

Council's Special Application Form – Part B, page 57 - states that "a full copy of each submission is provided under attachment 20". However, there is no attachment 20 and I thus feel obliged to attach my submission for IPART to view. I have also made comments in red, highlighting Council's responses to my submission (or, as is often the case, Council's lack of response), to assist IPART as it determines Holroyd Council's application for a Special Rate Variation (SRV).

Of course, IPART will also see that Holroyd Council suddenly changed the amount of the rate variation that had been exhibited for over the past 7 months during its supposed "extensive community engagement process", refer Pages 5 and 32 of the Application Form – Part B. At its meeting, 18/2/14, Council resolved to nominate Option 2 (9% increase for 4 years and 8% for 1 year – which has been on exhibition for 7 months), even referencing 9% in its Business Paper CCL013-14, 18/2/14, page 189. Yet 6 days later, 24/2/14, Council lodges a revised required rate increase percentage and applies for an altered SRV (8% increase for 3 years and 7% for 2 years). Shouldn't ratepayers (and IPART) be concerned that Council's Long Term Financial Plan seems to have been reviewed and changed in less than a week; particularly when Council has been proudly saying that their asset and infrastructure review led to a review of their Long Term Financial Plan, which in turn resulted in the 3 long term sustainability options on display - which has been on exhibition for over 7 months.

I stumbled across this changed rate variation 28/2/14 through IPART's website and raised the matter in Council Chambers 4/3/14, through Council's Public Forum. It would seem Council's IPART SRV application was subsequently added to Council's web page 6/3/14

Also, please note Council often makes reference to attachments in the text of their Application Form Part B, and even in their 'Engagement Summary Report' but the references are sometimes incorrect, or the attachments have not even been uploaded as supporting documents to the application. (I think this further supports ratepayer concerns regarding Council properly managing our millions of ratepayer dollars, services and infrastructure).

Also, on Page 4 of the Special Variation Application Form – Part B – it seems to be inferred that 64.2% of the Holroyd community support a rate rise that maintains services and facilities (Option 2). However, this statement is misleading - please note this percentage only relates to the 2017 people that responded to the postcard survey that was sent to the 36,000 households in Holroyd, refer page 65 of the Special Variation Application Form – Part B. (And even then this figure does not match the 59.8% figure that is listed for this postcard in the Council Business Paper CCL013-14, page 189. So I am not sure which figure is correct - 64.2% or 59.8%).

Likewise Page 71 of the Application Form Part B states that "Sections 4.4 and 4.5 of this submission set out how the engagement process undertaken with the community provided the factual evidence that a vast majority, some two thirds, of the community support the proposed rate increase". And on page 70 of the Application Form Part B, Council re-iterates: "The survey results from Council's community consultation gave clear indication that the community would accept the Special Rate Variation ..... Some 64.2% of residents surveyed indicated they would be willing pay more, and hence found the (Option 2) increase as reasonable". This is gross misrepresentation of statistics – as highlighted above, these percentages do not relate to the 36,000 households of Holroyd.

The measure that Council takes as the "best chance for an unbiased representation of the community's response" is the two x 400 person phone surveys – refer page 65 of the Application Form Part B. But this could never have included me, as the sample respondents were taken from the electronic white pages – I have a silent number.

This leads to my major concern regarding Council's whole stance pertaining to the community engagement and response / feedback process for the SRV. I attend most Council Meetings, read their Business Papers and associated pertinent information. I submitted a 14 page submission, and am even taking the time to contact IPART. But I have chosen not to respond to the 3 options presented by Council. Logically there may need to be a rate rise to keep pace with inflation, but there is an alternative 2-pronged option that Council should consider:

- cost analysis (Council examining their plans and strategies)
- cost cutting / cost containment

I even spoke at the Resident Meeting 28/11/13, stating that "the current search for funding and rate variations begs the question of cost cutting and cost analysis which Council does not want to seem to consider".

I think few ratepayers would disagree with one of the comments from the phone survey regarding Option 2: "Community is struggling with the increased cost of living as it is however we need our services and facilities to be maintained, therefore this is the most realistic and affordable option of the three". (Refer page 51 of the Special Variation Application Form – Part B).

This comment actually reflects what I am saying – that there were only 3 options. (And if asked over the phone to pick one option, and one only, the outcome is likely to be rather obvious, as Council found – few ratepayers would want to agree to infrastructure and services regressing – that is really non-negotiable, as quoted in one of the Option 2 Verbatim comments, page 50 of the Application Form Part B: "The community cannot afford to go backwards but also cannot afford a huge rate increase". However, had there been another option regarding how Council spends our rates, Council would likely have had very different responses.

I believe this notion for an alternative option is further reflected when it is considered that only 2896 responded to the surveys (refer page 187 Business Paper CCL013-14,) along with a few letters and emails lodged, out of 36,000 households. This surely indicates that ratepayers did not value the 3 options tabled, and did not deem them worthy of a response, like myself. And Submission 2, refer page 58 of the Special Variation Application Form – Part B – reinforces the anachronism of the 3 options, referring to all 3 options – and inferring there needs to be an alternate response to our funding shortfall.

Many ratepayers, such as myself, have not responded to the 3 options, as an alternate 'cost cutting, efficiency and analysis' option should have been tabled. And this focus is even reflected in a statement written on an OPTION 3 card – refer page 46 of the Application Form Part B: "Note: while I have numbered as above, there is a better way. Be more innovative, involve the community, and take part in an asset based model to planning and community development. You can achieve all the above with little or no rate increase". (Obviously this ratepayer felt obliged to pick one of the options on offer but actually said there is a better way).

I quote further from the Verbatim Comments illustrated on page 45 and page 53 of the Application Form Part B. These are comments written over the Survey Postcards or attached in separate letters and clearly flag the desire for a cost-cutting / efficiency option:

"You need to encourage your workforce to be more efficient"

"More focussed effort on efficiency"

"Heavily overstaffed"

"Maybe Council could look at some cost cutting measures"

"Council needs to be more efficient with how funds are spent"

Comments listed in the Application Form Part B (page 55) also reinforce ratepayer concerns with Council's services and infrastructure delivery:

"The Council appears to have funded growth for the sake of growth. 15 function halls, 11 meeting rooms, they don't make a profit. Perhaps look at getting rid of some of that infrastructure".

"A lot of services I don't agree with"

"I would like to see a full list of services that council provides so that the community can have a proper analysis of the funds. Services council is providing should not be in competition to the local businesses in the area – for example – child care facilities"

I firmly believe ratepayers would like to see Council expenses and costs in check before rate increases / reductions in services and infrastructure have to be considered. I also firmly believe ratepayers want a careful and thorough assessment of the nature of Council's service and infrastructure provision.

My submission incorporates this perspective and I enclose it as a separate attachment, for your perusal, particularly as Council has omitted to forward it to IPART, despite advising to the contrary.

On a final note, I have referenced in my submission attached, Council's apparent reluctance to encourage or seek real community engagement, and its associated unwillingness / inability to **listen** to its community. And I would like to refer (for IPART's consideration) to part of my 2013 submission regarding *The Draft 2013-2017 Living Holroyd Delivery Program (incorporating the Draft 2013/2014 Operational Plan and all other related documents* that also referenced Council's (lack of) engagement with the community. I commented how one Councillor had recently asked me to cease sending any emails to her, as she will not respond, as I apparently made her "look bad" when she was Mayor. When I queried this Councillor attitude with the current Mayor, he merely commented in one line, suggesting I "take her advice". These responses do not seem to be considered, thoughtful or even respectful – and are not what the community (or IPART) should expect from a Council supposedly willing to engage its residents and ratepayers in meaningful discourse. (And the Division of Local Government's Promoting Better Practice Review Report – Page 17 – even states "The Council needs to provide evidence that it has engaged the community in relation to agreed service levels, and ensure this is reflected in the Council's planning").

