

ROUSE HILL HEIGHTS ACTION GROUP INC

SUBMISSION TO DRAFT PLAN FOR RIVERSTONE EAST PRECINCT

Rouse Hill Heights Action Group Inc (RHHAG) congratulates the Department of Planning (DoP) on the Draft Plan for Riverstone East Precinct. While we have some issues with it, on the whole we think it is a very good plan.

However, RHHAG feels that, given the amount of open space and the limited number of homes in the Riverstone East Precinct, there are too many sporting fields. There are only 17 sporting fields in total in the surrounding precincts of Riverstone, Alex Avenue and Cudgegong Road Station, for a combined population of 58,000 people. Yet Riverstone East with only ?? residents, has 13 playing fields. Considering that approximately one third of the precinct is given over to open space, whether it be the Regional Park, playing fields, local parks, drainage and flood affected land, we think that the number of playing fields should be significantly reduced, and the space given over to housing. Given the Precinct's proximity to major road, rail and bus transport, the regional centre and the regional park, we feel that an increase in the number of houses available is a good planning option, and this can be easily done by replacing some of the playing fields with medium and/ or low density housing.

Some of our members feel that the DoP should consider allowing the height of medium density to be increased to 14 metres- not to allow another storey, but to allow for a pitched roof, and more flexibility in parking. RHHAG thinks this suggestion should be investigated and seriously considered if it found to be viable.

We also feel that medium density should be able to be extended beyond the current suggested zones, and the allowable density increased if necessary, on a case by case basis if the landowner or developer can convince the DoP that it is a good idea. We are aware of the problems in Area 20, where the Final Plan was amended several times, but we hope that owners will sell their land with a provision for a price increase if the land is up-zoned within a certain time period.

Some of our members are unhappy with their zonings, especially those who are earmarked to be parks or schools. RHHAG sympathises with them, and has encouraged them to put in a submission stating why their land is unsuitable for these purposes. However, RHHAG itself will not be commenting on these zonings where the removal of a park or school from one site, simply puts the school or park onto another landowner. We accept that each precinct has to have schools and parks, and we hope that the sites for these will be chosen on an impartial basis using the DoP criteria, and taking into account all of the submissions. By removing some of the playing fields, we can decrease the number of unhappy residents and provide more housing land close to all facilities.

RHHAG is please to hear that if there are to be changes from the Draft to the Final Plan which will affect some landowners unfavourably, the new plan will be exhibited or the affected landowners consulted. If there needs to be changes to provide a better outcome, it should be done now, rather than have the plan amended several times, as was the case with Area 20 Precinct. RHHAG also compliments the DoP for removing the Very Low Density Zoning from most of Area 20. It is also good to see that valuable housing land so close to Cudgegong Road Station will no longer be quarantined.

Stage One:

RHHAG members who have been zoned as parks or community centres have been encouraged to put in submissions regarding these zonings. RHHAG cannot oppose these sites, as the parks will simply be moved to somewhere else, onto another members' land, and we have to remain impartial. However, there are too many playing fields in the precinct. We understand that there is some vacant land next to the Switching Station in Cudgegong Road Station (Area 20) Precinct, freed up by the realigning of Cudgegong Road. Could this land be utilised for a community centre, to free up valuable Medium Density land in Stage One?

We feel that there could be a cause for increased density in Stage One, especially given the fact that almost half of the land in this stage has been quarantined by parks, drainage and the Stabling Yard. RHHAG feels that an extra amount of well-designed high and medium density could work well so close to Cudgegong Road Station Precinct. RHHAG does not want to see huge towers and cheek-by-jowl flats, but if the DoP and Blacktown Council worked with developers to provide apartments which would look good and appeal to buyers, the area could be a showpiece of high and medium density residential living.

RHHAG would like to strongly state our opposition to the fact that land along Schofields Road which was compulsorily acquired for the stabling yard and is now not needed, has been zoned as industrial, but the previous landowners have not been able to benefit from this rezoning. The previous owners should be offered the chance to buy the surplus land back from Transport NSW at the same price they were paid several years ago. We feel that this principle should be applied to all land which was taken from the landowners for infrastructure, whether they agreed to the price or had their land compulsorily acquired.

