

Submission

On the Villawood Town Centre Urban Design Study

19 January 2018

Executive summary

Woodville Alliance has a long history of working in and with the Villawood community. Our Head Office and our Child, Family and Youth Services was located in the Town Centre for the past 20 years and has only recently relocated while the site where we have a long-term lease is redeveloped. We are due to return to 1 Kamira Court in 2019.

This has given us deep insights into the history and current dynamics of the local area, and resulted in a strong connection with and commitment to the local community. In this context, we are delighted to provide feedback on the Draft Villawood Town Centre Urban Design Study.

Based on our community consultation, and our own deep understanding of the Villawood Town Centre, we have identified 12 key issues on which we would like to provide feedback, with one or more recommendations provided for each issue.

The following is a list of our recommendations, followed by a description of each of the issues from which they have been derived in the body of the submission.

Woodville Alliance recommends that:

1. A community newsletter be produced to provide information and notice of community participation opportunities to residents at appropriate intervals.
2. Fairfield City Council work with Woodville Alliance to facilitate ongoing community participation opportunities as planning and development progresses.
3. Kamira Court Car Park be repurposed to provide open space with connections to Villawood Centre Core.
4. A multipurpose community centre (hub) be integrated into plans for the Town Centre, with requirements identified as part of the Social Impact and Social Infrastructure Assessment in recommendation 12.
5. A safety committee be formed to identify key safety issues and potential responses.
6. *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* principles and practices be included in planning, design, and construction.
7. Development plans and building approvals be contingent upon the inclusion of one, two and three-bedroom dwellings, as well as social, affordable, and private housing, to facilitate diverse housing options for a diverse community.
8. Villawood Centre Core (Figure 10 in the study report) is converted into a pedestrian mall.
9. A pedestrian and vehicular traffic study be undertaken to ensure appropriate pedestrian routes, and the separation of open space from substantial traffic.

10. A comprehensive place making strategy be developed, in which the interrelationships between urban design, social infrastructure, public participation mechanisms and other considerations are embraced.
11. Provision be made for additional shops and supermarkets to cater for a growing population.
12. A social or health impact assessment be conducted by a suitably qualified consultant, and that it includes a social plan, and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and midcourse correction.
13. Fairfield City Council engage a suitably qualified consultant to conduct a social infrastructure assessment. This may be included in the social impact assessment referred to in recommendation 12.
14. Fairfield City Council negotiate accessibility improvements to Villawood Train Station with the NSW Government.

Our understanding of Villawood

Villawood has several attractive features as a town centre and a place to live. These include proximity to public transport, including the T3 Bankstown Train Line, as well as direct bus services to Fairfield, Bankstown, and Liverpool. The Town Centre contains a few key shops and services, including a supermarket, green grocer, bakery, chemist, doctor's surgery, post office, dentist, newsagent, hair dressers, variety store, and several fast food outlets.

The above notwithstanding, Villawood also has its challenges. Along with Carramar it forms the most disadvantaged postcode in Fairfield (2163), and the second most disadvantaged postcode in metropolitan Sydney, with only Claymore rated by Tony Vinson's *Dropping off the Edge report, 2015*ⁱ as being more disadvantaged.

Villawood also has a very culturally and linguistically diverse population with only about quarter of its population speaking only a language other than English at homeⁱⁱ. The area is also characterised by a high proportion of single parent families, very high rates of unemployment and low levels of home ownership.

The Town Centre itself has a difficult history. Many public housing residents were relocated from the area in 2005, when the housing estate known as 'Kamira Court' was decanted and demolished. Businesses anecdotally report that their turnover decreased by 30-40% at this time, and the site remains vacant to this day. More recently (2016) the building located on the 2 Villawood Road site stood empty for almost a year, and was subjected to extensive

vandalism, prior to its demolition in 2017. This site comprised many shops, units and services, which have also been lost to the Town Centre over the last two years.

The Villawood Town Centre Urban Design Study provides an opportunity for a very disadvantaged suburb to be transformed into an attractive place to live and work, while maintaining a diverse population.

Community consultation

As a local social and community service provider, Woodville Alliance places a high value on public participation in decisions that impact the local community. Based on our understanding that the community had not had substantial input into the development of the Draft Urban Design Study, and may not be aware of or fully understand the current exhibition and submission process, we organised a Community Forum for 15 January 2018. An event report produced by Holos Consulting is attached to our submission, and its content had been integrated into our feedback and recommendations below.