I hereby enclose my submission highlighting various concerns re Council's Draft 2013-2017 Delivery Program (incorporating the Draft 2014/2015 Operational Plan) and all other related documents – which includes three alternate funding options, two of which include a Special Rate Variation (SRV).

I have already asked questions of Council Officers re the 3 options and I have been advised by Lisa Oldridge, Manager Corporate Strategy and Engagement, that the matters I have raised will be taken into consideration by Council in making their decision on whether to seek a Special Rate Variation as part of the 2014/2015 Budget. However, I still thought I should correlate my comments into one document and lodge a formal submission. (I gather Council is supposed to include all submissions in its application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), illustrating community feedback).

I thus summarise issues / concerns that I believe should be considered / addressed:

### **A) Impact on ratepayers**

Holroyd has lower income levels and higher unemployment rates compared to Greater Sydney. Can ratepayers afford annual rate hikes of 9% - cumulative percentage increase of 42-49% in 6 years? (Some of the community do not even benefit from yearly CPI rises through their paid employment).  
**Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 198: "Noted for Council's consideration".**

**Council response in the Special Variation (SV) Application Form – Part B Page 67: In concluding that the Holroyd community has the capacity to pay the proposed rate increase, Council compares Holroyd to Bankstown, Auburn and Blacktown. This is a little incongruous (and misleading) when it is considered that these 3 areas are designated by the Department of Employment and the Department of Human Services as needing special program deliveries, due to the higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage of these areas.**

### **B) Need for the variation**

i) Various items were discussed in Closed Council 17/12/13, the very night that Council resolved to place the Draft Delivery Program and associated Special Rate Variation on exhibition. These items in Closed Council could perhaps help solve Council's funding gap of \$97.1 million over the next 10 years, and thus help alleviate the need for Council to reduce services and infrastructure or seek a Special Rate Variation.

Yet these items have not been mentioned during the community engagement regarding the Special Rate Variation and so I wanted to flag this to Council and the community in Public Forum 4/2/14.

However, I was not allowed to raise these issues – I was forbidden to speak by the Mayor.

Issues regarding the Rate Variation I wanted to raise:

- The McFarlane Street Car Park

I would imagine this is a piece of prime real estate and depending what happens to it, it could help solve Council's funding shortfall and there be no need for a Special Rate Variation. But this has never been mentioned in the Rate Variation arena.

I thus now ask can Council please advise (as I was not allowed to ask in Public Forum):

- 1) what was in the report accepted by Council 17/12/13
- 2) what is happening to the car park
- 3) how it will affect Council's income and financial capacity, particularly as Council seems to be categorically seeking a rate variation?

- Lot 1 DP 242004

It seems that this is another area of land to be sold.

So I also ask can Council please advise (as I was not allowed to ask in Public Forum):

- 1) what is this block of land?
- 2) how will this sale impact our Council coffers and the need for a Rate Variation?

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 198 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: "These matters are considered in Closed Council in accordance with State legislation and the Code of Meeting Practice".

As ever, Council gives no real response, stating simply, as it has before, that these matters need to be discussed in Closed Council, even though some of its own Councillors have queried why certain matters are buried in Closed Council.

Council response in the SV Application Form – Part B Page 80: Council states "Council has already commenced a number of major initiatives aimed at increasing revenues and decreasing costs. These include: Marketing the sale / development of a major piece of Council land in the Merrylands CBD, the proceeds of which will be used to acquire income generating property assets".

It is interesting that I am able to read this, buried in the SV Application Form submitted to IPART 28/2/14 but Council cannot provide this detail to its ratepayers. (I 'assume' this major piece of Council land relates to the McFarlane Street Car Park).

I again ask if this has been factored into the Long Term Financial Plan of Council, on which the need for an SRV is based, particularly as I read on Page 77 of the SV Application Form – Part B – that "There are no major asset sales or change in management of significant assets that is forecast in this (Long Term Financial) plan". (This statement on Page 77 does not seem to be an accurate statement, referencing what is stated on page 80 of the Part B Form, refer above, regarding the McFarlane Street Car Park).

- Council-owned Walpole Street premises

Expressions of Interest pertaining to the Council-owned Walpole Street building were also discussed in Closed Council 17/12/13.

Surprisingly, details of the 4 tenders were itemised in an article in the Sunday Telegraph, 22/12/13 and made reference to the Mayor's son now being the preferred tenderer, even though his offer was not the highest. This obviously begs questions regarding Council confidentiality / privacy, and also correct process and procedure.

I gather this tender will also increase Council revenue but again the impact has not been flagged (to my knowledge) in the Draft Delivery Program.

Concern not addressed – I again ask if this is factored into the Long Term Financial Plan of Council, on which the need for an SRV is based.

ii) And now two days before submissions regarding the Draft Delivery Program close, I read the Mayor's media release in the local paper (the Advertiser), where it states that if Wentworthville swim centre is closed, the site will remain community land. But this is apparently not necessarily the case for the Guildford swim centre site. So I now feel obliged to ask:

Will the closure of the Guildford swim centre affect the supposed need for Council to reduce services and infrastructure or seek a Special Rate Variation?

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 198 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: "These matters are considered in Closed Council in accordance with State legislation and the Code of Meeting Practice"

Again, as ever, Council has given no real response, stating simply, as it has before, that these matters need to be discussed in Closed Council, even though some of its own Councillors have queried why certain matters are buried in Closed Council.

Council response in the SV Application Form – Part B Page 80: “Council has already commenced a number of major initiatives aimed at increasing revenues and decreasing costs. These include: The development of a single aquatic/wellness centre, which will create opportunities to reduce the overall costs that Council currently incurs (some \$1.6m annually) on its three existing swim centres”. Again, it is interesting that I can read this, in the SV Application Form submitted to IPART 28/2/14, but Council cannot provide this transparent detail to its ratepayers. (Actually Council has recently seemed to be trying to tell its ratepayers that it has not decided what to do with the 3 swim centres, but this statement to IPART on page 80 reflects a different ‘truth’).

I again ask if Guildford Swim Centre has accurately been factored into the Long Term Financial Plan of Council, on which the need for an SRV is based, particularly as I read on Page 77 of the SV Application Form – Part B – that “There are no major asset sales or change in management of significant assets that is forecast in this (Long Term Financial) plan”. (This statement on Page 77 does not seem particularly accurate, if one references what is stated on page 80 of the Part B Form, refer above, regarding the development of a single aquatic / wellness centre).

### **C) Concerns re lack of cost containment / cost cutting strategies**

#### **1) Cost of extra 3 day ‘special leave’**

Council has given 3 extra days ‘special leave’ to all Council staff at Christmas since 1975 and continues to insist that giving 3 extra days of leave to all its staff, over and above their award annual leave entitlements, results in no extra cost to ratepayers.

If our Council believes that paying someone for 3 extra days to do nothing is not a cost, then that maybe why there is inadequate funds to maintain our service levels and infrastructure.

Looking at the average daily value of salaries for the entire organization that Council has finally provided to me (through a Business Paper), it surely costs \$370,878 per annum and over 38 years, in current terms, this equates to \$14 million – yet Council still refuses to recognize this.

