Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Draft Leppington Precinct Plan

I, Fr Gregory Burke, write on behalf of the Australian Council of the Discalced Carmelite Order, which is the responsible legal body for the Carmelite Order in Australia and I, Fr Paul Maunder, write as the prior of the Carmelite community 247 St Andrews Rd Varroville.

We write to express our opposition to an aspect of the Transport and Access Strategy associated with the above development. We object to the proposal to develop St Andrews Road as a four-lane sub-arterial road, or even an arterial road, linking Camden Valley way to Campbelltown Road and the M5 freeway. There is regrettable confusion in the Traffic Strategy documentation as to the proposed classification and role of St Andrews Rd (arterial or sub-arterial road) cfr. Leppington Precinct - Transport and Access Strategy, p. 13. If it is to be an arterial road linking to the M5 freeway then the consequences for us are drastic.

The Carmelite friars have been on this land since 1964. In that time we have worked and cared for the land. In recent years we have worked, with Federal and State Government assistance, to improve the property by removing the pest wild olives and helping to regenerate the native Cumberland Plain Woodland. Our land is a visual amenity that is greatly valued by our neighbours who live in the suburbs of Raby and St Andrews. We have allowed our land to be used for the benefit of the community by the provision on our land of Mount Carmel Catholic High School, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish Church and the Carmel of Mary and Joseph of the Carmelite nuns.

The South West Growth Centre Structure Plan makes no reference to St Andrews Road and shows no extension eastward from Camden Valley Way to the M5/M31 or to Campbelltown Road. How is it, then, that such a major structural proposal should appear in the Draft Leppington Precinct Plan which is part of the South West Growth Centre? Campbelltown City Council do not appear to have been unaware of it.

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If this upgrade proceeds, there will be major implications for the community, the Scenic Hills, local heritage and the Carmelite communities at St Andrews Road at Varroville.

Our fundamental concern is the absence of any justification in the Draft Plan for a third connection between Camden Valley Way and Campbelltown Road and the M5. At present, to the south, Raby Road provides a direct east-west connection between Camden Valley Way and Campbelltown Road and the M5 northbound. To the north, Denham Court Road connects Camden Valley Way and Campbelltown Road, with access via Williamson Road to the M5 in both directions. In 2010, the RTA (now RMS) proposed a major truck stop for the M5 at Varroville, which was rejected because it was considered unsafe for vehicles to access the M5 at that site.

Since there is now access to the M5 from Raby Road in the south and Williamson Road and Brooks Road in the north, we question the safety of yet another access point in close proximity to these two intersections. Officials of the RTS told us in conversation that St Andrews Rd would not be connected to the M5 because of the impact on vehicle speed and safety in what is one of the busiest roads in NSW.

St Andrews Road is currently a two-lane local road through the Scenic Hills of Campbelltown Local Government Area (LGA). Since 1972 Campbelltown Council, in line with recommendations of the State Planning Authority, has preserved the Scenic Hills as an environmental protection area because of its scenic beauty. This area is important for the people of Campbelltown to give a sense of place. There are several sensitive land uses on both sides of St Andrews Road at Varroville, all of which would be seriously adversely affected by the presence of a four-lane sub-arterial road. They include Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish church, the Mount Carmel Retreat Centre and priory, the Carmel of Mary and Joseph (Carmelite nuns’ monastery) and Varro Ville House (state listed heritage house and associated heritage landscape).

Of these, the most serious negative impact would occur on the Mount Carmel Retreat Centre, which we, the Carmelite friars, have operated for the past 50 years. It is a residential centre for people seeking spiritual refreshment in a tranquil rural setting for days or weeks at a time. In my contact with visitors the two words most often used to describe their experience of Mount Carmel are peace and tranquillity. The proposed development of St Andrews Rd would presumably take land from us, including a still needed cattle yard. It would change the landscape dramatically especially on the steep hill between us and the Carmelite nuns and lead to the felling of trees. It would rob us of peace and tranquillity and thus threaten our financial viability.

The Retreat House is located close to St Andrews Road and was fully refurbished in 2012. If St Andrews Road becomes a four-lane sub-arterial road linking Camden Valley Way and the M5 freeway, there will be constant traffic, noise and lighting impacting upon the Retreat Centre. It is not far fetched to think the Retreat Centre will become unviable, since the conference and accommodation areas are all within approximately 40 metres of the current road corridor. Given that we have recently invested considerable sums of money to refurbish our guest accommodation this is a body blow. The economic impact on us as a religious community will be major. We are not a wealthy group. We value the serenity of our property which supports our way of life. We rely on the retreat centre for our livelihood. Will the widening of the include significant costs to compensate us for losing ability to sustain our property, our way of life and our outreach to those in need?

The Carmelite nuns will also experience permanent traffic noise, lighting and disruption to the tranquil environment they chose for our monastery and life of contemplative prayer 25 years ago.

Furthermore, there will undoubtedly be a negative impact on local heritage associated with State-listed Varro Ville House and its surrounding heritage landscape. It is probable that land will be resumed
from Varro Ville’s original estate to accommodate the road widening, thereby compromising its landscape and the heritage dams built by explorer Charles Sturt, which are located close to the current road corridor. Varro Ville is one of the most significant heritage houses and landscapes in Campbelltown LGA. It should be quarantined from development and conserved for present and future generations.

A four-lane arterial or a sub-arterial road through the Scenic Hills at Varroville has the potential to spell the end of the Scenic Hills as an area of scenic beauty. It will inevitably open up the Scenic Hills to commercial development. More sensitive long-term planning would conserve the area as prime green space for present and future residents of Sydney’s south-west.

In summary, we support Campbelltown City Council’s concerns and ask to have the proposal to upgrade St Andrews Road to a four-lane sub-arterial road removed from the Draft Leppington Precinct Plan.

Yours sincerely,

Rev Gregory Burke, OCD

[Signature]

Rev Paul Mauder, OCD