

Independent Planning Commission Hearing on LCC St Leonards South Proposal

Text of Speech: Mon 20th May.

Good afternoon, my name is Denis Moore, I am an architect and a resident of Lamont Street in the LGA of North Sydney, which is just three streets away from this over-scaled proposal for an existing low-rise residential area located at the edge of Newlands Park.

Thank you for allowing me to speak at this hearing into the proposals for St Leonards South. I have some PowerPoint images I would like to illustrate my comments. They amplify some of the issues we are very concerned about. My comments on Lane Cove Council's Planning Proposal for this area are as follows.

Introduction

Like many residents I frequently use the park for exercise and walking with friends and horrified that these proposals will substantially overshadow the park. Newlands Park is a valued public park and sits at the centre of the St Leonards South community. The park is already in shade for a significant portion of the day, and these proposals will further reduce that valuable sunlight. This park is the only substantial green space in the area. The critical afternoon and evening sun shines from the Canberra Avenue direction to the west. Proposed building height here from 8-11 storeys is excessive and should be scaled back to assist this corner. As a local resident, I think the council should have been more active in engaging the community rather than the cat and mouse game they have been playing for the last few years. I think this area deserves so much better than this overblown and truly appalling scaled development that contains no community benefit whatsoever but will be a massive payday for the developers. We deserve good planning and urban outcomes from our council, not this outrageous piece of profiteering from the developers.

The noted architect Renzo Piano once said that *"you can put down a bad book; you can avoid listening to bad music; but you cannot miss the ugly tower block opposite your house"*. That is what these buildings will be, ugly over-scaled tower blocks, that no extent of mature trees can hide.

Draft Plan 2036

This plan has not even yet been approved, yet we are here making submissions on a proposal for a plan that has been overwhelmingly rejected by the community in recently received public submissions. Community comments need to be taken into account and a new plan prepared. It substantially exceeds all housing targets and is more about SLS becoming a sacrificial lamb to facilitate retention of a ten-year green

belt elsewhere in the Lane Cove area. This fails the stated objectives of the Draft Plan 2036.

Exclusion of Community

Council never brought the community into their proposal which was initiated in 2012. The community liaison committee was formed entirely of residents involved in the sale of their properties to developers and who stood to gain from the proposal. They also never released the analysis and research that underpinned their proposal by Annand Associates Urban Planners in Dec 2014. This research was based on the premise that high rise development should be located close to the rail stations, or more exactly Transit Oriented Development. That was never requested by the community. In fact, they overwhelmingly rejected that notion a year earlier (Marshall Avenue Action Group 29 May 2013), when they stated that any new development should be consistent existing building heights of Duntroon Avenue. These 5-6 storey buildings were well designed, well set back and worked well with Newlands Park scale, tree density and height.

Density

The scale and height of proposed buildings are vastly excessive. As noted by previous speakers they are way out of line with any reasonable appraisal of the area or indeed existing context. Proposed heights will overwhelm existing community, overshadow Newlands Park and create a dangerous precedent for further development across the whole area. I believe this area should be medium density development of no more than 5-7 storeys, with 3-4 storeys at critical perimeters to allow sun penetration and transition to existing low scale residential. Embassy Tower should be the line in the sand, with any further development appropriately scaled to reflect existing Duntroon Avenue apartment buildings. Appropriate scale has been completely omitted here in favour of developer needs and the profit margin with no benefit whatsoever to the community. Density should be reduced and appropriate to context. 2,400 units is too dense, and should be scaled back with reduced building heights to about half of that at 1,200 units max.

Council Proposal

The LCC proposal was first introduced to the community in December 2015. **Panel 1** shows the LCC proposed storey heights for the SLS Precinct Proposal. This was based on analysis from Annand Associates in their report of December 2014. This report examined three options of low, medium and high density approximating to 1000, 2000 and 3000 units. The study area covered a larger area than is now the case with current proposal. The high-density concentrated option was selected as it aligned with the TOD intention. It was based on the concept of Transport Oriented Development (TOD) which completely ignored the existing context. It proposed maximum density at the top of Canberra Avenue to satisfy the TOD criteria. All guidelines in relation to

transition, scale, context and appropriate built form seemed to be thrown out of the window.