I have not spoken to one ratepayer who supports this perk – and, after all, most other Holroyd residents have to take ‘forced’ annual leave for business closures over the 3-day Christmas break. NB Even worse, if the employee accrues the untaken ‘grant day’, it is apparently paid out on termination.

Council has not tried to cut costs here and moreover, this ‘special leave’ is not even mentioned in the Draft 2013-2017 Workforce Strategy, one of the documents listed in the overarching ‘Draft Delivery Program’. What has happened to Council transparency and informing the community?

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART’s SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: “While Council grants 3 days leave to staff, Council offices are open on these days to ensure the community have full access to Council services”.

This does not answer my concern at all - that 3 days ‘special leave’, over and above award conditions, is an unnecessary luxury paid to all Council employees (unbeknown to most Holroyd ratepayers). Despite numerous communications with Council regarding this matter, each of their responses avoids confirming it is a cost to Council, which it surely has to be. And Council continues to not curb this large expense.

#### **2) Excessive annual leave accruals**

It would seem the granting of the above leave is also impacting on the build-up of annual leave and the future liability of council. (It was revealed in Chambers recently that there are staff with in excess of 8 weeks annual leave accrued with a combined total of accrued annual leave of 1079 weeks - and even 30 week accruals exist!

There was an attempt to reduce Council liability by one Councillor at the Council Meeting 17/12/13 when he suggested there be a new item in the Draft Delivery Program:

- Create a new item under "19.2.3 Foster a safe and healthy working environment for staff" titled "Workplace Relations" for the reduction of the annual leave liability to industry standards as a continuing operation over the next four years, with the percentage reduction to be listed as the performance indicator.

But the suggestion was ignored by the majority of Council. And as there is also no reference in the Draft Delivery Program to the issue of excessive leave accruals, the document is again not transparent and the community is unaware of this costly item and Council liability.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: "Action in hand". But Council does not elaborate how it is in hand.

### 3) At whim spending

Council seems to spend ratepayer money on a whim eg a 2013 sponsorship of \$25,000 to the Western Sydney Wanderers football team, through a Mayoral Minute, without consulting the community.

Council has responded to me regarding this matter stating: "The donation ....was ...provided in accordance with the Community Strategic Plan in line with the Community's expressed desire to "Build partnerships to foster and promote community well-being"". However, I question if Council has correctly interpreted "the Community's expressed desire" as I have not spoken to one resident who supports this expenditure - quite the contrary.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: "Sponsorship is used by Council to foster community engagement and to market the Holroyd LGA".

As ever, Council has not answered my question / concern - that ratepayers do not seem to support such spending. Nor has Council attempted to demonstrate how this expenditure fosters community engagement and markets the Holroyd LGA.

### 4) Councillor expenses

Councillor expenses increased 15% during last year to \$168,000 as indicated in Council's Financial Statements for Councillor Expenses, excluding fees, but still Council has not provided detail as to what is included in this figure, despite being asked repeatedly by myself and as mandated by the Division of Local Government (DLG) to do so.

Council has said to me that this 15% increase is explained through 2012 being an electoral year and that newly elected councillors are equipped with IT equipment and phones etc. I was also referred to the Annual Report but this did not actually itemize the \$168,000 or reflect IT and communication expenditure to this amount – refer Point 5 below.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: "The proposed SRV will fund the identified shortfall in infrastructure and asset funding. It is not being used to fund Councillor expenses".

As ever, Council has not answered my question / concerns. (I am not querying that the SRV will fund Councillor expenses). But that Council seems to misunderstand my point, may explain why Councillor expenses have risen and that Councillors still attend various conferences (and the Hay Races) unfettered (and unbeknown to ratepayers).

### 5) Contradictions between Annual Report and Financial Statements

Council referred me to their Annual Report, pertaining to Point 4 above regarding the \$168,000, but this actually complicated matters. And I 'cut and paste' below what is on Page 194 of the Annual Report, obviously not referencing the \$168,000:

The total amount expended by Council during 2012/2013 on Mayoral and Councillors facilities and expenses was \$989,251. Councillors received a fee of \$ 17,060 for the year, with the Mayor receiving an additional allowance of \$37,230 for the year.

In addition to the above mentioned Mayoral and Councillor Fees, the following facilities and equipment were also provided:

- Cost of providing office equipment, i.e. laptop computers, mobile phones, telephones, facsimile machines and internet installed in the Councillor's homes was \$100,019
- Cost of telecommunication services and equipment, including mobile phones, landlines, facsimile and internet services was \$54,686
- Conference and seminar expenses were \$46,927
- Overseas travel expenses were NIL

Provision of Facilities and Expenses for Councillors:

Executive Assistance	\$ 86,731
Member Fees	\$ 237,780
General Operating Expenses	\$ 197,998
Mayor Motor Vehicles Operating Expenses	\$ 4,096
Election Costs	\$ 404,208
Civic Receptions	\$ 1,510
Citizenship Ceremonies	\$ 4,479
Capital items (computer hardware and office equipment	\$ 52,449

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: "Council complies with the requirements of the Local Government Act".

The DLG has confirmed they comply with legislation, but Council still has not answered my question / concern, regarding what is the substance of the \$168,000 Councillor expenses.

6) Cost containment suggestions in submission regarding Councillor Expenses and Provision of Facilities

In my submission regarding the Policy for the Payment of Expenses and Provision of Facilities for the Mayor and Councillors, all suggestions for cost containment were ignored:

- Councillors can now have ratepayers funding computers at an "other nominated location", aside from the Councillor residence – which means ratepayers could be funding IT communications for eg Councillor partners, relatives or self-employment opportunities.
- Alcohol intake for Councillors is still to be included at all functions, conferences, Council Meeting evenings etc.
- Meals / functions still have a cap of \$200
- Spouse expenses were **increased** to include the Floodplain Management Conference (Interstate or intrastate) despite DLG Guidelines stating spouse expenses can be considered only **within the state**.
- Overseas travel still remains permissible, as does business class aircraft travel for journeys over 4 hours of travelling time, and first class train travel.



- Seemingly unlimited numbers of Councillors and staff can still attend various conferences, etc, even the Hay Races and Christmas Carols, yet still do not have to report back to Council, flagging the aspects relevant to Council business and the community.  
NB At the Council Meeting 4/2/14, some Councillors tried to justify their visits to Hay through intimating that business and pleasure can co-exist. However, with the advanced telecommunications of today (emails, tele and videoconferencing, skypeing etc), ratepayers still question the validity of such trips, particularly as it was clearly stated, 4/2/14, that all 12 Councillors could go to Hay if they wish – at ratepayer expense.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 59: "The provision of expenses and facilities for Councillors is made in accordance with the Local Government Act following public consultation on the adopted Policy".

Again, this statement does not address my questions / concerns.

7) Ridiculous Council staff and legal expenses incurred to deal with my privacy complaint against Council, initially lodged February 2012.

Council apparently recently squandered over 3 weeks' salary of their Risk Manager reviewing my privacy complaint and then paid lawyers to take over the matter at the Administrative Decisions Tribunal, when the General Manager only had to have respectful discourse with me regarding my concerns, and respect the Privacy Commissioner's findings.

The General Manger would not even provide me with a copy of the Privacy Commissioner's report, yet the lawyers instantly gave it to me, as they should.

