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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION

MEETING WITH STATE GOVERNMENT

**RE: WEIGALL SPORTS COMPLEX, SYDNEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL PROJECT
(SSD-10421)**

PANEL:

**PETER DUNCAN, AM
PROF RICHARD MACKAY, AM**

ASSISTING PANEL:

**LINDSEY BLECHER
JANE ANDERSON
PHOEBE JARVIS**

STATE GOVERNMENT:

ALEX GREENWICH

DATE:

4.01 PM, FRIDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2021

MR P. DUNCAN: Good afternoon and welcome. Before we begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we virtually meet today, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. Welcome to the meeting today to discuss the Weigall Sports Complex, Sydney Grammar School project SSD-
5 10421 currently before the Commission for determination. Sydney Grammar School, the applicant, is seeking approval for the new Weigall Sports Complex comprising demolition of existing sports facilities and car park areas, bulk excavations and construction of a new three-storey sports complex with basement and single-storey split-level car park.

10 My name is Peter Duncan. I am the Chair of this Commission panel and I'm joined by my fellow Commissioner, Professor Richard Mackay. We are also joined by Lindsey Blecher, Jane Anderson and Phoebe Jarvis from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission. In the interests of openness and transparency,
15 and to ensure a full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded and a complete transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website. This meeting is one part of the Commission's consideration in this matter and will form one of several sources of information upon which the Commission will base its determination.

20 It is important for the Commissioners to ask questions of attendees and clarify issues whenever it is considered appropriate. If you're asked a question and you're not in a position to answer please feel free to take it as a question on notice and provide any additional information in writing, which we will also put on our website. If I could
25 just make one request, if we could all not talk at once –not over the top of each other, just for the accuracy of the transcript, and very happy to now begin. But just by way of context, we've had meetings today with the Department, the Applicant, Council and now yourself, and we really appreciate at the end of a – what sounds like a very busy week for you, we appreciate your time, Mr - - -

30 MR A. GREENWICH: Well – and thank you for the opportunity to engage. Would you like me to just start by sort of an overview of my concerns about the proposed development.

35 MR DUNCAN: Yes, please. I think that's the best way to go. You know, obviously, we've heard a lot of views today and we would be really interested to hear your position.

40 MR GREENWICH: All right. Great. Well, I might start by saying where I come to this is as a – as the State representative for the area in which this development is going to take place, and in particular to represent the constituents and the concerns of the neighbouring constituents, particularly those in 29 to 33 Lawson Street, which is the public housing site there which houses a – you know, a large number of fairly vulnerable people who have been in that site for quite a while. It is also an important
45 publicly owned asset in that it is vital inner city social housing of which we are in

short supply, and I strongly believe we should be doing everything to protect the amenity and quality of that.

5 My concerns on this development really go to the very start and some of the
consultation work that was taken place on it, and in that the consultation was done in
a way that seemed to largely exclude this cohort of people from being able to engage
in it, with information being shared at a very high level and a way which could not
be, you know, easily consumed by lay people. My office would get calls and
10 complaints from residents. They would try to attend some of the consultation
sessions that the school was running. They didn't feel comfortable to ask questions.
They found photographs of them being taken, you know, against their permission
that could then be used to say they have been consulted.

15 The – and then also we did have a concern around the consultation with the full DA
document which was being proposed, in that that wasn't really made accessible for
people in that complex to be able to participate in. My office had to be proactive in
asking for Sydney Grammar to provide a copy of that DA. Not everybody has
internet access or is computer literate who lives in that complex. We – you know, it
20 was a ridiculous process, to be honest, that it seemed to be a great deal of resistance
from the school to be able to get that full – a copy of that full DA. We had to request
it through DPIE. It was – I remember, it was reluctantly delivered to my office by a
representative of Grammar who said this cost them thousands of dollars to produce,
“So keep it safe and then we will come and pick it up”.

