Summary of community feedback

This document provides a summary of community feedback from the recent Public Briefing session that was held as part of the West Oxford Street project at Easts Leagues Club on Wednesday 18 June 2014. It outlines comments and questions from members of the community who participated in the session and responses from Waverley Council and its project team. The purpose of the session was to present the ideas and design concepts developed by three independent design teams – Hill Thalis, Simpson+Wilson, and Archrival – in liaison with Council and the NSW Government Architect’s Office, through a design charrette process. The design charrette considered community input collected through three community drop-in sessions held as part of the first steps in the project. The session was led by Peter Monks, Director of Planning and Environmental Services at Waverley Council, with questions and answers facilitated by Brian Elton of Elton Consulting.

Q&A – Peter Monks
Q: Why is Waverley Council ignoring local residents’ concerns about high rise? Why does Waverley Council think they can take a piece of Centennial Park away from the people of Sydney?
Response: The design teams have taken building heights and solar-access modelling into account as part of their design. Additionally, the design teams have worked to align their design concepts with the 2040 Centennial Park Master Plan.

Q: Why is there this idea of redevelopment around? Waverley Council is already one of the most densely populated LGAs in the country with 8,000 people per square kilometre. We don’t need more development.
Response: We do have a dense population. Any development needs to be both balanced and sensitive. We still need to look at development opportunities where they are available, but we also need to look at transport infrastructure, promoting small business and the look and feel of our streets.

Q&A – Hill Thalis
Q: Can you reassure us that developers will redevelop the West Oxford Street Precinct within the public interest?
Response: We have clearly identified and differentiated between public and private interests. However through a process like this and thinking more broadly than a single development proposal, we have an opportunity to bring them together to get wins and deliver community benefits. While we need to manage local impacts, we also need to think about wider Sydney and what is in the broader public interest.

Q: I disagree with increasing the population density of West Oxford Street. Old buildings need to be preserved. They don’t need to be changed and retail is starting to take off in this area.
Response: I agree with the need to keep the fine grain. There are plenty of good examples of building on top of existing shops and even building up to five storeys on very small sites. If you have to provide car parking this is made difficult.

Q: If people can cycle in London and New York, why can’t we improve cycling in Bondi Junction?
Response: We need to rethink the way we plan cities in order to improve the safety and feasibility of cycling. Cars are currently given priority in Bondi Junction. Parking for cars wastes a lot of valuable space. As I indicated in my presentation there are no solutions in providing for more cars.
Q&A – Simpson + Wilson

Q: A key issue for me is the amount of noise on Oxford Street and the potential amplification of noise with further development. Has anybody thought about noise levels with more buildings and greater heights?

Response: Our plan is to reduce traffic volumes and create pedestrianised, car-free zones. These measures reduce noise levels on Oxford Street. Our idea of creating a public space in Nelson Street would create a place where noise is lower.

Q: Trams or light rail have created issues in the past. Have these issues been considered? Where will the buses go?

Response: Most of the bus depot would remain operational. We would look at putting some of the buses under the expressway where the Wilson car park is.

Q: In your design, why aren’t the buildings tapered towards Centennial Park?

Response: We aren’t wedded to this idea that cities and centres need to rise to a peak in the centre. As long as impacts such as overshadowing can be managed, varied buildings can provide character. Successful, modern, intelligent cities contain a mix of different levels of density.

Q: I am concerned about over-shadowing and additional cars being forced to park in Centennial Park. Also what does “fine grained” mean?

Response: Our initial solar access modelling doesn’t indicate over-shadowing impacts. The buildings we are envisaging in this section of Oxford Street are nothing like the towers in the mall area of Bondi Junction. More car parking kills local streets. At some point we need to address whether cities are for cars or people. With the level of transport here, we should be able to have an increase in population with fewer cars. Fine grain refers to small lots that provide an intimate, human scale. The terrace houses that are throughout much of West Oxford Street give the area its fine grained character.

Q: I have issues with the proposed building on the corner at the entrance way to West Oxford Street and Bondi Junction. I am concerned that a building of that height will set the precedent for taller buildings along West Oxford Street. Additionally, I am concerned with any construction occurring in Centennial Park and also believe the bus depot should be left out of any plans to reform the West Oxford Street Precinct. Public land shouldn’t be up for private development.

Response: Let me clarify, we are not building additional structures in Centennial Park. We are providing amenities structures and supporting public recreation, all of which are things that are needed in the area. We are planning on revitalising the Woollahra Reservoir so the public can enjoy this open space. What we are proposing is fully consistent with the Centennial Park Master Plan and doesn’t seek to put private development within the park.

Q&A – Archrival

Q: Oxford Street has no street life. How can we stimulate retail activity and improve the street life of West Oxford Street?

Response: Improving the public domain will help to stimulate retail activity and enliven the area.

Comment: I like the achievable scale of your plans compared to the others and congratulate you on your efforts.

Comment: I like the idea of reclaiming the corner of Centennial Park. It is important to attract people back to this forgotten corner of Centennial Park as long as it is sympathetic with the values of the park.
Q: Have you thought about a way of taking buses more directly onto Syd Einfeld Drive? Oxford Street is not a through road so why send through traffic along it?

Response: We will consider all options that make use of existing infrastructure. I agree that tackling traffic is an important measure.

Comment: I am concerned about my direct access to and from Bondi Junction being removed. I have two kids that I need to drop off at school.

Peter Monks: Closing remarks

Q: What about considering the social needs of more growth. Have you thought about the pressure on schools?

Response: Yes this is something that would need to be looked at. At this point we are a long way off any definite scheme. Any development would need to go through its own planning process where these issues would be investigated.