

Questions For Candidates

Blue Mountains City Council

2021 Election



The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is providing a set of questions to candidates in the 2021 Blue Mountains City Council Election.

The answers to these questions will be published.

Questions have been deliberately framed to provide a “yes” or “no” answer. Please add a brief comment if required.

Candidate's Name:	Suzie van Opdorp, Lead Candidate Labor Ward 1
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The Questionnaire

Please answer each question with a “yes” or “no” in the green shaded box.

Environment budget

Q.1	a)	Do you support increasing the Council's natural environment budget to at least 5% of the Council's overall budget in 21/22 and then ongoing?
<i>(Council's natural environment budget for 20/21 was 4% of Council's overall budget (Blue Mountains Council Operational Plan 20-21 p69). Since 2018 the natural environment budget, as a percentage of Council's overall budget, has remained at 4% and not increased. This is inadequate given the Blue Mountains is surrounded by World Heritage and the significant natural areas Council manage.)</i>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes		Click here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/> no		
	b)	Do you support reinstating transparent reporting of Council's yearly natural environmental budget?
<i>(Prior to 2013, Council provided much more detailed public reporting on the planned expenditure of the natural environment budget. This has been discontinued and Council currently only provide an overall budget figure under the heading "Natural Environment" in the yearly Operational Plan. Without this detail, budget changes cannot be compared from one year to the next.)</i>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes		Click here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/> no		
	c)	Will you advocate for the introduction of a new budget item within the Natural Area Visitor Facilities for maintenance?
<i>(Maintenance of visitor facilities does not currently have a budget. This means that skilled Council staff from other areas are often deployed to do this work. A specific allocation for maintenance of walking tracks and lookouts, toilets etc would ensure that Council assets do not get run down and require a major overhaul.)</i>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes		Click here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/> no		

Katoomba Airfield

Q.2		Will you actively support the Katoomba Airfield (located at Medlow Bath) being included in the Blue Mountains National Park and retained for emergency services?
<i>(On 22 October, Crown Lands announced that it had refused the proposed lease to operate a commercial airfield, but will continue to allow emergency operations. To ensure that there is never a commercial development on the site it needs to be incorporated into the surrounding national park.)</i>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes		Click here to enter text.
<input type="checkbox"/> no		

Dual naming

Q.3	Do you support the promotion of dual current and Aboriginal naming of Council managed iconic sites throughout the Blue Mountains (e.g. Minnehaha Falls and lookouts along the southern escarpment) in consultation with the Darug and Gundungurra communities?
<i>(Many Councils are adopting a proactive program of dual naming sites owned and managed by local councils, in recognition of local First Nations people eg Newcastle City and Hornsby Shire Councils.)</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<i>In consultation with and lead by the Traditional Owners – Gundungurra and Darug Nations</i>

Encroachment policy

Q.4	Do you support the development and resourcing of a Council Land Encroachment Policy to address degradation of bushland reserves caused by the use of this land by neighbouring private landholders?
<i>(The development of a Council Land Encroachment Policy has been included in past Council Operational Plans and has been raised by previous Councillors in Notice of Motions, but no policy has been finalised and adopted. Currently there are significant issues of residents degrading Council bushland reserves adjacent to their properties by using the land to park vehicles, stockpile materials, dispose of garden waste, or by mowing.)</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<i>Click here to enter text.</i>

Climate change

Q.5	Do you support Council developing a policy of prohibiting gas appliances in all new residential developments in the Blue Mountains?
<i>(Prioritising removing gas appliances from households in NSW is the quickest and most effective way to reduce gas usage and therefore climate change-inducing pollutants from the gas industry. It is also relieves our homes of airborne pollutants from gas appliances which increase the risk of asthma and other respiratory illnesses. Canterbury Bankstown Council has led the way by proposing a ban on gas connections in new developments, and making rooftop solar panels compulsory, as part of the Masterplans for Campsie and Bankstown Town Centres.)</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<i>However I would want to see Council undertake extensive community consultation on this policy.</i>

