

25 March 2021

To: Jim Betts, Secretary, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Marcus Ray, Deputy Secretary, Planning and Assessment
Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary Greater Sydney, Place and Infrastructure
Susan Holliday, Member Independent Advisory Group
James Cain, Member Independent Advisory Group
Geoffrey London, Member Independent Advisory Group

CC: The Hon. Rob Stokes MP, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
The Hon. Melinda Pavey MP, Minister for Water, Property and Housing
Councillor Clover Moore, Lord Mayor, City of Sydney

Dear Mr Betts and those addressed,

RE: Waterloo South Planning Proposal Assessment and Consultation

Groundswell is a coalition of non-government agencies ('NGOs') and residents from the Redfern/Waterloo area. As an alliance whose members have actively and diligently engaged with all agencies and local government since 2004 when proposals for the renewal of the Redfern-Waterloo area were first mooted.

We are writing to raise our concerns in relation to the two Waterloo South plans and the assessment process that has recently been put in place by Minister Stokes. We request that the independent expert panel in particular, be briefed on the unique elements of the existing Waterloo South community and the need for special consideration when assessing any planning proposal for the area.

The community has been through several start and stop planning processes over the last two decades. In many respects, therefore, we welcome the Minister's intervention to at least conclude this part of the process. We urge the Minister however, to require that proper attention is given to community concerns. As an alliance, we offer our full co-operation in providing feedback, insight or access to tenant representatives.

Beyond appreciating the direct impact on their own lives - residents and members of Groundswell do understand that the redevelopment of the Waterloo South is very significant. There is a lot at stake for Government agencies, local government, the broader Waterloo community and the people of NSW. This project will set precedents in terms of social housing stock, 'social mix', community infrastructure (facilities and services) for decades to come. But the people most impacted and at risk are current residents, public housing tenants and future tenants who are increasingly from a complex, disadvantaged cohort.

This is no ordinary development.

The Waterloo South estate is public land, home to a large and diverse long-standing public housing community (including a substantial Aboriginal community). The NSW Government in this case is both 'landowner' and proponent but also, importantly, 'landlord' to thousands of public housing tenants. We expect that special efforts be made to understand the needs and requirements of this community.

We acknowledge the expertise of the appointed independent panel within the planning sector. However, both residents and NGO's with decades of experience in working with the community have concerns and anxiety. How will panel members be able to learn about resident concerns and about the lessons learned from other social housing renewal projects – whether it be in NSW, Australia or overseas?

On behalf of Groundswell and current residents, we offer the following observations about key elements of the underpinning business model featured in the proposals, as well as concerns about the way which our community has been consulted on these proposals.

- **The 'Social Mix' argument - (the *Communities Plus 70:30*).** This argument says that concentrated social housing is by definition poor practice and that public housing tenants' well-being will improve by simply being in proximity to other more advantaged tenants. Groundswell suggest that, 'diluting disadvantage', by having proportionately fewer disadvantaged people, does not address poverty, disability or poor mental health; it just hides it rather than tackles root causes.
- ***Communities Plus* has become a 'one size fits all' constraining, commercial model** - the current NSW Government policy context constrains the LAHC team proposal. Groundswell opposes the communities plus policy mode and the economic assumptions which underpin it. The policy of disposing of valuable public land to secure investment to replace existing housing stock and, in some circumstances, only marginally increase social housing is, in our view, economically short-sighted, and needlessly complicates any planning proposal being advanced. For economic, sustainability and ethical reasons, the government cannot afford not to invest directly in social housing.
- **Long and protracted process.** The community has been through several 'start and stop' planning processes over the last two decades. The level of confusion, anxiety, and wasted energy has been physically and psychologically detrimental to residents. However, expediency should not trump the process of addressing and completely understanding the community input on these matters.
- **Lack of transparency regarding two models under consideration.** We have significant concern that the two plans under consideration - one of which the community has never been briefed on. The Department or the Panel could produce a third, which we fear will not reflect community input. For example, we strongly support greater amenity, broader and more accessible paths, greater solar access that the city plan provides.

However, we are unclear how the LAHC plan addresses these issues, and they have never briefed the community on their final plan prior to lodgement.

- **Plan- specific concerns (not exhaustive):**

- Is the level of density proposed appropriate for this type of community?
- Community services, facilities and human service planning. We have found the consultation on this to be woefully inadequate and superficial at best.
- The location of a community centre at Small Park, rather than the large central park; the location bike path; the opening of McEvoy Street, and the lack of scattered facilities are all in direct opposition to community documented views.
- Diversity of built form e.g number of high rises verse mid-rises. Both proponents have not adequately consulted the community on this.

Groundswell offers its support for the following:

- There is overwhelming community support and clear evidence of the need for a greater amount of public housing. In Waterloo the social housing community is accepted and this land could be used to address some of the state's social housing shortfall. To not do so would be a shamefully wasted opportunity. This site is ideally placed to provide a greater quantity of both social and affordable housing if funding could be found.
- We strongly support and welcome the City of Sydney's approach to strengthening the mix ratio of 30% Social housing and 20% affordable housing (including dedicated Aboriginal housing, which we believe should be set at 10% of the entirety of the site).

Exhibition period / Communication and Engagement for the life of the project

We strongly support the City's approach to the extended and well-resourced Exhibition process. Groundswell would welcome a discussion with the Department to ensure our community can make informed, barrier-free contributions that can directly influence the final approved plan. This new process, set up by Minister Stokes, potentially lays waste to a lot of work that we did with LAHC and the city to try and ensure they appropriate consultation process for public housing tenants.

We also strongly advocate that given the project's size and complexity and to ensure its success, it is essential that the community are independently supported and resourced to respond to the proposal from an informed perspective and supported through anxiety such process causes.

LAHC withdrawal of the previously well-established and respected resourcing to support tenants should be reinstated immediately. This included Community development staff, capacity building staff, bilingual educators, and social support.

Should the Minister, or the panel or the DPIE wish to further discuss any of these matters and meet with residents directly, we welcome the opportunity to do so.

Yours



Michael Shreenan
Groundswell Chairperson
Counterpoint 67 Raglan St, Waterloo, NSW 2017

What is *Groundswell*?

Groundswell is a coalition of residents and non-government local agencies and peaks within the Redfern and Waterloo areas committed to assisting local residents to understand what it is the government plans to do in their local communities and to their homes.

We will work together to

- To develop and offer capacity building opportunities (peaks and local NGO's, community groups to share information and skills to develop training programs and other learning opportunities for both residents and across sector agencies)
- To provide mechanism for peer support/communication for those working in tenant participation and community engagement
- To impartially document and share resident's perspectives in its diversity during the redevelopment through multiple platforms as resources allow.
- To provide opportunities for individuals, organisations, and community groups view to be heard without fear of reprisals and provided and undertake advocacy work where appropriate

For more information contact Mshreenan@Counterpointcs.org.au or call 9698 9569

Groundswell includes the following organisations, Resident groups and others:

