

1 DISCUSSION PAPER - BROOKLYN PLACE PLANNING - FEEDBACK FROM EXHIBITION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Discussion Paper – Brooklyn Place Planning, was developed as a first step to re-engage with the community of Brooklyn and the river settlements following the cessation of the Brooklyn Improvement Master Plan in late 2018.
- The Discussion Paper sought to test a draft vision for Brooklyn with the community, along with several guiding principles and priority actions.
- There was good to very good community agreement with the proposed guiding principles and priority actions. It is proposed that Council endorse these items and use them as key reference points moving forward with place planning for Brooklyn.
- Where agreement with individual guiding principles dropped below 70%, the absence of an articulated position on resolving car parking seemed to be the issue holding back further agreement. Taking on board community feedback, it is recommended that Council address car parking in Brooklyn in the first instance before proceeding with the place planning process.
- Whilst most people agreed with the draft vision for Brooklyn, a revised “working version” of the vision for Brooklyn has been developed based on community feedback.
- To progress the Brooklyn Place Plan, it is recommended that Council work with the community to produce a “consultant’s brief” for the next stage of works – including how engagement should be managed.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT:

1. Council note the survey results and summary of comments received during the exhibition of the Discussion Paper - Brooklyn Place Planning outlined in the contents of General Manager’s Report No. GM31/21.
2. Council endorse the guiding principles and priority actions for the development of the Brooklyn Place Plan as outlined in the contents of General Manager’s Report No. GM31/21.
3. Council endorse the revised “working version” of the vision for Brooklyn outlined in the contents of General Manager’s Report No. GM31/21 – such that it may be further tested with stakeholders as the Brooklyn place planning process progresses.
4. A workshop be conducted with Councillors to discuss an approach to, and principles associated with, car parking management in Brooklyn.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Report is to provide details of survey results received on the Discussion Paper – Brooklyn Place Planning (attached) and to gain agreement on key foundational principles as the Brooklyn place planning process progresses. The report also considers how the place planning process should best proceed based on community feedback.

BACKGROUND

At the October 2018 General Meeting, Council considered Group Manager's Report No. PL28/18. This report noted that:

Brooklyn Improvement Masterplan - There are a number of tasks that have not been completed to finalise the draft Brooklyn Improvement Masterplan. It is recommended that priority be given to working with the community on a place-making approach in the short term, with a focus on achievable short-term improvements prior to formally revisiting the Masterplan...

A place-making approach allows Council to broaden single discipline thinking to focus holistically on people and places. In taking a place-making approach, Council aims to build stronger relationships with the community and be thoughtful and collaborative in our planning and strategy development.

DISCUSSION

The Discussion Paper – Brooklyn Place Planning was drafted to re-engage with the Brooklyn and river communities following the cessation of the Brooklyn Improvement Masterplan in 2018. The document seeks to summarise the planning work previously undertaken in the precinct and reframes the work within a place making/place planning context – rather than a land use planning based context such as that employed through the Brooklyn Improvement Masterplan.

Importantly, the Discussion Paper recognises that without a clear vision or purpose it is difficult to make decisions about the future of Brooklyn and how it is planned and managed in a consistent and coherent fashion. The Discussion Paper also seeks to establish guiding principles that will help to make decisions about Brooklyn. These guiding principles are more specific in their focus but together, contribute to the overall vision for Brooklyn. Lastly, the Discussion Paper sought feedback on suggested high priority actions that set up a process pathway for resolving issues and formulating a place plan for Brooklyn using joined-up thinking.

Survey results

Council letter box dropped survey promotional material to all residences in Brooklyn, Dangar Island and Milsons Passage. Email correspondence was also forwarded to all civic organisations in the Lower Hawkesbury area - regardless of whether their location is based within the Hornsby Shire - and invited stakeholders and residents to complete the survey. This approach was taken in recognition of the function that Brooklyn plays as an intermodal transport interchange for the broader river communities in the Lower Hawkesbury area. A total of 234 surveys were completed both online and in paper-based form. Feedback was received from the following parties:

Respondent group	Number of responses
Resident of Brooklyn	97
Resident of Dangar Island or Milsons Passage	91
Resident of elsewhere in the	12

Hornsby Shire	
Resident of Little Wobby, Mooney Mooney, Cheero Point, Cogra Bay or Bar Point	25
Own or operate a business in Brooklyn	15
Work in Brooklyn	21
Visitor or tourist to Brooklyn	11
Other	19

It is noted that a resident of Brooklyn may also nominate as working in Brooklyn (for example). This practically means that, the total number of “respondents” exceeds 234 in the table above – even though each survey has only been counted once in the guiding principles agreement percentages listed below.

