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Director, Urban Renewal
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GPO Box 39
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Ref: Response to Department of Planning & Environment (DoPE) Showground Precinct Proposal

The long overdue arrival of a rail line through the Hill area represents a substantial piece of infrastructure which needs to be well patronised to justify the substantial investment by the Government and the taxpayers of NSW. The project should be capitalised on from the beginning by ensuring development around the station is innovative, master planned and concentrated within the favoured 800 metre zone already established in the original 2013 draft plan and now the Showground Precinct Proposal. The areas of concern with the Showground Precinct Proposal are:

- Economic Viability & Growth Targets
- Land Consolidation Allows Master Planning
- Distribution of Density
- Provision of Local Infrastructure

1. Economic Viability & Growth Targets:

Due to current real estate values in the Showground Precinct (and Castle Hill area generally) it is clear that where densities are below at least 150 dwellings per hectare it will not be financially viable for owners to sell or developers to buy, existing single dwelling and replace with low rise 2 to 3 villas or townhouses. Within the R3 area marked on the Showground Precinct Proposal there will be no development, the proposals growth targets will not be met and it will lead to piecemeal development a long time into the future. Further commercial investment at the station for shops and especially cafes and restaurants will be jeopardised if there is not a good flow of people that can easily walk to the station. What is the point in building 2 to 3 story villas that are within the comfortable 800m walking distance? Currently within the proposal there are many properties shown as R3 that are within the suggested 800m walking distance which does not make sense. This will lead to the Showground Station being underutilised with local foot traffic for both transport and the commercial viability of shops, cafes and restaurants jeopardised. Clearly the greater the density close to the station, the more scope a developer has to financially motivate existing owners to sell so that development can take place.

The table below seeks to demonstrate the unviability of developing townhouse / villa type dwellings that take up a minimum of 240sqm. The calculations in table below are based on a current single dwelling with approximate land size of 800m. Amounts below are based on known or conservative estimates.

R3 Zone Viability

Is it possible to build 3 x 240sqm Town Houses on 1 x 800m average size block?

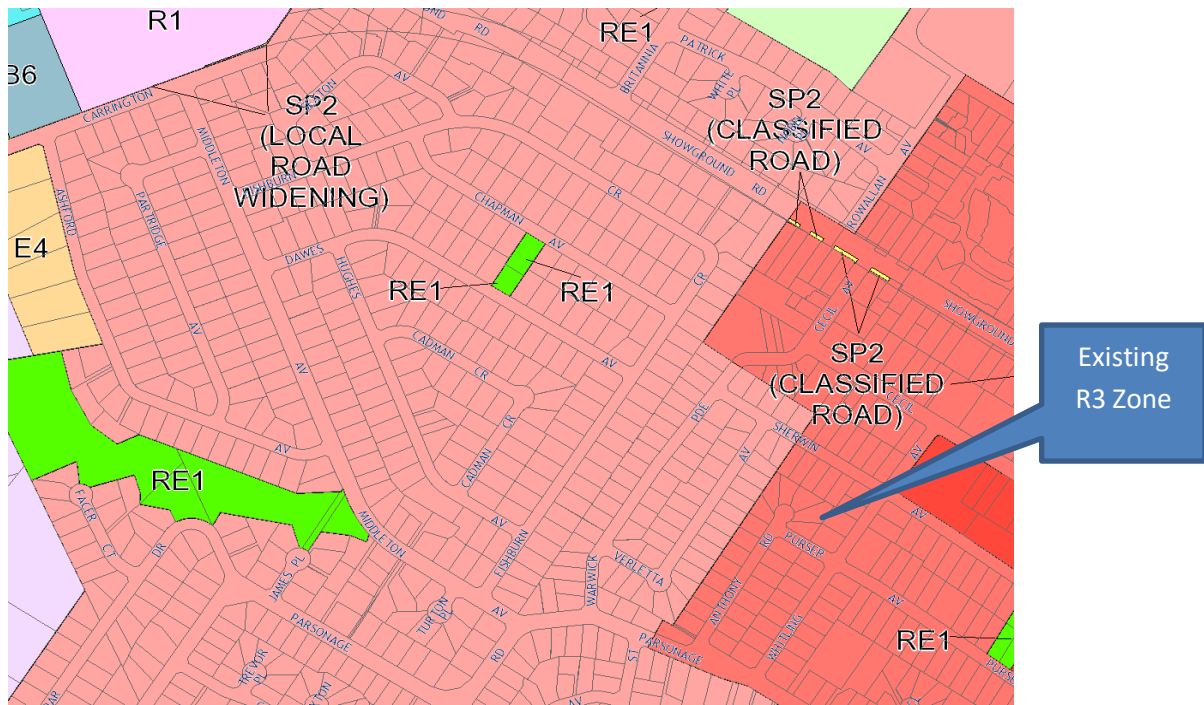
Land Size of Average Block	800sqm
Rate Sqm	\$2125sqm
Current House Market Price (Showground Precinct)	\$1,700,000
Cost of Moving to another House	\$25,000
Stamp Duty New Purchase	\$95,000
Agents Commission	\$40,000
Legal Fees	\$5,000
Incentive To Move	\$300,000
Minumun Sale Required	\$2,165,000
Cost to Build each Townhouse	\$450,000
Compliance	\$50,000
Cost per townhouse to build	\$500,000
Cost to Build 3 Town Houses	\$1,500,000
Total Cost of Project	\$3,665,000
Developer Profit Margin 20%	\$733,000
Total Cost of Project for 3 townhouses	\$4,398,000
Total Cost of Project for 3 townhouses	\$5498sqm
Each Townhouse Needs to Sell for Minimun	\$1,466,000

