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The Minister
NSW Planning & Environment
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001
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Attention: Mr Rob Stokes

Dear Minister Stokes

Re: Our response to the Hills Corridor Strategy draft plan-Showground precinct

We express our concern with Council's draft strategy and appeal to you as Minister. We live in the Showground precinct so our comments are mainly directed to that area.

Having lived in Castle Hill for 46 years, and wanting to continue to live in Castle Hill, we would prefer for everything to remain the same. However, we recognise that, with the construction of the Rail Link, that will not be possible and we reluctantly agree that major change must occur.

However, we are of the view that Council's draft plan:

- (a) Fails to protect the interest of the State Government by ensuring (as far as any plan can achieve it) that the rail link is patronised to the extent the State Government forecasts;
- (b) Fails to maximise the potential for the precinct to remain a garden suburb;
- (c) Fails to protect the interests of residents; and
- (d) Fails to demonstrate full planning by Council.

The interests of the State Government

Billions of dollars is being spent on the rail link. An appropriate return on investment is in everybody's interests. Yet, the draft plan does not permit a density of living that would permit sufficient patronage of the rail line, particularly in the Showground precinct, giving the people of NSW a sufficient and appropriate return on their investment.

The benefit for the area is a more viable and liveable environment. Insufficient pedestrian traffic to the trains could lead to a failure of the area to live up to its potential, perhaps resulting in failure of business and a run-down area around the train station.

We would like to see a study done to determine the appropriate zoning (and therefore the number of residents) that would be necessary to provide a base to support the use of the rail line. The failure to do this means Council is making profound decisions with inappropriate or insufficient information.

Remaining a garden suburb

Higher density (if appropriately planned) can enhance a garden suburb. We are already seeing the sale of homes to speculators who put tenants into the home. Tenants do not usually take an interest in the garden, as an owner does. The decline of the garden suburb is assured.

We would prefer to see a higher density but with an emphasis on remaining a garden suburb, to protect the environmental value of the area. This is more likely to protect the suburb than the piecemeal proposals contained in the current draft proposal.

Given that the lowest density is 39 dwellings per hectare, those affected residents cannot sell their homes to developers because, with an average purchase price well in excess of \$1.5 million (and likely to go higher), developers cannot afford to purchase the properties at that price and put up townhouses. Without higher densities, it is not a viable proposition. Residents may choose to sell but any purchaser would not buy to live in the home, because of the proposed development. Purchasers are likely to be speculators and the deterioration of the “garden” suburb will be pronounced if the residents are tenants.

By zoning for low density, some residents would remain (because they cannot sell to a developer). This would mean that the intent of lifting housing density will completely fail. By failing to consider higher density at a wider level, Council is failing in the overall State government effort to achieve higher densities. Why do the comparable developments in the Hills Corridor strategy have much higher densities, yet this plan has relatively low density surrounding a railway station? We are concerned that the area around the station might not be viable, leading to degradation of the area and attracting drug dealers etc. It is important to minimise this possibility.

Respectfully, it makes no sense unless Council is attempting to manage the development process and, instead, planning to rezone to higher levels at a later date. If that is correct, to leave so many residents in such an uncertain state for Council’s own purposes is a failure to consider the rate payer.

Protecting the interests of Residents

The current proposal places a road directly through our property. We note the protection afforded to us under the Land Acquisitions (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991.

However, the current proposal for the road means at least 12 to possibly 15 or more homes being acquired for the currently proposed road. If we assume that Council notifies of its intent to acquire the homes say in 12 months’ time (we recognise it could be much longer), and if we assume an average price of around \$2 million, Council would have to find (12 homes x \$2 million) \$24 million or (15 homes x \$2 million) \$30 million. Does Council have that sort of money for that purpose?

We express our concern. Would it not be cheaper to use the existing Fishburn Avenue and acquire 3 homes (3 homes x \$2 million) for \$6 million? It is not so good for those 3 home owners, but cheaper for the community. We are concerned that if 12 to 15 homes have to be acquired that Council will resist compensating us appropriately, despite the protections of the Act.

The 3 home owners would be protected by the terms of the Act. Perhaps 12 to 15 homes would be too big for Council to deal with?

Some residents will have massive redevelopment going on around them, with only downside and no up-side, given they cannot sell to a developer and they will not be able to sell until the adjoining development is completed.

Demonstrate full planning

Surely traffic and infrastructure studies should be done before any final plan is put forward? Should not cheaper solutions be found if that is at all possible? Would not a Fishburn Avenue road meet such a requirement?

It would appear that no traffic impact studies have been done? (We recognise some consideration has been given to traffic in the draft proposal). Surely that is necessary before moving forward as part of the overall planning? How does the currently proposed road through our property benefit the redevelopment overall, compared to a road utilising Fishburn Avenue? That cannot be answered without further study.

Does the state not need to do a road infrastructure review for the roads leading into the area? If so, should that not be completed first before any final planning is completed?

It seems to us that decisions have been made (reflected in the current draft proposal) but without sufficient and appropriate information to justify those decisions. Many residents are adversely affected by those decisions but completed planning seems to be missing.

Yours faithfully

Fred & Bev Fiegert