This is an extraordinary and questionable/ shameful way of spending ratepayer money, particularly as Page 206 of the Draft Delivery Plan even states the General Manager's Department will '*Ensure all actions required by legislation are implemented in a timely manner, complete, accurate and in accordance with Acts and Regulations*' - obviously my complaint was not dealt with in a timely and accurate manner – or a cost effective manner.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 60: "Council seeks legal advice from time to time in relation to the Code of Conduct, GIPA, privacy issues and other statutory matters where considered appropriate".

Again, this statement does not respond to my concerns. Council did not simply seek legal ADVICE, it sought unnecessary and expensive REPRESENTATION. (I simply wanted acknowledgement of Council's wrongdoing and an apology – and as I subsequently achieved this, I withdrew my matter from the Tribunal as it did not warrant Council wasting further ratepayer monies on expensive legal representation).

## **D) Delivery program and long term financial plan assumptions**

1) Incorrect overarching philosophy underpinning the Draft Delivery Program

- Page 23 of the Draft Delivery Program advises over 2,800 individual participants have taken part in activities to guide the Living Holroyd Program, highlighting the priorities and future direction of our city. But I question the validity of this claim and also ask who were the 2,800 individuals?

I collected 1800 signatures and numerous submissions objecting to 20 storey zoning in the Merrylands Town Centre during our recent LEP process. But Council must have totally ignored these voices in its Strategic Plan as these 1800 plus community wishes and submissions, and the other numerous submissions that residents lodged, were cast aside. Council continued to vote in 20 storey zoning. So this must mean that Council only selects

the services and infrastructure it wants to deliver, not what the community says it really wants.

- Page 29 of the Draft Delivery Program states that *“Through the development of the Living Holroyd Community Strategic Plan, our community has told us how their vision for the services and infrastructure they desire in the Holroyd of tomorrow”*. I question (as do others) when and how the Community “told” Council what it desires. How big was the representative sample and what were the methods of collection?

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 199 and in IPART’s SV Application Form – Part B Page 60: *“The 2,800 participants on page 23 of the Delivery Program, refers to the original development of the Living Holroyd Program in 2010. This 12 month engagement process led to the development of the Living Holroyd Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program (Operational Plan) which was adopted in 2011. A range of engagement activities took place and are listed in the Community Strategic Plan”*.

Again, this statement does not respond to my concerns – and nor does perusal of the Community Strategic Plan answer my questions. I can see that Page 11 of the Application Form Part B states: *“The community was concerned regarding matters relating to effective urban planning and sustainable management of growth of the city with particular concerns regarding infrastructure and services (page 24 of the Living Holroyd Community Strategic Plan)”* but this is typical of many residents living in metropolitan LGAs, as stated on page 35 of the Application Form Part B and is not a surprising result.

And comments listed in the Application Form Part B (page 55) from the Resident Meeting held 28/11/13 reinforce ratepayer concerns with Council’s services and infrastructure delivery: *“The Council appears to have funded growth for the sake of growth. 15 function halls, 11 meeting rooms, they don’t make a profit. Perhaps look at getting rid of some of that infrastructure”*.

*“A lot of services I don’t agree with”*

*“I would like to see a full list of services that council provides so that the community can have a proper analysis of the funds. Services council is providing should not be in competition to the local businesses in the area – for example – child care facilities”*.

This does not sound like residents who were involved in (or support) the Holroyd Community Strategic Plan. Yet they all turned out, 28/11/13, and attended this important Resident Meeting, to try and communicate their vision for the services and infrastructure desired in the Holroyd of tomorrow.

- Page 31 of the Draft Delivery Plan tells us an independent research company, Micromex Research, conducted a random phone survey of 400 community members to develop the three rate funding options on exhibition now. Is this an adequate sampling number? Were they truly representative of Holroyd’s demographic mix? Were they residents or landlords? What were the questions asked? Was this the best process / optimal strategy to underpin and develop the 3 options?

The list of concerns with random phone surveys, particularly for such a major issue of a Special Rate Variation and Council services, infrastructure and funding is endless – and the concerns should be easily recognisable to any reasonable person. It is good that qualified, experienced IPART ‘reviewers’ will be able to consider the survey underpinning the Draft Delivery Program and the associated proposed Special Rate Variation.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 200 and in IPART’s SV Application Form – Part B Page 60: *“In relation to the consultation for the SRV engagement (which is a different program from the previous engagement schedule for the development of the Community Strategic Plan), Micromex conducted two (2) phone surveys of 400 participants each. One at the beginning of the program (July 2013) and one at end of the program*

(November 2013). The sample size of 400 residents provides a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 4.9% at 95% confidence. The sample was weighed by age to reflect the 2011 ABS census data. In the first survey of 400 participants, 82% of participants were rate payers and 18% were non ratepayers. The second survey, of an additional 400 participants was made up of 80% ratepayers and 20% non-ratepayers”.

Council’s response does not flag that the 400 participants were sourced from the electronic white pages. (And I am not sure, in today’s climate of diminishing landline usage, if this method should be deemed as being able to provide accurate and representative sampling). Furthermore, Page 34 of Part B reflects 63% of participants were born in Australia and 81% speak English as their main language. This is not representative of the demographic mix of the Holroyd community.

And, again, Council’s response simply ignores (and does not address) all of my concerns listed.

## 2) Deficiencies in plan assumptions regarding Council’s service and infrastructure provision

- Page 6 of the Draft Buildings Asset Management Plan Executive Summary refers to “Hyland Road Rifle Range/Pigeon Clubs” – I question how many Holroyd ratepayers even know they have funded these items and I question if the average ratepayer would want them funded through their rates. I am sure I do not, yet was completely unaware I did fund them.
- Page 211 of the Draft Delivery Program flags “Foster strategic alliances with Hay Shire Council, Auburn Council, Albury Council and WSROC”. I am surprised our very large and neighbouring Parramatta Council is not on this list, and am sure other ratepayers would expect it to be, rather than Hay Shire Council. We have joint borders and areas with Parramatta that would benefit from joint strategies and partnerships, let alone the overall opportunities that could be embraced by strategic alliances and planning.
- Pemulwuy Child Care Centre – in 2009 Council declared there was over a million dollar shortfall for this project and then in 2013 Council said there was nearly another \$1.3 million still ‘missing’ in a supposed loan from Developer Contributions.  
(Council has responded to me regarding this, saying the Centre would always be funded by a combination of Developer Contributions and Council Contributions (the Future Fund). And that “the community has identified that children .... services are a key element of their vision for Holroyd”.

However, perhaps ratepayers would have a different “vision” if they knew the cost of child services and perhaps Council should actually steer clear of service provision in child care and leave it to the private sector. And perhaps Council should re-consider its recent decision to provide 2 more child-care centres under the Section 94 Development Contributions Plan, if cost is such a problem.

I raised this issue, 28/11/13, when I spoke at the Council’s Resident Meeting regarding the Special Rate Variation.

- At the Council Meeting 17/12/13, a Councillor suggested:  
*Remove the following items from the 2013-2017 Delivery Program as they relate to items funded under a proposed SRV:*
  - *Item 2.1.5.8 Implement Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology at all library branches;*
  - *Item 19.1.3.5 Upgrade Council’s corporate wide phone system to meet ongoing needs; and*
  - *Item 19.2.3.8 Investigate functional assessments for ageing workforce, to be funded from the General Rate Base raised from current rate pegging.*

Council chose not to resolve the amendment but as these items do not seem critical to Council operation, I would suggest they should be removed.