25 It's still in my office today and, I guess – so, I – and then there have been other
things which have concerned me about their engagement, particularly with that
cohort. You know, for example, the concerns of overshadowing and particularly on
some other communal area and the clothesline. There – you know, there was a
30 suggestion at one point made that, “Well, we can just buy some dryers for them”, as
if that's an appropriate solution to that. So; I guess the lack of genuine concern and
consideration – or what appeared to me – for the residents in that building is of great
concern because this development will impact them probably more than some of the
other residents, specifically loss of views, the outlook and sense of space, loss of
light and brightness.

35 Adjacent homes will be darker and prone to damp as a result, and then the light
pollution which would be expected during the construction with construction lights
and complex lights needed. Obviously, the overshadowing, the height and proximity
of the complex to homes and the communal outdoor areas, the substation, the
40 ultimate location including underground options that leaves – there's obviously less
impact on those residents. There's also concern about some of the traffic, including
idling coaches, creating noise and pollution that should not be close to homes,
construction traffic, vibration and structural impacts of site excavations so close to
homes that will cause potential physical and emotional discomfort.

45 There was a large development on Neild Avenue which occurred some years ago and
that did have large impacts on that area. Everybody remembers the impacts of that

construction in terms of the physical and emotional discomfort, and then also the concern about there appears to be – beyond the school community – little evidence of community benefit, that we are dealing with a site which seems to largely be exclusively for the school and items that I have raised with them about how it should
5 be more accessible to the wider community. There seems – that seems to be extremely conditional in their proposal, and I think there is certainly room there.

I, in particular, think that there needs to be greater consideration of option 5, which is to align the development with Neild Avenue. That would address some of the
10 concerns that I have raised. I know that Councillor Price has made the suggestion, which I believe Woollahra Council has said would be appropriate, that the truck movements during construction should be kept on the Sydney Grammar site to prevent, you know, further intense traffic movement in what is a residential area which – with very tight streets and roads around it. There is also, you know, concern
15 that – I know it's not – it's a separate part to the development, but it's development in the area, which is – there's this long proposal for the Paddington Greenway, that the Grammar proposal doesn't seem to leave room for that despite needing to provide cycle parking, you know, a greenway cycle way that would deliver people to the Grammar site would seem to be appropriate and seem to be appropriate to be part of
20 the proposal, and I also have a great concern that we have two major developments happening which no one has been able to say won't be happening around the same time, that with the Hakoah development at White City and the Grammar development, the cumulative impact on, you know, one of Australia's most historic suburbs, that being Paddington, it seems to be not appropriately thought out and,
25 again, the community benefit.

We have a membership – a club-limited membership at Hakoah, and we have a school community, largely limited use, at the Grammar. I really think with these two
30 developments we could be doing a lot better around conditions around greater community and access. So – and I think – just going back to my original point, I think it would be really appropriate for the IPC to do a site visit, particularly to the common areas and outdoor areas in the units in Lawson Street, so you can see the impact. As I said, you know, the – this is – this – the Lawson Street social housing complex is vital – is a vital community asset for the home it provides to people who
35 need to be close to supports and services in the inner city, and the supply of housing that it provides in an inner city where the demands for inner city social housing are ever increasing, and where the supply is ever diminishing. So we shouldn't be looking at approving developments which are going to have a negative impact on such an important asset, particularly when there could be other options that could be
40 considered in this context. So I believe that is most of what I want to say in my introduction – introductory remarks, but happy to take any questions.

MR DUNCAN: Thank you for that explanation, and you wouldn't be surprised that
45 most of those issues have been raised today by either Council or during our discussions. So I just wanted to let you know that we're well aware of them and appreciate the comments. Commissioner Mackay, would you – do you have anything to ask at this stage?

