

The Secretary
Planning Industry & Environment
Re: Exhibition of State Significant Development Application
Application: SSD14394209
NEW HIGH SCHOOL IN BUNGENDORE
18 October 2021

Dear Madam/Sir

I wish to advise that I object to this development proposal on the following grounds:

- a) It offers – and locks in – a compromised, inadequate and inequitable educational provision for the current and future young people of our rural region and does so without any apparent, consultatively-developed overarching educational strategy;
- b) The proposed site jeopardises the safety of its children/young people;
- c) It damages and is disrespectful to the Bungendore community's right to
 - (i) peaceful enjoyment of their village,
 - (ii) its cultural heritage,
 - (iii) retention of greenspace and heat mitigation;
- d) The inadequacy of the plan appears to reflect expedient deal-making between the local member and the council in their mutual interest rather than in the long term interests of the educational outcomes of students.

Inadequate and inequitable educational provision

Enquiries regarding the existence of an overall educational strategy for our region that include plans for learning outcomes, curriculum, demography, geography, transport infrastructure including for this proposed school and existing campuses, such as Braidwood Central School, have met with silence.

As a Director on the board of the local bank it certainly became clear that large scale housing developments were being approved around Bungendore. By 2018 provision for more than 2000 new homes was in planning phase.

It is most surprising therefore that with such intensity of change the Department of Education had not developed, in consultation with the community, a long term educational plan for the region. More recently population growth is apparent (alongside a growing shortage of affordable housing) across most of the smaller villages in the region.

For these reasons it seems ludicrous to suggest that a full-service high school designed for "up to" 450 students will cater long term for the educational needs of the village and the region.

An equitable educational provision for the young people of this region would offer them a full curriculum range – both academic and “hands-on”, full array of dedicated amenities for physical and mental health and well-being; a safe place in which to be noisy and let off steam, adequate transport and parking bays uncompromised by village constraints; with room to grow.

The proposed siting of Bungendore High School amounts to an inner-city in-fill compromise, irrelevant to the needs of a rapidly growing rural community which has plentiful greenfield options closer to newer housing developments. It unfairly diminishes the provision of amenities as it requires restrictions on use and shared facilities. My 30 years of experience as a teacher and principal with the Department of Education leads me to believe that any remaining green space on this site will find itself covered in demountable buildings within its first five years – and for a long time afterwards.

Unsafe

The site proposed is bounded by immutable infrastructure, namely, railway line, highway/s, a flood zone, potentially contaminated zone from waste fill (requiring intrusive investigation), narrow village streets. Should flood, fire or other emergency require evacuation of students in both primary and high schools the options for safe places are very few indeed. School management would be severely tested in this scenario – a not uncommon one with climate change upon us.

Further, the narrow streets surrounding the secondary school are entirely inadequate to cater for the combination and intense density of traffic at peak times – student cars, family cars, buses, staff vehicles. With a pre-school, primary school and secondary school safety is jeopardised.

Finally, as the proposal requires demolition of some existing sports facilities future young people will necessarily pass, potentially in great numbers, through the village and across highways before, during and after the school day to reach the planned sports precinct. No infrastructure is currently in place to ensure their safe passage.

Damaging and disrespectful to the community of Bungendore

Covid lockdown has taught communities across the country the invaluable significance of the local park. For a local member of parliament along with an elected council to agree to remove this essential element of a community’s right to peaceful enjoyment by building a high school over the top is quite beyond belief. No community would tolerate such abuse of their rights.

The proposed site is bounded by heritage buildings – some locally listed and one, the railway station, state listed. Furthermore, the site is understood by many in the community

to contain the remains of an Aboriginal person. This understanding has not been denied to date. Desecration of such a site should be outside the jurisdiction of Planning.

Moreover, to clutter this lone village greenspace with buildings laughs in the face of current attempts by Queanbeyan Palerang Council to mitigate built environment heat spikes exacerbated by climate change.

Expedience

To propose to build a high school on this site appears to be the result of expedient and opportunistic agreement between the local member (recently resigned) and the Council (soon to face an election). The local member stood to benefit by bringing a school – any school, no matter how inadequate or unsafe or unplanned - and the council stood to sell off a building, financial assistance sorely needed due to debt growth. The integrity of these plans, these relationships and the vested interests at play providing mutual support for this proposal are, at least, questionable.

Conclusion

Why should our young people's schooling quality be compromised? If there is to be a high school let it be well-planned, equitably provisioned and adequate to the long term future. What community is entitled to less?

The NSW Department of Education must reject this site and instead conduct fulsome and effective planning for a regional school on a greenfields site that can offer our young people all of the educational services to which they are entitled.

I have made no reportable political donations to the state government or opposition in the last two-year period.

Susan Doran
Retired School Principal, Director on Braidwood/Bungendore Community (Bendigo) Bank franchisee, Lawyer.