

South Sydney Consortium Response to the Redfern Waterloo Authority Built Environment Plan Stage 1

13 April 2006

South Sydney Consortium

The South Sydney Consortium is a group of small community-based services operating in Redfern and Waterloo who have grouped together to speak as one voice for their member organisations and the social needs of people living in the area and being supported by these services. Many of the issues outlined below were identified at a meeting of the Consortium on 20 March 2006 and refer to the overheads supplied by the RWA Community Forum 4 March 2006 and the Draft Plan Document. This document has been written by Faye Williams, Executive Officer of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social development and also includes some recent developments that are relevant to the topic.

Consultation Process

Given the scale and impact of the proposals in this draft plan, the number of local residents providing input appears to be inadequate. This is especially in relation to Department of Housing tenants, older people or people from culturally and linguistically diverse and ATSI backgrounds. The relatively narrow scope of the community consultation process suggests that the RWA was not seeking to achieve a broad cross section of input from the community, but was going through a required 'process of consultation'. The seriousness that RWA places on community input will be demonstrated by the way plans are changed to reflect community concerns.

The staging of the three areas of RWA development is interesting. We note that this Built Environment Plan comes before Stage 2 of the Human Services Plan that deals with aged people and people with disabilities, who will be greatly affected by plans to sell off community services infrastructure.

Recommendation: The RWA makes adjustments to this draft plan in the light of relevant comment from the consultation process and informs local people of those adjustments.

Community Feedback already provided

The South Sydney Consortium is providing comments about the Built Environment Plan from the perspective of the impact on the lives of local residents and existing community services, which is our area of expertise. The Consortium is concerned that RWA is not looking at the information provided by local residents and community organisations at the in-depth consultations carried out by Morgan Disney consultants. Local people treated these consultations in good faith and expressed their concerns and needs, only to find their input not recorded in the consultants report. As a result, many are not inclined to provide further comment.

Recommendation: That the RWA explore community feedback from consultations carried out by Morgan Disney (although not reflected in the consultants report) and reflect those needs in this and future proposals.

Population Increase

Referring to the overheads provided to people attending the consultation, the 'Local Context' overhead identifies a planned increase in housing and people in the area. Figures of a 75% increase in population in the Inner City area have been quoted. We are already seeing a lot of new housing and residents in Redfern and in Waterloo especially high rise apartments built on vacant industrial sites. Because of this population growth, we do not agree with the sell off existing community infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and community justice facilities. There is also a concern about the impact of the planned level of development on infrastructure such as water, sewerage, electricity and traffic.

Lost opportunities

The built environment in Redfern and Waterloo consists of a high proportion of ageing real estate that needs development, but the opportunity to produce an exceptional community through the built environment does not appear to be in the plans. Because the new developments in Redfern and Waterloo have to pay for themselves by meeting the needs of developers, it appears we will have high-rise units, a large shopping and office complex on narrow streets with insufficient open space. The capacity to produce an inner city village that retains its historical charm and builds on the diversity of culture, while treating long-term residents with respect, appears to be lost.

One of the attractions of Redfern and Waterloo is its proximity to the CBD, but the built environment plan does not seem to be considering the impact of the CBD on Redfern and Waterloo. Why build more office space in Redfern and Waterloo when there is excess office space in the city not being used? Conversely, there is the opportunity to use public facilities that are being sold off to offer services that are now congested in CBD eg, legal services.

Working with Council

The quality of the built environment in Redfern and Waterloo also depends on plans and action taken by the City of Sydney Council. Yet there appears to be no inclusion of City of Sydney plans and initiatives in this proposal. The upgrade of Redfern Street is one example of how it is essential that these two authorities integrate their efforts.