The above figures constitute a 13% response rate from all Brooklyn residents and a 28% response rate of all residents of Dangar Island and Milsons Passage.

Agreement with Guiding Principles

Survey respondents were asked if they agreed with a guiding principle and if they did not agree they were required to explain why to progress through the survey. This approach was taken because understanding why a respondent disagreed with a principle was considered to facilitate a greater understanding of the issues involved. The following table outlines the collective level of agreement with each principle (in descending order of agreement) regardless of the residential location of the respondent.

Guiding principle	Percentage agreement	Summary of comments from respondents disagreeing
A town centre that celebrates and preserves its connection to the river, the environment and its heritage.	92%	Those disagreeing tended to prefer more of a focus on Aboriginal heritage. Some commented that car parking was a more pressing issue. Others commented that the word “celebrates” was not appropriate.
A town centre that is well maintained, attractive and with community custodianship.	88%	Those disagreeing tended to question the inclusion of community custodianship as part of the guiding principle.
A town centre that supports local business.	85%	Those disagreeing tended to comment that local businesses predominately serve visitors and that they didn’t benefit locals. Comments also suggested that suitable parking needs to be

		available to support businesses.
A town centre that is walkable, integrated, connected and active.	80%	Those disagreeing tended to do so if a walkable town centre meant that they would need to walk further to their vehicles.
A town centre that incorporates an appropriate community facility as a hub.	79%	Those disagreeing tended to seek clarification on what this would entail or how it would function as a hub.
A town centre that functions as a transport interchange.	71%	Those disagreeing tended to object to the notion that the Brooklyn village centre should provide this function – often mentioning car parking as a point of contention.
A town centre that maximises benefits from visitors for locals.	69%	Those disagreeing tended to comment that locals do not currently benefit from visitors and indicated that visitors tended to utilise limited car parking resources.
A town centre that is a vibrant and welcoming visitor destination with an active spine along Dangar Road.	69%	Those disagreeing tended to question the need for a vibrant town centre (as opposed to a sleepy village atmosphere), the desire to attract visitors who would further compete for parking, and the notion that Dangar Road may be developed to become “active” – attracting more visitors.

ITEM 1

The above percentage agreement results are considered to represent good to very good agreement with the guiding principles – with agreement generally above 70%. The guiding principles were derived from community feedback received from the Brooklyn Improvement Masterplan process and best practice standards and so high levels of agreement are not unexpected.

Of interest is the narrative that has developed in the comments provided when a respondent disagreed with a principle. When considered within a broader context, these comments would suggest that the areas of tension in Brooklyn very clearly relate to car parking and visitation to Brooklyn. Visitation to Brooklyn seems to be a point of tension because of the demand for car parking that this generates. It is also noted that there is competition for parking in the Brooklyn village centre from river residents – although this issue was not specifically articulated in the survey results.

Agreement with the vision

Despite the draft vision being an amalgam of most of the guiding principles, which had good to very good levels of agreement, overall agreement with the draft vision was relatively low at 56%. The draft vision, as exhibited, was:

“The Brooklyn town centre protects its unique natural environment and celebrates its rich heritage and waterfront village atmosphere.

It functions well as a transport interchange between river, road and rail, while supporting local business and maximising the benefits of its visitor economy for the local population.

The Brooklyn town centre has a vibrant spine linking McKell Park and Bridge Street along Dangar Road.”

Agreement with the vision differed depending on the location of the respondent. Approximately two thirds of Brooklyn residents agreed with the vision but less than half of Dangar Island/Milsons Passage residents agreed with the vision. Given the degree of agreement with the guiding principles, which informed the vision, an evaluation of the comments provided by those disagreeing with the vision has been undertaken. A respondent who “disagreed” with the vision tended to fall into one of three categories:

1. Misunderstanding of what a vision is – respondents tended to comment that they disagreed that the vision matched the current reality in Brooklyn.
2. There was not enough weight within the vision given to resolving car parking.
3. There were conditional agreements which register as disagreements e.g. I’d agree if only...e.g. a particular word was changed.

The above categories are not listed in any particular order.

