

David Webster

Bungendore

NSW 2621

18 October 2021

Director - Social and Infrastructure Assessments
Planning and Assessment
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

Dear Sir or Madam

**NEW HIGH SCHOOL IN BUNGENDORE
APPLICATION NO. SSD-14394209**

I refer to the above state-significant development application.

I **object** to the proposal, for the following reason(s):

In relation to the above SSDA-14394209, I wish to lodge a formal objection to the DA submitted for the construction of a high school in Bungendore on the eastern portion of Bungendore Park, Majura Street, the current council chambers and a part of the community dog off leash area.

My strong objections are:

The DA is for a site **not** considered or recommended by The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment which is the government agency tasked with:

“...Stewardship of our physical environment - both natural and built - with the goals of achieving sustainable development and giving future generations the ability to meet their own needs. The operations of the Department reflect the government’s intention to manage land and natural resources together in response to the community’s constantly evolving social, economic and environmental needs”.

“Our shared vision allows us to prioritise projects effectively and make sound, informed and defensible decisions that will deliver the NSW Government’s priorities”.

The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment brings together specialists in urban and regional planning, natural resources, regulation, industry, the environment and:

“We strive to be a global leader in planning and managing resources, environmental and socio-economic security, financial affordability, land use and lowering carbon emissions. We make decisions based on advice and analysis that is transparent and reflective of the diversity of NSW. Together, we create thriving environments, communities and economies”.

In contrast, The NSW Department of Education serves the community by **leading the provision of world-class education**. It is responsible for the delivery and co-ordination of early childhood, primary school, secondary school, vocational education, adult, migrant and higher education in the state of New South Wales, Australia.

In the introduction to the Education Departments School Site Selection and Development Guidelines, it states:

“A range of issues need to be considered when identifying a site for a new school. The acquisition of a site for a new school, particularly in areas where property is scarce or expensive, will always require a case-by-case assessment with consideration given to environmental factors, availability, cost, need, alternative sites available, funding and feasibility of property acquisition.

“The diverse nature of school sites illustrates how schools can operate successfully in many types of environmental settings. Despite this there is a range of public and private interests that need to be determined, investigated, assessed and balanced, through property due diligence and urban planning to identify design complexities. Each new school site proposed brings with it a range of risks, opportunities and constraints”.

“Planning for new schools should be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders including the Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Environment, Transport for NSW, Roads and Maritime Services and the relevant local council and community, as appropriate”.

Using the School Site Selection and Development - A guideline for determining appropriate school sites - October 2020, DPIE examined a number of options for a high school site and after careful and thorough evaluation of the criteria, chose a site based on a property called Ashby about 2 km from the centre of Bungendore Village and 2.1km from the existing primary school.

I emphatically support the selection of the Ashby site for the proposed Bungendore High School.

The property chosen as a result of the process followed by DPIE, is adjacent to the expanding northern and eastern communities of the village from which a substantial portion of the students are expected to come.

After extensive consultation, the DPIE prepared an agreement that was about to be signed by land holders when the process was stopped by a communication from the Dept of Education stating that they had chosen a different site in Bungendore – noting that it is not

their responsibility to choose the site for the school. On 15 June 2020, the same day that the Department of Planning sent the Access Deed to start works on the Tarago Road property, the Education Department emailed the Department of Planning:

“Hi... Just a short note to let you know we have confirmed our preferred site location for the new high school at Bungendore. The preferred site is the ‘Mick Sherd Sports Oval’ located adjacent to the existing Bungendore Primary School. Cheers...”

11 days later, on 26 June 2020, the Department of Education wrote to the Department of Planning. It simply said:

“the Bungendore project has taken a significant change in direction as discussed with [Department of Education staff]. The preferred site has swung towards the Mick Sherd oval and SINSW has and continues to engage with council and the Deputy Premier, both supporting the oval as the preferred site.”

