

LABOR COUNCILLORS OF THE CITY OF SYDNEY: SUBMISSION TO THE DRAFT BUILT ENVIRONMENT PLAN FOR REDFERN-WATERLOO

1. Labor Councillors note that the Draft Built Environment Plan is the final component of the State Government's ambitious re-generation plan for the area.
2. The State Government and the Redfern-Waterloo Authority deserves credit for attempting to devise a comprehensive and holistic approach to the entrenched social and economic problems faced by the community. Such a co-ordinated response is long overdue.
3. However, Labor Councillors have serious reservations about some aspects of the Built Environment Plan.
4. As it stands, Labor Councillors believe the Built Environment Plan:
 - does little to address the employment and economic needs of local residents;
 - does not adequately address the views of the local indigenous community;
 - significantly lessens Redfern's heritage status;
 - negatively impacts on the Authority's already released 'Human Services' and 'Employment and Enterprise' draft plans; and
 - recommends the building of large scale office accommodation in areas demonstrably unsuitable for such buildings, such as Gibbons Street.
5. The Draft Plan has been developed in a unilateral manner without sufficient consultation with the City of Sydney, local businesses, and residents of the area.
6. Labor Councillors call on the State Government to enter into immediate consultation with all relevant stakeholders ahead of preparing a new Draft Built Environment Plan for Redfern Waterloo.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Employment

7. The Draft Built Environment Plan provides for 440,000 m² of office space. It is suggested that this will drive the 18,000 new jobs promised by the Draft Employment and Enterprise Strategy.
8. Despite the existence of this strategy the Redfern-Waterloo Authority has still failed to present compelling policy arrangements to ensure that forecasted employment opportunities in Redfern will be available to local people.

9. The vast majority of these 18,000 jobs will be in high skill, high wage white collar professions as epitomised by the Australian Technology park site which currently houses over 100 scientific and technology R&D companies. Under the current strategy sites such as this will require thousands more highly trained workers.
10. The vast majority of local community members will not be candidates for these jobs. Not only does the skills base not currently exist within the community to match the need of sites like the Australian Technology Park, the community's capacity to build an effective skills base is significantly hampered by entrenched social and educational disadvantage.
11. Labor Councillors note that the Draft Employment and Enterprise Plan does seek to 'develop and implement a whole of Government approach, in partnership with universities located in the Sydney area, to improve the number of local children entering tertiary studies.'
12. The proposed Vocational Training Centre is also welcomed as it will equip local residents with the important high-end technical skills that will be needed at sites like the Australian technology Park.
13. However, it must be noted that these are long term pilot strategies that will cater for a relatively small number of people. Certainly not enough to fulfil the needs of even the Australian Technology Park.
14. The simple fact remains that the vast bulk of skilled labour will have to be imported into Redfern for the strategy to work.
15. Opportunities for local people are more likely to come in the hospitality and services industries identified in the Draft Employment and Enterprise Strategy. These areas are marked by high rates of casualisation and employment uncertainty.
16. Finally, employment creation in Redfern-Waterloo is contingent on business taking up the 440,000 m² of commercial space on offer. Bearing in mind that more than half of the two ex-TNT towers at Redfern Station have remained vacant for the last two years this is an overly optimistic goal.
17. Sydney is already awash with excess office space. Many companies are now choosing 'satellite' business parks in areas such as Baulkham Hills and North Ryde in preference to inner-city locations.
18. Stiff competition also exists close to Redfern from sites such as East Darling Harbour, other areas of the CBD and the brand new Green Square development which will provide 106,000 m² of office space.

19. In the CBD alone Council has estimated that over 100,000 m² of office space will be built in 2006.
20. As yet the Redfern-Waterloo Authority has not released any detail regarding how they intend to fill such a mammoth release of commercial floorspace. If the Authority is unable to find tenants it would be assumed that this would affect funding for programs developed under the Human Services and Employment and Enterprise Strategies.