PROF R. MACKAY: Yes. If I may. Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Mr Greenwich, and, look, could I begin by just letting you know that the Commission has actually requested from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment the full set of records from its engagement with those residents, including the meeting on 10 May, because we're interested in drilling down on exactly that kind of fine grain level of detail and we are very mindful of the issue about equitable access to participation in the decision making process. With that in mind, we've also this week put a leaflet into all of their letterboxes to say, look, the Commission is now the consent authority and if you want to talk to us this is the timeframe. We've given them two weeks, which pushes us a bit in terms of our statutory timeframe, but we've also said, "You don't have to lodge online. If you want to send us something in the mail, that's fine, too."

So we – we're mindful of that in trying to reach out, and both Commissioner Duncan and I have spent time on site, including going to the available public areas, and you would be able to see later on, from the transcripts of this morning's meetings, we are very concerned about the amenity view loss issues. In that regard, we've had lots of discussions with the Department and with the applicant today and one of the questions we're grappling with is that if a form of development is approved here, and there is this sort of assurance by the school, and we – you know, we're enthusiastically ensured by headmaster Dr Malpass today that, you know, Grammar wants to connect with the – and provide benefits for the broader community, but they are proposing, with the operation of this facility, that it would be only community groups that would have access, like the local public school or groups like that in an organised way.

We've put it to them that if they're going to do that they need to consider the people who are actually affected. So if – where I'm getting to is saying we – we're grappling with how that might be appropriately achieved and just, I guess, put – invite the open comment from you about if there's a way in which your office might assist with that in terms of establishing a community organisation that is to the benefit of those affected residents and enables them to use this facility as recreation, you know, would you be happy to be a part of that process?

MR GREENWICH: Look - - -

PROF MACKAY: Sorry, it's a long question.

MR GREENWICH: I – yes. Sure. Of course I would and of course it would be appropriate for the affected residents to be able to have access to the site if the site goes ahead and does have a negative impact on – particularly, what we're talking about is a lot of their health and wellbeing. So, you know, the facilities that would be available there would be ones that we know assist with those factors. That said, I think it is going to be critical for the school to define the process of which they will grant those community organisations access to the site. It's very easy to say, "We will allow community organisations", and then for them to define that, the amount of times those organisations can visit it after the approval has gone though, so that

needs to be clear in terms of the number of days, the times of those days, the process of which they will go to for – you know, for allowing access, and how do they define a community group. You know, is it the schools old boys or is it an actual – is it a – you know, Glenmore Road Public School.

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PROF MACKAY: Well, thank you. I think, again, with – the Commission has not yet formed a view on whether it's moving towards an approval or a refusal, but, certainly, we think one of the gaps in the process at the moment is how to connect that general offer of community use and connection with the immediately adjacent community.

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MR GREENWICH: And, look, and I would just add that it's disappointing to me that that has not been more clearly defined to date.

15 PROF MACKAY: One – can I just ask a couple of small technical questions. With the greenway, we've been assured that the greenway options are not affected this site because one of them is along the stormwater canal that crosses the site, and the other one is further east again. Do you have other information that creates a concern for the greenway?

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MR GREENWICH: Well, I'm aware that the school is opposed to the greenway down the canal side, unfortunately. The canal side is obviously a – the appropriate way for use of active transport, like cycling, and so, you know, that – that's my understanding, but that's obviously – I will let Sydney Grammar reflect their own view on it. I also do find it disappointing that two major developments have – one has been approved through Hakoah. The Grammar one is obviously under application and before you at the moment, and there could have been a real opportunity here around looking at some sort of voluntary condition or voluntary contribution to facilitate the greenway, which would be an actual public asset of all community benefit.

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I have, in my meetings with Grammar and when I will meet with the White City proponents, always talk about the need to be a good neighbour. You know, in my electorate we have a lot of big institutions who do a lot of land grabbing and development. Some of them are really good at being good neighbours and making sure that areas are open to the community and, as a result, those institutions survive and thrive, you know, really well and have become part of the community. We can't have a system where somewhere like in the Paddington/Edgecliff area we're starting to have the build-up of institutions continually building on land, closing it off to the community, getting in the way of community developments like the proposed greenway. That really changes the nature of a historic precinct like Paddington.