There seemed to also be a view expressed that the vision should be more practical, and solution focused – rather than providing a goal to work towards and a tool to guide future decision making. There was also an undercurrent of mistrust of Council and cynicism expressed by those respondents disagreeing with the vision that the place planning process would produce any practical change on the ground. There were also many constructive and positive suggestions received when respondents disagreed that can be used to improve the vision.

To respond to the feedback received, a revised vision has been crafted based on the areas where there were very high levels of community agreement with the guiding principles. Constructive and positive suggestions have also been taken on board in this regard. The revised “working version” of the Brooklyn vision is:

Brooklyn protects its unique natural environment and celebrates its rich European and Aboriginal heritage and waterfront village atmosphere.

The Brooklyn village is a liveable place for people that is welcoming and vibrant for the whole community – both residents and visitors.

The village centre is attractive, well maintained and provides support for local businesses.

In fulfilling its function as a port and transport interchange, Brooklyn village will support all river communities to transition between river, road and rail.

In drafting this revised vision, the following elements and feedback have been taken into account:

1. A good amount of feedback on the importance of Aboriginal heritage was provided. Both European and Aboriginal heritage have now been referenced in the vision rather than a generic reference to heritage.
2. Brooklyn is a place for people – this element has been emphasised more explicitly in the revised vision.

3. Brooklyn is for residents and visitors – this element has been emphasised due to the recognition that Brooklyn serves as a destination for the whole of the Shire. Car parking studies undertaken in late 2019 indicate that 66% of cars entering Brooklyn on a mid-week vehicle survey day were owned by Hornsby Shire residents – 40% were from the newly developed suburbs with 2077 and 2079 postcodes. These postcodes include the suburbs of Hornsby, Hornsby Heights, Waitara and Asquith (2077) and Mount Colah (2079). This equates to roughly, 600 cars per day from within these two post codes alone. It is noted that the inclusion of this element is, perhaps, contrary to some of the community feedback – but an essential inclusion never the less as it speaks to an essential function that Brooklyn has.
4. An emphasis on Brooklyn as a transport interchange supporting all river communities has been included in the revised vision. Whilst there was concern raised over Brooklyn fulfilling this function, it is unfortunately not a matter for debate and is unavoidable. In including this element, it is noted that Council has adopted a Car Parking Management Study for the Shire, which will provide the policy position for future engagement with the community about car parking.

Given that this revised vision has not been tested with the community, it is proposed that it be treated as a “working version” of the vision as the place planning process progresses. At an opportune time, this vision would again be formally tested with the community through an exhibition period.

Actions to proceed with

In testing a path forward for the Brooklyn place planning process, 64% of survey respondents agreed with the high priority actions listed in the Discussion Paper.

Those actions were:

1. A clear place vision for Brooklyn – this outcome would provide a standard by which future decisions about Brooklyn could be measured against.
2. A functionally laid-out village centre (Brooklyn urban design footprint) – this work would produce, visually, a place plan layout for Brooklyn.
3. An economically sustainable and resilient village centre – the background informing work to produce this outcome would allow us to understand the economy of Brooklyn, determine tipping points regarding visitation (and also the benefits), and guide decision making around issues like car parking and how these decisions may support businesses that rely on the visitor economy.
4. Dangar Road activation strategy - this work would consider how to best use the Council owned assets on Dangar Road to deliver on the place principles and vision for Brooklyn.
5. A resolved approach to village centre parking – this work would consider the vision for Brooklyn and the functions that it needs to perform for residents, river residents, as well as visitors, and manage parking accordingly.

When respondents did not agree with the priority actions listed, they tended to disagree with the order in which the priority actions were listed (wanting a resolution of car parking prioritised) or they did not see a need to re-consider the layout of Brooklyn. It is noted that the action list was not listed in order of priority in the Discussion Paper as all elements need to be considered simultaneously. Consideration of the layout of Brooklyn was listed as an action because it is assumed that the current use of land is not necessarily the best use of land and that changes may need to be made to achieve the best outcome for Brooklyn.

Tourism and visitation

In considering feedback received from the community through the survey, it is apparent that visitors and visitation to Brooklyn are points of conflict. Visitors compete for limited parking resources and often don't contribute to the local economy when they only utilise the Parsley Bay boat ramp or bring a picnic from home to eat in McKell Park – for example. Other visitors will attend Brooklyn for the cafes and restaurants – but parking is often constrained, and these offerings tend to be time limited to the middle of the day. Car parking in Brooklyn is not currently managed in a manner that supports a visitor economy as the majority of car parking spaces are untimed and the car parking survey indicates that spaces tend not to turn over with any degree of regularity - which makes parking for visitors difficult.

