



Major Planning Assessments
Department of Planning
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

By Email

Monday 29 February 2016

To the Director,

Re: Australian Technology Park Redevelopment (SSD 15_7317)

I wish to make a submission on the Environmental Impact Statement provided by Mirvac for the redevelopment of Australian Technology Park (ATP) on behalf of the constituents of the electorate of Newtown and the NSW Greens.

I strongly object to this project on the grounds that this is an important public site that should not have been sold off, and now should not be developed by private interests. I have serious concerns about the impact the proposed development will have on our local community and am concerned about the flawed consultation process, the damage to nationally significant heritage, the transport implications, poor public access, commercialisation of public space, and the impact on local residents. More detail on each of these is outlined below.

I urge you to take seriously the concerns raised in this submission and other submissions made by members of the community both locally and with a connection to this important historical site.

I agree that I have not donated more than \$1000 to any political party, elected member, group or candidate within this financial year. I agree to the NSW Planning Department publishing my submission on their website, including any personal details it contains.

Flawed consultation process

At the heart of any EIS is adequate consultation. Unfortunately, I have no confidence in the consultation process undertaken by Mirvac in relation to the Australian Technology Park site to date. In fact, the consultation has been a sham, and many constituents have expressed to me their frustration at the utter lack of genuine consultation.

A glaring example of the serious flaws in the consultation process is found in the "Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary Report", where I am listed as one of the stakeholder groups engaged in consultation [p.4]. In reality there was no consultation with me. My only interaction with Mirvac that could possibly be categorized as 'consultation' was my presence at a regular meeting of the Alexandria Residents Action Group where Urban Growth and Mirvac were on the agenda as speakers. I was at the meeting as I was also on the agenda, so speak to another item.

To claim that this constitutes consultation with me is nothing short of untruthful.

The “Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary Report”

also states that “the feedback received during the community information session was generally supportive of the site’s development” [p.4]. This is patently false. The community members who attended were extremely concerned about most aspects of the development; there was a lot of uncertainty about the details and a lot of questions that remained unanswered.

Constituents in the Newtown electorate have written to me in disgust at the blatant disregard for the local community. One constituent writes: “I am appalled in a democratic society that the overwhelmingly strong and clear views of local residents are not being reflected in communications of this public authority.” Another resident writes: “I have lost faith in our ability to make any difference... ‘Community consultation,’...is simply a euphemism for pretending to listen with no intention of making any changes. Ticking the boxes, it’s called.”

A consultation evening at ATP was held on Wednesday 24th Feb 2016, again I was not formally invited to or informed of this consultation (a local resident alerted me to the meeting) and was unable to attend, however a member of our office was present. Those present had a host of genuine questions to raise at that consultation. However, Mirvac and JBA Urban sent a team of communications and consultation staff to answer questions, who had clearly had no role in actually preparing the EIS and were unfamiliar with even the most basic elements.

When community members queried how the conclusion that additional car parking spaces would have ‘no impact’ on surrounding streets had been reached, they were met with a denial that the EIS stated that there would be an increase in car parking. This is false, as the EIS clearly states that there will be an additional 121 car parking spaces, bringing the total to 1574 [p. 73]. The EIS also states that the increased parking would generate an additional 336 car trips per hour in the morning peak and an additional 257 car trips per hour in the evening peak [p. 74-75]. It is undeniable that this additional traffic will have an impact on surrounding streets.

If this consultation process were genuine, Mirvac and JBA would send the architects, planners and engineers who are working on the project to the community consultation sessions, to give substantive answers to legitimate questions – and more importantly to take feedback. As one frustrated community member said on the night: ‘it’s a perfectly designed system so that everyone can pass the buck to someone else’. No one can actually answer the questions, while the developer blames the government and the government blames the developer for not acting in the community interest.

Heritage significance

Australian Technology Park is a site of national and international significance. According to the NSW Government, the “Eveleigh workshops are the best collection of Victorian period railway workshops in Australia and are considered to have world heritage significance... They represent the pinnacle of manufacturing achievement in NSW and the equipment was once (and remains) the best collection of heavy machinery from the period. The buildings are fine examples of workshop architecture and are an important part of the historic fabric of the inner city.” [Source: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=4801102>]. The heritage significance of ATP extends well beyond its buildings and artifacts, to the site’s immense social and cultural heritage, which is also of national and international significance.