Heritage

21. The Redfern-Waterloo area is rich in cultural, social and economic heritage.
22. The plan does not respect this heritage.
23. A number of the strategic sites of great heritage value have been earmarked for extensive re-development. They include:
 - Former Local Court House and Police Station – up to 6 storey structures will be permitted;
 - Former Rachel Forster Hospital – up to 6 storey structures will be permitted;
 - Former Redfern Public School – up to 7 storey structures will be permitted;
 - North Eveleigh – up to 16 storey structures will be permitted;
 - South Eveleigh – up to 12 storey structures will be permitted; and
 - Eveleigh Street – up to 5 storey structures will be permitted.
24. The Built Draft Environment Plan is worryingly brief and at times ambiguous in relation to heritage concerns for these sites.
25. It states that ‘Further work will be undertaken to determine the heritage integrity of individual heritage items and appropriate measures to protect their relative importance with each development proposal’ (page 12). The report further states that heritage items may need to be removed (page 26). This last statement is of great concern.
26. As the plan currently stands a large number of heritage items stand to come under significant threat.
27. At the former Redfern Police Station development of up to six storeys will be allowed which is quite out of context with the Redfern and Turner Streetscapes. This makes it likely that the Police Station will be demolished.
28. At North Eveleigh maximum height limits of up to 10 storeys have been set which imply that heritage items like the ‘Fan of Tracks’, the 1887 ‘Paint Shop’, the 1913 Clothing Store and the 1907 Blacksmith’s shop could be demolished.

29. Similarly the draft plan is silent on the future of the South Eveleigh railway shed that houses Steam Engine 3801 and the Erecting Shop (circa 1889) on the same site.
30. The State Government must give a complete guarantee that all items of heritage interest in Redfern will be conserved.
31. Redfern is also rich in indigenous social and cultural history: a fact this plan largely ignores.
32. Redfern is the birthplace of the Aboriginal Housing Company, and home to the first indigenous owned housing project, The Block, which was created under the Whitlam Government in the early 1970s.
33. Despite the social and economic problems that now infest The Block, this area remains an area of great historical significance and a symbol of indigenous self-determination.
34. Redfern is also the birthplace of a range of indigenous organisations, important social protest movements, and landmark political occasions such as Paul Keating's 1992 'Redfern Park' address.
35. This historical heritage must be protected. Attempting to turn Redfern into a crowded satellite CBD complete with large scale high-rise development cheapens and degrades the suburb's unique history.
36. At the very least, the State Government must recognise the recommendations of the South Sydney Conservation Area Study 2003 which states that the area known as The Block should be declared a conservation area under the Darlington Conservation Area.
37. They must also consult the local indigenous community regarding strategies that will conserve the rich historical heritage of Redfern that is so important to our national story.

Loss of Public Land

38. The strategic sites identified for development under the Draft Built Environment Plan are currently publicly owned.
39. However, the plan is silent regarding the future ownership of these sites.
40. The fact that these sites are slated for major residential and commercial development would seem to suggest that the land will be sold to developers.
41. The State Government should now immediately clarify whether this land will be sold or whether it intends to be an owner/developer.

42. Labor Councillors will oppose the sell off of any strategic public land in Redfern.

Lack of Consultation

43. The Draft Built Environment Plan has marginalised a wide range of stakeholders in the Redfern-Waterloo Area.
44. There is a perception that the State Government has decided on the future of Redfern-Waterloo without reference to its community. This has led to the current consultation process being labelled a “sham” as in the minds of many in the community who think the government has made up it’s mind already and is just ‘going through the motions’.
45. The government’s dismissal of the Pemulwuy project is a case in point.
46. While not perfect, the Pemulwuy Project is an innovative and locally developed proposal that blended affordable housing opportunities with culturally appropriate job creation strategies.
47. The project had strong backing from local business owners, the indigenous community, noted architects and urban planners.
48. Under the Draft Built Environment Plan the Pemulwuy proposal becomes obsolete. This is because the plan only allows for 30 homes to be built on The Block site. The Pemulwuy Project proposal called for the construction of 62 homes, both privately owned and leased. Many in the indigenous community now feel betrayed and are suspicious of the State Government’s motives, especially as they relate to The Block.
49. The State Government must now involve the Indigenous Community in the planning process for the future of The Block, and more importantly be prepared to take their ideas on board even if they don’t coincide with the Government’s view.
50. Finally, the State Government should also consult with the City of Sydney Council to ensure its strategy is compatible with a range of City initiatives including the Draft Social Plan; Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan; Draft Youth Strategy and Draft Youth Facilities Plan; and the Action Plan for Aboriginal People.
51. Considering that the City of Sydney Council is a major stakeholder in Redfern, the current consultative processes and mechanisms must be strengthened.

