

28 November 2013

Dear Sir/ Madam

Northern Beaches Hospital – SSI 5982

I wish to make a submission in relation to the above.

I am not “for” the hospital or “against” the hospital. Rather, I wish to raise a number of concerns about the Concept Design and I hope that these can be addressed in some way. I also wish to raise concerns about the process for community consultation.

Community Consultation

In December 2012, I attended the “Visioning” session held at The Forest High School and immediately volunteered to participate in a proposed community committee announced at those sessions. It has been almost a year and no further consultation has happened to my knowledge. I live directly opposite the Hospital and so stand to be significantly affected by the proposal. The lack of any opportunity for ongoing consultation is very disappointing and seems inconsistent with the PR messages given at the “Visioning” sessions.

In relation to the Exhibition of documents relating to the Concept Design, the sheer volume of documents is overwhelming for an ordinary person. I am a lawyer and not usually daunted by lengthy documents, however the sheer volume of documentation has all but defeated me on this occasion. I expect many members of the community will feel overwhelmed by the documents and this will lead to a lack of engagement and inadequate opportunities for meaningful dialogue involving local residents. This is a great shame and means many local residents will not have a proper opportunity to provide feedback on the information which has been placed on Exhibit.

The files are massive – printing them would involve exorbitant cost and usage of paper. I attempted to view the papers at the library. Initially I was given a large bound document but I soon realised that this included only some of the Annexures. I queried this with the librarian who then realised that she had 3 volumes which she had assumed were all the same (ie one document but in triplicate) so she had been handing out individual volumes, without realising that she was only supplying one-third of the document! Until I queried this, it appears other residents had been content with whichever volume they were given, apparently (blissfully) unaware of the other volumes.

I appreciate that the Government is trying to be transparent in providing background technical reports and the like, however I believe more can and should have been done to engage the local community, perhaps by having another meeting at which the documents could be explained and summarised and an opportunity given for locals to ask questions.

I feel that merely placing these bulky and dense documents on display at the library and on the web is woefully inadequate and does not make it easy for the community to engage with the proposals.

Environmental aspects

The Concept plans do not place a high priority on the preservation of the natural habitat and the protection of wildlife. In my view, the buildings could be designed to have a much smaller "footprint" to enable larger tracts of forest to be retained. In particular, the main building could be made more bulky, with the buildings sited mainly toward the Southern (South West) side of the site and not proceeding with the two buildings shown on the Eastern side of the site. (The bulk should nonetheless be reduced to the North side, toward Frenchs Forest Road and there should be a reasonable setback from this road, given that there are residences facing onto the Hospital from this side.) If greater emphasis was placed on protection and retention of the natural habitat, I believe that a design could be formulated which would achieve a good compromise. This could be achieved by ensuring that buildings do not encroach on the part of the site to the East of Bantry Bay Road. There could be a band of open landscaped grounds where the houses used to be on this road, with the (relatively) pristine forest to the rear of the house sites fenced off and protected.

There should be no objection to having the bulk of the buildings to the Southern (South West) edge of the property because this adjoins a busy highway (Warringah Road) and no residences "face" this aspect.

I choose to live in Frenchs Forest (and have done so for approximately 20 years) because of the natural environment. I enjoy the abundance of wildlife and birds that live in the area as well as the beauty of the trees. Retaining the bulk of the "forest" would have a number of benefits, namely:

1 preservation of habitat for native animals;

2 visual amenity – imagine being a patient in the Hospital and being able to look across to a mature stand of trees;

3 preservation of history – the name of the suburb includes the word "Forest". We should strive to preserve and protect as much of the "Forest" as possible so that the suburb name does not lose its meaning and value.

I note that surveys have been conducted of native flora and fauna on the site, with certain particular species mentioned. The focus seems to be only on species that are already facing extinction. The Powerful Owl is listed as vulnerable, and I can confirm having seen these magnificent creatures in the neighbourhood. Destroying so much habitat will undoubtedly put additional pressure on this species. Every effort should be made to allow the owls to remain on the site and co-exist with the Hospital. The Concept Design does not adequately seek to balance these aims. Rather, priority is given to the Hospital at the expense of the habitat.

Although other species may not be listed as "vulnerable" or worse, the biodiversity of the local area should not be underestimated, and efforts should be made to give the existing animal populations an opportunity to continue to live in the local area. At and near my home, which is just across the road from the Hospital, I have seen echidna, long neck turtle, black cockatoos, king parrots, bush turkeys, swamp wallabies, possums, bandicoots, as well as an array of lizards, snakes and frogs. While these may be thought to be "common" it is easy to become complacent and given the unique features of the Duffy's Forest Ecological Community, in my view, as much as possible of this habitat should be preserved and protected for the benefit of the local animal populations. I understand that it was not long ago that koalas were considered to be plentiful at Oxford Falls, whereas now it is understood that there are no remaining koalas in that area. My point is that what is common now soon may

not be, so we should adopt a cautious and conservative approach by trying to protect the animals we are fortunate to have living with us in our community.

If the native vegetation cannot be protected in a meaningful way, then further consideration should be given to the appropriateness of this site. A number of other sites have been considered, none of which would involve the destruction of areas of "high biodiversity value".

Traffic, Transport and Parking

The entrance to the Hospital should be located on Warringah Road. Warringah Road is already a busy road, with no residences impacted. Having the main entrance on Frenchs Forest Road will significantly impact on residents of Frenchs Forest Road, increasing congestion on this residential street and compounding the traffic associated with the High School.

It is critical that traffic issues are properly addressed by designing appropriate upgrades around the site. These improvements should be designed and approved prior to approval of hospital construction. Frenchs Forest Rd is a residential street and is not suitable for use as an alternative to Warringah Road for through traffic.

To accommodate the proposed hospital, it will be essential to improve public transport connections to Manly, Narrabeen, Dee Why, Brookvale, Chatswood and the city. As public transport will predominantly be by bus, there should be a transport hub with secure parking to service the needs of the population of residents and workers.

Onsite parking should be designed to accommodate all likely parking needs to avoid impact on neighbouring residential streets. I understand that underground parking facilities are to be included in the design, however I was unable to confirm the details of this in my review of the proposals.

Pedestrians and cyclists

The design should accommodate paths for pedestrians and cyclists to move easily and safely across the site from Frenchs Forest Road to Warringah Road. The paths should be well lit to allow use at night. It is essential for pedestrian access across the site to be maintained at all times during the site preparation and construction phases.

Yours sincerely


Ruth Stringer