

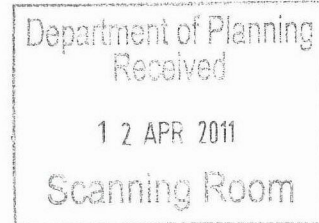
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Health  
Health Reform Transitional  
Organisation Northern

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Dear Ms Johnston,

**Re: Minmi/Newcastle Link Road Part 3A Concept Plan (MP10\_0090), State Significant Site Study and draft Voluntary Planning Agreement.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Minmi/Newcastle Link Road Part 3A Concept Plan (MP10\_0090) State Significant Site Study and draft Voluntary Planning Agreement. The State Significant Site Study and draft Voluntary Planning Agreement have been reviewed by the Building Liveable Communities in the Lower Hunter Region Steering Group. The Steering Group understands that this Concept Plan proposes the development of 520 hectares at Minmi, comprising:

- 3,300 residential dwellings,
- 2 mixed use village centres, and
- associated infrastructure and facilities.

The Building Liveable Communities in the Lower Hunter Steering Group includes representatives of the following organisations:

- NSW Health
- Department of Premier and Cabinet (Hunter)
- Hunter Councils
- NSW Department of Planning
- Housing NSW
- NSW Sport and Recreation
- NSW Department of Community Services
- Transport NSW
- TAFE NSW
- NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
- NSW Department of Education and Training
- Landcom

The Building Liveable Communities in the Lower Hunter project is funded by NSW Health to work in partnership with Local Governments in the Lower Hunter to conduct Liveability Assessments of areas earmarked for developed by the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. The project has recently undertaken a Liveability Assessment of the Blue Gum Hills Planning District (Minmi, Maryland and Fletcher). The Assessment was informed by the collection of ABS data and a Community Telephone Survey in which 488 owner occupiers were interviewed.

Each 'Liveability Assessment' evaluates the proposed development site in terms of access to public and active transport, recreation, healthy food, education, employment, health and community services. The assessments also consider community cohesion, perceived safety and access to community services and facilities. Careful consideration of these areas has the potential to significantly improve the wellbeing of both the current community (residents of Minmi and surrounding suburbs) and the new community through impact on the social determinants of health (including housing, education and employment) and health risk behaviours (including participation in physical activity and consumption of healthy food). The Department of Planning (2008) predicts a shift towards an ageing population within the Newcastle Statistical Sub Division. There is a significant decrease in persons aged 18 to 39 as well as a slight decrease in those aged 17 years and below. Development planning should provide for 'ageing in place' to increase social connection and reduce stress on residential aged care facilities.

The Steering Group would like to take this opportunity to commend Coal and Allied for promoting liveability in the Minmi/Link Road development by:

- Facilitating safe and convenient access to green space in the Blue Gum Hills Regional Park and the use of natural surveillance and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in residential areas adjacent to this Regional Park.
- The placement of higher density dwellings in the Minmi East and Village Centre Precincts to facilitate equitable access to retail and community facilities for residents who are elderly or less mobile.
- The provision of a mixture of dwelling types to promote housing choice and affordability.
- The retention of key areas assessed as high Aboriginal Archaeological potential and the incorporation of Aboriginal walking routes in partnership with local Aboriginal communities. It is recommended that extensive consultation and ongoing relationship building occur with the Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council and other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

The Steering Group would like to provide further comment based on the results of the Community Telephone Survey that was conducted during March and April 2010. Where relevant, statistics have been included to support the recommendations made by the Steering Group. Statistically 'significant' results are significant at a p value of 0.05. The Steering Group would like to make recommendations in the following areas:

### **Access to Quality Employment**

The Community Telephone Survey indicated that 23% of Minmi residents travel more than 30 minutes to get to work. This proportion was significantly lower in Maryland (7%) and in Fletcher (12%). The Steering Group notes the provision of employment lands at the

proposed Black Hill site and commends this proposal in terms of its capacity to provide local employment options for both the existing community and new residents.

The Steering Group encourages the proponent to consider provision for dedicated bike lanes, walking paths and public transport infrastructure to support the use of public and active transport to access these employment lands.

### **Access to Fresh Food**

A very high proportion of respondents to the Community Telephone Survey reported that they would use a community garden and/or a local farmer's market. In Minmi, for example, 90% of respondents reported that they would use a local farmers market, a local community garden or both. This proportion was 84% in Maryland and 88% in Fletcher.

Community gardens and farmers markets can have positive impacts on consumption of healthy food, participation in physical activity and social cohesion and community connection. The Steering Group strongly recommends that provision be made for the future development of a number of community gardens and a farmers market within the development. In addition, the Steering Group encourages that the concept plan allow the continued provision of locally available affordable and fresh fruit and vegetables by identifying land suitable for small, local retail outlets in each of the development precincts.