We believe that local community members have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, and that community participation leads to better processes, decisions, and outcomes. It is important that processes be put in place to share information with the local community, and to gain their participation, as plans unfold for Villawood Town Centre. This could be done through periodic newsletters, and a commitment to community participation at each stage of planning and implementation. Woodville Alliance would be delighted to work with Fairfield City Council to facilitate ongoing community participation, and to form a Citizens' Panel if/as deemed appropriate.

Recommendation 1: A community newsletter be produced to provide information and notice of community participation opportunities to residents at appropriate intervals.

Recommendation 2: Fairfield City Council work with Woodville Alliance to facilitate ongoing community participation opportunities as planning and development progress.

Community facilities

The land on which the existing Senior Citizens Centre and Early Learning Centre are located are due to be rezoned for multistorey residential development. Additionally, the substantial increase in population that is expected to result from redevelopment will lead to a commensurate increase in demand for social infrastructure. This provides an excellent opportunity to develop a multipurpose community centre (or hub) that could be used to provide existing and additional services, as well as contributing to community engagement and place making efforts during and beyond the transformation of the Town Centre. Such a facility should have space available for or allocated to: child care; youth activities; seniors activities; sporting activities; health services; community hall(s) available for hire; offices for locally based services; and so on.

Recommendation 4: A multipurpose community centre be integrated into plans for the Town Centre, with requirements identified as part of the proposed Social Impact and Social Infrastructure Assessment in recommendation 12.

Crime and safety

Safety issues emerged as a key issue in our community consultation, including safety at Villawood Train Station after dark, and the need for safe housing designs. Safety issues could be addressed via the formation of a safety committee and the inclusion of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles and practices in planning, design, and construction.

Recommendation 5: A safety committee be formed to identify key safety issues and potential responses.

Recommendation 6: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles and practices be included in planning, design, and construction.

Diversity of housing

The Draft Town Centre Study foresees the development of 1,200 to 1,300 apartments, and for planning purposes these are assumed to be two-bedroom dwellings. We feel that it is extremely important that there is a combination of one, two, and three-bedroom dwellings, to facilitate the formation and maintenance of a diverse community, including singles, couples, families with children, and older people.

The Draft Town Centre Study foresees a mix of social, affordable, and private housing on the LAHC site. This too is essential to maintaining diversity in the community, and should be a requirement of any future development.

Recommendation 7: Development plans and building approvals be contingent upon the inclusion of one, two and three-bedroom dwellings, as well as social, affordable, and private housing, to facilitate diverse housing options for a diverse community.

Open space

We believe that the very substantial increase in density in the Town Centre should be accompanied by a commensurate increase in open space. While we acknowledge that open space is included in the LAHC site, this is likely to be used primarily by the new residents of this site, which is somewhat removed from the Villawood Centre Core. We would like to see the Karima Court car park re-purposed as green open space that is visible to, and highly accessible to, residents and visitors in and near the Villawood Centre Core.

The Draft Town Centre Study identifies this carpark for retention. We feel that this space could be far better utilised as open space, with appropriate connections made to Villawood Centre Core. These parking spaces could be relocated underground, or to another part of the site, such as the flood prone and noise affected State Rail land adjacent to the railway line. This State Rail land is identified in the study as having potential for additional parking. In addition to improving the amenity of the Town Centre, repurposing of this land would remove a large hard surface with high absorption of solar radiation from a highly developed area.

Recommendation 3: Car parking be relocated underground or to another part of the site leaving the Kamira Court Car Park be repurposed to provide open space with connections to Villawood Centre Core.

Roads and pedestrian access

The precinct identified as Villawood Centre Core (Figure 10) appears to be well suited to removal of vehicular access and conversion to a pedestrian mall, similar to Lane Cove Plaza, and a range of similar sites found throughout Sydney. This would increase the quantum of open space, enhance place making efforts, and increase pedestrian safety. It would also provide an opportunity to deliver the covered/sheltered open space requested by residents during our community consultation.

Based on current plans, we are concerned that building setbacks may be insufficient to accommodate appropriate footpath widths and street treatments.

We are also concerned about the proposed new road connection between Koonona Avenue and Howatt Street. This will create a major new access road from Villawood Road, and adjoins the only highly accessible open space in the Town Centre. We acknowledge that this may be inevitable if Villawood Centre Core is converted into a pedestrian mall, though a traffic study/plan will be required to confirm the most appropriate plans.

