

# Dangar Island League

PO Dangar Island, NSW 2083  
www.dangarislandleague.net



Mayor Steve Russell  
C/- Hornsby Shire Council  
PO Box 37, Hornsby NSW 1630

2 December 2016

Dear Steve,

## **Brooklyn Improvement Master Plan**

I am writing concerning the work being undertaken to prepare a master plan for Brooklyn. While I strongly support the need to develop and implement a plan, I wish to draw to your attention some concerns that Dangar residents have expressed, about the direction and content of the work undertaken to date.

We are now well into phase three of the study and I have had the opportunity to review the Constraints Analysis Draft Report (phase one of the study) and the Draft Vision and Place Principles (phase two). Last Saturday I, and many other interested people, attended the Community Round Table Workshop which fell well short of expectations - roughly 60 people, no chair and meeting procedures, no clear agenda and many issues declared off-limits, slides with print too small to read, no voice amplification and agreed speaking etiquette (so most points raised by the consultants or other participants were never heard), and the assessment of views by the aggregation of "sticky notes" which allows for no nuance or testing of meaning.

**There must be a more professional approach to public participation if it is to be effective and not result in cynicism.**

A central focus of the work undertaken to date is "community" and considerable effort has been placed by the consultants on ascertaining community views. While I understand the preparation of the master plan is informed by a Community Reference Group on which the Dangar Island League participates, there is an underlying concern amongst Island residents that the consultants do not recognise we are an integral part of the Brooklyn community. The Community meeting did not ameliorate this concern but rather left the impression we are a parking problem to be rectified.

**We are not connected to the Brooklyn community; we are about a third by population of it.**

Brooklyn and Dangar residents use the same doctor's surgery, go to the same school, are members of the same Parents and Citizens Association, use the same sports fields, vote in the same polling booth, support the same local businesses, reside in the same local government area, use the same paths, wharfs, roads and railway station, and battle the same number of railway station stairs. When the electricity goes down in Brooklyn, it's also down on Dangar; when the sewerage system plays-up, it affects us all. If our say in "community" is less, I would point out that Dangar residents are a shorter distance from the town centre than many residents towards the western fringes of Brooklyn Road and would transit and use the town centre more frequently.

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## Master Plan Analysis

Let me turn to the quality of the analysis that will underpin the master plan. Of the information released to date, much of the work has centred on a community engagement program. This approach has not pretended to have any statistical validity but has relied on asking questions about what different community members, and segments of the community such as businesses, see or feel as problems and desirable outcomes. When reviewing this analysis, there is no clarity on whether 90% of respondents see the same problem or 51% or 20%. As important, there is no feel for whether respondent's answers were nuanced. A final weakness is that a bald question in the absence of any prior discussion of constraints can lead to impractical answers, no follow up and disillusionment with the process.

Two examples: At Saturday's meeting the consultants proffered that younger residents had expressed the desire for a town centre with a more dynamic nightlife. Other residents had indicated their desire for a 24-hour service station and convenience store. In my view these answers would carry far more weight if the respondents had earlier briefings on the Brooklyn economy and understood these desires were only viable with far higher population densities than Brooklyn. Not introducing what is basic information skews responses and will compromise the options that are finally considered and ultimately outcomes. Better to first widely distribute to the community, some information papers for discussion on Brooklyn and its physical, social and economic constraints, to get more robust and informed responses.

## Draft Constraints Report – Additional Work Required

The draft constraints report requires, in my view, considerable additional work. It is almost anecdotal with a dearth of hard information. As important, it is static and does not look to the future. Trends are not identified and projections are conspicuous by their absence. Some points:

### The Hawkesbury Context

There is only cursory discussion of Brooklyn's place as the gateway to the lower Hawkesbury - the river and its national parks. No effort appears to have been made to put numbers on present tourist traffic or to make best guesses about growing demands with a burgeoning greater Sydney population. Alternatives to Brooklyn as a gateway are already congested. How will such pressures be managed? The existing approach is to "choke" demand with a narrow entry and restricted parking. The proposed Peat Island development gets a mention but no effort is made to provide even back-of-the-envelope calculations about what this might mean for the Brooklyn economy or the demand for public transport, public wharves and parking. The absence of looking forward at how constraints are evolving suggests this master plan might not be relevant tomorrow.

### Land and Housing

There is no detailed discussion about the dynamics of the land and housing market in Brooklyn and its relationship to the broader Sydney market. This information (and statistics) is publicly available. Is Brooklyn gentrifying like other water front communities and becoming more integrated as a suburb of Sydney. What will be the pressures on the proposed "Built" Form Principle over the next twenty years? The SC Lennon and Associates work hints at the issues but provides no real discussion of the dynamics involved and likely futures.

### State Government Agencies

While I understand there is an Agency Reference Group, the draft report does not canvas in any detail what these agencies see as constraints. A picture of the land in Brooklyn by ownership (freehold, leasehold, crown land, etc.) and controlling entity (private, Council, State Transport, etc.) would provide a useful background.

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## **The Economy**

The section on the Brooklyn economy is very weak. There is little hard information on business viability or patterns of demand between different sources - local residents, the river communities, different classes of tourists. The information provided is static and provides no indication about trends. The Census contains data about median incomes. What does it say about Brooklyn? My guess is that Brooklyn residents have a relatively low median income and this lack of disposable income at least partly accounts for the lack of night time restaurants and activities. If this is correct, the proposal for a piazza must address this issue. It may only be viable with greater densities or a different tourist model.

## **Demography**

The changing population, age structure and social composition of Brooklyn get short shrift. Where is a demographic picture of Brooklyn showing how it is changing and how it compares to other areas of Sydney? Do we have an older population structure than Sydney as a whole? Where do people work? What sort of work do they do? Is technology changing their work patterns? How do they travel to work? What is the modal split? Is the need to travel to work declining? A social picture of Brooklyn gets equally short shrift. Only brief references to homelessness and unsafe spaces get a mention. I would expect the doctors and school principal as well as the local area commander with NSW Police could provide a more fulsome picture of the social issues in Brooklyn. Can planning influence better social outcomes?

## **Transport and Parking**

Again, this has the same weaknesses. There is a description of services and roads, but no information on vehicle movements or public transport patronage and whether this is rising or falling. The same for movements by boat and ferry. Projected future patterns are not discussed. Are issues around transport getting worse? Anecdotal reports suggest so, but there is no answer in the draft report. The treatment of parking has similar problems. There is no breakdown of the demand for parking of different groups - short-, long-term, tourist, and how this is changing over time. How do you provide parking if you have no data on demand?

I am aware that this letter may read as a criticism or complaint. The work to date is useful, but it urgently needs to be strengthened. I have attempted to provide a rough guide as to some areas for attention above. This sort of information would make the master plan more about Brooklyn and the broad Brooklyn community of which Dangar is a part. It would also be a forward-looking document that addresses the real problems we face. As it stands the "place principles" developed could be "cut and pasted" to any community.

I trust this letter is both fair and frank. I acknowledge that only some information is publicly available, and I have not seen the consultant's full terms-of-reference. As this is a community process, I am copying this letter to the organisations on the reference group and to our local State and Federal members for their information.