This also makes me wonder what other items could easily be removed from the Delivery Program – if I knew about them.

Furthermore, I doubt the community - who Council insists they have 'engaged' - would even know that these items are listed. And if they did know, would want them removed, along with other various items.

The above are all examples that underpin the larger issue that:

- a) Ratepayers do not even know what their rates do fund.
- b) Ratepayers may well not choose to fund the services and infrastructure that Council chooses to fund (and is seeking a Special Rate Variation to fund).
- c) Council assumptions underpinning the Draft Delivery Program may not be realistic.
- d) Consultation material should have enabled measurement of the level of community support for different programs of expenditure by allowing respondents to rank services and / or proposed works in order of priority.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 200 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 61: "Council has placed the Draft Delivery Program on public exhibition with the full suite of documents. Council provides a range of methods in communicating to its residents including items in the corporate news, newspaper articles, the Holroyd Herald, Facebook, a Council Website, brochures, flyers, emails, 'Have your Say' section of the website, community representation on Council Committees, End of Term Report, Annual Report and Quarterly Reports which are available on Council's website plus a range of engagement programs that the community may choose to be involved in. All these methods seek to provide the community with information and updates on activities conducting by Council. Council continues to explore ways to communicate with its residents and ratepayers. The SRV will be used to fund the asset maintenance, renewal and operational costs of works across the LGA for the entire community".

Again, Council has not addressed any of my concerns, it has just re-iterated what is listed in the Business Paper CCL 013-014, 17/12/13. It does not respond eg as to whether ratepayers want child care centres or a pigeon club or RFID technology at the local libraries. And the Business Paper does not reference the Micromex July Survey results – Page 35 of the Application Form Part B - that states "As with many residents living in metropolitan LGAs, the primary concerns for most residents of the Holroyd LGA revolve around population growth and a perceived lack of supporting infrastructure and facilities, i.e. parking, roads, parks, schools and hospitals to support the area". No, no mention of child care, rifle ranges, Hay Shire Council etc etc – or the community's main concern with "over population and its impact on infrastructure" – refer page 36 Application Form Part B.

A Verbatim Comment regarding Option 2 (refer page 45 of the Application Form Part B) also confirms a concern with what Council chooses to provide: "Return to core (basic) services and infrastructure".

And comments listed in the Application Form Part B (page 55) from the Resident Meeting held 28/11/13 reinforce ratepayer concerns with Council's services and infrastructure delivery:

"The Council appears to have funded growth for the sake of growth. 15 function halls, 11 meeting rooms, they don't make a profit. Perhaps look at getting rid of some of that infrastructure".

"A lot of services I don't agree with"

"I would like to see a full list of services that council provides so that the community can have a proper analysis of the funds. Services council is providing should not be in competition to the local businesses in the area – for example – child care facilities"

### 3) Flaws in Council's facilities and service management and decision making processes

- One of Council's major funding issues at present is what to do with our 3 swimming pools. But Council's facility management and decision making processes involved with this issue of our 3 swim centres have to be seriously questioned. Council was pursuing the development of a 'super pool' at Hyland Road despite paying \$50,000 for a report that advised the location was not suitable. Then, in 2012, Council spent money on a (questionably worded) survey and voted just before the Council election to keep open all 3 pools and upgrade them to acceptable standards. However, Council took no follow-up action to do this. But now Council has changed its mind yet again, only recently voting to again go the path of one pool – this time an Aquatic Wellness Centre and this time at the Merrylands Pool site. But there still seems varying understandings and reports concerning the costs underpinning this decision. And, because vocal sections of the community are objecting to this switch in policy, Council is now financing a campaign to try and garner community support for the Wellness Centre. Community (and Councillor) understanding of the whole issue needs to be clarified by thorough and consistent costing and reporting. And community desires and needs must be cogently aligned to any budgeting and funding constraints. And hard decisions need to be made and acted upon – Council procrastination has to cease, particularly as it is simply costing ratepayers more and more money.

NB Today's issue of the local paper (the Advertiser), contains a media release from the Mayor, intimating that no decision has been made regarding the 3 swim centres as yet. This 'information' release, at this stage of the game, seems even more confusing and flags / reinforces the flaws in Council management and process.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 201 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 61: "Council is in the process of consult with the community on this issue in accordance with the strategy adopted by Council".

Yet Council states in the SV Application Form – Part B, page 80, that Council has already commenced initiatives aimed at reducing costs and this includes "The development of a single aquatic/wellness centre, which will create opportunities to reduce the overall costs that Council currently incurs (some \$1.6m annually) on its three existing swim centres".

So page 80 confirms decisions have already been made regarding the 3 swim centres, yet Council is still suggesting to the community that it is consulting with the community, when this clearly seems not to be the case? Again, there does not seem to be very transparent engagement with the community or an accountable, transparent and sound Long Term Financial Plan.

### 4) Inconsistencies in Council's reporting methods

- As already highlighted, Council's detail of Councillor Expenses in the Council's Annual Report 2012/2013 seems to differ from detail shown in Council's Financial Statements for the same period – refer Point (C5) above.
- Council advises there is a \$97.1million funding gap over the next 10 years that needs addressing:
  - \$57.1m - Asset Renewal - this funding is to be used to rebuild assets and infrastructure that fall in condition 4 or 5*
  - \$10.5m - Asset Maintenance - this funding is to be used to maintain assets and infrastructure so that they don't fall into condition 4 and 5*
  - \$29.5m - Operational - this funding is to be used for machinery, staff /contractors costs and all items that would be required to deliver the actual works*

Yet documents on the Council web-site, regarding the Draft Delivery Program, seem to reflect that \$207.5 million would be needed to cover a renewals backlog and the listed unfunded new works, renewals or services, refer below:

\$72.5million in renewals backlog, to be funded through a Special Rate Variation consisting of:

- \$15.5m building
- \$7m parks/recreation
- \$47.5m road & bridges
- \$2.5m stormwater;

\$135 million of unfunded new works, renewals or services

Total: \$207.5 million

I am only a layperson and am probably missing something here but, to me, there seems to be a major incongruence here regarding the supposed funding gap of only \$97.1million? Should ratepayers be concerned?

- Furthermore, the Council Business Papers 17/12/13 had numerous items funded through the Option 3 proposal in the Long Term Financial Plan, totalling approx. \$257,500.

Also, another item of \$115,000 per annum to be funded through Option3 was deferred on the night.

So as there are already plenty of items coming through Council that would not be included in the listed \$97.5million shortfall, one does have to ask what is Holroyd's real position regarding a funding shortfall / gap?

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 201 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 62: "The SRV in Option 2 is to fund the backlog of \$97.1m. If Option 3 is the preferred Option, an additional amount of \$14.7m would be raised. Council and the community would then choose to complete a further \$14.7m of works from the Unfunded Works, Renewal and Services List (which amounts in total to \$135m)".

Again Council just re-iterates what is on its web-site. It does not address the issue of an apparent \$207.5 million shortfall indicated in the documents on Council's web-site. Nor does it mention the items funded through Option 3 at the Council Meeting 17/12/13 – that they are not listed in the \$97.1m backlog (or total of \$135m).

