

Objections to the Adaptive Re-use of the previous Berrima Gaol as proposed by BlueSox

I support the move to adaptive re-use of the former the Berrima Gaol but am totally opposed to present proposal of *Blue Sox* on the following grounds:

1. The overall proposal is ill-matched to the exiting Berrima residential and retail communities and to the numerous day-visitors who provide the village's current vibrancy
2. The building of a 55-bed hotel alongside the rear wall of the gaol flouts heritage guidelines by ignoring the gaol's curtilage
3. The use of the property for events beyond 10.30 pm is unacceptable given the proximity of residences
4. It is unacceptable that a prime and highly visible space at the centre of a heritage complex be given over to a 195-space car park

1. The overall proposal is ill-matched to the exiting Berrima residential and retail communities and to the numerous day-visitors who provide the village's current vibrancy.

The gaol and courthouse buildings are important assets to Berrima village, sited central to heritage township contained within a meander of the Wingecarribee River. Development within this precinct – essentially the curtilage of these important buildings – has been controlled for the last forty years. Council regulations stipulate the half-acre allotments cannot be sub-divided and place restrictions on building size and style of build. As a result the village retains its spacious, semi-rural character and forms a backdrop to its several extant Georgian-style buildings.

Entertainment is also low-key. The National Trust property, Harper's Mansion is open every weekend and public holiday as is the Berrima District Historical Society (BDH&FHS) museum and the courthouse adjacent to the gaol. All are staffed by local volunteers. BDH&FHS volunteers also initiated signage along the River Walk to recognize the use of the gaol for German internees during WW1. Bushcare groups maintain other walks alongside the river. There are monthly farmers' markets and meetings of various vintage car groups. Children's play and BBQ areas have been upgraded by the Council and are available in the Market Square and Oxley Park. Applications to hold special events, again usually organised by community groups, are approved *only if they do not detract from the experience of other users*.

It is this character plus modest retail outlets and cafes that attract hundreds of day-visitors each week throughout the year. Surveys undertaken at the National Trust property, Harper's Mansion, indicate regular visitation from people – notably middle-income families – from south and west Sydney, Canberra and the Illawarra.

The overall proposal with its emphasis on 'premium hospitality', 'signature restaurant' and providing a 'luxurious retreat' is ill-matched to the exiting Berrima residential and retail communities and to the numerous day-visitors who contribute to the village's current vibrancy

2. The building of a 55-bed hotel alongside the rear wall of the gaol flouts heritage guidelines by ignoring the gaol's curtilage

The proposal completely ignores the importance of maintaining meaningful curtilage around a heritage building. The site of the gaol was specifically selected to encompass the 'cliff' face to the

rear, overlooking the Wingecarribee River. Though the hotel will not be visible from the main street it will be highly visible on the other three sides and from across the river.

3. The use of the property for events beyond 10.30 pm is unacceptable given the proximity of residences

The interior of the gaol would be ideal for hosting some of the events listed in the *BlueSox* proposal - parties, meetings and supper clubs to drinks receptions, private screenings, art displays and weddings etc. However, there already exist venues for these events within the village and whether a new large-scale venue is required is doubtful. What is totally unacceptable is that any such event could continue until midnight. The gaol is in the centre of a residential area and sound from this area travels across much of the village - when the gaol was used at one time to stage an opera the sound could be heard from my own property half-a-kilometres away. Similarly when there is a band at the *Surveyor General Inn* which sits alongside the gaol. The inn, however, is limited in its opening hours and is generally closed by or before 10.30. Patrons – cars - leaving any event at the gaol or hotel beyond this hour would cause a disturbance.

4. A 195-space car park should not be located in the centre of a community

The building of a new large carpark at the centre of a village is contrary to current best-practice for urban planning. Figure 18 in Appendix 20 (Transport Impact Assessment and Green Travel Plan) shows that currently unrestricted parking is distributed over eight separate sites in the vicinity of the gaol - mostly roadside parking. These provide parking for 172 cars. *Blue Sox* is planning to concentrate 195 spaces into a purpose-built car park sited on what is currently open space. Setting to one side for the moment the various traffic counts undertaken by *JMT Consulting* this will, simply put, double the amount of vehicle traffic entering/leaving this central part of the village.

The need for this additional parking is, according to Table 2 in Appendix 20, primarily to meet the needs of the proposed new development, the hotel and restaurant. It will not add to the number of spaces available to the general public – primarily residents and day-visitors. Furthermore the owners will be able to limit access in any way they choose.

a. The open space below the southern wall should not be built over.

Blue Sox documents refer to the car park as having one surface and two underground levels. This would seem to be misleading. Wingecarribee Street, alongside which the car park will sit, drops away significantly from its junction with Argyle Street (eastern end) to the river (western end).

