

Brooklyn Improvement Master Plan Update

The League Executive has set up a subcommittee to focus on the development of the Brooklyn Improvement Master Plan by Hornsby Shire Council. The subcommittee members are Broniek Karcz, Trevor Kanaley and Hans Pols.

If you are not aware of the planning process for Brooklyn and outputs to date, you can familiarize yourself by visiting the Council website and viewing the Brooklyn Improvement Master Plan page.

The League has been very active in engaging with Council members and planning staff, as well as other river communities, to ensure that the needs of Dangar residents are fully considered in the planning process. A letter to Mayor Steve Russell detailing our concerns with the process to date is on the League website.

A committee - the Lower Hawkesbury Communities Group (LHCG) - consisting of representatives from all the Lower Hawkesbury River communities has been set up to help develop and coordinate approaches where river residents have common issues. Representatives are from Milsons Passage, Bar Point, Mooney Mooney, Dangar Island, Brooklyn, Little Wobby, Cogra Bay and Mullett Creek. The committee meets once a month.

The LHCG met with Mayor Steve Russell and Council planning staff on 15 February to discuss the concerns of the river communities. In broad terms the issues raised were:

- The scope and importance of the Masterplan for River Communities
- Lack of structured and numerical content: Parking needs
- Lack of structured and numerical content: Economic activity
- The importance of addressing Economic Sustainability
- The impact of Peat Island on Brooklyn and the Masterplan
- Possible amalgamation of the northern Hawkesbury communities into Hornsby Shire

Mayor Russell assured river residents that their needs would not be ignored and that Council and the consultants recognised that river residents are dependent on Brooklyn to manage their lives. Schools, transport, parking, mooring, shopping and medical services were all mentioned. The Mayor noted that any proposals from the Brooklyn Master Planning process will consider the needs and impacts on all affected parties including Brooklyn Residents, River Residents, businesses, tourists, train travellers and so on.

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The Mayor and Council staff made a number of other points.

- Brooklyn is run down from years of neglect.
- The master planning process has been implemented to get a clear long term plan for the future improvement and development of the town. The Brooklyn Master Planning program is entirely managed and paid for by HSC.
- Economically Brooklyn is struggling. In the CBD, businesses regularly close down as they cannot sustain themselves under current circumstances. The economic viability of Brooklyn needs to be addressed. The CBD is run down.
- There is no set agenda, preconceived view or preferred outcome for the Brooklyn Master Planning program.
- The Mayor is keen to see input and ideas from all parties involved, including river residents.
- The Mayor stressed that there is nothing stopping individuals or groups engaging in the process.
- There is a Brooklyn Mater Plan website which should be used to convey ideas to the planning team and all will be considered.
- While some river residents (such as Little Wobby) are outside of Hornsby Shire, the Mayor recognised their dependence on Brooklyn and assured such residents that their needs will be included in the master planning process.
- The Mayor commented that there is no set deadline or unnecessary hurry to get the Brooklyn Master Plan finished. It is important that the broad Community (including river residents) is brought along.
- So far 50% of the program budget has been spent:
 - Stage 1 of the program is complete
 - Stage 2 is now underway (identification of issues/opportunities/solutions)
 - Stage 3 First draft of the Masterplan is expected in mid to late 2017
- During Stage 2 - to be run in the first half of 2017 - there will be several public “Drop In sessions” by the planning team. One was requested for Dangar and tentatively agreed.
- Two consultants have been appointed to the Master Plan team to collect and analyse statistical information on traffic and economic activity in Brooklyn. These are new resources. They will help address some concerns that have been expressed to date.
- As yet, no information is available as to the identity of the new consultants or their scope of work.

- The Master Planning Team at Hornsby Council has been disappointed at the lack of solutions emerging from the Community during the process so far.
- The planners are encouraging the presentation of ideas with sketches, drawings etc. These can be posted to them (to Fletcher Rayner) via the Brooklyn Master Planning Portal on the HSC website.
- As regards Peat Island, the State Government is still a long way from presenting the next draft plan. It seems previous proposals are being scaled back with Peat Island itself being designated a tourist area with some buildings under heritage listing review. As Peat Island is outside of Hornsby Shire it is not directly considered in the Brooklyn Master Plan process.
- There is no overwhelming demand for amalgamation of northern river-side (Gosford) communities into Hornsby Shire Council. It is very unlikely. There are too many obstacles.

After letters and consultation, we have assurances that development of the Brooklyn Masterplan will take into account the needs of River Residents.

It is clear that Brooklyn, the River Communities and Council need to work together to achieve a good and lasting outcome, though it is less clear how trade-offs will be identified and negotiated in practice.

More resources such as parking, community spaces etc need to be developed in Brooklyn rather than shuffling the scant ones that are now available from one interest group to another.

It is also clear that Brooklyn is in a run-down state economically and physically. It needs some serious TLC.

Over coming months, as the planning process continues and more information becomes available, the challenge for Dangar residents and the League will be to develop (and respond to) solutions which realistically advance our interests and those of the broader Brooklyn and river community.

Bronek Karcz

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