#### 5) Deficiencies in asset management

Page 7 of the Draft Asset Management Strategy states: "*Recent asset management gap analysis (assessment of current practice vs. desired/target practice) indicates that whilst Council has a range of asset management systems, processes and practices in place they lack consistency and formality, and there are deficiencies in a range of practice areas*". This is an area of concern for ratepayers, particularly when being asked to consider rate increases / reductions in services and infrastructure.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 201 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 62: "As Part of Council's continuous improvement program, Council continues to review its asset management processes for all public assets. It is noted that in the Premier and Cabinet Division of Local Government "Local Government Infrastructure Audit" June 2013, Holroyd City Council was assessed to have "strong" infrastructure management assessment and competencies".

I merely quoted Council's own Draft Asset Management Strategy and I think I should doubt Council's "strong" infrastructure management assessment and competencies as the figures in the SRV application to IPART based on funding Option 2 suddenly changed, between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2014.

Furthermore, if Council has suddenly revised the required rate increase percentages (to 8% for 3 years and 7% for 2 years), yet will still obtain the \$97.1m to address the identified infrastructure asset funding gap, why would Council not still seek its original 9% SRV (supposedly so wholeheartedly supported by ratepayers – according to Council). In this way, couldn't Council have sought to

address some of the \$207.5 million listed as renewals backlogs and unfunded new works or services in Councils' documents regarding the SRV? And, as items were funded through Option 3 at the Council Meeting 17/12/13, surely Holroyd is facing more than a shortfall of \$97.1m?

I asked these questions at Council's Public Forum 4/3/14, concerned about deficiencies in Council's asset management and Long Term Financial Plan, but Council's response did not include an answer to these questions at all.

6) Concerns with the Draft Delivery Program document, as raised in my last 2 annual submissions regarding the Delivery Program:

i) Action items are still not specific, measureable and time-framed.

I re-iterate (as stated in my previous 2 submissions) that surely operational plans have to be very specific, time-framed and measureable. This makes them substantive, solid – not 'waffle'.

Unfortunately, as I read this document, many items listed are still not quantified or detailed, and thus much of the document seems to be unsubstantiated. It reads and looks good, but it is very flowery, and thus may possibly be misleading to a less discerning eye, with no experience of workplace operational plans.

(And I note my feedback regarding this is valid as the Division of Local Government's Promoting Better Practice Review Report, Page 17, stated: "performance 'outputs' in the Operational Plan should be reviewed to ensure they are specific and measureable").

I quote some examples:

- Page 83 – A4.1.4.5 *Provide and promote function centre and related facilities for use by the community.*

The performance measure is '% increase in number of year to date functions'.

It seems you heeded my suggestion last June as this is an improvement from the previous performance measure 'year to date functions'.

However, to be a truly robust measure, I again suggest the performance measure 'increase the no. of functions from last year by (10)%'.

Using a formula with a percentage increase that is specific and measureable, should encourage an upturn in usage and revenue which is surely what is needed as the Function Centre operates at a loss.

- Page 84 – A4.1.4.6 *Provision and effective management of Council's function centre and internal Council facilities*

The performance measure is 'Total earnings less total expenses'.

However, as this will only reflect the loss the Centre is making, surely a better measure should include a percentage reduction in the Centre's losses?

And hopefully again, such a performance measure would help positively turnaround the Centre's operations.

- Page 105 – G6.2.1.1 *Develop transport and car parking strategies for growth.*

I made comment in last June's submission that the performance measure of 'strategies complete' does not really say anything.

So I again flag my concern that this Draft Plan contains no different text as to that contained in last June's Plan.

What are / were the strategies? Are the strategies responding to our growth? How is this being measured?

- Page 115 – G7.3.2.1 *Work with key partners to support and assist the business community with the development of programs that provide employment and education opportunities for the CALD community*

The performance measure is 'No. of programs implemented'. But this measure is not

specific. What number of programs is desirable? Are the programs appropriate and bringing employment and education opportunities to the CALD community?

What will be the measure of success of these programs?

- Page 115 – G7.3.2.2 *Provide support and assist with the promotion of bilingual education programs across the City*  
Performance measure is ‘No. of occasions’.  
Again, how many occasions are desirable or acceptable? Is the assistance and support provided appropriate, and what is needed?
- Page 185 – D17.1.1.1 *Effectively manage the provision of information between Council and its community through media channels regarding matters on the agenda of the Mayor, Council or media.*  
Performance measure is ‘Provision of information between Council and community managed effectively’.  
But how is ‘managed effectively’ measured in this instance?  
And Council should realise that from community responses made during the recent LEP process and the swimming pool survey last June, the community does not praise Council in its dissemination of information or believe it is managed effectively.  
Last week, several Councillors made comment in Chambers regarding differing swim centre costings being put to the community. (And thus it is evident that even Councillors believe Council’s information provision is not managed effectively).

ii) Actions introduced by Council that are specific, measureable and time-framed BUT are not included in the Operational Plan.

I flagged in my submission last year the apparent issue where actions are regularly carried out by Council but are not included in the Operational Plan and I re-iterate the same issue again:

- Page 200 – D19.2.1 *Implement HR strategies that encourage engagement, innovation and retention of staff.*

As per last year, I again refer to the 3 extra paid leave days per year voted by Council each year, since 1975, over and above award entitlements.

I imagine this is part of a strategy to engage, innovate and retain staff but I do wonder why it is not flagged in the Draft 2013-2017 Workforce Strategy, one of the documents listed in the ‘Draft Delivery Program’.

The Plan (and Council) should be transparent, and not hide the cost or the fact that Council staff are treated more favourably through this ‘perk’, over and above the majority of their own Holroyd ratepayers.

And I have flagged this issue repeatedly to the General Manager, Mayor and Councillors, even the Council’s auditor, but had no real response that would satisfy the ratepayers of Holroyd.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 201 and in IPART’s SV Application Form – Part B Page 62: “Council’s Delivery Program has been developed in accordance with the Local Government Act and reviewed by the Division of Local Government. The suitability of the performance measures is reviewed on an annual basis by Council whilst when adopting the Draft Delivery Program and Budget. The Division of Local Government Promoting Better Practice Review stated that “Holroyd City Council presents as a well-managed and efficient local government body with strong links to the local community.”

Again, Council has not responded to the specific issues raised.

## **E) Community awareness and engagement**

1) I include below some of the engagement activities Council says it has provided, with reference to Page 31 of the Delivery Program, and also the Council Business Paper, 17/12/13.



I feel obliged to flag concerns with these activities:

- \* 5 face to face focus groups (2 x general community, 1 x Council Committees community representatives, 1 x S355 Committee community representatives, 1 x Business community)  
\* 2 online community focus groups

*The Application Form Part B, page 39, reveals that these 2 groups (face to face and online) consisted of 44 people only, with the general community and online groups also being sourced from the same Micromex Research Group.*

*\* Email distribution through have your say contact list.*

I question the robustness of the general community focus groups.

As I attend almost every Council Meeting, read all the Business Papers and ensure I obtain both local papers weekly, I am surprised I have never heard anything about the groups.

What was their constitution? What was their demographic?

I have also never seen anything regarding the online community focus group.

I did try to subscribe to Council's E-news facility, as per a flier I saw in June 2013. Apparently the day I tried to subscribe there was a technical error and Council advised me I would be added to an email database. I was also told "it could be a number of months before you start receiving the E-news summaries". I have never received any E-news.

- \* 5 listening posts set up including attendance at Community Safety Day, Community Services Expo, Guildford Community Centre, Pemulwuy Shopping Centre and Stockland Merrylands  
I attended the Community Safety Day, 26/10/13, in King Park but there did not seem to be any active attempt by Council to discuss, or even promote the Delivery Program / Special Rate Variation.