Based on the estimated numbers above and the required sale price for townhouses and villas a developer would need to recoup, estimated at just under \$1.5 million is not realistic to make any R3 development worthwhile.

How will it be possible for the R3 density targets to be met when each townhouse would need to sell for almost \$1.5 million?

There is already an example of this close by where current R3 zoning (that allows for villa / town house development) exists between Anthony Road, Parsonage Road, Kerrs Road and all the way south to Old Northern Road. Whilst several town house developments occurred over 15 years ago there is now very few if any being built due to high land values. The area is still very much dominated by single dwellings where many owners of these properties have opted to build granny flats on their land, embark on renovations or build new houses. The town houses that exist sit between single dwelling houses namely on Parsonage Road south of Coolong Place / Hughes Avenue to Old Northern Road where single dwellings are next to townhouses next to single dwellings etc. The point being that if development in the 600 to 800 metre radius of Showground Station is restricted to villas or townhouses with a 10m high limit, no development is likely to occur. Please refer to below map of current R3 zones published by the Hill Council where little to no development of townhouses has taken place for over 15 years when the land values were a fraction of what they are today:

Map of current R3 zones published by the Hill Council



2. Land Consolidation Allows Master Planning:

The Showground Precinct Proposal fails to recognise that since the 2013 Draft Structure Plan land owners have actively come together in pods to consolidate land holdings that will facilitate development. This represents a once off opportunity to achieve state of the art master planning of new communities and achieve the population which is required to ensure patronage of the new station. Failure to capitalise on this opportunity now will result in fragmentation of the groups, no development in the foreseeable future and adhoc development in the 600 to 800 meter radius of the station. Castle Hill is a large tract of land and the 800 meter radius of the station is a small area in comparison. With continued property price increases and cost of living pressures, development in the future will be harder and more costly than today so it would be prudent to develop the 600m to 800m radius in the next 5 to 10 years than have to rezone again in future. There is an opportunity now to plan for the future and ensure success of the Showground Precinct Proposal.

Within the Showground Precinct building Townhouses and Villas will not give the openness and greenspace that is a feature of the Hills district. With a minimum lot size of 240sqm you will have the building and driveway (preferably 2 car garage to avoid having excess cars on the street) takes up the majority of land, no trees and a tiny strip of grass as the outdoor space. Having rows of these buildings squashed into grids surrounded by more roads highlighted in the proposal is not a good outcome.

With large building blocks over 1 hectare available due to current residents consolidating land there is a chance to build smarter designs which are higher but allow for greater setback, private open space and more amenities such as picnic, gardens, BBQs or private pools. An example of residents joining forces can be seen in the attached appendix to this proposal being "12 Pod Response to DoPE Showground Precinct Proposal" to which I am a resident and amongst my neighbours a contributor. As will be shown in other submissions the "12 Pod" response is one of many groups of residents that have joined together.

