

Double Bay Residents' Association

Protecting Sydney's Stylish Bayside Village

26 March 2022

Dear Member,

Draft Double Bay Centre Planning and Urban Design Strategy

This strategy, which will determine the future of Double Bay, is now on exhibition and can be viewed online at yoursay.woollahra.nsw.gov.au/doublebay. Copies can also be read at Woollahra Library or the Council's customer service centre, 536 New South Head Road. If you would like to read the strategy in hard copy at home, the only options offered by the Council are to pay \$290 for the three documents or to print them out yourself.

The strategy confirms our worst fears, proposing six storey buildings throughout the commercial centre. DOUBLE BAY'S VILLAGE CHARACTER WOULD BE DESTROYED and it would become yet another soulless suburb.

While the strategy document is compelling at first glance, it includes a 50% increase in height controls, back-tracking on commitments all councillors made during the municipal election campaign. The illustrations seem to have been designed cleverly to play down the height of buildings and exaggerate the width of streets. In addition to the unacceptable increase in building heights, our initial concerns include the impact on traffic, parking, schools and other infrastructure which will be stretched as the population grows.

We recommend that you study the strategy carefully and encourage your neighbours and friends from throughout the Woollahra municipality to do the same and provide feedback to the Council. Meanwhile, we will scrutinise the strategy in detail and let you have our thoughts which – if you agree with them – you may like to include in your submission.

We cannot over-emphasise the importance of providing feedback, which needs to be submitted by 6th May to records@woollahra.nsw.gov.au quoting reference SC6808. Unless there is substantial push-back by residents of the whole of the Woollahra municipality, not just Double Bay, the strategy is likely to be endorsed, changing our environment for ever.

Our annual general meeting (see below) will provide an initial opportunity to discuss the strategy and, if enough members wish, we will arrange a separate meeting later in April.

DBRA annual general meeting

As we have already advised, your association's annual general meeting will be held on Tuesday 12th April 2022 at Woollahra Library, starting at 6:00pm, and we hope you will attend.

We are delighted to announce that Dave Sharma, Gabrielle Upton and Susan Wynne (Mayor of Woollahra) have indicated they will join us. The formal part of the meeting will be relatively brief so we can discuss the Double Bay centre strategy and you have plenty of time to talk to our guests and other members.

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, with so much going on in Double Bay at present, your committee members – all volunteers – are stretched and we need to spread the load. We hope that members will step forward to join one of the working parties we have established to focus on residents' interests in particular areas. If you are prepared to help, please let us know and we will discuss how you could contribute.

Another way in which you can strengthen the association is through encouraging other residents, or people you know who enjoy visiting Double Bay, to join. The more members we have, the more influence we may have with the Council.

Interaction with the Council

I am grateful to the Mayor, Susan Wynne, for inviting me to meet her earlier this month to discuss residents' concerns. Craig Swift-McNair, General Manager, and Scott Pedder, Director Planning and Place, were present for part of the meeting which lasted for an hour and a half.

My main focus was that many residents feel their views are not taken into account in the Council's decisions. This is despite guidance for councillors on the NSW Office of Local Government website which says: 'As a councillor you are expected to represent the views of the community while making decisions in their interests...' Some councillors also seem to ignore the protocols in the Woollahra Community Participation Plan (especially pages 8, 9 and 10) which is available on the Council's website. If you are unfamiliar with the plan, we recommend that you read it so you are aware of the Council's commitment to community participation.

Regrettably, I received no assurance that residents' submissions would carry more weight in future or that all Double Bay's elected councillors would represent residents' views. The Mayor referred to state government pressure to increase Double Bay's population; this is despite Woollahra already exceeding the Greater Sydney Commission's target for new dwellings.

We have also interacted with councillors from all three groups since the beginning of the year and we thank them for their time. During these three months we have lodged submissions on 11 motions of concern to our members.

Cross Street car park

One of the issues of great concern to residents, which I raised during my meeting with the Mayor, is the Cross Street car park, owned by the Council on ratepayers' behalf. The Council has been progressing a project to redevelop the site in secret without consulting residents on their wishes or giving us any information on what is proposed.

A meeting was held in February to enter into Heads of Agreement with a developer. During the initial, brief open session, we called on the Council to be transparent with residents and consult us on our wishes for the site. The meeting then went into secret session when a decision was taken to postpone the agreement until late March. We understand that a proposal to consult residents was deleted from the final motion.

During the open session, it was revealed that changes (no doubt increases) in height and bulk are proposed and some councillors are committed to including a cinema in the new development. We remain very unhappy with the secrecy as an earlier proposal to redevelop the car park included some 84 apartments, up to six storeys of excavation and the loss of 396 parking spaces for up to

three years during construction. It was even suggested that Steyne Park would become a temporary car park. The impact on Double Bay residents would be significant, and yet the Council doesn't believe we should be consulted.

We are pleased to announce that, after considerable pressure from your association, the Council has released to us the Request for Development Proposal (the initial brief for prospective development partners) which is attached to this newsletter. We've been told that other relevant documents will be released shortly through the Council's Your Say website.

While the financial details of the redevelopment agreement may need to remain confidential during its negotiation, we hope that residents will be invited to provide input before there is a binding contract which cannot be changed. At this stage, however, we're not confident that residents' views will be sought.

Double Bay – Rose Bay cycleway

We are grateful to Councillors Mary-Lou Jarvis and Sarah Swan for proposing a motion to defer construction of the cycleway pending further investigation of alternative options to address community concerns. The motion, which is based on the research your association carried out and the detailed report we issued with the Rose Bay Residents' Association in November, is to be debated on Monday, 28 March.

At this stage, it seems there won't be enough support for the motion to succeed, in which case construction work will begin on 4 April or soon thereafter. If you walk regularly between Double Bay and Rose Bay and believe there should be further consideration of the dangers you will face if the cycleway proceeds, please take action now, sending a submission to the Council before midday on Monday, marked 'Late correspondence' and referring to item 16.2. You may also wish to write to individual councillors.

We would emphasise that the association is not opposed to a cycleway along New South Head Road, but our report identified significant flaws in the current plan which we believe should be addressed in the interest of pedestrians' safety. You can read the report on the Issues page of the DBRA website.

Road safety

As mentioned in our last newsletter, we were surprised and disappointed when the Council's finance committee overturned a recommendation by the traffic committee to remove two parking spaces in Wallaroy Road which restricted drivers' sight of oncoming traffic. We are delighted to report that the finance committee has reversed its decision; the parking spaces will be removed and a 'no u-turn' sign will be erected where the road splits. We thank Councillor Isabelle Shapiro for supporting the community on this issue.

We also thank Councillor Nicola Grieve for supporting a proposal to improve the safety of pedestrians crossing Suttie Road between Lough Playing Fields and Cooper Park, following one of our members bringing the danger to our attention.

Anthony Tregoning
President