Yet that venue was listed as one of the nominated forums for community engagement regarding these matters and it was also at no extra cost to Council as the Expo was a pre-planned Council event.

I mentioned to a Council Officer that I had not been approached to discuss Council services and the proposed Special Rate Variation at the Expo, and that I did not observe any apparent proactive engagement to do this with other residents either.

In response, I was told that I had been seen there but had not been receptive to any approach.

I was actually completely unaware of any approaches being made to myself – even though the staff apparently recognised me, knew my name and thus should have easily got my attention.

Thus I question what proactive strategies were adopted to engage the community at the Expo and other listening posts?

If staff could not even approach and engage a resident that they recognised and knew by name, how successfully would other members of the community be engaged, bearing in mind that King Park is in area where the first language of many residents is not English?

After a Council Meeting 29/10/13, I was approached by a lady who had attended a listening post that very night and, at the encouragement of a Councillor, had signed off on a Rate Variation.

However, now she had attended the Council Meeting she seemed to feel duped as she had just learned her rate increase would go towards funding an Aquatic Wellness Centre - Council had just resolved to "provide in principle support for the development of an integrated single aquatic wellness centre on the site of the Merrylands Swim Centre".

Her concern about any Rate Variation going towards funding a new swim centre was also echoed by others who attended the Council Resident Meeting 28/11/13, regarding the Draft Delivery Program, refer below.

The above incident also highlights the erroneous hypothesis in the Council Business Paper FW053-13, 17/12/13.

With regard to the results of the community feedback, the paper states: *“It is apparent from the engagement activities undertaken, that those activities where the community members spoke to a Council representative and had the opportunity to discuss the impacts and detail of each Option proposed, have resulted in clear support for a SRV of some kind”.*

This statement clearly flags the dangers of Council staff and Councillors tainting and biasing input and results obtained, as happened with the above example of the lady at a listening post, spoken ‘at’, by a Councillor.

Page 38 of the Application Form Part B substantiates this concern – it states *“when prompted”, the community supported, as a first preference, Option 2.*

*There should have been no prompting or leading of ratepayers to a specific response.*

- *\* Meetings – Large Business, Small Business and Resident.*

I was one of the 100 plus residents that attended the Council Resident Meeting 28/11/13.

Tim Butler was asked various questions by several residents, and I asked at the end, in public, if we would get a response to our queries / concerns. The response was ‘yes’; we were told we would.

However, no Q & A has been lodged on Council’s web-site and I have only had a response specific to my concerns as I followed up with Council myself.

I have had no other feedback regarding all the other (very pertinent and valid) questions raised and would gather no other attendees had any responses.

So, how are residents supposed to lodge submissions / give Council further feedback if questions remain unanswered?

The cost of the community engagement project was raised by one resident at the meeting but there was no response to this in public, nor is it mentioned in the Council Business Paper FW053-13 that placed the Draft Delivery Program on exhibition.

Why has the project budget of \$100,000 not been made public? Why has Council not been transparent and accountable? (Perhaps it was / is feared that the attendees and ratepayers would object to this budget of \$100,000).

One attendee at the Resident Meeting asked what are the “100s of different services” Council provides, as only 15 services were shown during the Council presentation (and are stated on Page 29 of the Draft Delivery Program).

Council Officers / Councillors present did not respond.

I have also been asked by other ratepayers what are the 100s of services that Council provides – I have no idea.

The tone of the Resident Meeting indicated concern re the proposed rate hike and what services are provided by Council. And one Councillor has even made reference in Chambers regarding the “negativity” from residents regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation at the Public Meeting.

Consultation material should have enabled measurement of the level of community support for different programs of expenditure by allowing respondents to rank services and / or proposed works in order of priority.

Yet the feedback from the Resident Meeting is not even mentioned in the Council Business Paper, FW053-13. And the Paper only seems to include results that Council seems to deem support the Special Rate Variation.

Ratepayer comments are listed in the Application Form Part B (page 55) and these reinforce ratepayer concerns with Council's services and infrastructure delivery:

"The Council appears to have funded growth for the sake of growth. 15 function halls, 11 meeting rooms, they don't make a profit. Perhaps look at getting rid of some of that infrastructure".

"A lot of services I don't agree with"

"I would like to see a full list of services that council provides so that the community can have a proper analysis of the funds. Services council is providing should not be in competition to the local businesses in the area – for example – child care facilities"

"without paying attention to what the residents want council made a decision anyway"  
(about the pools)

My questions and comments made at the meeting are not referenced at all in the Application Form Part B – yet I was actually applauded by the attendees for my comments and input.

The Application Form Part B page 74 states the Micromex Survey "identified that all services provided were in fact considered to be important". However, the above comments from ratepayers do not substantiate this.

I understand only 2 people attended the Small Business Meeting so little input would have been gleaned from that meeting.

The Application Form Part B confirms only 2 people attended the small business forum and no-one attended the big business forum.

- \* Information on Council's website
- \* 36,000 Letters sent to each Rate Payer (both residential and business) in Holroyd with reply paid postcard outlining options
- \*Dedicated edition of the Holroyd Herald (36,400 copies) on the Financial Options and Special Rate Variation
- \*Brochures and Frequently asked questions developed and delivered
- \*Facebook – Town Hall Social – 12 people voted (out of 2625 people that viewed the page, refer the Application Form Part B, page 57)
- \*On-line Survey

The Application Form Part B flags only 79 people responded – refer page 56

None of these engagement activities or the information provided have clearly flagged the percentage increase of the proposed Special Rate Variation and the real full cumulative effect / impact of the proposed special variation on rates.

I doubt that many residents would realise that:

Under Option 1, rates will increase 19% in 6 years

Under option 2, rates will increase 42% in 6 years.

Under option 3, rates will increase 49% in 6 years.

And as close to half of Holroyd's residents do not speak English at home as their first language, I question how accessible has any of the information been to a vast number of Holroyd residents.

Page 37 and 39 of the Draft Delivery Program state that through Options 2 and 3 a "new Aquatic Wellness Centre would be built" through the Special Rate Variation.

Yet Council's on-line 'Local Solutions' does not say this, and neither did the Holroyd Herald nor the letter with reply paid postcard, both sent to 36,000 residents.

I have flagged to Council that people have been horrified to learn that their support of the rate increase would fund a new Wellness Centre and the other 2 pools will be closed.

And this apparent dislike of the rate increase funding a new Wellness Centre was raised at the Resident Meeting by more than one person.

So, with reference to the 8000 residents who have expressed a view, as mentioned in the Council Business Paper FW053-13, 17/12/13, it would seem that these 8000 residents have expressed a view before the wording of the Draft Delivery Program was even on exhibition – before it was stated / known that the rate increase would fund a new Aquatic Wellness Centre.

And thus it is obvious that these 8000 have unfortunately responded and expressed an opinion when not all information (or consistent information) was disclosed or transparently on view, particularly with reference to the contentious issue of the Wellness Centre.

- *\* Media releases in the Advertiser and the Sun local newspapers and the Western Sydney Business Access newspaper.*

In an interview with Tim Butler, The Western Sydney Business Access newspaper quotes him as saying that Council has maximised savings.

Ratepayers would disagree, however, eg refer Point (C1) above, regarding the 3 days extra leave granted to staff each year, that will cost approx. \$382,000 this year.

The Council Business Paper 17/12/13 states “All of these (36,000) Households were ....reached through the Advertiser and the Sun local newspapers”.

This, however, is an absolute mistruth/ misrepresentation about community engagement and awareness - and Council should know this.

