

# SUBMISSION

## PROPERTY OWNER RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT PROPOSALS FOR SHOWGROUND ROAD METRO STATION PRECINCT

### Introduction

We, the undersigned, own a residential property located at 108 Showground Road, Castle Hill, 2154. The property is one of 32 properties that form a boot-shaped parcel of land bounded by Showground Road on the north-western side, Britannia Road on the south-eastern side, Kathleen Avenue and Belvedere Avenue on the north-eastern side and the pedestrian path that links Showground Road with Belvedere Avenue (see aerial view below).



Owners of these 32 properties, which cover a total area of more than 3.1 hectares, have formed a group seeking to have the R3 zoning proposed by the Department of Planning & Environment (DoPE) and The Hills Shire Council (THSC) changed to R4 zoning to permit construction of high-rise apartments that would provide better urban planning outcomes than the townhouses and/or terrace houses proposed by DoPE/THSC. Other groups in the north-eastern sector share our view. In fact, nearly 100 property owners have indicated a desire for high rise development in an area that is within 400 to 800 metres of the Showground Metro Station precinct.

Collectively, we believe construction of an appropriate mix of well-designed high-rise buildings on the 3.1-hectare parcel of land would complement what has been proposed for the north-western side of Showground Road and make for a more visually appealing urban landscape built on sound town planning principles.

Moreover, R4 zoning in the north-eastern sector of Showground Road would create a vastly improved sense of place for the NSW Government's long overdue investment in public transport infrastructure in Sydney's North West region and help preserve Castle Hill's reputation as the "Garden Shire".

### **Strong Appetite for R4**

During the DoPE's recent community drop-in sessions for the Showground Station precinct proposals, a number of senior DoPE officers expressed surprise at the strong appetite for R4 zoning property owners had shown for the north-eastern sector of the precinct.

We believe the lack of knowledge about the willingness for change is a reflection of the inadequate community consultation done by THSC and DoPE. Both organisations claim to have undertaken "extensive community engagement" during planning for the North West Metro. Despite this, none of the more than 100 owners of property in the north-eastern sector of the Showground Station precinct recall ever being approached or invited to comment on initial planning proposals by telephone survey, online survey or newsletters.

The last two Hills Shire Council meetings in December 2015 provided further evidence of the lack of community consultation among property owners most affected by construction of the North West Metro. At that meeting, it was revealed that Council had breached its own community consultation policies by not engaging with local residents prior to releasing its North West Metro Corridor Strategy and plans for the Showground Station precinct. Two Labor councillors tried to force a vote requiring proper community consultation and public meetings for residents directly affected by the Council's Metro Corridor Strategy. Unfortunately, this attempt was blocked by the Liberal-controlled Council.

Clearly, both local government and the NSW Government do not subscribe to the principle of open and transparent Government and the public's right to know – and be actively involved in and consulted on matters affecting them.

### **Setting Up the Metro for Success – Not Failure**

- The low density R3 zoning currently proposed for the boot-shaped area bounded by Showground Road, Britannia Avenue, Kathleen Avenue, Belvedere Avenue and the pedestrian laneway is inappropriate and contrary to the NSW Government's usual practice of allowing increased population densities around major transport hubs. The rationale for such practice is simple: the greater the number of residents located in high-rise developments around these hubs, the more likely those residents will switch to public transport and increase the viability of the Metro rail service from the outset.
- A clear precedent exists to allow R4 high density residential development within the 800-metre radius of the proposed Showground Metro Station. Many properties on the north-eastern side of Showground Road, Castle Hill, are located within 300 metres. Moreover, *A Plan for Growing Sydney* calls for higher population densities around high frequency public transport hubs.

- Allowing higher density on the site would help the NSW Government meet housing targets and provide more affordable housing for first home buyers. **Advantages of R4 Zoning**

- Allows high-rise development that is better able to counter noise and air pollution generated by increased traffic in Carrington Road and Showground Road
- High-rise development would create more affordable homes and help increase rail patronage to support investment in the North West Metro and virtually guarantee its subsequent success.
- High-rise development would allow for the provision of more neighbourhood shops, providing a greater sense of place and community and create local employment.