Built Form

It is over three years since the LCC presented their proposal, and in that time all the community have seen is a single misleading massing diagram. **Panel 2** shows the council overall precinct vision with storey heights added. The substantial difference in storey heights from 4-19 are hardly discernible, with all buildings shown immaculately in white to further minimise the scale. They look to be the same height as the 6-7 storey Duntroon Avenue buildings. What this diagram does not show is any sense of building height. I have taken the liberty of extending developer proposals at River Road / Canberra Avenue up to the Embassy tower and Marshall Avenue corner to throw some light on what Canberra Avenue elevation might look like, and while these are only an impression, they give a sense of the overwhelming scale of the LCC Proposal:

Panel 3 shows this impression. This is what the council are ludicrously suggesting is appropriate transition from the Embassy tower at 27 storeys down to 4 storeys at River Road. I dread to think how this might be applied to existing low scale residential behind the current construction of the Mirvac towers at 47/35 storeys and soon to be constructed 50 storeys across the railway line beside the Embassy tower. This game could play out forever.

Panel 4 shows what the community believe to be a more appropriate scale, echoing what has been built to the west of the Embassy tower. This scale would better reflect context, sit well with Newlands Park and more importantly reduce building scale at the most sensitive part of Canberra Avenue to reduce overshadowing to the park. Buildings at this point should be configured to allow sunlight through with larger gaps between buildings or further reduction of scale.

Panel 5 shows new 6-7 storey apartments to the west of Embassy tower that are more appropriate and should be echoed on the other side of Marshall Avenue, rather than LCC proposed 19/15/12 storey buildings on the masterplan vision.

Panel 6 shows a developer impression of proposed buildings at lower corner of Canberra Avenue. This impression is seriously misleading and probably inaccurate in its depiction of 8/10 and 12 storey buildings. They would completely overwhelm and overshadow the park at this point, which is why they have been minimised in height. The developer in this case sought 'flexibility' from the council in its application of requirement to minimise overshadowing to the park, precisely because from 2pm onwards, it completely overshadows the park.

Panel 7 shows developer proposed perimeter treatment adjacent to the west edge of the park at Canberra Avenue which would be broadly similar to that of Duntroon Avenue. Unlike Duntroon Avenue however which is recessed back from the top slope of the park and visually lower, the proposed heights are significantly higher and sit on the flat side of the park. They would completely overwhelm at this point.

Panel 8 shows a visual impression of 19 storey building as proposed for the top of Marshall / Canberra Avenue corner starting the so-called transition down the hill. Still significantly over-scaled and contextually inappropriate.

Panel 9 shows building forms and heights that would be more contextually appropriate with low rise at Canberra Avenue South and medium rise at the centre of Canberra Avenue. Existing apartments and current construction units at Duntroon Avenue indicate this scale. Why do all these developer apartment blocks have to be so monotonously slab-like and horizontal? Why not some verticality, more articulation and variety of facades?

Panel 10 suggests that buildings fronting River Road have the opportunity to be broken into smaller more interesting units utilising the height differences to provide steps, terraces and some individual courtyards that could act as a buffer to River Road with sunlight penetration to perimeter. Two and three storey townhouses should be included to reduce densities, increase the diversity of housing types available and provide a better alternative long-term option for families than apartments. These buildings might display a little more interest than slab type elevations.

Liveability

This is about creating a well-designed mix of open space to building, pocket parks for informal gathering and a suitable park for leisure and children. Newlands Park is highly valued by the community and acts as a vital lung for the area. Children require sunny outdoor spaces to play whereas adults value these spaces to exercise, walk and congregate with friends. There are opportunities that could be explored in the park to provide for more group and resident activities. **Panel 10** suggests a possible grass amphitheatre on the south and east park slopes that could provide wonderful spaces with afternoon and evening sunshine coming through reduced height buildings.

Neighbourhood

The SLS precinct topography is very inclined with access to upper Canberra Avenue presenting a difficulty to older residents and mothers and babies. Some consideration needs to be given to provision of childcare facilities, coffee shops and local corner shop towards the centre of Canberra Avenue.

Contextual Development

The community have been clear in their demands for development that enhances and respects the existing local character of the area. The Draft Plan 2036 talks about all of these qualities in separate reports, with most of these requests largely ignored by a council more intent on satisfying the rapacious greed of the developers concerned and the huge sums of money already spent that substantially exceed property values in the area. This is not the way to plan development and not the way to treat a community who do not have a problem with additional development and are generally supportive of increased density due to the adjacent transport network. We want genuine

consultation with council and engagement with the issues of traffic, congestion, overlooking, building height, massing and good design to create a vibrant community rather than serve as a dormitory town to the city.

I urge the commission to reject this proposal as it does not comply with the initiatives and guidelines of the Draft 2036 Plan. I furthermore urge them to request the council to prepare a new masterplan this time fully in consultation with the community. This precinct needs to be properly planned in line with the character of the area and to maintain the community and its precious park.

Thank you.