

Double Bay Residents' Association

Protecting Sydney's Stylish Bayside Village

Member newsletter: 24th May 2022

Dear Member,

During the two months since our last newsletter, your committee has been occupied with several major issues.

The future shape of Double Bay

Our first priority has been to encourage residents and friends of Double Bay to consider Woollahra Council's new draft Double Bay Centre Planning and Urban Design Strategy and, if they oppose the construction of six-storey buildings throughout the centre, to write to the Council. The strategy, if adopted, would change Double Bay for ever, destroying its low-rise village charm and creating another soulless suburb, indistinguishable from many others. We therefore need to convince the Council that it should be abandoned or altered.

The attached flyer, setting out the threat posed to Double Bay by the strategy, has been circulated widely and we've received copies of numerous objections sent to the council by DBRA members and others. The period for objections has been extended to Friday 27th May – so there's still time to send an objection if you haven't already done so. The email address is on the back of the flyer.

Please also consider forwarding the flyer to friends who live outside Double Bay and encourage them to write too. We suspect that the Council will be influenced by non-residents' opinions as well as by submissions from those of us who live here.

Encouraged by the Council, Double Bay has become a 'honeypot' for property developers. The frenzied pace of new construction shows no sign of abating: around FIFTEEN DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS (DAs) for substantial residential or commercial buildings in the Double Bay centre have already been approved and at least another SIX DAs are making their way through the approval process. This shows that an increase in the height control to six storeys is not needed to incentivise development, but regrettably the Council seems to prioritise developers' commercial interests over the interests of residents.

Another worrying factor is that the Double Bay Transport Study (July 2020) is predicting peak-hour traffic gridlock at the New South Head Road/Cross Street/Kiaora Road/Bellevue Road intersection if the commercial centre reaches its full development potential, which is predicted to happen by 2027 assuming this increase in the height control.

Developer levy to fund local infrastructure

The Council has asked for feedback on a proposal to require development applicants to pay a levy equal to a percentage of the development's proposed cost to fund local infrastructure. Your association has supported the proposal subject to the following three conditions:

- The developer will not receive permission to exceed existing height and bulk limits or to avoid parking, excavation and other usual conditions in return for the levy. We are concerned this could lead to more over-development.
- Funds raised through the levy should be spent in the relevant local community – e.g. a levy raised on a development in Double Bay should be spent on infrastructure in Double Bay, rather than added to the Council's general financial resources or spent elsewhere in the municipality.
- All levies, related conditions and consequential expenditure on infrastructure should be on the public record.

Cross Street car park

As you will be aware, the Council has been progressing in secret a project to develop the Cross Street car park site, without consulting residents on their wishes or, until recently, providing any information on what is proposed.

After considerable pressure from your association, the Council released to us the initial brief for prospective development partners, which we sent members with our March newsletter (available on the DBRA website).

Last month, the Council issued a press release announcing that the existing car park would be demolished in 2024/2025 and replaced over three years with a new multi-screen cinema complex; retail, office and community space; 18 apartments; and a car park in the basement. While future 'community consultation' has been promised, so far the Council has refused to consult residents about any concerns they may have and we fear that plans will be 'set in stone' before our opinions are sought.

Meanwhile, we have several concerns and are very unhappy with the Council's lack of transparency:

- The project will effectively privatise one of ratepayers' most significant assets through granting a 99-year lease to the developer.
- The height and bulk of the development are expected to exceed current controls and block the harbour views of houses and apartments in the Double Bay amphitheatre.
- Excavation for the basement car park is likely to cause environmental damage in the Double Bay basin based on a report by hydrogeological engineers.
- As both regulator and development partner, the Council will be able to breach its current height and excavation controls
- No information has been provided on where cars will park during the construction period; without adequate alternative parking, there will be a major impact on local businesses as well as on residents and visitors to Double Bay.
- When complete, the development will exacerbate traffic congestion for residents throughout the municipality.

Knox Street pedestrianisation

Last night (23rd May), the Council voted to approve the closure of most of Knox Street and create a pedestrian plaza. The next steps, we understand, will be a review of environmental factors and, if required, an environmental impact statement. A detailed timeline will then be developed.

This has been a contentious proposal, opposed by some Cosmopolitan Centre residents and Knox Street businesses, as well as by others concerned about traffic congestion when the street's 4,000+ daily vehicle movements are diverted elsewhere. The Council believes it has 'accommodated the

concerns of Cosmopolitan apartment residents and their amenity will not suffer' which we hope turns out to be the case.

We understand that the police remain concerned about disruptive late night activity, but the Council has stated it does not agree this will be a problem. If the police concern proves to be correct, we trust the Council will accept responsibility and take steps to prevent antisocial behaviour.

Development applications of interest

34-36 Ocean Avenue (corner of Guilfoyle Avenue): Despite over 10 objections and a three-storey height limit, the Woollahra Local Planning Panel (WLPP) has granted planning consent for a new four-storey residential apartment building with a penthouse. Basement parking has also been approved although the site is susceptible to flooding and excavation could result in dewatering. We are pleased to note that the conditions of consent require the developer to obtain Water NSW's approval before a construction certificate is issued and that dewatering will only be permitted during construction. The basement must also be fully watertight for the life of the building and any elevated water table must remain one metre below the ground.

491 New South Head Road: We supported the Council's recommendation for refusal. The DA exceeded all guidelines and created serious access problems on a bend of New South Head Road.

19-27 Bay Street: Malcolm Young represented DBRA before the WLPP, objecting to this massive overdevelopment. We are awaiting the panel's decision.

35 Suttie Road: We supported residents requesting that the WLPP examine a DA for which a s.4.55 application had been made to increase excavation, risking damage to nearby houses.

53 Cross Street: Sadly, the developer's appeal was upheld and a six-storey development will take place.

14 Bay Street: The developer's appeal here was also upheld and a four storey development will take place, replacing one of Bay Street's few remaining Victorian terrace buildings. A tragedy for Double Bay.

DBRA priorities

At your association's annual general meeting on 12th April, we reported on our activities during the previous year. We were planning to invite members to let us know whether they were happy with our current direction and to tell us the issues on which they would like us to focus during the rest of the year. Unfortunately, we ran out of time. If you have any suggestions on how we could be of more value to you or where you would like us to increase our focus, please let us know.

If you weren't able to attend the meeting and would like to read the report, you can find it on the news page of our website at dbra.org.au

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