

# Athol GARDENS

25 May 2015

The Secretary  
Department of Planning and Environment  
22-33 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2799

Attention: Mr Robert Byrne

Dear Sir

## **PROPOSED BLAYNEY ABATTOIR AND CONTINUED OPERATION OF BLAYNEY SEALINK - SSD 6954**

This report is written in response to the Environmental Impact Statement released for public comment on 9 April 2015. It is concerned only with the Athol Gardens function and reception centre business. It covers:

- (a) the nature of the business; and
- (b) the impacts on that business if the proposal is approved.

## **THE ATHOL GARDENS BUSINESS**

### **Background**

Athol Gardens is a function and reception centre business located at 84 Newbridge Road, Blayney. The business has been in operation for over 10 years. It was registered with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission on 2 February 2004 (BN 98035054). Karen Somervaille is the sole proprietor.

It is a well-established function centre that ranks amongst the top of its type in the entire Central West, sits comfortably with the Shire's strategic plan, brings flow on benefits to the town and, we are told, contributes to a feeling of pride in the town and what it now has to offer. If one judges these things by those who attended the community information session on 12 May 2015, it is supported by a clear majority of the townspeople over a 'back to the past' abattoir at the proposed location.

### **Area occupied**

The business operates from the heritage listed "Athol" homestead and gardens. Under a lease agreement with the owner, the business occupies:

- (a) the gardens to the east, north and west of the homestead, including the front lawn and ceremonial rose arbour to the north where wedding ceremonies are held;
- (b) the purpose built garden terrace room, opening onto the gardens to the north and east (and able to be closed in the event of unfavourable weather with clear plastic blinds) and adjoining conservatory in which sit down meals are served;
- (c) the commercial kitchen;

- (d) the male, female and disabled toilets;
- (e) a storage room for crockery, cutlery, glasses, kitchen equipment and tables;
- (f) the heritage listed mill/stables to the east of the homestead, used for accommodation both in connection with wedding functions; and
- (g) the car park to the south of the mill/stables, with parking for 55 cars and one bus.

### **Approvals**

The following development consents are held:

- (a) DA 110/2004 for the use of the premises for functions (weddings/receptions etc);
- (b) DA 157/2006 for the construction of the garden terrace room and associated facilities;
- (c) DA 105/2010 for the commercial kitchen; and
- (d) DA 30/2015 for a storage shed.

The premises are also licensed under the Liquor Act (on-premises licence no. LIQO660010148). The licensed premises comprises the areas described in paragraphs (a) to (d) above. Licensed hours are 10.00am to midnight (Monday to Saturday) and 10.00am to 10.00pm (Sunday).

### **Type of functions held**

The business caters mainly for the following functions:

- (a) wedding ceremonies;
- (b) wedding receptions;
- (c) engagement parties;
- (d) fundraising events;
- (e) milestone birthdays;
- (f) christmas parties;
- (g) naming ceremonies;
- (h) luncheons and high teas; and
- (i) corporate special events.

### **Number of functions**

The first wedding ceremony and reception was held on 13 June 2004.

Since then Athol Gardens has hosted:

- (a) 121 wedding ceremonies/receptions; and
- (b) 51 other functions. These have included events for Rotary Club of Blayney, Inner Wheel Club, View Club, Blayney Shire Council, Central Tablelands Water, Blayney Family Medical Centre, Heritage Schools, Cowra Medical Practice, St Joseph's

Primary School, Blayney Vet Clinic, Newmans Buses, Landmark, Hill & Crofts, Australian Open Gardens Scheme and Bathurst Garden Club.

Wedding ceremonies and receptions generally occur between late September and late April. Typically a function starts with a ceremony in the gardens at 3.30 pm (earlier out of daylight savings time) and the reception concludes at 12 midnight. Over the last few years we are averaging about 23 functions a year. Attendance at weddings ranges from 65 to 150.

### **Charity and community fundraising**

Athol Gardens has a policy of making the gardens, function centre and all facilities and our time available at no cost for charitable fundraising events at least twice a year. We have held functions under this policy to raise money for:

- (a) a dynavox machine to enable a young cerebral palsy sufferer to communicate;
- (b) garden improvements for Lee Hostel;
- (c) three local children with severe medical conditions;
- (d) the Sudanese community in Orange;
- (e) the Barbara May Foundation, based in Ethiopia working towards improved maternal health care in developing countries;
- (f) Multiple Sclerosis, through a high tea in the gardens;
- (g) a trust fund for the education of 3 local children of a mother killed in a car crash;
- (h) CanAssist Blayney branch, through a black tie dinner;
- (i) the establishment of Little Athletics in Blayney;
- (j) a new community bus for Blayney Health Service;
- (k) a 'spring bling' garden ramble for St Joseph's Primary School;
- (l) the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Inner Wheel, Blayney; and
- (m) various Rotary dinners and garden luncheons for local projects.

