

DALKEITH REDEVELOPMENT (PRECINCT NO 18)

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Community planning must be a participatory process

Community planning requires the *active participation* of citizen and local government in *decision making* from the inception of the process.

Participation is the complete opposite to consultation. Consultation is a process by which a planning agency calls for submissions and comments on a proposed plan already wholly or partially approved by the Council and the Planning Commission. Participation, on the other hand, requires that a proposal to plan is put to the community from the moment that the decision to plan is made such that the community becomes directly involved in its formulation and adoption.

Thus, although Council is to be congratulated on adopting the idea of Precinct Planning, the Dalkeith Precinct plan as proposed falls far short of the spirit of Precinct Planning as a *participatory process* in the following respects:

- a. Participation in decision making means openness and a constructive dialogue between planners, the people and their elected representatives: and not, as in the Precinct 18 report, the presentation of “ready-to-bake” plans at confidential meetings with stakeholders.
- b. Holding private meetings with residential land owners seeking support for their proposal to sub-divide existing blocks of land in Waratah Avenue and Circe Circle which inevitably led to speculation on appreciation of capital values (depending on location and degree of redevelopment) and, by so doing, breaching at least the spirit of the Local Government Act’s pecuniary interest rules.
- c. Participatory planning requires that the objectives of the plan and the precinct boundaries be clearly stated and put to the public for discussion before any further action is taken. Despite denials, what was presented was a “ready-to-bake” redevelopment plan that could have been presented to the WA Planning Commission with little or no alteration.
- d. It is evident throughout the report that a fundamental rule of planning, the greater the change - the greater the need for research, was not followed. One glaring example, notwithstanding the fact that the Claremont Centre is at present undergoing a radical upgrade as a sub-regional retail and commercial centre, no evidence was adduced to justify the proposed massive retail and commercial development west of Alexander Road on a scale comparable to Rokeby Road in Subiaco. Since the Dalkeith village shopping centre is and should remain at the lowest level off the Planning Commission’s long established retail centre hierarchy to argue that the development to come from a wider area than that of its immediate locality is in itself evidence of a lack of understanding of both the commission’s policy and of the way the retail hierarchy is supposed to work: especially when a bus route happens to connect Dalkeith village with Claremont Town Centre.

- e. Precinct planning is fundamentally about resolving differences between the objectives and policies of planning authorities – in this case the City of Nedlands (CoN), the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) and the people living or working within the precincts. In the case of CoN's Precinct 18 there is a fundamental difference between the CoN's long-established residential policy for Dalkeith as a R10 single family density and those of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure's (DPI) metropolitan wide policy of forcing increased residential densities aimed at reducing the use of the private motorcar and accommodating the bulk of future population growth in existing urban areas. The actual extent to which the DPI is either directly or indirectly engaged in using state powers to coerce Nedlands City Council (CON) directing what is proposed for Dalkeith (and else where in the city) should have been made public by council officers from the very start of the process and in writing: especially since council officers were, apparently, negotiating with DPI from the very beginning.
- f. Precinct planning should be internally consistent with its stated aims and objectives by ensuring there are no contradictions. For example, the report's forward claims that "Future development proposals should acknowledge and *respond* to the historical development patterns of the area i.e. maintain built form that compliments the village values" as stated in the draft report. Having said that, the Precinct 18 plan, with its proposed mixed use buildings up to four storeys, hundreds of metres of commercial and retail frontage, proposes completely the opposite.

Precinct 18 is NOT a Concept Plan

A concept is something conjured in the mind. Concepts arise out of experience and imagination. They represent no more than a point of departure for a debate or discussion: or a scaled down version of what is proposed. (See Appendix A for a fuller description of a concept plan)

Precinct Plan 18 goes so far beyond the true meaning of a concept plan that it is, in most respects an "oven ready" plan which could have been left as is without any public consultation until the statutory 42 day period for submissions: by which time it would have been virtually impossible to have made any significant changes.

This is clearly evidenced by the fully detailed regulations set down on pages 18-36 under General Provisions and the Addendum pages 1-7.

The consultant firm which drew up the plan must have been given a brief that required it to go beyond the concept stage.

