

The General Manager
Ku-ring-gai Council
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11 May 2017

Dear Mr McKee

RE: DRAFT DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

We have a number of issues and concerns regarding the draft Plan particularly the potential overdevelopment of the St Ives Showground which this Plan appears to advocate.

First and foremost, Ku-ring-gai is a residential area known for its unique natural environment and built heritage. Ku-ring-gai is bound by Garigal National Park in the east, Lane Cove National Park in the west and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park in the north. Ku-ring-gai has a very environmentally sensitive environment.

Priority 1. Structure Tourism and Events Management resources within Council to strategically lead and implement the actions of the Ku-ring-gai DMP 2017 to 2010

According to the draft Destination Management Plan (the Plan) Council has policy commitments to diversify the local economy to include tourism. Necessary expertise and funding is required to implement the plan.

Priority 2. Continue to develop and reposition the St Ives Precinct as a contemporary and distinctive tourism destination in Sydney.

The Plan states that it develops a strategic strategy for Ku-ring-gai but the Plan focuses on the St Ives Precinct.

- It is unclear what precise areas the Precinct comprises, e.g. is the old tip site included? The St Ives Precinct should be defined in the draft Plan.
- The Plan acknowledges that primary opportunities identified for Ku-ring-gai are nature based and Aboriginal Tourism yet its focus is on a single precinct when many other opportunities are available.
- Given that Ku-ring-gai adjoins three National Parks and that there exist numerous established walking trails in addition to a Marina in Ku-ring-gai National Park, the Plan as a strategic document has a narrow focus. The Plan should integrate the other walking trails and nature based sites.

The Plan fails to give an analysis of all the other activities on offer that could be developed in association with the St Ives Precinct. A whole of Ku-ring-gai approach should be taken.

- Analysis of accommodation on-site should be limited to eco-tourism only. Proposals of 5 star hotels and associated infrastructure is a gross overdevelopment of the site.

For the St Ives Precinct (presumably the Wildflower Garden, Nursery site and Showground) the rebranding and extent of development and activities suggests a total disconnect with the existing natural setting of the area which has been regarded in past development of these sites.

- The nature based education at the Wildflower Garden, its nature based settings for events and recreation and the uniqueness of the Showground as the last existing showground in Sydney should be showcased. Developing activities based on existing users such as Equestrian Events and Dog training does not seem to have been considered.
- The Showground is an environmentally sensitive area with areas of Duffy's Forest. Only 15% of this endangered ecological community remains and Council has the responsibility for it to be preserved as a number one priority. Overdeveloping the site is a real threat to the ecological community that survives on the site.
- The impact of Bushfire risk and necessity for Asset Protection Zones in addition to the intensive use of the site would actively degrade the site.
- The site is in the Cowan Creek Catchment and intense development and actively threatens the water quality.
- The only access to the site is by road – this is an important constraint as the resulting requirement for carparking is an important consideration. Bus transport to the site is infrequent and would entail a number of bus or train changes to access the site from other destinations by public transport.
- The increased traffic on Mona Vale Road is an important consideration as it is unlikely to improve with further development in the Upper Northshore, the new Northern Beaches Hospital, the northern beaches, Ingleside and Forestville.

Environmental protection must be a priority in the Plan. A study of the maximum visitor capacity of the site within the limitations of the environmental constraints and car parking and traffic constraints must be a priority.

The steering committee should include community members with historical and environmental knowledge of the site.

Rebranding the site implies breaking the link with the Showgrounds historical past and existing uses – suggestions like “Parklands” is inappropriate given the environmental and natural environment. St. Ives Showground is unique being the only ‘rural’ showground left in Sydney in an environmentally sensitive area.

Priority 3. Establish Ku-ring-gai as a key destination for year round festivals and events in Sydney.

As Ku-ring-gai is foremost a residential area, impacts of the intense programming of events should take into account the impact on local residents in terms of local traffic, parking, noise and amenity.

The events programme should be spread across Ku-ring-gai and the assessment of impact on locals should be a priority.

Priority 4. Further develop Ku-ring-gai's architectural heritage, cultural and recreational experiences and attract quality hospitality and retail operators to the area.

Promotion of the heritage and cultural experiences in Ku-ring-gai should be a high priority. There is a demand for this by locals and it is the best way to promote heritage and educate the public to value and conserve unique assets characteristic of the area.

We have found the FOKE National Trust Heritage Festivals (NTHF) Walks held over the past three years are becoming more and more popular each year. Our walks predominantly highlight the threatened and endangered ecological community Blue Gum High Forest BGHF e.g. Sheldon Forest.

One of this year's FOKE's (NTHF) walks which was publicised by Council and lead by environmentalist Nancy Pallin in the Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve to celebrate the 10 year anniversary of the purchase of land incorporated into the Reserve, attracted over 40 people.

Celebrating and promoting unique bushland and threatened species needs a higher priority by Council. There is less than 1% remaining of the BGHF.

Similarly, FOKE has had walks showcasing Ku-ring-gai's architectural history and the birthplace of the National Trust. National Trust events which feature architectural homes designed by Australia's leading architects have also been popular in past years.

In the past two years we have held a fundraising lunch in the Pecorino Café at Gordon with guest speakers to talk about Ku-ring-gai's Blue Gum High Forest. These events promote Ku-ring-gai but are not deleterious to the environment, nor do they create traffic, noise or parking problems for residents.

Knox Garden Days in past years featured magnificent Ku-ring-gai gardens and homes and were extremely well attended and a great fundraiser for the school. The private gardens of Ku-ring-gai are a great feature of this Municipality and should be promoted more by Council.

Encouragement of hospitality and retail operators in strategic planning of Lindfield, Gordon and Turrumurra Hub projects must not rely on concessions on development but promotion of the quality and amenity of the site. These sites are already being compromised with plans which will result in overdevelopment and loss of Ku-ring-gai's historic 'village' character.

Priority 5. Support the sustainable development of new accommodation infrastructure to stimulate overnight visitor stays in Ku-ring-gai.

Accommodation opportunities across Ku-ring-gai particularly in heritage buildings or conservation areas should be carefully controlled to avoid alternate uses and preservation of the heritage features of the buildings.

Community participation should be included as part of the Plan at every stage with local resident members of the Steering Committee.

Conclusion:

The proposal for the St Ives Precinct is an overdevelopment of the site. Environmental preservation, bushfire, traffic management, parking and public transport are major constraints.

The Plan fails to incorporate the negative impact on local residents in St Ives of noise, lights and traffic. In other areas, traffic, parking and noise with increased activities and influx of visitors.

Promotion of heritage and cultural activities should be a priority.

Accommodation must respect the character of Ku-ring-gai and maintain its values.

We thank Council for the opportunity to be able to comment on the draft Plan.

Yours faithfully

Kathy Cowley
PRESIDENT