

Double Bay Residents' Association

Protecting Sydney's Stylish Bayside Village

15th November 2023

Dear Member,

Double Bay Centre Planning and Urban Design Strategy

As members will be aware, a revised strategy was debated by the Council's Strategic and Corporate Committee on 30th October. We were pleased that the massive public opposition to the original proposal for six storeys throughout the Double Bay centre was reflected in this revised strategy – demonstrating the impact residents' submissions can have.

The draft strategy, published 18 months ago, attracted objections and/or comments by 209 residents. The top five issues raised were:

1. Building height (146)
2. Village character and overdevelopment (134)
3. Amenity impacts – solar, wind, views (86)
4. Traffic and congestion (79)
5. Parking (74).

While we accepted most of the proposed height limits in the revised strategy, we objected to the proposals for six storeys along New South Head Road, which would dwarf the library, and argued strongly that all height limits should be measured in metres, not storeys, as storey heights can vary. We also objected to proposed restrictions on vehicles turning right into Kiaora Road.

In addition, we expressed concern about the loss of smaller, local businesses in Double Bay; traffic congestion on New South Head Road; and the impact of excavation for underground parking, which appears to ignore warnings in GHD's geotechnical report commissioned by the Council in 2021.

After five hours of submissions and debate, the committee finally resolved unanimously to defer consideration of a motion to endorse the revised strategy to the full Council meeting on 27th November. Meanwhile, the proposal to restrict vehicles from turning right into Kiaora Road has been deleted from the strategy and clarification has been sought on the proposed FSR (floor space ratio) in Bay Street and the height and FSR controls for New South Head Road.

We encourage members to attend the 27th November Council meeting when decisions will be taken which will have considerable impact on Double Bay. Please also submit late correspondence on any points you would like the Council to consider at the meeting – e.g. restricting the height limit in New South Head Road to the height of the library.

State Government's proposed 30% bonus for affordable accommodation

The NSW Government has proposed a change to its housing policy which would grant developers building height and FSR bonuses of 30% for certain residential developments which dedicate at least 15% of their floor area to affordable housing for 15 years or more. We understand Woollahra Council has requested exemption; while acknowledging the need for permanent affordable housing, the Council believes the present proposal would not address this and would undermine its strategic planning.

We all should be aware of this State Government proposal which could allow developers with approval for a six-storey building to add an extra two storeys.

Meetings with new Mayor and Deputy Mayor

Earlier this month, your committee held our first meeting with Councillor Richard Shields following his appointment as Mayor of Woollahra at the end of September. Having been brought up in Double Bay, he expressed an affinity for the area and listened our concerns, including the hydrogeological impact of excavation and the traffic consequences of increased population and commercial activity. We also discussed the negative impact of commercial, as opposed to residential, development on the ambience of Double Bay and residents' lifestyles. Overall, we gained the impression that he empathised with many of our concerns. We agreed to hold regular meetings with the Mayor and the General Manager, with the first of these arranged for late February.

We have also arranged to meet Councillor Sarah Swan, the new Deputy Mayor, at the end of November.

With the Mayor representing Double Bay ward and the Deputy Mayor representing Cooper ward (which includes Double Bay south of New South Head Road), we hope Double Bay residents will be able to have greater influence in the future on issues which concern us.

Cooper Park tennis courts

We are delighted to be able to report that community pressure has resulted in a Council committee declining to accept a staff recommendation and proposing that the tender process for the operation of Cooper Park tennis courts be reopened. The staff recommendation included the repurposing of courts to accommodate other sports, which was opposed in submissions by more than 200 residents. This is another example of the effect residents' submissions can have.

Planner joins DBRA team

Members may have noticed that some of our recent submissions on development applications (DAs) have been co-signed by Douglas Bennett. We are pleased to announce that Douglas has been appointed a consultant to DBRA to assist with our responses to DAs. He has a bachelor's degree in city planning from UNSW and has extensive experience of planning for other Sydney municipalities.

Knox Street

Our latest submission drafted by Douglas Bennett (3rd November) objected to a development application for 27-29 and 31-37 Knox Street which had been rejected by the Council and the Woollahra Local Planning Panel (WLPP) and now is being considered by the Land and Environment Court. Our submission concluded that the proposal 'constitutes a gross overdevelopment of the site and will have significant amenity impacts on the surrounding area'. If any member would like to read a copy of this 11-page submission, let us know.

In the same week, Douglas made an oral submission on DBRA's behalf to the WLPP regarding a development application for 3 Knox Street, for which the Council has recommended refusal.

Gum Tree Lane

One of the concerns we raised during the Council committee meeting on 30th October is the proposal to allow car park access to Bay Street developments via narrow Gum Tree Lane. One proposed development in Bay Street includes four levels of basement parking and other DAs are likely to follow suit, resulting in well over 100 vehicles entering the lane and exiting via Knox Street at peak periods.

Traffic coming down New South Head Road from Edgecliff frequently has only one lane; the right lane is blocked as the right turn lane into Manning Road is over-full. In addition, visibility is poor due to a bend in New South Head Road. There is a risk that vehicles may drive into the back of cars slowing to turn into the lane and, because of the poor visibility, pedestrians walking across the junction may also be at risk.

If you share this concern, please consider writing to the Council recommending a traffic study before further parking is approved with access from Gum Tree Lane.

Double Bay heritage walk

On 9th November, some 50 people joined a walk organised by the Woollahra History and Heritage Society (WHHS) and DBRA, led by Peter King, to learn about Double Bay's history and heritage. This was the second such walk organised by the WHHS. You can find out more about the society and receive information on the next walk (Darling Point) through emailing pking@qsc.com.au.

DBRA end-of-year party

We hope you will be able to join us for our annual Christmas drinks at Woollahra Library on Wednesday 6th December, starting at 6pm. As mentioned on the Invitation which has been emailed to members, please let us know by 4th December if you are coming so we can arrange catering. Non-member residents who may be interested in joining the association will also be welcome.

As this is likely to be our last newsletter for 2023, we thank you for your support during the past very busy year. We hope you have a happy and peaceful Christmas and new year season.

As always, we'd like to hear about any issues on which you'd like us to focus in 2024 – as well as suggestions of residents who may be interested in joining DBRA's committee or assisting the association in other ways.

Best wishes,
Antony Tregoning
President

Double Bay Residents' Association

PO Box 1684, Double Bay 1360

Tel: 0414 932 818

Email: dbrassoc@gmail.com