This is confirmed by the fact that alterations and amendments made by council officers to Precinct 18's General Provisions following the public meeting held at Dalkeith Hall are not, as one would have expected, judging from what was said from the assurances given at the public meeting, about the basic issues, but are all mere matters of detail.

Nevertheless and at the appropriate time, items listed under the heading General Provisions are of such importance that they need to be examined carefully with regard to their validity and applicability with regard to their implementation in Dalkeith.

The core concepts

Precinct 18 Plan is not a concept plan. It is so conditioned by (a) the General Provisions already alluded to and (b) the highly detailed Development Area Guide

Lines (DAGL) for each of the Character or Development Areas (DA) or Precincts¹ that any chance of actually discussing the Concept Plan set out on pages 12-17 on its merits, is treated as no more than a framework on which to peg development controls.

The *Concept Plan* divides Precinct 18 into five character areas. With the exception of what is described as the Village Core, and Circe Circle, the remaining DAs are really mixed activity zones.

The five Character Areas are sub-divided into 18 areas variously referred to either as *Precincts* (actually sub-precincts) or, more generally, or as DAs.

Each of the 18 sub-units is first described in general and easily understood terms the *Concept Plan* (pages 12-17), and then considerable detail in Section 6 in *Housing Diversity Zone Use Classes* tables. Each use is given a rating as either permitted or subject to subject to council's use of its discretion.

With the exception of DAs 13 (Southern end of Genesta) and 14 (Circe Circle) all other DAs allow commercial uses. All DAs allow for apartment density residential development.

None of the proposed 18 Development Areas is acceptable

There are a number of clear and very obvious objections to what is proposed.

- a. The scheme, when taken as a whole, is out of scale and out of character.
- b. The out-of-scale nature and extent of the proposed changes is illustrated by two perspective diagrams superimposed on oblique air photographs views as seen from eastern and western ends of Precinct 18. These show the built form design envelop as it would be if all DAs went to the limits allowable.
- c. The plan's key proposal, the conversion of both sides of Waratah Avenue from Adelma to Roberts Road from single family residences with large front garden to zero lot line retail on the ground floor, commercial uses on the first floor, and residential uses at 1st, 2nd, 3rd and fourth floor levels, would more than double the existing retail frontage.
- d. The fact that no explanation is given as to why such an enormous increase is required is inexcusable.
- e. Furthermore, since there is a marked difference in setbacks between residential and commercial properties piecemeal development over the time taken to fully develop the land west of Alexander Road (if it were ever economically feasible which is doubtful) would inevitably lead to loss of amenity as the result of spasmodic development.
- f. The plan breaches the City Council's well known policy of retaining existing residential areas Residential Code 10 (R 10) in resisting pressures by both residents and the Planning Commission to change this policy.
- g. In view of this policy, one has to ask why Nedlands City Council allowed a proposal to dramatically change this policy to proceed as far as it has?
- h. The Development Areas (DAs) are little more than old fashioned zones tartered up to look like precinct character statements. Precincts-cum-development areas should have been drawn as unique, easily identifiable places but they are not.

¹ Which seem to be interchangeable descriptions

- i. The Village Centre is split into two separate areas; one at the eastern and the other at western extremity of Waratah Ave between Adelma and Roberts Road.
 - ii. Urban General comprises three separate areas all of which are currently residential. One is a block of land both side of Waratah Avenue to the west of Shrike lane, another is the northern end of Alexander road; and the third is along Genesta Crescent.
 - iii. Because the Circe Circle DA, unlike the all the other DAs, is not in direct contact with Waratah Avenue precinct one has seriously to question why this portion of Circe Circle should have been added to Precinct 18.
 - iv. The proposal to allow DA 14, Circe Circle (part of) to be converted into three storey, high density, one-side lot line apartment blocks with minimal front and rear set backs of 6 and 4 metres respectively is not only out of character with the rest of Circe Circle,² but with (a) greatly increased traffic and (b) the absence of families with children in a proposed multi-lot development requiring a *minimum* of one dwelling with a maximum floor area as 70m², puts the school opposite at risk morally as well as from traffic movements.
- i. The lack of any social provision and the cavalier fashion in which the plan includes Dalkeith Hall (DA are 7) without comment or explanation as part of the retail and commercial Dalkeith Village core area.