Importantly, car parking studies have also shown that Brooklyn serves a definite function as a regional recreational destination for residents of the Hornsby Shire who predominately live in higher density suburbs around Waitara and Asquith. This is especially the case in the mid-week period as previously mentioned. On weekends, this make up of visitors changes slightly to 61% of visitors being from the Shire - due to the broader attraction of the Parsley Bay boat ramp for recreational boating. Regardless, Brooklyn remains an important recreational destination for Hornsby Shire residents on weekends.

The newly adopted Economic Development and Tourism Strategy requires Council to develop a Destination Management Plan for river and rural areas in the Shire. This action builds upon a direction set by the Greater Sydney Commission via the North District Plan to improve and manage access to the Hawkesbury River.

It is clear that Brooklyn needs to play a role as part of the broader Hornsby Shire as a destination for day visitors in particular. It also has a role to play in hosting visitors from further afield who wish to tour the Hawkesbury River and surrounds. It is clear that this is a point of conflict for some people that live in Brooklyn, or who travel through Brooklyn to reach their homes in the Lower Hawkesbury. It would seem from feedback received through the Discussion Paper survey that taking steps to resolve car parking in the first instance, would remove any uncertainties about the competition for parking from visitors for local residents.

To progress this matter, an early workshop should be conducted with the new Council, due to be elected in September 2021, on the adopted Car Parking Management Study recommendations for Brooklyn. The workshop would discuss an approach to, and principles associated with, car parking management in Brooklyn.

Future engagement

Moving forward with the Brooklyn place planning process, it is important that Council continues to collaborate with the community and be responsive to feedback.

As a way forward to progress the Brooklyn Place Plan it is recommended that community stakeholders continue to collaborate with Council and work to produce a 'Consultant's Brief' for engagement and planning work to be undertaken to produce the place plan. This informal group, comprised of Council staff and external stakeholders, would be tasked, amongst other things, with articulating/identifying key input components of the planning process, including those relating to engagement. In simple terms, this group would be tasked with creating a brief of exactly what needs to be done rather than be tasked with solving the problems – noting that a broad process pathway has already been identified and tested with the community via the Discussion Paper survey.

Importantly, in considering how to best engage with the community moving forward on the Brooklyn Place Plan, the consultant's brief will need to articulate the context, scope (negotiable and non-

negotiable elements) and the purpose of any future engagement processes as the place planning process progresses.

CONSULTATION

The consultation undertaken to produce this report has been described in the body of the report. 234 people from Brooklyn, the river communities and elsewhere in the Shire completed an online and paper-based survey which responds to the Discussion Paper – Brooklyn Place Planning document.

In discussing the results of the survey with the executive committees of the Dangar Island League and the Brooklyn Community Association, it was made clear to Council officers that addressing car parking in the first instance is the preferred pathway forward.

BUDGET

There are no budgetary implications associated with this Report. The Brooklyn Place Plan is funded in the adopted Delivery Program including Operational Plan 2021/22.

POLICY

There are no policy implications associated with this Report. The development of the Brooklyn Place Plan will be aligned with adopted strategies, studies and plans.

CONCLUSION

Place planning for Brooklyn needs to be an iterative process that responds to community feedback as it arises and adapts processes to suit. In this instance, significant community agreement was found on the guiding principles for Brooklyn and the priority actions required to progress the place plan. It is recommended that Council endorse the guiding principles and priority actions for the Brooklyn Place Plan and that it also endorses the revised “working version” of the vision for Brooklyn listed within this report – such that it may be further tested with stakeholders as the place planning process progresses.

It is recommended that a “Draft Consultant’s Brief” is developed for progressing the Brooklyn Place Plan (with input from community stakeholders) which would consider all of the negotiable and non-negotiable elements for change in Brooklyn, such that when consultants respond to the brief, they may accurately determine the most appropriate community engagement methodology to produce the Brooklyn Place Plan.

However, prior to progressing the place planning process, the community feedback has been such that a focus should, in the first instance, be placed on resolving an approach to car parking in Brooklyn. To this end, it is recommended that a workshop be conducted with Councillors to discuss an approach to, and principles associated with, car parking management in Brooklyn.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

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