### **Access to Physical Activity**

The Steering Group commends the developers' intention to create a "walking distance neighbourhood structure" where dwellings are located "within walking distance of daily needs and close to public transport".<sup>1</sup> Coal & Allied have duly noted that this structure can "encourage alternative modes of transport to employment, education and leisure destinations."<sup>2</sup>

According to the Community Telephone Survey the current use of active transport among residents of the Blue Gum Hills Planning Area is very low. No respondents reported using active transport to get to work. In Minmi and Fletcher no respondents reported the use of active transport to travel to the shops and in Maryland only 2 respondents (out of 223) reported using active transport for this purpose. Respondents who had primary school aged children were asked if their children used active transport to get to school. Minmi (64%) revealed the most promising result, with students using active transport to school at significantly higher levels than in Maryland (23%) and in Fletcher (5%), most likely due to the proximity of the Minmi Primary School to residences.

Features which promote connectivity by linking the proposed development to surrounding suburbs are of particular importance as the North and South Link Road Precincts straddle the Newcastle Link Road. The Steering Group notes a significant expected increase in traffic on the Newcastle Link Road and is concerned that the Link Road South Precinct, which includes the proposed Primary School site, will be inaccessible for pedestrians and cyclists living north of the Link Rd. The Steering Group recommends provisions are made for traffic calming measures and an appropriate pedestrian crossing on the Newcastle Link Road.

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<sup>1</sup> Minmi / Link Road Concept Plan Environmental Assessment. P. 22

<sup>2</sup> Minmi / Link Road Concept Plan Environmental Assessment. P. 88

The Steering Group is also concerned about cyclist and pedestrian access to recreation facilities located at the Northern End of the Minmi East Precinct, at least 3.5km from the proposed Primary School site and surrounding dwellings. The intention to provide a “social and cultural focus for the community” may be undermined by this limited accessibility.

### **Access to Flexible and Affordable Housing**

Diversity in housing form and cost is required to accommodate differing housing needs during a family’s lifecycle. Family changes (such as children leaving home, students requiring inexpensive housing for the duration of their studies, couples separating or the death of a spouse) may entail a different need for housing in terms of size, cost or access to amenities. Without such housing diversity being available, changing housing needs can mean that people have to move out of the area or adopt unsatisfactory accommodation arrangements, which can have significant impact on the health and well being of individuals and families as their relationships and social support are affected.<sup>1</sup>

Consideration should to be given to the provision of lot shape and size which will facilitate the future development of homes which are flexible and diverse.

### **Access to Public Transport**

The Steering Group encourages the development of a road structure which will allow for the bus access to within 400 metres of each residential lot.

The current use of public transport in the Blue Gum Hills area is very low - there was no reported use of public transport to travel to work and to shops. Community Telephone Survey respondents were asked if they would increase public transport use if services were improved. 52% reported that they would increase bus use, 16% would increase use of school buses and 32% would increase use of trains.

During early development phases, before facilities such as local food options are established, increased bus services service will be critical to link those living in new areas with retail outlets, local schools and local employment zones. There is a significant opportunity at the early stages of development to establish active and public transport ‘habits’, with benefits including increased social cohesion and connection.

### **Access to Childcare**

Community Telephone Survey revealed that Minmi residents currently experience significantly higher levels of difficulty (50%) than respondents from Fletcher (24%) and Maryland (11%).

The Steering Group encourages the provision of lands suitable for the location of day care services. In addition, the provision of infrastructure which would promote the use of active transport to and from day care services would be beneficial in establishing early patterns of active transport use among parents and children living in and around the development site.

### **Access to Education**

To promote the provision of centrally located Primary Schools and the use of active transport, the Steering Group recommends the investigation of a suitable Primary School site in the Link Rd North Precinct.

The results of the Newcastle Community Telephone Survey demonstrate that the use of active transport to primary schools is significantly increased in areas where a centrally located primary school is provided. In Minmi, 64% of residents reported that their children used active transport to get to school. In Maryland, where the nearest Primary School is Glendore Primary School, only 23% of respondents reported that their children used active transport to get to school. In Fletcher, where students would need to cross Minmi Road to access the closest primary school (Glendore Primary School) the proportion of students using active transport was just 5%.

Based on the proposed development of 3,300 dwellings, the NSW Department of Education predicts an additional 650 primary school enrolments. The Minmi Primary School, even with additional capacity, is not suitable to meet this demand. The current proposed school in the Link Rd South Precinct is physically and psychologically inaccessible to residents north of the Link Rd North Precinct. In addition, residents of the Link Rd South Precinct would have access to the Edgeworth Public School, which currently has capacity for additional enrolments.

### **Access to Health Care Services**

The Steering Group recommends that the proponents consider identifying suitable sites for the location of several General Practice facilities to allow for the alleviation of high levels of difficulty accessing GPs. Strain on local GP services may also be alleviated by the establishment of effective public or community transport links to health services outside of the Blue Gum Hills area. Additionally, the Steering Group recommends provision be made for the location of Community Health Facilities in the Village Centre Precinct.