### **Environmental Issues**

- Sensitive high-rise development would lead to the creation of more open space and greenery, thus preserving our Garden Shire.
- High-rise apartments would not create shadowing due to geographic position of our 3.1 hectare parcel of land.
- Positioning of high-rise and the size of the land parcel would ensure ample solar access.
- Conversely, R3 zoning would lead to a cluttered urban landscape and the proposed 240 square metre blocks for townhouses and terraced housing would increase shadowing and diminish opportunities for landscaping and the planting of trees.
- We note that the Department of Planning & Environment is taking steps to make it easier for developers to build townhouses and terraces by revising complying development provisions that will effectively turn 1,000 square metre blocks of land into 240 square metre allotments for townhouses and terrace houses.
- The lack of opportunities for landscaping on 240 square metre townhouse/terrace blocks would severely diminish the greenery for which the Garden Shire is rightfully proud. Anyone with minimum knowledge about building and planning is aware that negative issues outlined above could be overcome with sensible high-rise development that allows for imaginative open space, sensitive landscaping, improved solar access, minimum shadowing and vehicular access located in, for example, Belvedere Avenue to the east of Showground Road.

### **Traffic Issues**

- The Council and DoPE proposals for concentrating high-rise development on the south-western side of the Showground Metro Station will bring about a dramatic increase in traffic flow in Carrington Road and neighbouring streets.
- Extending R4 zoning to the north-eastern side of Showground Road would achieve better traffic outcomes than R3 zoning. Ingress and egress on proposed 240 square metre blocks fronting Showground Road would be virtually impossible when Showground Road is upgraded to provide two lanes of traffic in each direction. In contrast, R4 zoning would allow people living in high-rise apartments to access their homes via Britannia Road, Kathleen Avenue and Belvedere Avenue.

- According to information published on the Roads and Maritime Services website, Showground Road carries an average of 37,161 vehicles a day (Source: GHD Traffic and Transport Assessment for Showground Road Upgrade, Feb. 2014). At present, the signalised pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Showground Road and Carrington Road is well able to cope with safe pedestrian movements. However, if this situation were to change over time, a subway or an elevated pedestrian bridge could be installed to improve access to the Metro station for residents living on the north-eastern side of Showground Rd. In any event, DoPE should have considered the inclusion of a pedestrian bridge or subway to facilitate Metro access for all residents, regardless of whether the north-eastern sector is zoned R3 or R4. It appears that current planning proposals only favour property owners and residents on the north-western side of Showground area and have forgotten about residents living on the north-eastern side of Showground Station.

### **Economic Viability**

- It is not economically viable for us to sell our property at townhouse/terrace values, which are the same as selling our current stand-alone properties as is. Because of this, there is no incentive for us to sell our property and help DoPE follow through on its planning proposals for the Showground Station precinct. Given that many property owners are willing to sell and contribute to DoPE's vision for an exciting, vibrant community, it seems odd that the NSW Government does not wish to take advantage of a unique opportunity to bring about real change in a precinct that could set the standard for future expansion of the North West Metro.

- DoPE's R3 proposal will not be able to meet economic growth and redevelopment targets for the Showground Station precincts because there will be no change in population densities, current individual dwellings will remain the same and fewer residents will be available to use the new Metro facility and support the NSW Government's long overdue investment in public transport infra-structure.

### **Noise and Air Pollution**

- Residents living in the north-eastern sector of Showground Road are worried that DoPE's current proposal to concentrate high-rise development on the southern side of Carrington Road will result in an ugly urban landscape and a massive increase in traffic in the area, particularly near the Metro station. This in turn will impact on existing low-rise homes, which are not designed to handle the accompanying increase in noise and air pollution. If the north-eastern sector were zoned as R4, high-rise apartments could be built to better counter such pollution. But if the R3 proposal is adopted, local residents are destined to experience long-term suffering rather than enjoying the so-called "updated and vibrant environment" being promoted in the DoPE's current proposal.

### **Creating an Underdeveloped and Isolated Precinct**

- Current THSC and DoPE plans concentrate high-rise development on the southern side of Carrington Road, opposite the Showground Metro Station – and areas more than 800 metres north-west of the Showground Station and arguably closer to the next Metro stop, Norwest Station. This planning aberration will leave the north-eastern sector of Showground Road underdeveloped and isolated, despite it being located within 400 metres of the Showground Station. Furthermore, the north-eastern sector will not provide a good connection with a redeveloped Castle Towers shopping centre. Nor will it make for a logical connection with the Metro on the other side of Showground Road. Sadly, the unimaginative urban

planning, inconsistent building heights and bizarre Metro passenger catchments the THSC and DoPE propose will not provide an even distribution of sensible and well-designed high-rise development around a key mass transport facility.