Council was told repeatedly about the lack of circulation of the 2 local papers during the recent LEP process.

Approximately 100 residents attended the resident meeting 29/11/13 and it was obvious to any reasonable person that the tone of the meeting was one of concern re the proposed rate hike and what services are provided by Council. (One Councillor has even mentioned in Chambers the negativity from residents regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation at the Resident Meeting).

Yet the press, as ever, did not print anything AT ALL about the meeting and thus other residents were not able to learn of the content or mood of the meeting.

As ever, Council issues formal press releases or spruiks its own viewpoint in the local papers – but it seems that the community viewpoint is often no longer represented in the local press if certain contentious issues are involved.

I have even written and asked both of the Sun and Advertiser Editors why they have not reported on the 100 plus attendance at the Resident Public Meeting 29/11/13, and ratepayer reaction, but the Editors do not respond. So, no, Council should not delude themselves that ratepayers are advised through our local papers.

**The Application Form Part B, page 83, indicates there were newspaper articles, as well as media releases. But this is not correct - there were never any newspaper articles that included the community perspective, questions, viewpoint, comments and / or feedback – only media releases.**

- *\* The above activities were further supported by information handed out at Pendle Hill, Westmead, Merrylands and Guildford train stations.*

I commute daily from and to Merrylands station, in both peak travel times during the working day.

Yet I have never seen any information handed out about this Special Rate Variation at Merrylands Station – even though this is the prime travel time / target time for the community

(2) Holroyd Council does not have a strong track record of encouraging community awareness and real community engagement.

Council's real desire and efforts to gain community input is questionable – past history suggests and reflects that Holroyd Council does not really want to 'listen' to its community eg:

- During the LEP process and introduction of 20 storey zoning Council tried to limit input from members of the public.  
Instead of members of the public having 3 minutes to speak during Public Forum at Council Meetings, Council tried to reduce this '3 minute timing' to '25 words or less'. The Division of Local Government was notified, and also the Sunday Telegraph and a local radio station embraced the story of this undemocratic Council behaviour.
- At the Council Meeting, 4/2/14, the Mayor refused to hear any questions regarding the possible proposed sale of 2 pieces of Council / ratepayer-owned land, and how that could impact our funding and reserves, and the need for a Special Rate Variation – refer Point (Bi) above.

Such responses by Council cause great angst, stress and discomfort to residents and ratepayers. A Council willing to engage with its community would not respond and react in such a fashion; treat its ratepayers in such a manner; nor stifle possible valid input from the community.

3) Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) residents

Leaflets and newspaper advisements have asked ratepayers and residents to lodge submissions regarding the Special Rate Variation.

But as nearly half of Holroyd residents do not speak English at home as their first language, Council may not obtain a true idea of what the community thinks about the Special Rate Variation. (The leaflets and advisements do not have information in other languages for the high concentration of CALD groups residing in Holroyd).

Obviously there are major issues involved in CALD ratepayers even understanding the proposals, let alone being able to respond.

4) Inability (or desire) of many to advocate / self-advocate

As flagged during the LEP process, Council should realise a large proportion of the Holroyd population do not have the capacity to air their views / write letters or submissions, or even access the Council web-site to follow Council actions and decisions.

(It is an established fact that the elderly / CALD and lower socio-economic demographics are all ill-equipped to self-advocate and tend to have a 'wait and see' mentality).

5) Inability / unwillingness of Council to **listen** to their community

My final (and very real) concern is that all of this submission process, as ever, is for nothing. I have thought this from the start, and others have also expressed this belief to me, that any feedback given to Council will not make any difference whatsoever.

It would seem Council has already made up its mind, that they are going to vote affirmatively for Option 3, as can be observed through the Council Business Papers 17/12/13.

17/12/13, the very night Council resolved to place the Draft Delivery Program on exhibition, Council also resolved to fund numerous items through the Option 3 proposal in the Long Term Financial Plan. (Approximately \$257,500 was resolved this way, including the deferral of another item of \$115,000 per annum, that was also listed to be funded through the Option 3 channel).

There was no mention of Option 2.

Council may pride themselves on consulting and engaging the community but do they listen to their community?

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 201 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 63: "The public process used to develop the SRV has been extensive. The engagement process for the proposed SRV and Draft Delivery Program commenced in July 2013 and included a broad and in-depth consultation with the community. Council extended its exhibition period for the Draft Delivery Program and associated documents from the statutory 28 days to 55 days and Council received 2, 895 individual responses to the project. The program has been summarised previously in this report along with the results of the online, phone and survey postcard.

Council provided media releases to 42 different CALD papers and had multilingual staff available at the Redgum Centre and the Community Safety Day. Council also provided the same level of support for counter and phone enquiries during the consultation period through the utilisation of existing multilingual staff to answer questions.

Council in its engagement process undertook a broad range of communication methods and advocated to the community to contact Council officers to discuss matters relating to the SRV. Council has responded to all feedback during the consultation period and all submission during the exhibition period. It is Council's role to consider Submissions received and will make their decision based on all information provided".

Again, Council simply re-affirms previously stated comments. It does not respond to specifics; that I was banned from asking certain questions at Public Forum. Furthermore, Council did not respond to all feedback during the consultation period - it never gave answers to the community regarding the questions asked at the Resident Meeting; and there was no Q and A posted on Council's web-site, in response to the matters raised at the Resident Meeting.

(Yes, Council did vote for Option 2, not the Option 3 that it had referenced at the Council Meeting 17/12/13, but it would seem Council was always going to vote for Option 2 or 3 and perhaps Council Papers, 17/12/13, were meant to reference both Options, seeing as a decision had supposedly not been made by Council at that stage. But Council throws no light on this matter).

### **Recommendation**

I am not a planning or financial expert, and I appreciate that Council is facing some tough decisions. But I request that Council carefully peruse the three options before them, carefully considering cost cutting and implementing cost effective strategies, services and infrastructure options before any Special Rate Variation rate increases are mandated.

I firmly believe ratepayers would like to see Council expenses and costs in check before rate increases / reductions in services and infrastructure have to be considered. And Council also needs to carefully assess the nature of its services and infrastructure provision. Also there needs to be consideration and advisement regarding items withheld from the public arena, such as the MacFarlane Street car park.

Council response in Business Paper CCL 013-14 Page 203 and in IPART's SV Application Form – Part B Page 64: "It has been noted that Council has implemented over a number of years a range of efficiency gains including:

- freezing a number of major cost items from one year to the next forcing savings
- savings through contestability of major supplier contracts, building management recycling efficiencies, using recycled materials in road construction, continuous improvements program which identify efficiency savings across all operations
- increased income from property assets
- application of reserve funds to minimise the need for an SRV.

Council continues to develop its revenue generated capacity for property development to reduce reliance on rates as part of the Property Management Strategy adopted by Council. An SRV is a last option in securing a sustainable level of income for Council”.

With regards to Council freezing the costs of its non-wage and non-statutory components of its operations, Page 80 of the SV Application Form Part B makes reference to Attachment 26. However, it seems this attachment has not been uploaded as a supporting document, so it is impossible to view what costs have been frozen.

I also fail to see how an SRV is a last option in securing a sustainable level of income for Council, when Council has not even attempted to address the majority of the content of my submission, nor the questions asked at the Resident Meeting or other engagement mediums.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. Please contact me if you would like clarification on any matter raised.

I look forward to your response.

Regards,

Gillian Kirby