We don't want this!



Where do the cars live?

We Want This!

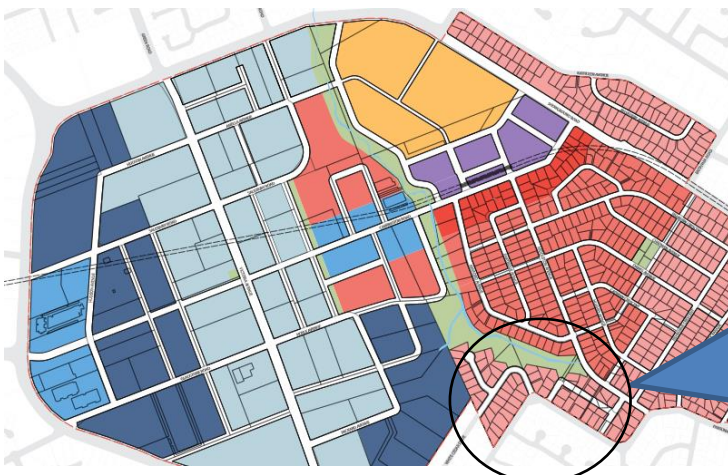


DoPE should not miss the opportunity to create an enviable Showground Precinct that would be in high demand with the facilities most other suburbs don't have.

3. Distribution of Density.

Houses in the Showground Precinct are mainly project homes developed over 30 year ago and are ripe to be developed into modern efficient living. It is essential for the success of the Showground Station Precinct that the R4 zone exists within the 800m radius where the topography, natural features and ease of access to amenities is prevalent, such as around Cockayne Reserve / Cattai Creek.

Proposed Zones within the Showground Station



The R3 Zone to the end and south of Cattai Creek should be zoned R4 due to access to amenities of open space, walkways & cycle-ways linking Castle Hill Showground, the Station and Fred Catterson Reserve.

Easy access to employment & retail within the industrial / commercial zones

Existing map of Cockayne Reserve and surrounding streets



It makes no sense that the landowners with easy access to the naturally existing Cattai Creek greenspace and close to the employment / retail area around Victoria Ave should be in the R3 zone. This catchment extends all the way through the existing showground to link up with Fred Catterson Reserve where many existing sporting facilities exist. Further along the creek is natural bushland that already contains excellent walking and cycling tracks.

The vision contained in the Showground Precinct Proposal (figure 29 below) for the reinvigorated Cockayne Reserve and Cattai Creek is shown in the picture below. Note the prevalence of R4 style buildings on the left of the picture which technically will not be allowed as this area in the proposal is shown as R3 refer image of zones above. Densities and corresponding heights should be optimised now.



What a great vision! Note R4 style buildings on the left are currently zoned in the proposal as R3?

4. Open Space & Local Infrastructure:

It is important that with the advent of additional population and dwellings within the Showground Precinct that additional open space and facilities be developed. The obvious green link already in existence to achieve open space and parkland is Cockayne Reserve. It would make sense that a large portion of funding for infrastructure be directed to beautifying this natural water catchment along Cockayne Reserve making this a grand No Car “boulevard”. Whilst the vision of the Cockayne Boulevard is good, widening the reserve and entwining some of the natural creek features and native trees that are already there is encouraged. The area should include kids play equipment and picnic facilities to provide the open space a new population will require. This reserve would create a direct pedestrian / cycle link between Parsonage Rd & Middleton Ave to Carrington Ave noting that these 3 roads are the main access points to Showground Station within the precinct. Another bold vision could be to extend from Cockayne Reserve a pedestrian / cycle path under Middleton Ave linking the Chapman Avenue Reserve and Showground Road. This link would allow unique walkway and commuting opportunities across the whole precinct including for children walking to Castle Hill High School.