Conclusions

Council has been led into unnecessary expense by not following planning's most fundamental principle survey before plan. In the case of Precinct 18 this should have include research into the need for any expansion retail and commercial activities beyond the areas already allocated. Such a survey would have included an assessment of the impact of the enlarging and deepening of Claremont Centre as the logical and nearest district centre.

Similarly, investigation into the true residential requirements of the area would have revealed that for the most part such is the value of land in Dalkeith the real reason for sub-division is profit taking disguised in many cases by social arguments concerning aged.- at 55 years of age?

Indeed, so far as we are aware, Council has never conducted any 15 year retrospective research into what happens after a subdivision has been granted on social grounds to land owners.

Nor, do it seems, are officers providing Council with a full assessment of the actual trends in residential development in the Dalkeith area and their impact upon the area's famed treescape.

Similarly, Council (not to mentioned the Planning Commission) appears to have fallen into the trap of assuming that more dwellings in an existing residential area increases population when, because flat and apartment dwellers are childless and often single persons, multiple dwelling lots at best seldom do more than maintain the same number of persons per lot. In some metropolitan Perth areas populations appears

² Circe Circle was designed by Surveyor Hope as Western Australia's first garden suburban sub-division shortly before the First World War.

to have fallen as the result of conversion of family-friendly lots to flat and apartment dwellings.

This of course makes nonsense of the government's sustainability policy when it drives out families with children

The plan as proposed is not only marred by a lack, despite avowals to the contrary, of any sense of appreciation of Dalkeith's remarkable treescaped humanised environment, but also because it lacks any sense of social responsibility. The plan talks of community, and on the basis of a highly successful coffee shop it then invents what it calls "the village core" by imagining Genesta Crescent Park to be the equivalent to a "village green." This reveals how little those who constructed this report really know about the socio-psychological and economic factors that affect the locations of coffee houses and restaurants.

Similarly, the report totally failed in its responsibility to protect very young primary school children who must make their way to and from school via the surrounding streets which are much part of the school environment as the school grounds: a neglect made worse by ignoring the fact that parents are already sufficiently worried as to ferry most of the children to and from school by car.

Similarly, the unconditional proposal to develop Dalkeith Hall, council's only other community facility in the area, as an integral part of what it calls "mainstreet" commercial development is reprehensible.

Since Council owns this particular piece of property and, more importantly, and owes a responsibility to the community for this piece of land, arguments along the lines of "it's only used once or twice a week and its costs too much to keep" are socially irresponsible and morally reprehensible.

From this it would appear that the report's underlying aim is a misguided attempt to create, in the heart of Dalkeith, the centre which the dormitory suburb of Nedlands supposedly lacks. Misguided not only because this ignores the increasingly important role by Claremont as the district centre, and importance of Stirling Highway and Broadway as complementary residential/retail/commercial "mainstreets" as providing ideal opportunities for fully high density multi-use retail/commercial/residential redevelopment.

Appendix A

Conceptual models in Precinct and Local Planning

Planning conceptual models must be simple, easily understood visualisations of what is proposed aimed at achieving the following:

1. A summarisation of what will eventually involve detailed technical concepts.
2. The integration of the social, economic, environmental elements and their impacts upon the cultural landscape and established community values.
3. The intended outcomes and the value of these outcomes to the community.
4. The identification of knowledge gaps especially where the members of community know more about the locality and how it works than the professionals drawing up the model.
5. The direction and open participation of the community/stakeholders in the decision making process immediately following the primary decision to embark on a plan whereat it is little more than an idea.

6. A two way flow of information in the decision making process such that the community is never faced with a “pre-cast” plan: one drawn up in such detail that changes of almost any kind appear to threaten the competence of the professional officers, the authority of council, or the plan itself.
7. A clear understanding of the objectives of the plan, the reasons why it is being proposed and its social, economic, environmental and cultural impacts on the community.
8. And presented in such a way that the community may in turn develop alternative models for discussion and examination by the professionals for further discussion.

Those who present models must never forget that they are the servants of the community, not its masters and must never use the argument that what is presented is too technical for lay-persons to understand.