

## **New Cultural Centre / Council Chamber & Offices**

# **REPORT**

*By hand delivery to Rodger Roppolo, Planning Officer  
NSW Planning Industry & Environment  
For later submission to Ministers*

### **CURRENT STATUS:**

**>15,000** Coffs Harbour residents signed a Petition asking for Council's proposed development in Gordon Street to be paused pending further community consultation and the assessment of other options. The petition was tabled and debated in NSW Parliament last week. 15,000 is one third of the adult voting population, though also signifies far greater than 50%

NOTE: It is acknowledged in Law that the views and opinions of a person selected for Jury duty represent not just him or herself but that of others known to that person. Therefore 15,000 signers of the Petition represent the views of 45,000. Or >60% of Coffs adult voting population.

Council continues to ignore the petition.

So far, over 600 people have signed Letters of Objection and these have now been submitted to Department of Planning Industry & Environment - some with OAM after their names.

The community DOES NOT object to a new Art Gallery, Library and Museum. The community objects to the inclusion of new Council Chambers and Council Offices in substitution for Performing Arts facilities. Planned public protest rallies will occur and Ministerial lobbying will continue.

The people of Coffs Harbour have without precedent found themselves divided over the intentions of the Mayor, the General Manager and support of three other councillors. Also without precedent, on 25 July 2019 four Councillors out of the eight sitting Councillors walked out of the Council meeting in protest to the actions of the Mayor, who unconventionally twice abused the privilege of a Casting Vote. The mere fact of this action alone enraged the community and created much bitterness and disharmony.

There is presently widespread fear throughout the community that our city of some 75,000 people cannot afford the debt of \$46,000,000, the 30 year payback on borrowings and concerns of there never being any hope for Performing Arts facilities.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

- The Mayor was elected during 2012 on a platform of promising the community that Culture and Performing Arts would be a top priority. City Hill was cited to be the location for a Cultural and Performing Arts Centre.
- The community remained believing that Performing Arts and entertainment facilities were going to be provided right up until the end of 2018. Even after, it was not common knowledge that they were not. Since then, the greater part of the community has made very clear its objections and strongly believes it has been misled and deceived.

#### **THE GORDON STREET SITE & KEY ISSUES OF CONCERN:**

- It conflicts with the streetscape in Gordon Street in that the proposed building is outside the context of this street having regard to the scale, existing street setbacks, design and general form of the adjoining buildings.
- The building scale is overbearing of adjoining buildings, having no regard to scale.
- The location of the building being in a commercial part of the CBD and restricted access to open landscaping or parkland.
- Congestion of travel modes to and from and within the vicinity of the development.
- Fails to make a positive contribution by obstructing street views and provides potential risks to public safety through an unsafe arcade
- The scale ignores the influence on the heritage significance of the neighbouring church
- The building breaches height limitation

#### **PARKING:**

- The project fails to comply with the LEP DCP for office space
- There are considerable issues with the limited approach to parking assessment that reflects a bias that Council would not permit under a normal commercial DA
- Council's parking assessment also relies on use of the existing Council building which will not be available when vacated
- Inadequate parking internally and externally

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

**April 2014:** Council committed to undertake a community engagement program to assess community's interest and willingness to pay for a Cultural Entertainment / Performing Arts Facility.

**December 2014:** Results of engagement regarding cultural facilities were produced and Council was informed of the outcome of community engagement. There is no public disclosure surrounding this assessment. At least none can be found.