Part of this can be achieved by building higher dwellings which allow private open space due to longer setbacks and innovative design. An increased R4 zone to the edge of the targeted 800m radius will take advantage of the proximity to what could be a wonderful area for families and friends to meet up or simply commute easily without having cars around. This would be a great way to reach the station and its amenities for residents on the south side of the reserve and increase access for those outside the 800m radius south of Parsonage Road. With the infrastructure grants and developer levies there is an opportunity to create a revitalised greenbelt we can all be proud of that maintains the mantra of the “garden shire”.

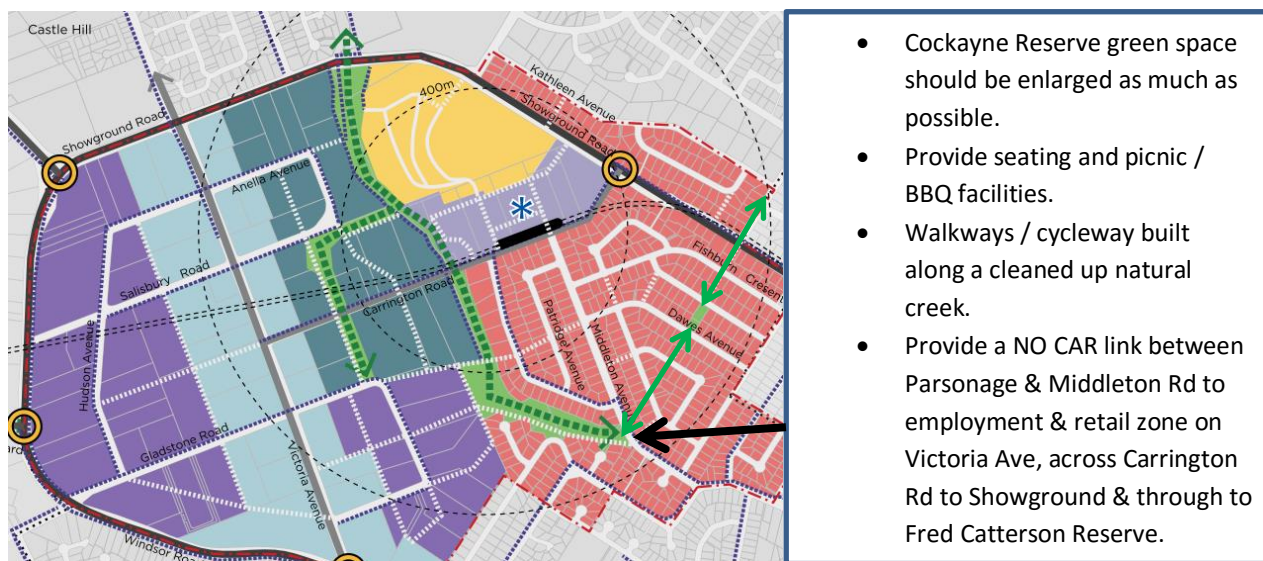


Figure 5 of the Showground Precinct Proposal

It is important that no building development occurs on any open green space that already exists.

The Showground Precinct Proposal shows many new roads some of which are ok but many just divide the land into more square shapes meaning many more intersections for pedestrians to cross and more incidents. Many of the roads are unnecessary when there is already good access, with many pods formed by existing landowners having over 1 hectare of land with multiple street frontages. Get rid of as many cars off the street by planning basement style parking under new larger R4 style dwellings so the movement of vehicles is restricted to the owners of the properties. Typically with 240m square townhouse (R3), cars owned by residents end up parked on the road outside meaning new roads will need to be quite wide taking up more of a footprint.

Planned Additional Roads



Figure 21 Station Precinct Proposal

5. Summary:

With rising residential prices especially in close proximity to infrastructure, it will become increasingly less viable over time to develop quality dwellings where large pods of land are available to create a master planned Showground precinct. Now is the time to develop the precinct with a sensible R4 zone within the original 800m radius of the station that will allow densities targets to be met, ensuring the Showground Station gets the patronage it deserves to match the investment. To achieve this, landholders must be incentivised to sell and developers incentivised to build quality dwellings and only an R4 zone will achieve this. Planning for the showground is a once in lifetime opportunity to transform the precinct into something special for future generations and I urge the department of planning to strongly consider the points raised in this response.

I would be happy to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Regards,

[Redacted Signature]