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40

PROF MACKAY: Thank you. Thank you. Just a quick question on the truck movements during the construction. There's a fair amount of representation and information before us and, look, again without prejudice to what might or might not happen, if it were possible to have the trucks for construction utilise Neild Avenue, both for egress and in terms of stacking, rather than being in the residential streets,

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Lawson, Alma, Vialoux and the like, and rather than driving up the green space on the fields, would you feel that that adequately addressed the residential concerns? I mean, there would obviously be an incremental traffic effect of the trucks still being in a street, but it would be an arterial road rather than a local road.

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MR GREENWICH: I mean, that's right, and the arterial roads there, you know, are used to different traffic conditions, are used to trucks coming up and down them. The residential roads of Paddington are narrow. They are used by many cyclists. They are used by parents with young children. They are used to smaller – yes, slower speeds and tighter corners. The – their homes are really close to the roads as well and the vibrations, pollution and noise impacts of trucks in those – their – in those neighbourhoods would have a negative impact. Those would be concerns which we wouldn't have on an arterial road.

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15 PROF MACKAY: Thank you for that, and my last question – thank you, Chair – is just with the substation. Would you mind just briefly articulating the concern about that. I mean, I think you just sort of said the substation and put it underground - - -

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MR GREENWICH: Look, I just think that it would be appropriate for the location of the substation to be considered to be placed underground just to have less impact, less – you know, less visual impact, noise impact, etcetera. There's – I think there's nothing more that frustrates Sydneysiders than seeing a whole bunch of above ground substations everywhere when there could be an opportunity to underground them.

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PROF MACKAY: Okay. So it's not the location, per se. It's just the fact that it's a substation, utilitarian structure - - -

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MR GREENWICH: Exactly.

PROF MACKAY: - - - on the corner. Chair, thank you. That's all from me.

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MR DUNCAN: Thank you, Commissioner. I don't have any more questions at this stage, and we've pretty well covered everything that we had. Mr Greenwich, is there anything else you wish to say at this stage towards - - -

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MR GREENWICH: No. I think I – you know, from – obviously, from my submission and the views I've expressed, I think my concerns about the proposed development are clear. I – you know, I – I'm not sure why this site needs to be in the exact spot it is, and why it – at a site that is going to have the most negative impact on the most vulnerable residents has been selected, and I would really encourage the consideration of alternate sites within the wider Weigall precinct, as well as along Neild Avenue, and to look at the bulk and scale of the development.

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PROF MACKAY: Sorry, Chair, can I just perhaps ask a quick supplementary to that question.

MR DUNCAN: Yes.

5 PROF MACKAY: So is it correct then, Mr Greenwich, that you are quite comfortable with the notion that Sydney Grammar provides new sports facilities on this site, but it's the specific attributes of this proposal about which you and your constituents are concerned.

10 MR GREENWICH: Yes, that's correct, and, you know, full disclosure, I went to Sydney Grammar. I had a good education there. I went to Edgecliff as well. I – we didn't have such site. I think I turned out okay, but I think it – the school has every right to want to provide facilities to their students as they have proposed in their development – every right and, obviously, are really keen to provide the opportunities to their students. My concern is the location that they have chosen to place that in.

15 PROF MACKAY: Thank you.

20 MR DUNCAN: Okay. Look, I think that's – that finalises anything that we have to ask at this stage. Just by way of conclusion, as Commissioner Mackay said, that we've got – we're open for submissions for another two weeks and if yourself or your office wishes to provide anything to the Commission we would be more than happy to receive it.

25 MR GREENWICH: Okay. Great. I really appreciate that. Thank you.

MR DUNCAN: And thank you very much for your time today.

MR GREENWICH: Thank you, all. Really appreciate it. Thank you. Okay.

30 MR DUNCAN: Okay. We will close the transcript at that point.

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[4.24 pm]