Apart from these issues, RHHAG sees Stage One as an example of good planning, which will be very popular with buyers. We look forward to it being rezoned shortly.

Stage Two:

The same RHHAG impartiality applies in Stage Two: we can see a few issues, but we cannot comment on some of these, as it would be to the detriment of some members while benefiting others, if these were changed. We have encouraged our members to put their concerns in a submission. Again, we feel that there are too many playing fields in the precinct.

However, we do have a problem with the Environmental Living Zone. This quarantines valuable housing land next to two major roads, Garfield Road and Clarke Street, for a vague benefit for a historic home which really no longer exists. The oldest surviving part of Nu Welwyn is only around 90 years old, and it doesn't need to have an artificial Curtilage around it to preserve any value it may have. The Environmental Living Zone quarantines 60% of the land in this zone from housing. If the DoP thinks that this zone is necessary, then get Urban Growth to negotiate with the owner(s) to buy the land at the market rate of the surrounding housing land, and then redevelop it to show how this type of zone would work.

We would encourage the DoP to ensure that Endeavour Energy builds the new substation as quickly as possible. We would like to see Stage Two rezoned within 12-18 months, so the development is ready to go as soon as the substation is operational. As mentioned below, we feel that there are many blocks in Stage Three, especially in the north of the precinct which could be included in Stage Two, as they are also only waiting on electricity.

Stage Three:

RHHAG's biggest concerns are with Stage Three, which may be due to the fact that the planning for this stage isn't as advanced as that of the other two stages. Again, the impartiality arises on some issues, and again we have encouraged the affected landowners to raise these issues with the DoP. However, we feel that nine playing fields in Stage Three are too many- it quarantines valuable housing land close to all facilities.

There are many blocks in Stage Three which we feel should have been included in Stage Two, as they, too, are only lacking electricity- they already have access to water and sewer. RHHAG asks the DoP to provide us with maps showing which parts of Stage Three need electricity, which parts need sewer, and which parts are waiting on water. We are relieved to hear from both the DoP and Sydney Water that the sewer line should be provided to Stage Three by 2018/19. We would encourage the DoP to fast-track the provision of services to Stage Three, to provide valuable housing land so close to all amenities, and to enable Stage Three to be rezoned within three years.

We feel that there could be a case to be made for more medium density in Stage Three, especially in the Cudgegong Road Station Precinct area; next to the proposed village centre; and even where some of the playing fields and schools have been proposed.

We congratulate the DoP on recognising that the Very Low Density zoning isn't needed in Stage Three- it is good planning practice that quality housing land so close to major rail, bus and road transport, major shops and a regional park, should be Low Density at the least. We urge the DoP to stand firm against any attempts to quarantine land because of the curtilage of Rouse Hill House. The unique aspect of Rouse Hill House, which makes it so valuable, is that it wasn't stuck in a time warp – it changed with the times. It is hypocritical, therefore, for some to seek to impose an artificial “vista” around the house, especially since the main view of the house was across Windsor Road, not over the Riverstone East area. It is also poor planning to impose restrictions on the valuable housing land surrounding Rouse Hill House - most of the land which would be affected by any attempt to increase the curtilage, is contained in the Cudgegong Road Station Precinct. This is an area identified by a joint task force of the Department of Planning and the Transport Department which identified this area as a priority area to provide housing close to the Cudgegong Road Station.

Conclusion:

RHHAG looks forward to working with the DoP and our members for the swift rezoning of Riverstone East, which is destined to be a very popular area, and to provide more housing in this Precinct. We also encourage that the areas currently part of Rouse Hill retain that name, since they are located on the geographical feature known as Rouse Hill, next to Rouse Hill House and Rouse Hill Regional Park. This is an ideal way to retain the history of the area.

Colleen Abela,
President,
Rouse Hill Heights Action Group Inc.
15th September 2015.