bottlenecks such as the Canon Road Recreation Area that need to be addressed for both immediate residents and community users. There is no silver-bullet, but striking the right balance on all these local issues is important to a happy and vibrant community.

8. Are there any additional comments you wish to add?

As an engaged citizen, I have been a regular attendee to the public gallery at Ku-ring-gai's monthly Public Forum and Council Meeting. By my account and those of others, the conduct of some long-serving Councillors has been abhorrent to witness, and an embarrassment to us all. This is unacceptable, we must not tolerate this poor behaviour from 'yesterday's heroes' any longer. I decided to contest this election in the hope of reinvigorating an era of positive, mature and collaborative decision-making to ensure better and more transparent governance in Ku-ring-gai.

I believe that our Councillors should always be responsive, accessible and accountable to residents. I will stand ready to assist residents and advocate for community groups and local businesses in their dealings with Council. Comenarra Ward should no longer remain the forgotten Ward of Ku-ring-gai, we need representation for the here and now. If Comenarra Ward is to elect me in September, I will leave no stone unturned in my endeavours to support, advocate, and deliver for our community. I won't play games, and you'll always know what I'm thinking and where I stand.

**Candidate's Name:** Matt Devlin

**Signature:** *Matt Devlin*

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> August 2024

Thankyou for your time in answering the questions. Candidate answers will be published on FOKE's website, Enews and sent to members and supporters/resident's lists.

Please attach your election **photo**.

Authorised by Kathy Cowley, President, Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment Inc. (FOKE) M: 0431 158 880