Impact on existing residents

The focus of the Built Environment Plan is limited to the public owned sites. Around these sites are other elements of the built environment that are in private hands. Existing residents talk about being built under, above and up against but are not seen as part of the 'built environment' and not catered for in the plans. There is concern about a canyon effect with 18 story developments and narrow streets

Recommendation: The RWA takes the opportunity to create an holistic Built Environment Plan that includes the necessary elements of state government, RWA, council, community and private interests with the view to create an exceptional inner city community.

Traffic

This is a vital element of the whole plan that is dependant on its interface with existing infrastructure that is controlled by the RTA and has impacts wider than Waterloo and Redfern. Its proximity to the CDB makes Redfern and Waterloo a conduit for the arterial traffic passing through the area on its way to the city, or traveling from suburbs in the

south towards the east or west. It now appears that necessary RTA and State Rail approvals and co-operation that are vital to the success of the plan are not forthcoming. The benefit of the proximity to the railway is for workers coming in from other suburbs, not for local people who live or work locally. The new development will greatly increase the need for car parking for workers coming from outside the area and for greater car ownership by more affluent residents. Free public car parking space does not appear to be well catered for. Local disadvantaged residents have a low level of car usage. What they really need is public transport across Redfern and Waterloo and to hospitals and shopping centres. The South Sydney Traffic Plan needs to be a reference point for RWA traffic plans. The problems of Sydney traffic should not be replicated in new plans for any hubbub in Sydney.

Recommendation: This plan has firm traffic-related proposals for:
adequate free car parking
dealing with increased local car use on narrow streets
dealing with the interface of local traffic with through traffic
provision of adequate cross-suburb local public transport

Safety

Safety and security are two issues of vital concern to residents. Some members of the consortium are involved in the Community Safety Committee and are aware of how the built environment can provide locations where crimes such as robbery and assault are easier to commit. There is a strong incidence in the area already of attacks on residents and visitors in public spaces.

Some areas of particular concern are:

- civic square - open space is essential but has to be planned to maximise safety
- pedestrian footbridge
- tunnel under the road
- small pockets of open space where there are needles, drinking and cars smashed (need more open space)
- injection of gentrified commercial and residential activity into localities where disadvantaged people now operate with some degree of acceptance
- areas of friction between existing residents and newcomers eg shopping centres
- even worse, fully privatised shopping centres where locals suspected of causing trouble are not admitted
- new developments becoming gated, excluding existing residents and increasing tension when they finally do interact.

Recommendation: All proposed development is assessed by the local Community Safety Committee to identify design elements that would impact negatively on safety and encourage crime.

Public community infrastructure

The community organisations in Redfern and Waterloo are particularly opposed to the sale of public land and existing publicly owned premises. Community organisations who use these buildings to run local services are in a key position to identify the need for these community resources. Given the extreme level of disadvantage in Redfern and Waterloo, the need for public community infrastructure is critical. It is recognised that the properties are old and need upgrading and much of this need is due to government departments

such as health, corrective services and education rationalising their services and closing down facilities. The issue may be that these properties are being sold because they are close to the CBD and likely to sell for a high price, not because of a lack of need for services.

Once this public land is sold, it is lost to the community forever. Meanwhile the population is growing due to other RWA initiatives such as increased accommodation and workplaces. There is recently announced increase in mental health funding for community services that will need facilities. vital for the large number of people with mental health in the locality. Health needs are high, with special needs in the Aboriginal population.

Need for good quality premises for community services

Many community organisations have for some time been squeezed into inadequate premises that are too old and too small and that restrict the provision of much needed services let alone any expansion.

When community infrastructure is sold, existing tenants have a tough time finding alternative premises. Rather than a 'make do' or 'move on and don't complain' strategy, there is an opportunity in built environment plans to provide high quality premises for local services. There are already good facilities at The Redfern Centre for aboriginal young people and the other Redfern Centre that houses services for frail aged and people with disabilities. Redfern and Waterloo need purpose-built accommodation for its Neighbourhood Centre and two youth services whose premises are currently unsafe or unusable. This is a built environment issue, not just a human services issue and an opportunity to show local people that they are valued.