A total in excess of \$100,000 has been raised for charity and community projects from these events held at Athol Gardens.

### **Staff**

Athol Gardens directly employs 2 bar staff, a casual gardener, 2 casual maintenance staff and a 3-day a week function assistant. The catering function is contracted out to a local restaurateur, who employs from 5 to 8 staff for functions at Athol Gardens, depending on the size and nature of the function.

### **Source of clientele**

Wedding reception clients are drawn from most parts of the Central West and Blue Mountains regions. Typically the bride or the groom will have grown up in the region and their family will still be living here. The bride/groom will have moved away from the region for tertiary studies or employment, usually in Sydney. They will have met their partner at work or university and return to their parents' home region for the wedding. At

least two thirds of the guests will not be from this region and tend to make a long weekend of the occasion. Guests have come from as far away as Scotland, Ireland, England, USA, France, Germany, New Zealand and Canada.

The "local" family home town has been Bathurst (35%), Orange (30%), Blayney (10%), Dubbo/Narromine/Coonabarabran (7%) Parkes/Forbes (6%), Blue Mountains (5%) and Goulburn/Southern Highlands (5%). There have also been some entirely Sydney sourced weddings.

Our statistics show that the choice of Athol Gardens is made:

- (a) by recommendation of friends or relatives, who have been to a wedding at Athol Gardens;
- (b) by an internet search for country gardens wedding venues in the Central West;
- (c) by other service providers (celebrants and photographers in particular) who are asked for a recommendation.

Bookings are made 12 to 18 months prior to the event. We already have confirmed bookings, with deposit paid, for weddings throughout 2016 and January 2017.

### **Support for local businesses**

We source all our supplies locally. This includes Bathurst Laundry, run by Glenray Industries, who employ people with disabilities. Most of the catering supplies and liquor purchases come from IGA Blayney, meat from Robanco and in-season fruit and vegetables from other small local suppliers. Wines are sourced from local wineries, in particular Angullong, Bantry Grove, Sons & Brothers, Logan, Cumulus and Phillip Shaw. CSU Bathurst is used for printing, Wraprite Orange for kitchen consumables, Bloody Good Marketing for website design and local electricians, plumbers, carpenters and other tradespeople, repairers and contractors. We have participated in the regional hospitality and tourism sector through our membership of Taste Orange over the last 7 years.

### **IMPACT OF PROPOSED ABATTOIR ON THE BUSINESS**

The panorama below shows a typical wedding in progress in the rose arbour ceremonial area which overlooks the proposed abattoir site.



It is not an overstatement to say that if there were an abattoir directly opposite the Athol Homestead operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including afternoon, evening and night deliveries of livestock, the business would in all likelihood have to close. We have had independent corroboration of this as follows:

First, since the abattoir plans were announced in mid-2014, we have had four prospective clients who were aware of those plans and enquired as to the location of the proposed abattoir. When it was pointed out to them, they said the thought of an abattoir so close

to their wedding venue was just not acceptable to them. We are now not mentioning the abattoir plans to enquirers who are not aware of it, as to do so would mean a very significant loss of business when common sense may prevail and the abattoir may not proceed at this location.

Secondly, we have canvassed the service providers with whom we regularly work. They have all cast doubts on the ongoing viability of the business if an abattoir were built. They have also pointed out the unique facility we have at Athol Gardens and the tragedy it would be for the region if we were to close. I attach copies of the letters from the following, all to this effect:

- (a) Kris Rose, celebrant;
- (b) Jenny McCarron, celebrant;
- (c) Simon Coomans, celebrant;
- (d) Seth Buchanan, photographer;
- (e) Mark Quade, photographer;
- (f) DJ Sinclair Bus Services, bus operator

What must be remembered is the ambiance that brides (and grooms) are looking for in a venue such as ours. It is its unique outdoor garden setting with vistas to the north/north east and an open garden terrace dining area that is so attractive. One could not imagine two more conflicting land uses than a country garden wedding venue and an abattoir, 350m away, operating 24/7, slaughtering 4,500 feral goats per day and receiving livestock 24 hours a day along a shared access road 45m from the ceremonial rose arbour.

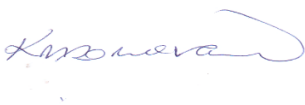
Clients will simply not book. There is no point saying (if the EIS is to be believed) that the odour units will likely be only 1.3 OU, that goats only bleat when under stress and then only 5% at any one time, that the B Doubles will unload under cover, that rendering is offsite and that the risk of Q fever, based on desk top studies by non-health professionals, is elevated but still assessed as very low. All of that either means nothing to them or simply raises their concerns. An abattoir is an abattoir. When they have a choice of venues, they will simply go elsewhere.

