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Concerns over standard plan

More than 100 Blue Mountains residents attended a public meeting in Lawson on Sunday to look at progress on the new Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan (LEP).

Organised by the Blue Mountains Conservation Society, the meeting gave "almost unanimous support for three resolutions" — to lobby Blue Mountains City Council for more community consultation about the LEPs, to ask the State Government to "ensure environmental assessment and development controls are at least equivalent or more stringent to the existing LEPs" and to consult with federal Environment Minister Tony Burke about the impacts of the draft LEP on the world heritage area, Society campaigner, Sue Morrison said.

The current LEPs are being revised to make them consistent with the NSW government-mandated standard LEP format.

Council's request to the NSW Minister for Planning and Infrastructure for a "formal and full exemption" from the standard instrument LEP was rejected and council has had to prepare a draft review for the Department of Planning.

Greens councillor Geordie Williamson attended the meeting but did not vote in support of the motions. He told the Gazette he had abstained from the motion "because I remain concerned about the lack of transparency in the process of revising our LEP".

"My concern is at the end of all this is we will have a cake baked by the end of the year and ratepayers will be asked what colour icing do you want," he said.

"Organisations such as the Conservation Society have raised important points about the need for public consultation, and I understand that other councils, including Penrith, have sought to include the

public during their LEP revisions. I appreciate that the State Government has accelerated the timeframe for a new LEP but I believe there is space for compromise with the community's desire to have input. That is why I will be bringing a notice of motion to council in coming weeks, seeking greater transparency."

Blue Mountains Conservation Society president Peter Ridgeway said the society had a number of concerns including that "some existing environmental protection LEP provisions will be moved to the Better Living Development Control Plan, and ... will not be legally enforceable".

John Merson, the executive director of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, highlighted the importance of flexibility in the LEP to allow for management of swamps in the face of climate change and urban development while Citta slow convenor, architect Nigel Bell, expressed concern about retaining the unique character of the Blue Mountains, particularly Katoomba and Leura.

Mayor Daniel Myles reassured residents that every effort was being made to ensure that consolidation of the existing LEPs did not result in reduced environmental protection.

Council's draft plan should be available for public viewing in December.

The society has asked for the public exhibition period to be at least three months and that council set up a discussion forum on its Blue Mountains Have Your Say website.

A council spokeswoman said the council was "committed to undertaking comprehensive community engagement on the Draft Comprehensive LEP once the Department of Planning approval processes are completed".