### February / March 2018: Figure 1.

| 16 focus groups & 7 Stakeholder meetings |  |             |
|--|--|-------------|
| Date                                     | Focus Groups and Stakeholder Meetings  | # Consulted |
| 1/02/18                                  | Family History Community Group   | 4           |
| 5/02/18                                  | Muurabay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative                         | 2           |
| 9/02/18                                  | Bularri Muurlay Nyngan Aboriginal Corporation                                | 1           |
| 19/02/18                                 | Volunteers - Gallery   | 5           |
| 19/02/18                                 | Volunteers - Museum  | 5           |
| 20/02/18                                 | Cultural and Creative Sector/Cultural Reference Group / LOPAG                | 9           |
| 21/02/18                                 | Gallery Users & Artists & Friends of the Regional Gallery                    | 6           |
| 21/02/18                                 | Library Users (including volunteers)   | 5           |
| 22/02/18                                 | Aboriginal community members   | 2           |
| 23/02/18                                 | Elders Group (awaiting confirmation of numbers attended)                     | -           |
| 2/03/18                                  | Disability Inclusion Access Advisory Group                                   | 6           |
| 5/03/2018                                | Media Launch of Concept Designs @ Council Chambers                           |             |
| 6/03/2018                                | CHCC Staff Information Session - Session 1                                   | 50          |
| 6/03/2018                                | CHCC Staff Information Session - Session 2                                   | 30          |
| 6/03/2018                                | Multicultural Reference Group  | 7           |
| 8/03/2018                                | Artist / Gallery Volunteers / Friends Of Gallery / Frequent Gallery Users    | 11          |
| 12/03/2018                               | Friends of City Hill, Cultural & Creative Sector, Bunker Caroon Gallery Inc. | 8           |
| 13/03/2018                               | Teachers and Educational Representatives                                     | 6           |
| 13/03/2018                               | Community Theatre Groups, Arts & Creative Sector                             | 11          |
| 13/03/2018                               | Museum & Library Volunteers / Book clubs / Writers                           | 10          |

Between 1/02/2018 and 13/03/2018 Coffs Harbour City Councils management undertook a survey to seek support and confirmation of the project.

Council DID NOT attempt to engage with the community other than through Council's website page "*Have Your Say*". The average person on the street was not approached and no meaningful community engagement took place. Instead, the survey included 80 members of Council staff and the remainder were people with a vested interest. The Mayor claims to have "Ticked All the Boxes" but this is not the case.

Council claims that extensive and broad community and stakeholder consultation took place between January to April 2018 but yet this is not so. Supporters of this project came from Council staff and those with a vested interest. There was no community consultation other than expressed in Figure 1. Totalling 233 individuals.

**June 2018:** Report for Cultural & Civic Space Concept Business Case produced. This is a covering report for the Business Case that documents the Cultural and Civic Space project. Council claims it satisfies relevant policies and plans and is responsive to the balance of input from community consultation. There was no community consultation.

Council's other attempt at community engagement has taken the form of placing a notification within the April 2019 Ratepayer Notice on a folded over section headed - Cultural & Civic Space PROJECT UPDATE. It calls for people to visit the council website and go to:-

<https://haveyoursay.coffsharbour.nsw.gov.au/cultural-and-civic-space>.

**THIS IS THE UTMOST EXTENT TO WHICH COFFS HARBOUR COUNCIL HAS REACHED OUT TO THE PUBLIC. IT ASSUMES EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO COMPUTER FACILITIES, HAS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ACCESSING THE INTERNET OR HAS DESIRE TO.**

## COUNCIL'S ACTIVITIES:

**26 November 2015:** Council approves \$90,000 from the 'Future Fund' for a new feasibility study for an entertainment space, art gallery and library to form part of the Cultural Strategic Plan for 2017 - 2022.

It forms the basis of a report for consideration in 2016. The study is to show where the best place is to build it and for how much. Next day, the Mayor declares the aim is not to have all three facilities in the same space, **but the broad community remain generally unaware of this and continue to believe Performing Arts facilities will be delivered.**

**May 2016:** Endorsement requested of the Terms of Reference for the Library and Gallery Planning Advisory Group, although this not being a preferred group as representatives of the community. For the remainder of 2016 draft recommendations, policies, plans and financial support matters take place. A report considers issues and options relating to Performing Arts Centre (performance and conference events).

**May 2017:** Additional 'Civic Use' investigation is introduced.

**September 2017:** Request for quotes go out to three firms of architects for concept designs with a closing date of November. BVN NOT INCLUDED.

**September 2017:** A Notice of Motion is presented for a comprehensive feasibility study for the development of **City Hill** as a Major cultural complex. Council commits to allocate \$75,000 in next years' budget to undertake studies, concept designs and preliminary budgets associated with cultural development at City Hill. **This was not progressed and expenditure of the \$75,000 remains a mystery.**

**November 2017:** Three design teams – Designinc and Lacoste and Stevenson, FJMT, and Dominic Finlay Jones Architects – prepared concept designs for the project as part of a community feedback process.

