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31 March 2011

Submission, Exhibition Period - Wet 'n' Wild Sydney, reference MP 10_0190

Dear Sir/Madam

As part of the exhibition period, I would like to make the following comments concerning the proposal for the development of a water theme park known as Wet 'n' Wild Sydney, Reservoir Road, Prospect.

While, I acknowledge the recreational use of the proposal within the Western Sydney Parklands and identification of the site as a tourism hub in the draft Plan of Management, I would like to express my concern about the impact of aspects of the proposal. As a heritage architect, I have focused my interest and comments on the impact of the proposal on the heritage assets of the local area. I have worked with other Councils and State Government agencies assisting to manage development and heritage. Thus I am pragmatic about the need to promote and ensure viable future uses, balancing heritage management with other constraints and opportunities.

I have reviewed the Draft Heritage Impact Statement dated January 2001. The heritage impact statement identifies a number of elements which demonstrate heritage significance in the local area (both currently listed and not yet listed) which will be affected by the proposal. The affected elements include the former Policeman's Cottage, the open rural character of the area from the M4 to the Prospect Reservoir Catchment, the alignment of the former Old Western Road and the views to and from St Bartholomew's Church.

I am concerned that there is not sufficient information within the proposal package to allow the assessment team and the consent authority to make a balanced judgment as to the merits and impact of the proposal.

Reservoir Rd

The heritage impact statement identifies an impact on Reservoir Rd, the former Old Western Road, and the environmental assessment report states that the development will be visible along most parts of the road. Importantly, the heritage impact statement recommends that this section of the former Old Western Road has the potential to demonstrate values at State level. However, this assessment is being undertaken without any statutory protection afforded to the road corridor and there does not appear to be an explicit and independent assessment of the heritage values of the road, against which the impact of the proposal can be properly assessed.

With this proposal being the first large scale development on the road corridor after changes wrought by the M4, any assessment of the proposal should be carefully undertaken (informed by a

formal and independent assessment of road's values) to ensure that the proposal does not diminish any heritage values. I would suggest that the road's physical values are likely to be embodied in the existence of the road corridor itself, its alignment, the topography and the predominance of a relatively undeveloped setting free of the buildings and infrastructure that characterise the roads to the north and the east. I would query the findings of the heritage impact statement when it advises that the current character in the vicinity of the road has little relationship to its 19th Century landscape and displays more characteristics of its 20th Century development. I would suggest that the principal heritage value of the landscape is that it survives as a relatively open and *undeveloped* setting which can still present and evoke the layered history of the Prospect area which was one of the first areas west of Sydney to be developed. Despite the tree regrowth and current degraded landscape and farming miscellanea, the landscape in the vicinity of the proposal is still a rare survivor as an undeveloped landscape, worth retaining and enhancing. With this, I am concerned that the scale of the attraction and its high visibility on the road corridor is likely, in the future, to precipitate a setting akin to the cluttered, unsightly landscape which characterises the Gold Coast attractions, on the Pacific Motorway at both Coomera and Helensvale. To minimize any impact, large structures should be positioned away from Reservoir Rd, super-signage should be minimized, the driveway entrance should be clearly indicated for safety but not dominant on the road and a landscape buffer between the buildings, structures and especially the carpark (which comes very close to the road) should be provided. Any landscape buffer should be wide enough to retain the landscaped character along the road corridor itself working with the road's curves and the undulating ground.

The environmental assessment report is cursory about the likely traffic impacts of vehicle movements to and from the site along Reservoir Rd. The serendipitous survival of this section of the Old Western Rd is because it was by-passed as it was considered to be dangerous, being narrow and winding. The attraction includes for over 1800 car park spaces and 12 coach parking spaces which all access the water park via the underdeveloped road. I understand that upgrading of the paired roundabouts on the M4 is proposed, but the application is unclear about any detail. Any proper assessment of the proposal should not just address the immediate impacts of such an intense use on the narrow winding road, but should ensure that there is capacity for the future. My principal unease with any increase in vehicle movements is that it will precipitate an upgrade (including widening, straightening, turning lanes and possibly traffic lights) of Reservoir Rd, destroying the road's ability to demonstrate heritage values embodied in its relatively underdeveloped character.

I would question the claim in the impact statement that the high visibility of the attraction on both the M4 and Reservoir Rd is essential to its contribution as a social asset for the people of Western Sydney. Effective publicity in print, television and electronic media and partnerships with Government and private tourism agencies are just as effective. Smaller directional signage is important for safety, but super-sized signs and large brightly coloured structures would have a substantial impact on Reservoir Rd and would establish an unfortunate precedent for the future.

St Bartholomew's Church

The heritage impact statement discusses the impact of the development on views from the Policeman's Cottage to St Bartholomew's Church which has been assessed as an important historical view external to this proposal. The heritage impact statement puts forward that the impact is acceptable as the former open view is now cluttered with tree regrowth and infrastructure (including the transmission lines) and the proposed water park structures will be open, dispersed and placed in the lower section of the development site.

I would hope that the claim is corroborated with accurate photomontages to and from both buildings which illustrates the actual impact, showing the proposed structures and other miscellanea, form, materials and colours and the resultant planting in its mature form. My concern of the actual impact is precipitated by the photomontages included with the proposal showing views on both Reservoir Rd and the M4 showing large, brightly coloured, abstract and constructivist forms placed uncomfortably in the landscape, exacerbated by super-sized signage, site lighting infrastructure and open, unshaded carpark hardstands. In addition to accurately illustrating the view corridor to and from the Church, the views from the Church on its hill should also be illustrated with a photo-panorama. This will assist the assessor and consent authority to ascertain that the final detail of the proposed open areas and built form do not collectively diminish the setting of the Church and views to and from the development site. I concur with the heritage impact statement's findings that the Church's setting, affected by large infrastructure, is not currently ideal and may not improve with the nature and scale of future development on the land to the north of the M4. However, there is a timely opportunity, if the Parkland Trust's land is developed sensitively, for a meaningful part of the Church's former setting to be retained and interpreted in physical form into the future. With a sensitive and sophisticated design, development on this site could set an example as to how to develop in the vicinity of the Church but still defer to the setting of the building and graveyard.

The proposal includes for regeneration of 1.5 hectares of Cumberland Plain Woodland. The environmental assessment report advises that 2.2 hectares is currently accommodated across the site. As a result of the development, less woodland will be provided and the resultant remnant will only consist of 5.8% of the wider 25.5 hectare site. It is acknowledged that the regenerated woodland within the Prospect Reservoir site to the south provides a substantial area for the threatened species community. However, I would hope that, as a principal, the consent authority should seek to retain the current percentage of woodland and press for an increase as a important public benefit and a precedent for future development.

Finally, overall, I acknowledge the benefits that a sensitive and well considered development can have on an underused area, acting as a catalyst and providing an important recreational facility. However, I question whether this particular site and its underdeveloped infrastructure can sustain such a large scale development and that proposal, as submitted, would result in the loss of some important heritage assets and values. If there is an intention to develop the site for a wider public benefit, then at least, the consent authority should seek modifications to the proposal to lessen its impact.

Yours sincerely



Edmund Beebe