Planning and development

Q.6	Do you support Council's current opposition to the proposed NSW Government's state-wide 'one size fits all' planning reforms applying to the Blue Mountains? This includes opposing - <ul style="list-style-type: none">• more development types being exempt from Council assessment and approval;• changes which will allow developers to contravene more development rules; and• allowing 'big retail' standalone developments or Penrith-style retail conglomerations outside established town centres.
<i>(The NSW Government is currently escalating reforms that will further centralise planning decisions and over-ride local planning controls. The Society believes these reforms will fast track inappropriate development in the Blue Mountains, exclude residents' ability to have a say over how and where development will occur and will degrade the local environment and character of the Blue Mountains.)</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<i>I support Council's current LEP, character-zones and opposition to one-size fits all rampant overdevelopment being pushed by the LNP State Government and the impact on water catchment, World Heritage status, etc.</i>

Q.7	Do you support Council's current policy of low new housing targets for the Blue Mountains?
<i>(The Council is required to negotiate 5 to 10-year housing targets with the state government on an ongoing basis. Council's new housing targets are based on land capability/availability, environmental constraints on development, and the Blue Mountains' designation as a low-density Metropolitan Rural Area)</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<i>I do support the targets as this is one of the reasons I have lived in the Blue Mountains for nearly 40 years, however, I also believe we need to look at ways to address rental shortages and social housing needs.</i>

Q.8 Will you support Council leading a strategy to increase affordable housing in the Blue Mountains, working with the not-for-profit sector and the NSW Government?

(The Blue Mountains has a shortage of affordable rental properties. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has numerous expert reports which demonstrate that increasing housing supply does not necessarily lead to lower housing prices, or more properties available for affordable rents, in fact it can be the reverse. This is due to factors such as investor demand, the influence of negative gearing and other financial policies. The Society believes the provision of increased affordable housing in the Blue Mountains does not require an increase in the new housing target).

yes no

I have spent many years working with people who are at risk of homelessness. Housing affordability has reached a crisis point in the Blue Mountains and tenants are experiencing a major housing crisis forcing many into homelessness, couch-surfing, etc. In spite of promises to deliver more social housing the NSW Government has failed. In the past I have worked with Community Housing Providers and other stakeholders and have formed good working relationships with Link-Wentworth. Any commitments to increasing affordable housing needs to be consistent with the Blue Mountains LEP.

Q.9 Do you support Council’s continuing efforts to have the Blue Mountains Local Government Area excluded from the NSW Government’s Low Rise Housing Diversity Code?

(This Code, now in force in the mountains despite Council’s efforts, allows fast-track approval for medium-density housing which meets state-wide ‘one size fits all’ development standards. Council assessment and approval is bypassed and neighbours have no say in these types of development.)

yes no

Click here to enter text.

Q.10 Do you support Council’s ongoing efforts to protect the large garden and bushland lots of the Blue Mountains townships from subdivision and intensive development?

(The Blue Mountains towns are famous for their large lot residential areas featuring older character housing, ‘leafy green streets’ and display gardens as well as natural bushland. The NSW Department of Planning did not support Council’s proposal for the inclusion of the R6 Residential Character Conservation zone in LEP 2015, which would have protected these areas from inappropriate development. Council continues to negotiate with the Department of Planning for the protection of these areas.)

yes no

Click here to enter text.

Q.11 Do you support Council’s current strong opposition to the proposed ‘Wildlife Park’ (zoo) at Bodington Hill, Wentworth Falls, now classified as a “State Significant Development”?

(Although the Council is not the approval authority for this proposed development, its opposition will be crucial to the outcome.)

yes no

Click here to enter text.

Q.12 Do you support retaining the Katoomba Golf Course as a publicly owned community recreation area?

(The Katoomba Masterplanning process, presently under way, will determine the future of the old Katoomba Golf Course. Local tourist operators have publicly stated their interest in the Golf Course as a site for a large-scale hotel/resort/conference centre or tourist ‘hub’.)

yes no

I support the Katoomba Golf Club remaining in public hands. I will not support the sale – ever!

