

DALKEITH: A VISION FOR A GARDEN SUBURB

A report to City of Nedlands
Dalkeith Redevelopment Steering Committee

by

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The submissions: survey and interpretation

Of the 407 out of 470 recorded written submissions opposing the proposed Dalkeith Redevelopment Concept Guidelines, the majority did so on recognised planning grounds in which such issues as, lack of research, out of scale built form, amenity, lack of economic feasibility, failure to recognise public transport access to nearby higher level shopping, lack of social responsibility especially with regard to Dalkeith Hall and Dalkeith Primary School, figure prominently: most of these criticisms can be traced back to the original consultant report.

The Steering Committee's decision taken at its March 13th meeting to abandon the Concept Guidelines was, therefore, completely justified

Moreover, the submissions were so well prepared that they provided a unique insight as to how their authors perceived Dalkeith as a family-friendly large-block garden suburb. And in such detail as to allow one to draw from them an alternative set of guidelines as to how the future of Dalkeith could be determined in the sure knowledge that what was proposed would most likely receive the support of the people.

That this is a reasonable assumption is supported by the high number and high quality of well-argued and well-written submissions.

With approximately 4,000 people comprising 1,400 households living in Dalkeith, approximately one in three households made a submission of which; only one in twenty households were unequivocally in support of the guidelines: most of which appear to have come from potential beneficiary residential landowners – some of whom appear to have attended one or other of the staff-organised confidential character area meetings held towards the end of last year.

The extraordinary high quality of the submissions is well illustrated by the fact that Council's Information Pack required 228 pages of closely typed print to record the 470 recorded responses.¹ Averaging 435 words in length, the originals must have occupied enough space to have filled, on average, at least one side of an A4 page.

¹ The report states that "some submissions may not have been included due to large volume [sic] of submissions requiring substantial time to cross check and format."

This startling result² should have alerted staff that something very serious was afoot.

What was equally impressive was that respondents showed not only a very high level of understanding of the report and of its contents, but an equally high level of skill in expressing their views on why the report should be done away with. Clearly these were not emotional responses, but a serious consideration of what the writers regarded as a serious threat to life and living in Dalkeith.

The extremely high volume and quality of the submissions made them an extremely reliable measure of the strength of the opposition to the redevelopment plan. And, more importantly, an equally valid and representative expression of a people's alternative to the concept plan as brief on which to build a new set of concepts.

Such was the excellence of the recorded submissions that they provide Council with an inestimable source of positive knowledge about Dalkeith and the view of its inhabitants.

The People's vision for Dalkeith

Opposition to aggressive planning proposals, particularly if the opposition appears to be based on things as they are, is all too often discounted by statutory planners as being nothing but conservatism. That may be so, but this is not so with regard to Dalkeith.

However, even where opposition to a plan is fully justified it will only succeed if the opposition is strong and persistent enough to win out; otherwise it will eventually be ignored, glossed over, or manipulated to secure the desired planning result. This should not be allowed to happen in Dalkeith,

In the case of Dalkeith there are, however, two complicating factors that have to be taken into account.

First, there is pressure from the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) intent on driving its *Network City* planning strategy in demanding that inner metropolitan local government areas on average double their existing housing density in order to accommodate the bulk of an estimated 500,000 additional dwellings to house the expected population growth over next 30 to 40 years.

Second, there is continuing pressure from Dalkeith residents seeking planning permission to subdivide their lots in order to capitalise on the current extremely high residential land values.³

This particular and locally controversial issue will be further complicated by a shortly to be implemented WAPC regulation raising the minimum residential code for a R10 subdivision from R20 (500 square metres per lot) to at least R25 (minimum 400 square metres per lot). When instituted this would not only stop the subdivision of Dalkeith's large lots into two, but, as it was designed to do, force multi-lot development: which would even more dramatically change the Dalkeith landscape than allowing R20 subdivisions.

² By comparison it is said that there were only 176 submissions on the 1963 Metropolitan Region Scheme.

³ There is an interesting letter on this in the *West Australian* newspaper (27/03/08) written by a Dalkeith resident Mr Kenneth Roxburgh Helsby pointing out the fallacies in the commonly and uncritically accepted arguments put forward by those seeking subdivisional approval.