The authors of the EIS make the most of their challenging task. They promise that by a combination of careful design and more importantly (but less likely) adherence to strict best operational practices, the proponent will ensure that the "impacts on the continued, normal use of Athol as a function centre and wedding venue with overnight accommodation are mitigated and minimised." (executive summary, p iii). At first blush this sounds like, and is meant to sound like, they have satisfactorily solved the problem. Mitigation and minimisation there may well be, but mitigation and minimisation of a totally disastrous impact still leaves a disastrous impact. If we were assessing fire danger the impact of the proposed development has moved from catastrophic to extreme.

If that is the highest that even the proponent can put it then it is a clear admission that the land use conflict is insoluble. It puts another small business out of business.

It is difficult to believe that an abattoir could be approved at this location.

Yours sincerely



Karen Somervaille

NB Attached letters – click on image to show full letter



**Kris Rose – Civil Celebrant**

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20 September 2014

The Secretary  
Department of Planning & Environment  
22-33 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**Re: Proposed Blayney Abattoir**

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing this letter in relation to the proposal to develop a goat abattoir on Newbridge Road, Blayney directly opposite the Athol Gardens Reception Centre.

I am a wedding celebrant who conducts in excess of 200 ceremonies per year in both Sydney and Central West NSW and many of these ceremonies are conducted at Athol Gardens in Blayney.

The garden and reception centre offered at Athol Gardens is one of the most beautiful and professional venues that I have the honour of conducting ceremonies at and it would be a tragedy if this historical landmark had to compete with a large commercial enterprise that would affect it so dramatically. I am certainly not against business growth in general but this abattoir is not only in total conflict with such an icon in the area as Athol Garden but it is in conflict with the entire area being only one kilometre out of the township as well!

Athol Garden is an all-in-one wedding venue where a couple can have their ceremony, their photos and reception celebration without having to move from one location to the other. It is very rare to find this kind of service or facility in the first place but to find one that provides all three of these services at such a high standard is nearly impossible.

As a tourist drawcard, Athol Garden is a showcase for historical country life and I have conducted many ceremonies where the guests were introduced to the Central West of NSW because of their experience of attending a ceremony there and then returning as visitors to see more of the area at a later time.

I know that Athol Gardens employs local staff and contractors, myself being just one of them, so their contribution to local employment and in turn the local economy should be a huge consideration for the local area as none of my couples would wish to have such a special "life moment" such as a wedding overshadowed by an unsightly factory full of thousands of noisy and smelly goats awaiting slaughter.

This proposal if approved will decimate Athol Gardens Reception Centre and therefore will greatly affect my substantial business dealings with them, along with all the other employees and businesses that benefit from them directly down the line. This proposal, I believe, will create a long term downward spiral affect which may not be felt immediately but in the longer term will be irreversible.

# Jenny McCarron

## Civil Marriage Celebrant

Justice of the Peace  
ABN 27 549 418 826

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The Secretary  
Department of Planning & Environment  
22-33 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

22nd September 2014

Dear Sir

### **Proposed Blayney Abattoir**

I am writing in relation to the proposal to develop a goat abattoir on Newbridge Road, Blayney directly opposite the Athol Gardens Reception Centre.

As a civil marriage celebrant who regularly works at Athol Gardens., I am very familiar with the wonderful gardens and reception centre facilities offered at Athol. In a typical wedding season I often work at Athol Gardens to make the wedding day of our mutual clients as memorable as possible. In my professional experience I am familiar with many wedding venues across this region and have to say that the garden setting and facilities at Athol make it one of the most, in fact probably the most sought after venue in the Central West of NSW.

The current owners have maintained this beautiful 1875 heritage listed homestead and garden and are continually improving the property to keep abreast with the requirements of a modern reception facility. It is essential to the rural history of the Blayney district that this property remain a viable business so that it can be maintained for future generations to appreciate, without relying on public funding.

The owners have informed me of the proposed abattoir. Such a development would be absolutely devastating. I cannot imagine a more conflicting development in such close proximity to this wonderful location. It would be a big blow to the hospitality industry of the region if it had to close. But clients who have their hearts set on a location such as Athol Gardens would be unlikely to want to have a wedding and reception there, overlooking an unsightly abattoir, with the risk of foul odours which can never be eliminated.

It would be a disaster for the region if this venue had to close.

I urge you to reject this proposal because of its location in close proximity to a totally incomparable land use.

Yours sincerely



Jenny McCarron  
Civil Marriage Celebrant



Mark Quade  
photography

6/10/2014

The Secretary  
Department of Planning & Environment  
22-33 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

**Proposed Blayney Abattoir**

I am writing in relation to the proposal to develop a goat abattoir on Newbridge Road, Blayney directly opposite the Athol Gardens Reception Centre.