Great Western Highway

Q.13 Will you publicly and strongly support Council’s position of opposing the Great Western Highway duplication?

(The proposed duplicated Great Western Highway from Katoomba to Mount Victoria, including the proposal for tunnels, will

- potentially damage groundwater, thereby threatening groundwater dependent swamps and creeks;*
- destroy parts of the Blue Mountains National Park; and*
- enable large reticulated “super” trucks to travel throughout the Blue Mountains.)*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<p>I am committed to the policy articulated by the Mayors' Minute and Blue Mountains City Council.</p> <p>The issue of the highway duplication is a State Government matter however I believe community consultation has been inadequate and that a better investment would be in freight to rail which would also address many of the highway safety and congestion issues.</p> <p>Given the State Government's stated intention to proceed with the tunnel option I believe the tunnel must include the village of Medlow Bath in order to protect the heritage and amenity of this village.</p> <p>I also oppose the introduction of 30 metre trucks on our highway and will advocate for a moratorium on their introduction by the NSW Government.</p>
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Western Sydney Airport (Nancy Bird Walton International Airport)

Q.14 Will you publicly and strongly support Council's current advocacy for residents and the environment in regard to flight paths and the lack of a curfew in relation to the Western Sydney Airport?

(Flight paths for the new airport have not yet been publicly exhibited. The number, the elevation, the frequency and paths of flights from the new airport, as well as the lack of a curfew, will significantly impact residents, the Blue Mountains National Park and local fauna.)

yes
 no

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

Q.15 Will you publicly and strongly support Council's current opposition to raising the Warragamba Dam wall?

(Raising the Warragamba Dam wall will damage Aboriginal cultural sites and heritage, the Blue Mountains National Park and world heritage values; and will destroy endangered flora and fauna)

yes
 no

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Q.16 Will you support the protection of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area by opposing development on the escarpment?

(Over 70% of the Blue Mountains Local Government Area is included in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Urban areas adjacent to the World Heritage area, and major new developments on/near the escarpment, have a significant impact on world heritage values. Although the Council is not the approval authority for major developments its opposition will be crucial to any outcomes.)

yes
 no

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Visitation impacts

Q.17 Will you support Council's efforts to further raise revenue from visitors and tourists, such as parking fees in tourism areas, to minimise tourist and visitor impacts on council managed natural areas and enable council managed tourism infrastructure to be maintained and improved?

(The Blue Mountains experienced a massive increase in tourism and visitation prior to the pandemic which is anticipated to continue to grow post pandemic. Before the pandemic Council predicted that visitation in 2036 would be 33% above 2018 levels (Local Planning Statement 2020 p105). These visitors use council owned and managed infrastructure such as walking tracks, toilets, lookouts and camp sites which currently are inadequate in light of increases in visitation. Council owned natural areas are also impacted from visitors (eg litter, erosion of walking tracks) and need to be proactively managed. Currently these costs are largely borne by local residents through council rates.)

yes
 no

Personal conservation values

If elected, what will you do for the environment?

Outline one or more projects/issues that you intend to work on. Limit 100 words.

My background as a social worker is in health, social and community services and social justice issues. I see environment as inextricably linked to the health and welfare of the community.

One of my key strengths is working collaboratively and in consultation with the community and organisational stakeholders. Whilst working for Trish Doyle MP I developed strong working relationships with environmental groups and stakeholders in the Blue Mountains. If elected I will work with Blue Mtns Conservation Society, the Colong Foundation and other stakeholders as well as residents' groups drawing on their knowledge, expertise and advice. I believe a united position is needed to address a range of environmental issues and vulnerabilities as well as the protection of our natural assets.

Council currently has a number of big-picture issues on the agenda – Warragamba Dam, the Western Sydney Airport, Zombie development applications and protecting our LEP. I will commit to working on these matters as a priority.