**End 2017 The general public and community remained fully believing that Performing Arts facilities are being planned and will be provided..!**

**February 2018:** Three concept architectural designs are revealed to the public.

**13 March 2018:** A council organised meeting that included nine public attendees occurred, when three architectural design concepts were discussed. Technical aspects of the designs were led by a Contract Architect and a council staff member. Only one of the designs kept the project budget to \$36M but with some reduction in car parking and office space. A question was asked - "why are new council offices being included"? The question was not answered. Also note, the current design was not among the three shown and discussed.

**Late March 2018:** The three original schematic designs are abandoned. Reasons are not made public though it appears the architectural firms were somehow not fully qualified and not pre-registered, yet somehow were included in the “shortlisted” group.

**13 September 2018:** Council votes for \$2M to be available for 2018/19 instead of the \$500,000 then currently allocated. The additional \$1.5M sourced from the T2S Reserve.

**13 September 2018:** \$2,000,000 is agreed upon by Council to fund the Schematic design and writing of the DA for the current proposed project.

**May/June 2019:** Public display launched of the draft Schematic Design drawings for the Cultural and Civic Space. Council appoints international firm BVN for the project and locally born architect Matthew Blair plays key role.

**The project has grown in scope since a site was selected in 2016. A June 2018 business case found the estimated bill had ballooned to \$75 million, from an earlier estimate of \$35 million. The estimated cost is now at \$76.5 million.**

# ADDENDUM

## CITY HILL

In 1987, Mr John Smith, Councillor and Chairman of the Regional Gallery Development Committee and Mr Bob Bosler, Chairman of the Regional Gallery Committee, met with the Minister for Administrative Services, Mr Tom Uren in Canberra. The purpose of the trip was to purchase D.C.A.Hill – now City Hill.

Negotiations proved successful and the Federal Government sold City Hill to the Coffs Harbour City Council for \$200,000. The Minister agreed that a caveat be placed on the land to secure it as a Cultural Centre for successive generations.

That part being the high ground of City Hill was signed over to Coffs Harbour Council by the Commonwealth of Australia on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1988 for Cultural & Civic purposes with a caveat which included the following possible uses:-

- Art gallery, display areas and related workshops
- Library
- Civic community centre and senior citizens centre
- Theatre and/or cinema and museums
- Music education centre
- Open space and amenity areas together with necessary roads and services
- Educational facilities
- Restaurant, café and taverns
- Radio studio and other media facilities
- Visitor and tourist accommodation, ancillary and convention facilities.

The second part was purchased by Council from the then RTA for \$50,000 and the transfer was then made on 13 September 1996.

It was recognised that the whole of 22 acres may not be needed for cultural purposes and it was agreed that the lower flats could be used for income generating purposes. The restriction was that all profits generated from the site must be used for cultural activities only.

### **Nov. 1992: COUNCIL ADOPTS CITY HILL PLAN**

Coffs Harbour would gain a striking and functional regional art gallery for about \$4.8M if plans released on Monday proceed. “I don’t know of any gallery or public building with such an affinity to its surrounding”, said Colin Still – assistant government architect.

## **20 October 2010 - ABC NEWS REPORT:**

### **"Coffs Harbour's City Hill now the preferred site for a cultural precinct"**

City Hill has re-surfaced as the preferred site for a cultural precinct. The future development would include a major performing arts centre and an art gallery. The City Council earmarked City Hill in the 1990's but lately it's been on the back-burner.

**Deputy Mayor, Denise Knight** says there is now the view the one-hectare site is perfect for a cultural precinct. "It's a prime location in that there wouldn't be a parking problem. We would be able to get larger trucks into that area if we had sets or things like that needed to be put in."

"All the studies say that an entertainment or performing arts centre should be in the CBD, but our city isn't planned for it".

Deputy Mayor, Denise Knight goes on to say that Coffs desperately needs an entertainment centre. "We so need one, everyone knows we need one". "It's a really exhausting process. It's something that I always feel that the middle echelon of Coffs Harbour has so missed out over the years. "The amount of touring acts that are driving up the highway straight past us". Cr. Knight said.

## **CONCLUSION**

The citizens of Coffs are upset with the intransigence of their elected council and their obvious anger is mounting. The residents of Coffs Harbour are demanding a public hearing.