I am a local photographer who regularly works at the beautiful Athol Gardens

I typically work 6-7 weddings per season at Athol Gardens. I shoot all over the Central West and Blue Mountains at many wedding venues, and the setting and facilities at Athol make it my favourite venue.

The owners have informed me of the proposed abattoir. I am in no doubt that such a development would be a devastating blow to any wedding venue. Athol Gardens is no different. The local wedding industry is just starting to find its feet and more and more interest is coming from the large metropolitan areas of Sydney and Canberra. With typical weddings having approximately one hundred guests, the dollar value that the wedding based tourism brings to the region is significant.

It would be a huge blow for the region if this venue had to close.

I urge you to reject this proposal because of its location in close proximity to a totally incomparable land use.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Quade





Mr Simon Coomans  
PO Box 1075  
BATHURST NSW 2795  
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Mob: 0431 754 454  
Email: [simon@simoncoomans.com](mailto:simon@simoncoomans.com)

The Secretary  
Department of Planning & Environment  
22-33 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

**Re: Proposed Blayney Goat Abattoir**

It has belatedly come to my attention that there is a proposal to build an Abattoir in Blayney, the suggested siting of said abattoir being directly across the road from 'Athol Gardens' on the Newbridge Road.

This is a most inappropriate location for a proposed abattoir. Apart from the fact that the location is too close to the built-up area of the Blayney township, as was the last abattoir that operated in Blayney, it is directly opposite a thriving existing business, which would suffer irreparable damage to its reputation if the abattoir facility would be built.

As a registered civil marriage celebrant, who has been conducting ceremonies for 5 years, I have conducted ceremonies all over the Central West of NSW and this includes a number of ceremonies at 'Athol Gardens'. I have also had the pleasure of attending receptions as a guest at Athol Gardens following the marriage ceremonies.

In my assessment 'Athol Gardens' provides an outstanding service to its customers. This is reflected in the demand for ceremonies that are held there. As a celebrant, couples regularly seek advice regarding possible locations for ceremonies and receptions. 'Athol Gardens' is an obvious suggestion for them.

It is obvious that 'Athol Gardens' is not only a magnificent establishment from an aesthetic point of view, but also a very well run business venture that provides a great service to couples looking to be married in an idyllic location as well as have their reception at the same venue.

The spinoffs for the Blayney community are obvious. Apart from employment opportunities for the reception staff (chefs, wait staff, etc.), the accommodation industry in Blayney surely benefits from increased overnight stays.

It is certainly also true that Athol Gardens not only provides an excellent service, it also serves to enhance the perception of Blayney amongst the wider community in the Central West of NSW.

Seth Buchanan Photographer

5 Thoopara Place, Orange

02 63631384

27 October 2014

The Secretary  
Department of Planning & Environment  
22-33 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**RE: Proposed Blayney Abattoir**

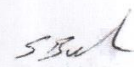
I am writing to express my concerns and opposition to the proposal to develop a goat abattoir on Newbridge Road, Blayney.

As a local wedding photographer, I regularly photograph weddings at the beautiful Athol Gardens Reception Centre. The picturesque property is a spectacular and popular wedding reception venue, boasting expansive, well established gardens.

I was concerned to hear from the owners that a proposal is currently being considered, to establish an abattoir nearby. This sort of development would be hugely detrimental to a business such as Athol Gardens. I strongly believe this development would be unsightly and noisy and threaten the closure of Athol Gardens.

I would encourage you to exercise common sense and compassion when considering this proposal and visit the gardens to appreciate the natural beauty and serenity of the property prior to making any decision.

Regards

  
Seth Buchanan



# DJ Sinclair Bus Services

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Bathurst NSW 2795

Acc No 16692

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Mobile: 0414 349 342

The Secretary  
Department of Planning & Environment  
22-33 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

## **Proposed Blayney Abattoir**

I am writing to you in regards to the proposed goat abattoir development on the Newbridge Road, Blayney, directly opposite the Athol Gardens Reception Centre.

I am a Bus Operator and often perform charters from Bathurst to Athol Gardens throughout the year for all the guests attending the ceremonies and receptions. Athol Gardens has become a very popular reception centre, due to its wonderful garden and excellent facilities which makes the clients wedding day so unique and memorable.

I myself got married at Athol Gardens in 2010, so I am very familiar with the venue and the high standard they maintain.

The owners have informed me of the proposed development, which I believe would be completely devastating to their business and therefore have a flow on effect to all associated businesses in the region, including my own.

I can't imagine getting married at such a wonderful location with a goat abattoir directly opposite. An abattoir would be unsightly, with odours, noise, and B- Double trucks passing Athol Gardens door.

I implore you to please REJECT this proposal due to its location, so close to a successful and in fact probably, the most sought after venue in the central west.

Yours truly,

 29/9/14

Darren Sinclair