Results from the Community Telephone Survey indicate that a substantial proportion of residents (35% in Maryland - 43% in Fletcher) currently experience difficulty accessing a GP. These results strongly suggest the need to ensure facilities are available to accommodate GP services in the future, especially in light of the proposed retirement facility in the Village Centre Precinct.

A significantly higher proportion of residents in Minmi (32%) report difficulty in accessing Community Health Services compared with Maryland and Fletcher (9% - 14%). This may be due to the availability of services at the Maryland Multipurpose Centre, and indicates a need for additional services to be located in the proposed Village Centre Precinct.

### **Access to Community Facilities and Public Spaces**

Based on the results of the Community Telephone Survey, the Steering Group recommends that a multipurpose community facility be located in the Village Centre Precinct to support the provision of community services and as a community development resource.

The results from the Community Telephone Survey indicate that residents are much more likely to use a community facility within their suburb compared with a facility located in an adjacent suburb. For example, respondents who lived in Maryland reported a higher level of using the Maryland Multipurpose Centre (21%) compared to residents in Fletcher (15%) and in Minmi (10%). Similarly, residents of Minmi were far more likely to report using a Community Hall (the Minmi Progress Hall) in the last 12 months (38%) compared with residents of Maryland and Fletcher (2% and 4% respectively).

## **Access to Communication**

The Steering Group supports the laying of broadband cables or conduits for cables early in the development phase to ensure internet access from the early stages of development.

The internet, including internet-based email, has become integral to school and tertiary education and is a gateway to many services. Effective internet connections can enable the operation of home-based businesses, which can have positive effects such as reduced vehicle usage and reduced commuting time. Data from the 2006 Census indicates that broadband internet connections in Minmi (62%), Maryland (55%) and Fletcher (65%) are somewhat lower than the NSW rate (66%).

## **Community Safety**

Implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) design and planning initiatives within particular communities have been found to not only reduce crime, but to reduce depression, support mental health by promoting community capacity, cohesion and connectivity.<sup>ii</sup> The Community Telephone Survey found that the proportion of people who feel safe walking alone around their neighbourhood at night was significantly lower among respondents from Maryland (28%), compared with respondents from Minmi (60%) and Fletcher (48%).

Based on this result the Steering Group advocates for the consideration of mechanisms through which perceived and actual safety can be increased, such as:

- adequate lighting of street and public places;
- street and lot design and controls which encourage natural surveillance from street-house and vice versa;
- positioning of pathways and cycle ways so that such natural surveillance is enhanced

## **Social Cohesion and Participation**

Blue Gum Hills residents, particularly those living in Minmi, currently have a strong connection to community and place and high levels of social cohesion and social capital. The Steering Group would encourage the proponent to consider the early development of a centrally-located, multi-use, flexible space, such as a multi-purpose community facility in the Village Centre Precinct that encourages social interaction, is useable for a wide range of ages and is welcoming to a wide range of cultural groups.

The Community Telephone Survey revealed that a majority of respondents across the Blue Gum Hills Planning District reported feeling that they belong to their neighbourhood, with 96% of those residing in Minmi, 89% in Maryland and 87% in Fletcher reporting a feeling of belonging. Eighty-seven percent of respondents living in Minmi reported that they planned to remain a resident of the neighbourhood compared with 88% in Maryland and 81% in Fletcher. Residents from Minmi (68%) and Maryland (67%) were more likely to agree that their neighbourhood is a good place to retire than those from Fletcher (55%).

## **Environmental Sustainability**

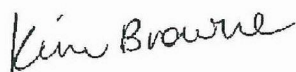
Respondents to the Community Telephone Survey were generally satisfied with the number of trees in their neighbourhood although there was some concern about the quality of rivers

lakes and creeks. The Steering Group therefore encourages the proponent to consider the following for the planning and development of the Blue Gum Hills Planning District:

- retaining as many of the established trees in the Blue Gum Hills Planning District as possible and encouraging the planting of suitable native trees in public places
- ensuring the preservation and restoration of waterways in development areas

The Building Liveable Communities in the Lower Hunter Steering Group trusts that the information provided in this response will be of use to the proponent in the planning and development of the Minmi/Link Road and Stockrington residential development and would be pleased to provide further information about the recommendations contained in this response.

Yours sincerely



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Chair  
Building Liveable Communities in the Lower Hunter Steering Group

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<sup>i</sup> Bridge C, Flatau P, Whelan S, Wood G. and Yates J (2003) *Housing Assistance and Non-Shelter Outcomes*, Final Report no. 40, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.

<sup>ii</sup> Kawachi, I., Berkman, L. (2001) Social ties and mental health. *Journal of Urban Health*, 78(3): 458–67