



*PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB*

*P.O. Box 85, HUNTERS HILL, N.S.W. 2110*

Barry Smith  
General Manager  
Hunters Hill Council  
3 December 2014

Dear Barry,

**Regarding the *Future of Gladesville* Community Workshops and survey**

To date the development of the Gladesville Shopping Village is the largest and most important development that Council has had to deal with so it is vital to do as much as possible to ensure its success. The Trust is fully supportive of ongoing community consultation in the planning process and the need to bring the community onside with Council in support of what is planned for the area. We have been involved from the very beginning with participation in meetings and workshops going back to the lead-up to the Gladesville Master Plan of 2009 and we are happy to continue this involvement.

The process so far has led to the withdrawal of the Development Application by the developers of the Coles site, which is an acknowledgement of the paucity of the proposal and, coupled with their change of architects, this seems like two steps in the right direction for the future of Gladesville.

The Trust however has grave concerns about the quality of the recent consultation meetings conducted by Place Partners and the design of the survey that was part of this process.

We have a copy of Helen Andrews' letter that she wrote on behalf of a number of residents in which she expressed her disappointment with the workshop she attended on 19 November 2014. We also have a copy of Council's response to Ms Andrews.

I attended the afternoon session on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November and Ms Andrews was at the evening session. I share her disappointment with the process and I am certainly not alone in this. I've spoken to quite a number of people who attended the workshops including fellow residents, Trust members and members of the Gladesville Chamber of Commerce.

Without exception they have said how deeply underwhelmed they were with both the event and the survey. These people included professionals with extensive experience in running and participating in community planning workshops.

There was also criticism of the on-line survey, which included the following:

- It seemed like a push-polling exercise designed to give a specific result rather than a mechanism for collecting the true feeling and aspirations of the community.
- The grouping of the options in the questions, where critical and basic issues that would need to be addressed in any major development were grouped together and survey respondents had to select a maximum of three issues only. For example,

when asked what are the critical issues facing the Gladesville Village Centre, survey respondents were asked to select 3 issues from the following list

- Lack of diverse housing
- Lack of green open public space
- Lack of community meeting rooms
- Too much traffic
- Location of community library
- Lack of car parking
- Lack of connectivity between transportation modes
- Lack of connectivity between shops facing Victoria Rd and the Coles Shopping Centre site
- Poor aesthetics, mismatched design, colours and materials
- Poor pedestrian network – lack of signage, uneven surfaces
- Lack of conservation of heritage buildings and sites

Every single one of these issues is either IMPORTANT or ESSENTIAL and all of them will need to be addressed in any proposal. To single out only three issues from this list implies that the others are less important, which is clearly not the case. People also questioned why *heritage conservation* was placed at the very bottom of the list of choices, which leads to the specific issue of 10 Cowell St.

Council's handling of the heritage status of the cottage at 10 Cowell St has often been hard to understand and past explanations for its non-listing have been confusing, so The Trust welcomes the recent decision to recommend it for Schedule 5 heritage listing in the LEP.

However, despite the prospect of heritage listing, the future of the cottage at No 10 Cowell St remains in the balance. By placing *heritage concerns* at the bottom of the survey list looks like a deliberate strategy to downgrade the importance of 10 Cowell St in the survey results.

As any politician will tell you, being placed at the bottom of a ballot paper is a distinct disadvantage. And when people are instructed to choose only 3 issues from this list, they will choose the essential items like reducing traffic, increasing car parking and fixing up pedestrian networks and uneven surfaces before they choose heritage.

Criticism of the workshops included the following:

- The stewardship of the Place Partners' facilitator, which came across as overbearing and dictatorial.
- People said they felt unable to properly express their individual concerns and that they were being corralled in a particular direction, which had been predetermined by Place Partners.
- They said they felt like they were being treated like kindergarten kids.
- There was consensus that the options presented for "like" (as on a Facebook page) were mostly irrelevant to the situation at Gladesville and thus had little meaning.
- That one whole side of Gladesville was left out of the discussion just didn't make sense, which was highlighted when participants were asked to nominate a preferred paving material from a number of examples shown on the screen. The reality is that Ryde has already completed the new paving on most of their side, so it would be very silly for Hunters Hill not to follow suit.
- The input of those attending the workshop was confined to superficialities. This was because no changes to the DCP were on the table, because the proposed change to the Flagstaff St setback and the status of 10 Cowell St are still to be finalised and because a number of development applications on both sides of Victoria Rd have already been lodged and are currently being assessed under the existing DCP.
- All this led to a consensus among the people I spoke to that the process was not one of genuine community consultation but one that seemed more like window dressing.

So it is not hard to agree with Helen Andrews' contention that the process was "a waste of everyone's time" and that "it is a mystery how the results can be used in any meaningful way".

The Trust believes that good design comes from enlightened developers using the best designers working in harmony with the community and its elected representatives. The idea that good design might come out of a poorly run consultation process with some form of majority vote for various unrelated incidentals reminds one of the adage that “a camel is a horse designed by a committee”.

We believe the survey and consultation meetings run by Place Partners were so deeply flawed that they will not enhance the prospects for the *Future of Gladesville*. We think the process has taken two big steps backwards and suggest that if Council wishes to engage the community in the planning process for the Future of Gladesville in any meaningful way it needs to ignore Place Partners’ contribution thus far and start again.

Yours faithfully,

Tony Coote  
President The Hunters Hill Trust

CC Councillors, Steve Kourepis