Recommendation 8: Villawood Centre Core (Figure 10) is converted into a pedestrian mall.

Recommendation 9: A pedestrian and vehicular traffic study be undertaken to ensure appropriate pedestrian routes, and the separation of open space from substantial traffic.

Placemaking

There are numerous references to placemaking throughout the Draft Town Centre Study. However, they typically refer to relatively minor design and landscaping features. We advocate a broader understanding and application of place making, one that includes: urban design; social infrastructure; active and passive open space; public art; public participation

mechanisms; community activities and events; the local economy; accessibility; health promotion; and a participatory approach to visioning and place making.

Recommendation 10: A comprehensive place making strategy be developed, in which the interrelationships between urban design, social infrastructure, public participation mechanisms and other considerations are embraced.

Shops

Participants in our community consultation expressed a desire other supermarket options to cater for the expanded and diverse population.

Recommendation 11: Provision be made for additional shops and supermarkets to cater for a growing population.

Social/health impact assessment

Redevelopment of the scale envisaged will result in several thousand new residents, and will also have a significant impact on existing residents and service providers. It was highlighted in the community consultation that the community needs to benefit from both plan and subsequent developments. A social and/or health impact assessment would serve to identify opportunities, risks, and mitigation strategies, and therein ensure appropriate consideration of relevant social issues, and the attainment of positive social outcomes. Any such impact assessment should give due consideration to the International Association for Impact Assessment's (2003) *International Principles for Social Impact Assessment*ⁱⁱⁱ, and/or the Planning Institute Australia's (2010) *Social Impact Assessment Position Statement*^{iv}, and/or the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation's *Health Impact Assessment: A Practical Guide*^v. This should result in the development of a social service plan, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that check progress and allow for midcourse adjustments as required.

Recommendation 12: A social or health impact assessment be conducted by a suitably qualified consultant, and that it include a social plan and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and midcourse correction.

Social infrastructure assessment

Social infrastructure is most needed during periods of development and change, to ensure residents have access to the services they need, and to play an active and constructive role in bringing about the desired change. It is imperative that a social infrastructure assessment is conducted prior to development proceeding, to ensure that new social infrastructure required is delivered where and when it is needed. This should include but not be limited to an assessment of the needs of the existing population, the expected needs of the future population, the need to replace existing infrastructure, and the need for flexibility and adaptability to 'futureproof' the infrastructure.

Recommendation 13: Fairfield City Council engage a suitably qualified consultant to conduct a social infrastructure assessment. This may be included in the social impact assessment referred to in recommendation 12.

Train station

There are significant accessibility issues at Villawood Train Station. Most obvious is the large number of steep steps required to access the platform, which are a serious impediment for young children, mothers with prams, the elderly, people in wheelchairs, and others whose mobility is limited. Many local stakeholders have lobbied Members of Parliament to address these issues over the past 20 years, though to date there has been no action. If Villawood Town Centre is to be activated, existing residents are to be provided with additional transport access/options, and new residents are to be attracted to the local area, the upgrading of Villawood Train Station with the inclusion of a lift is essential.

Recommendation 14: Fairfield City Council negotiate accessibility improvements to Villawood Train Station with the NSW Government.

Conclusion

Woodville Alliance welcomes the redevelopment of the Villawood Town Centre and strongly proposes a measured and well-planned approach with active community engagement.

As discussed in this submission, the redevelopment provides an opportunity to improve community facilities, increase public and open space, increase access to social and affordable housing while at the same time increasing retail and other business opportunities.

Ultimately, we want this redevelopment to result in a cohesive and flourishing community that is socially and physically connected and has a positive relationship within its physical environment.

ⁱ Tony Vinson and Margaret Rawthorn (2015), *Dropping Off The Edge, Persistent Communal Disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services / Catholic Social Services Australia 2015 (p 51)

ⁱⁱ 2016 Census data, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://profile.id.com.au/fairfield/language?WebID=330>

ⁱⁱⁱ Frank Vanclay (2003), 'International Principles for Social Impact Assessment', *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 21(1), pp. 2-11.

^{iv} Planning Institute Australia (2010) *Social Impact assessment Position Statement*, <https://www.planning.org.au/documents/item/250>, retrieved 17 January 2018.

^v Harris, P., Harris-Roxas, B., Harris, E., & Kemp, L. *Health Impact Assessment: A Practical Guide*, Sydney: Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation (CHETRE).