- We question why the current DoPE proposals for high-rise apartments and commercial/industrial undertakings favour areas closer to the next Metro stop, the Norwest, and neglect the Showground Boot area, which is located within 400 to 800 metres of the Showground Metro Station.
- Allowing high-rise to be built on the eastern side of Showground Road within 400 metres of the Metro station would make for balanced and visually appealing development. Moreover, such development would better meet the objectives of creating a broader customer base located within 400 to 800 metres of the mass transit facility and providing more affordable housing for Sydney's growing population.
- If the THSC/DoPE proposals prevail, the built form threatens to be a blight on the landscape and be lamented for years to come. Remember, the Showground precinct is one of only a few strategic centres blessed with the NSW Government's multi-million dollar expenditure on the North West Metro infrastructure. Long-term vision and well-designed structures put in place *now* for the Showground Station precinct will eliminate any poor planning decisions that might need to be corrected in the future.

#### **Recipe for Disorderly Development**

- It is short-term planning (and vision) to propose building townhouses and terraces on properties located on the north-eastern side of Showground Road. Such a proposal would only serve to fragment land use and lead to disorderly development that would severely limit any potential for high density buildings in the long term. Clearly, there is a strong case for proper planning for the future now – not retrofitting later to make up for the bad decisions of the past, e.g. man-made congestion created by inadequate road tunnels and multi-lane highways that connect with two-lane arterial roads.
- Most signatories in our group are not prepared to sell their homes at townhouse values, hence patronage projections for the North West Metro will not be maximised, resulting in a waste of taxpayers' money and put a further dent in NSW's reputation for implementing unprofitable Public-Private Participation (PPP) projects (remember the Cross City Tunnel and the Lane Cove Tunnel, etc.).

#### **Opportunity for Orderly High Density Development**

- R4 zoning would increase the opportunity for orderly high density redevelopment of the area on the north-eastern side of Showground Road and lead to the creation of more open space, greater opportunities for landscaping and superior urban design outcomes.
- Concentrating high-rise development on the north-western side of Showground Road rather than distributing high-rise development in the north-eastern sector would create an urban landscape that does little to provide a sense of place for the Showground Station precinct. With sensible planning, DoPE has an opportunity to turn the present goat track that is Showground Road into a visually appealing gateway to the Showground Metro Station and to Castle Hill proper.

#### **False DoPE and Hills Council Claims**

- DoPE claims that Showground Road is a "barrier" that precludes development of high-rise in the area to the north-east of the Showground Metro Station is grossly misleading. Showground Road is no more a

barrier to pedestrian movements than other major roads located adjacent to Metro Stations, e.g. Pennant Street and Old Castle Hill Road in relation to Castle Hill Metro Station, and Old Windsor Road in relation to Kellyville and Bella Vista Metro Stations.

- Equally false are DoPE and Council claims that an environmentally sensitive creek located well to the east of Belvedere Avenue precludes R4 zoning in the north-eastern sector of Showground Road. Our boot-shaped parcel of land is well clear of the creek. As environmentally sensitive areas go, we would have thought that Cattai Creek and its catchment area are more at risk from proposed work on a "revitalised" Castle Hill Showground and the plan to allow more high-rise residential apartments alongside existing factory units.

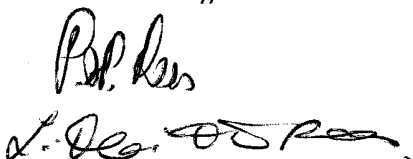
In conclusion, we believe the DoPE should give serious consideration to changing the zoning of land identified as the Showground Road Boot to R4. Such a change would permit construction of high-density apartments that will greatly improve urban planning outcomes and help give the Showground Metro Station a sense of place and community that sets the standard for further development of the Metro rail network across the Sydney metropolitan area.

We believe DoPE (and other representatives of the NSW Government) should meet with the Showground Boot Group and other groups located in the north-eastern sector of Showground Road to discuss how we can work with each other to set an example of what can be achieved through open, transparent and democratic consultation and the spirit of co-operation.

If nothing else, such a meeting would go some way to making up for the astonishing lack of community engagement demonstrated by the THSC prior to the release of its unimaginative Hills Metro Corridor Strategy.

NOTE: For privacy reasons, we request that DoPE not publish our names and addresses and replace those details with the words: "Name and address supplied".

Yours faithfully,



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