Resident Amenity

52. The Draft Built Environment Plan is inconsistent with current City of Sydney planning controls.

53. Of particular concern is the effect the proposed building heights of the development on many of these sites will have a direct impact on both public and private land adjacent to and surrounding them. This could include loss of resident amenity and sunlight access to private sites throughout Redfern. This development could also potentially damage views of the City from public spaces.

Public Space and Affordable Housing

54. It is worrying that the important issues of Affordable Housing and the creation of public space have been deferred as 'Key Future Tasks'.

55. The State Government must make the creation of an Affordable Housing Strategy and a Public Domain Plan absolute priorities.

56. In relation to the issue of open space it should be noted that the proposed re-development of Redfern Railway Station will eliminate existing open space in Marian Street. It also seems that much of the existing open space at the Redfern Public School site and Rachel Forster Hospital will be lost to development. This makes a Public Domain Plan doubly urgent.

57. The State Government's pledge that no public housing stock will be lost is welcome.

An Alternative Vision

58. Labor Councillors would like to repeat their support for the integrated approach to the re-development of Redfern-Waterloo.

59. It is therefore disappointing that the approach to the Built Environment is out of step with the progressive and innovative community solutions found in the Human Services and Employment and Enterprise Strategies.

60. As previously noted, Redfern has a rich historical and social heritage. This should be the bedrock of any re-development of Redfern.

61. The Pemulwuy project was one initiative that recognised the effectiveness of building on Redfern's strengths.

62. The centrepiece of the proposal would have been a large area of public space called 'Red Square' in tribute to Redfern's railway heritage.

63. This heritage would be utilised to create tourist attractions in the form of a revitalised Eveleigh train yards which are already full of important heritage items.

64. The unique indigenous character of the area should also be used to turn Redfern into a favoured cultural tourism hub and create employment and opportunity for local people.
65. Along with indigenous run markets in Red Square the Pemulwuy proposal also allowed for indigenous owned and operated tourist accommodation, cafes and restaurants and arts, crafts and theatre businesses.
66. There are further examples of progressive and economically viable cases of urban re-development from around the world that could serve as inspiration for the Redfern-Waterloo area.
67. The Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco is such an example.
68. It is an 87-acre 12 block, mixed use development on what was once an area of run down commercial and industrial premises.
69. Today the area features a 20 acre district of museum's and other cultural attractions including the Moscone Convention Centre which is dedicated to civil rights leader Martin Luther King.
70. There also exists a five-acre public park which regularly hosts concerts and cultural exhibitions.
71. Yerba Buena Gardens also contains a significant commercial and residential component. Alongside hotels and retail precincts are 3,750 apartments. Importantly half of these have been designated as affordable housing.
72. Another important lesson that should be learnt from overseas experiences is the potential for existing structures to be refurbished and renovated as opposed to being demolished and replaced with bland skyscrapers.
73. The Metropolis Apartments in Austin, Texas, are a good example. The City took buildings which were vacant and in disrepair and turned them into an ecologically sustainable and affordable apartments which served to revitalise the whole area without driving out existing residents.
74. A number of commercial examples also exist.
75. The most prominent is the case of Baltimore's disused Powerhouse. After being renovated and revitalised the Powerhouse has become the centrepiece of a business hub that contains a range of creative and knowledge industry firms.
76. Labor Councillors ask the State Government to take these successful examples, which build on existing heritage or cultural strengths, into mind before finalising their plans for Redfern-Waterloo.

77. Labor Councillors thank the Redfern-Waterloo Authority for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Built Environment Plan.
78. If any further information is required don't hesitate to contact us on (02) 9265 9427.