Refer image below. Given that the entry/exit ramps to the surface car park are situated at the



eastern end and on a level with the Argyle Street the excavation for basement levels will only be required at this eastern end. Essentially the facility will make use of the natural fall of the land and the so-called basement levels will gradually rise up as one progresses down Wingecarribee Street. This has several implications:

- At the eastern end a concrete car park will sit between and close to two heritage buildings – the gaol opened in 1838 and the Surveyor

General Inn opened in 1835. Both are in near-original condition and form an important part of the Argyle Street streetscape.

- No matter how well the surface level is landscaped the dramatic view of the gaol's southern wall, perched high above the river will be lost.
- The open space below the walls will be lost. Over most of Berrima's history it has been used to grow food to supply inmates. Most notably German prisoners of war housed in the gaol during the First World War established gardens there. The story of this group of men, the houses they built, the gardens they established and their interactions with the community are a major part of Berrima's history. Their story, is told at the Museum and on some 20 information boards placed along the River Walk.¹ The gardens were subsequently tended by inmates up to the gaol's closure and exemplifying the prison system of that time.
- One access to the River Walk is from Wingecarribee Street, appropriately unsealed - it serves only one residence. Presumably to accommodate commercial delivery vehicles the road is likely to be widened and this, plus views into the car park along the northern side, will seriously detract from the amenity.
- The viability of the outside entertainment area adjacent to the *Surveyor General Inn*, the location of weekend musical events, is likely to be compromised.

b. Traffic entering and exiting the proposed car will be a risk to public safety.

The information and diagram provided by *JMT Consulting* regarding the intersection of the Old Hume Highway, Argyle Street and Wingecarribee Street is somewhat simplistic (Figure 9 in Appendix 20). The reality is that it is already a complex junction. The original road, Argyle Street, passes alongside the Courthouse and in front of the Gaol and the *Surveyor General Inn*. It merges with the Old Hume Highway via a short stretch of road between the Gaol and the *Surveyor General Inn*. Traffic flow in this area can already be confusing as patrons of the car park in front of the *Surveyor General Inn* contest right-of-way with cars turning in from the Old Hume Highway or exiting Wingecarribee Street from the inn's carpark. That only one accident has occurred in this area in five years (page 10 in Appendix 20) is in part due to the low number of vehicles using the space, confirmed by Figure 9 in Appendix 20, and in part due to the familiarity of local people with the issue.



The proposed entry/exit ramps of the parking facility sit close to this junction and can only add to the confusion – 192 cars accessing the car park could involve almost 400 extra crossings each day. *The red arrows on the above images indicate where cars exiting from the proposed car park will enter the system.*

¹ John Simons. *Prisoners of Arcady: German Mariners at Berrima 1915-1919*. Berrima District Historical Society, 1999

Given the above the statement on page 21 that *the traffic impacts arising from the proposal are minimal, will not impact the operation of the road network and do not warrant any physical mitigation works* is questionable. The statistics that back the statement – the LoS and DoS – seem more relevant to urban environments than a rural village.

And the statement that *no modifications are to the surrounding road network are considered necessary, this includes any new line marking or regulatory signage at the Old Hume Highway / Argyle Street intersection* also on page 21, is somewhat surprising given the impact has yet to be experienced. Perhaps a re-assurance to Council?

I believe in due course, there will be pressure for additional traffic control structures, the introduction of which will detract from the heritage importance of the Argyle Street and the buildings along it.

If the proposal is approved then, at the least, positioning of the exit/entry ramps to the car park should be reconsidered.

c. Additional traffic will impinge be a safety hazard for pedestrians

The 50km/h speed limit and low traffic flows in Berrima allow relatively free and comparatively safe movement for pedestrians within the village. The Argyle Street, Old Hume Highway, Wingecaribee Street junction referred to in the previous section, is also where pedestrians currently choose to cross the highway. At this point access to retail outlets shifts from the eastern to the western side of the road. Also, the *Surveyor General Inn* is a major focus for locals and visitors, patrons often spilling onto adjacent roads, especially at weekends when events are held in the outdoor eating area. The crossing place is represented on Figure 14 in Appendix 20 by the double-headed arrow near the bottom of the diagram. So, should the car park be approved, and irrespective of the siting of the exit/entry ramps, not only will there be additional vehicle traffic at this junction, pedestrians will also be thrown into the mix.

I consider little thought has been given by the developer to aspects outside the project's boundary and the well-being of the community.

As an aside I note the plethora of footpaths indicated in Fig. 14 in Appendix 20, most of which do not exist. Lots of figures on traffic numbers but no appreciation of the terrain.

IN CONCLUSION

Berrima gaol was a public asset and it is regrettable that the state government chose to sell it to consortium which is proving to have little imagination both in the re-use of the gaol itself and the erection of additional buildings within the curtilage.

Nowhere in the proposal is there any attempt to recognise and promote the historical importance of the gaol, its site or Berrima village, one of very few remaining townships to retain much of its 1830s character.

With greater imagination that could inspire community support, the gaol premises could add significantly to the economic viability of the village, its social cohesion and to showcasing NSW's early history.

Hopefully it is not too late and the current Blue Sox proposal will not be approved.