Redfern School

Difficulty in finding alternate accommodation has been the recent experience of the experience of the community organisations housed in the Redfern School that has been sold to private interests. While a couple of services have been allowed to stay, most have been searching desperately for alternate suitable premises. While the RWA has offered support, this has proved to be ineffective and there are three or four organisations that will have difficulty providing services to the community for aboriginal people, multicultural residents and young people learning computers.

Redfern School should be kept for a mix of community services, free parking and educational services. The sale of any pieces of public land in this precinct should be used for the above purposes.

Rachel Foster Hospital

This hospital is an iconic facility from the community perspective. The local community has always been involved with the hospital as a community-building exercise eg. extensions were paid for by local low-income residents 'buying a brick'. The hospital represented a service that disadvantaged people in the community felt comfortable with and would therefore attend. Since the Department of Health has removed hospital services, local people experience difficulty getting to the Royal Prince Alfred hospital in Camperdown. Rachel Foster now provides a not-to-be-missed opportunity to provide accommodation for quality services to the high need community in Redfern and Waterloo. The services that need to be kept at Rachel Foster include;

- community health
- mental health services using new federal funding
- back-up facility for the crisis team so they can help people cope with everyday life

- a facility where people are helped to improve their living skills
- aged care – hostel and nursing home
- drug and alcohol services, especially a drug detox capacity for people with children

A sell off of any sections of Rachel Foster should be used by the Department of Health to provide the services listed above.

Courthouse

The courthouse provides an excellent opportunity to house high quality community justice facilities. Since law and order and safety are major issues in Redfern and Waterloo, any improvement will require good premises for services.

Recommendation: An important part of the Built Environment Plan is to provide high quality premises for local services. Any plans for existing state owned infrastructure should prioritise community infrastructure and proceeds of the sale of land surplus to that purpose should be used to provide those quality community premises.

These include

Redfern Courthouse to house high quality community justice facilities

Rachel Foster to provide facilities for expanded community health, mental health, drug and alcohol and residential aged care services

Redfern School should be kept for a mix of community services, free parking and educational services

Redfern and Waterloo need purpose-built accommodation for its Neighbourhood Centre and two youth services

Public Housing

We do not want to see public housing reduced. While we are concerned about the numbers of high need people in Redfern and Waterloo and the high-rise configuration, we cannot support any reduction in housing available for disadvantaged people. Rather, we want to see adequate public housing distributed in small groupings throughout the metropolitan area that would eventually mean a lower density of disadvantaged people than in Redfern and Waterloo. The funding of more public housing in other areas and a better mix of people with high and low needs in this area needs to be done **before** the high need people in public housing in Redfern and Waterloo are 'moved on'. We are concerned that the RWA is attempting to change the population mix quickly to meet development demands, rather than taking steps that are in the best interest of disadvantaged people. The RWA especially needs to consider frail older people and people from culturally and linguistically disadvantaged who are very disturbed about being moved.

Impact on Housing Estates

The consortium's greatest concern is the possibility of sell off of Public Housing, perhaps not the high rise at first, but certainly, the walk-ups are especially vulnerable to private sale. Broad directions and principles for changes to the built environment have been set down without reference to the impacts on public housing, as they are to be considered in Stage 2 of the Built Environment Plan.

Recommendation:

Stage 1 of this Built Environment Plan should include consideration of the plans impact on Public Housing.

There should be no reduction of public housing in Redfern and Waterloo

The RWA especially needs to consider the impacts of Stage 1 of the Built Environment plans on all disadvantaged residents in Redfern and Waterloo

Eveleigh

The treatment of the Aboriginal landowners in this plan is an example of negative discrimination that entrenches the disaffection of the aboriginal population.– one of the most destructive forces in the Redfern and Waterloo community. The Aboriginal landowners around The Block should be treated in the same way as other private landowners.

Recommendation The Aboriginal landowners around The Block should be treated in the same way as other private landowners.