

The battle for Balmoral

By Green Party Co-Leader Dr Russel Norman

I recently enjoyed the opportunity of meeting Balmoral Community Group members Justine Tringham, Nathan Inkpen and Peter Stephenson at Wiremu St.

They briefed me on the neighbourhood's David vs Goliath battle against McDonalds' plans to build a 24 hour drive-thru.

I've had a look at McDonalds' proposals, which are frightening for local people because of the increased traffic, noise, fumes and litter.

About the only good thing about McDonalds' plan is that it has united the community in opposition. Neighbours are talking to each other and organising themselves to fight the proposals.

I am impressed at the extent that Balmoral residents have mobilised against this controversial development. I heard that 4500 houses have been 'letterboxed' and 850 submissions lodged against the plan.

I gave Justine, Nathan and Peter advice on how to fight the proposal and I pledged my support.

You are all fighting the good fight and acting as watchdog for the entire community

The situation Balmoral residents find themselves in is common to many community groups. It's a totally uneven playing field and the goalposts are shifting due to changes in the Resource Management Act.

At the moment, community groups, businesses and land owners who do not like proposed new council rules for their area regularly persuade the Environment Court to change them, or they use the mediation services of the Court to get a better outcome.

But changes to the RMA, supported by National, Act and Labour, will whittle away rights of appeal to the Environment Court.

The proposed changes will make it harder for such organisations to fight district plan changes and developments.

Appeals will instead be largely restricted to points of law. The changes will also raise the fee for lodging an appeal from \$55 to \$500 and a bond.

Balmoral residents, I'm totally on your side in this unequal battle.

As Co-Leader of New Zealand's third major political party, I promise the people of Mt Albert electorate effective representation. I demand answers from the Parliamentary front benches and I have been holding the Government to account on changes to the RMA, the 1950s-style Waterview motorway, and the looming threat of asset privatisation and loss of democracy in the SuperCity proposals I categorise as Grand Theft Auckland.

I would love to hear from you. Please visit our website (www.greens.org.nz) or email me at: russel.norman@greens.org.nz