

# Residents vent anger over Abbott Lane closure

by Eva Wiland, *Artarmon Gazette* editor

The three men in suits from the Department of Education and Training were ill prepared on October 14 for the anger Artarmon residents unleashed at them over the compulsory acquisition of Abbott Lane.

The majority of the 50 or so residents who turned up at the DET information night at the Artarmon Public School (APS) – many of them parents of APS students – had arrived to fight against the closure of the laneway.

According to a Willoughby City Council-commissioned report, the lane provides an important pedestrian access to and from Artarmon village and the station for Barton Road residents, including about 270 frail, aged and disabled at the Housing NSW complex next to the lane. In addition, Abbott Lane is the safest and most direct route for workers to the industrial area.

The report, undertaken by gtk consulting, recommended against the closure of the lane, saying it was used by a significant number of pedestrians not associated with the school – 91 (46%) between 7am and 10am and 102 (30%) between 2pm and 6pm.

An inspection of Hampden Lane as an alternative route, suggested by Minister of Education and Training Verity Firth, found it potentially dangerous for the frail and disabled because it was a one-way road for motor traffic and had no pedestrian footpath. The closure would force pedestrians to walk a longer, steeper route. "In view of the adverse

impacts", it was considered DET's compulsory acquisition and closure should not proceed.

DET director of planning & delivery Tony McCabe, who was the department's "fall guy" to address the angry gathering and answer questions, stressed no change would be made to Abbott Lane until consultation with the wider community had been completed.

He explained it was "very common" for DET to make compulsory acquisitions of land when there was a need without having any specific plan for the land. "It doesn't always mean full development will happen."

McCabe pointed to the overcrowding of the schools in the Artarmon, Chatswood and Naremburn. APS student numbers between 2005 and 2010 had increased 15.7%, to 753 and was projected to increase another 807 by 2015.

At this point one of the Barton Road residents interjected: "What about the other people – there are a thousand of us who use that lane."

Other comments followed: "This is typical of the department." "You people are unbelievable." "This is poor custody of public money."

McCabe said there were several "options" – one was to link up the two school campuses and provide a "safe corridor between the schools" another was expansion of the schoolyard or shared use of the lane, closing it off at certain times of the day only.

One resident said: "There is only one option

– that's to leave (the lane) open." APA committee member Peter Egan asked why the department had bought the land "blindly". "That's just crazy," he said.

APA president Michelle Sloane said: "There's a lot of discussion about consultation but very little actual activity. What that acquisition will do is to deny those who are elderly and frail and a force them to take substitute routes which are dangerous."

McCabe said the consultation process would include another information meeting in November. DET would correlate the information from the meeting and consultation with WCC, which would be presented at another information meeting in November.

Options for managing the land would be developed in March 2011. In April 2011, there would be further community consultation on DET's proposed options.

The gathering clapped when Willoughby Mayor Pat Reilly warned: "Be careful you are genuine when you talk about consultation... You've been greatly upsetting the equilibrium of the people who have come here tonight."

"We are not happy with how this has been handled. You're certainly going to get opposition from the Artarmon community and you're certainly going to get opposition from us."

McCabe admitted: "Clearly it would have been a better move for us to consult at an earlier stage."