However, the submissions currently under review by this committee make it perfectly plain that the overwhelming majority would prefer Dalkeith to remain as it is. Not, as one might suppose because they do not want change – the NIMBY effect – but because they have a clear idea of what they want Dalkeith to be.

The collective vision

There is an almost universal agreement that Dalkeith works as a village sustained by its humanised landscaped environment and serviced by facilities designed to meet local family-oriented needs and free from the ill-effects of through traffic.

Taking all the factors and elements referred to by those who wrote the recorded submission into account, there emerges a clear collective community vision for Dalkeith which I believe provides us with a working and overarching planning brief for action by Council.

It is as follows:

Sustain and maintain Dalkeith's historic and long established position as one of Western Australia's first garden suburbs in keeping with its founding philosophy of providing an owner-occupied, free-standing, single-family friendly housing environment with a close-by and easily accessed range of basic social, recreational, shopping, medical, educational, and community funded facilities, and encapsulated within a parkland landscape of treed gardens, open front lawns, street trees, green areas, parks and recreation areas appropriate to its semi-isolated location as river foreshore lined peninsula, free from through traffic, yet easily accessible by public transport to nearby second level shopping facilities in Claremont Town Centre, Stirling Highway and to a lesser extent in Broadway.

I would like to submit to the members of this Steering Committee that this or something on similar lines be adopted as a policy brief to be used by Council staff formulating a new draft Dalkeith concept plan for public debate.

Having thought over this very carefully I believe that only by adopting an overarching directive will this Steering Committee be able to move forward.

Recommendation: Implement the collective vision statement

However, I also happen to believe that for this to happen it is necessary for this Steering Committee to clear the decks for action by following up its earlier resolution to advise Council to abandon the Dalkeith Precinct Concept Plan by indicating the direction in which it intends to go.

May I, therefore, put to the committee the following set of ideas, backed by the hard evidence provided by the submissions, which requires the implementation of the following adjustments to the Dalkeith Redevelopment Precinct Concept Plan:

- 1. Redefine Precinct 18 to include only the existing shopping and retail areas between Adelma and Alexander Roads and the north east corner of the junctions of Robert Street and Waratah Avenue.**

2. **Draw up a plan to upgrade the currently zoned shopping and retail area within the redefined Precinct 18 to include, if possible, feasible first floor residential accommodation, and a height limit of two storeys.⁴**
3. **Retain in public ownership the Dalkeith Hall land and research a long term plan for an expanded community use including a hall, community meeting facilities, and the feasibility of providing first floor aged persons' accommodation.**

Conclusions

Had Council followed its own precedent set when it placed its Housing Diversity Study under the guidance of a *Study Team* (in other words, a steering committee) comprising the then mayor, four councillors and appropriate staff members, it is highly likely that a great deal of anguish could have been avoided with regard to the current Dalkeith Concept Guidelines. As it was the absence of a steering committee from the very beginning which did much to bring about a situation which was made worse when the public got to hear that staff were holding a series of confidential meetings with beneficiary landowners.

The Housing Diversity Study set another precedent in writing a disclaimer at the very beginning of its report to Council stating that the report had no legal effect and was subject to the normal planning procedures.

The absence of a similar disclaimer⁵ at the beginning of the Precinct 18 consultant report and Council's failure immediately to release that report for community debate and discussion when it was first presented to Council in June last year long delayed Council discovering the fact that the report and recommendations were unacceptable: and wasted a great deal of Council staff's time in the process.

As there are eight other precinct reports yet to go, it is strongly recommended that each project be placed under a steering committee of councillors representing the ward affected by the project together with not less than two other councillors, plus the CEO, and with the Director of Planning in attendance.

⁴ This should be based upon a review of the AllerdinBurgess *Commercial Development Guidelines for Dalkeith Village Precinct*, December 2005 commissioned by a previous council and incorporating the Roberts Street-Waratah Avenue exclave and the possibility of mixed commercial and residential uses.

⁵ The disclaimer read as follows: This report is a technical document for providing the results of the Study Team only. It is not a statutory document. The information in this report should not be taken as a signal that any changes will be approved specific purposes. Further statutory planning processes are required by the city of Nedlands Council and all formal planning must be observed.