I object to the DA because it is not the responsibility of the Department of Education to select a school site and no reason has been offered to the people of Bungendore explaining why the DPIE – the Department responsible for site selection and acquisition, was directed by a client agency to withdraw its recommendation and its intention to proceed with the purchase of Ashby.

I object because the site chosen by Mr Barilaro fails on a number key criteria:

- it is too small and it fails miserably in its duty to considering space for expansion in one of the most popular rural towns in Australia (recent ME Bank survey),
- it will cause congestion in an already busy part of town,
- it requires the re-possession of Crown Land on which Mick Sherd Oval is located and re-assigning it for school use contrary to the Governments original and valid intentions.
- recent soil samples show the site is contaminated with unacceptable levels of lead,
- It will fundamentally alter the character of the centre of the village,
- The bus interchange for the school will impinge on the hallowed ground of the Bungendore War Memorial,
- If the Jerrabomberra school project is used as a comparator, the site chosen by Mr Barilaro provides a lesser facility with a much greater price tag,
- it is the wrong shape (not being square or rectangular) being made up of parcels of land spread across the eastern section of the original town centre,
- It fails to take account of the future developments in renewable energy sources to enable the physical orientation of the school to meet the Governments zero emissions targets, and
- It puts political expediency ahead of an opportunity to create a best practice school on a green field site close to the likely student population and to expand the town in a carefully considered cohesive manner.

The Department of Education website states that the Department is responsible for the delivery of education – there is no reference to their role in school site selection once it has delivered its selection criteria to the agency responsible for the acquisition of the Government’s property assets – i.e., DPIE.

The writer is aware that once a site has been chosen by DPIE, the school infrastructure agency is responsible for the design, construction and development of the school precinct.

Apart from the email directing DPIE to cease work on the selection of the most suitable site for a high school in Bungendore as determined by DPIE and a further threatening email from the same organisation, the fact that no explanation or reason is given for the decision to change the preferred location is both insulting and dumbfounding.

This type of action draws into question the probity of the people involved for the following reasons:

- No reason was given for the change in preferred site,
- By any reasonable assessment it is an inferior site to the Ashby site,
- Requests for the reasoning and processes used to undermine the DPIE decision to go with Ashby solution have been steadfastly resisted by the Department of Education. Why? What are they keeping from us? We the people have a right to know how our taxes are being spent,
- Recently released documents in response to a FOI request to DPIE show the site chosen by Mr John Barilaro allegedly at the instigation of the QPRC and Dept of Education does not comply with the Education Departments own requirements

I note also that one of the Premier's Priorities is the provision of greener public spaces by increasing the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open and public space by 10% by 2023. The site for the Bungendore Highschool proposed by Mr. Barilaro runs contrary to the Premier's own priorities because it actually reduces the amount of quality green space adjacent to the town centre by reallocating it to a school.

The Premier makes great sense when she states that:

Quality green, open and public spaces are important to everyone. They are our free and publicly accessible parks, gardens and sports fields, walkable shady streets and plazas, and the libraries, museums and galleries at the heart of our communities.

Our public spaces make our local neighbourhoods more welcoming and accessible. They delight and connect people. They support our health and well-being, environmental resilience and thriving local economies. They're at the heart of everyday life.

We know that people who have access to green and public places are healthier and happier. We also know that for many people living in urban areas without a lush backyard, our parks and green spaces are vital to maintaining both physical and mental health.

It is deeply insulting for we the rate paying and tax paying people of Bungendore to be treated like cretins by heavy handed bureaucrats and politicians by presenting us with a fait accompli without providing any explanation for the sudden change of heart.

We the people of Bungendore will not forget what some in Government in NSW are attempting to do with the tranquility, greenspace and heritage of our township especially when a more desirable and cost-effective option is available.

I have not, and no associate of mine, has made any political donation to any person in the 2 years preceding this submission.

Yours faithfully,

David Webster, AM, CSC, Brigadier Retired