The EIS claims that “no Aboriginal sites are recorded in or near the site, and no Aboriginal places have been declared The works are unlikely to have any impact on Aboriginal objects of sites.” This is a very concerning statement that willingly turns a blind eye to the continuous occupation of the site by Aboriginal people over thousands of years. The EIS also ignores the

significant social history of Aboriginal people who were employed in the workshops and involved in trade union activities on site.

The EIS is light on detail and provides only a broad overview of the project. The architectural drawings are too schematic to determine whether this building will do justice to the wealth of cultural and architectural history of the site, or whether it will be just another mediocre office park.

The sale of the site to Mirvac means that there is increasingly fragmented management of the site. This makes the creation of an independent heritage oversight body imperative. That body should be tasked with the responsibility of protecting the heritage assets of the entire site, including the ATP, Eveleigh, the Chief Mechanical Engineers Office, and related sites of significance. An independent heritage body would be responsible for management of heritage displays, housing existing archival materials under one roof, and providing a mechanism for the various owners of the adjoining sites to manage heritage in a consistent and ongoing way.

The existing Conservation Management Plan must also be adhered to, and not watered down. Funding must be allocated to ensure its implementation.

An in situ archive of the history, including oral history and physical artifacts, should also facilitate access for the public and historians. The still-functioning blacksmith's shop should remain and could form part of a heritage trades centre.

Loss of innovation and technological focus

Using the site for Commonwealth Bank headquarters fundamentally alters the purpose of the site as a centre for technology and innovation. Currently, tenants are required to demonstrate that they have a focus on innovation and new technologies. It is unclear as to whether these tenants will be allowed to stay, or whether space will be let on a purely commercial basis. If startup tech companies are evicted from the site, there will be a significant brain drain from Sydney's inner city, and potentially from Australia.

At the community consultation held at ATP on Wednesday 24th February, a representative from our office asked whether the current technological and innovation focus would remain for tenants of ATP. JBA staff were unable to answer this question. When inquiries were followed up by email, Ross Hornsey, Director of Communications for JBA Urban stated that *"It is anticipated that a large proportion of the 10,000 CBA staff will be directly involved in information technology or financial technology ("fintech") functions. CBA will be able provide greater detail on numbers of workers, their roles in the organisation and their origin and travel arrangements closer to it taking up occupancy at ATP."*

While staff at the Commonwealth Bank may be using information technology, this does not equate with an engagement in technology innovation. Mr Horney's response makes it appear likely that many of the genuinely innovative tech start-ups currently tenanted at ATP could be evicted.

Transport

Traffic congestion on local roads and demand for parking are already too great in this area. In one of the most congested areas of the inner city – which also faces huge risks from proposed plans for WestConnex – we need integrated, transport planning and solutions that prioritise public and active transport. We need to ensure that this massive increase in activity doesn't push our local roads and local streets beyond breaking point.

There needs to be significant investment in cycling, pedestrian and public transport infrastructure. The EIS states that approximately \$19.9 million will be spent on “Road, Public Transport and Access” in lieu of making S.94 developer contributions. This money should be spent on upgrading Redfern Station – something that is a long overdue community need and will also be essential to cope with the additional 10,000 workers who are proposed to be working at the site.

Impact on local residents

Residents living near the site are rightly concerned about impact of increased traffic and parking on local roads, overshadowing by tall towers, and lack of public access to the site.

Inadequate consultation with local residents, local community groups and key stakeholders in the local area means that many of the impacts and concerns have not been taken into consideration in the preparation of this EIS. As such, it is essential that these concerns are addressed in detail in the response to the EIS submissions.

Public access and facilities

The ‘Community Building’ referred to in section 3.6.3 comprises of a childcare centre, gym, retail tenancy and commercial office. These uses do not facilitate public access, and should not be considered as such, as they require membership or payment for use. Expensive retail outlets, gyms, cafes and supermarkets are commercial spaces, and exclude anyone who is not there to spend money. At the community consultation on Wednesday 24th February, our office asked whether the childcare facilities would be reserved for local families, or whether Commonwealth Bank employees would have priority. The answer was that these details have not yet been determined.

The redevelopment of the site provides the perfect opportunity for construction of a bridge over the railway line. This would re-establish a much needed pedestrian and cycling link between Darlington and Alexandria. It is imperative that the crossing of the rail line is for bicycles and pedestrians only, not cars. Without these bridges being included in this construction, there is little hope of them ever being built given the fragmentation of the site due to privatisation.

Affordable housing contributions

The EIS states that 2% of the total cost of the development will be spent on delivering 17 affordable housing units in the Redfern-Waterloo area as per the Redfern Waterloo Affordable Housing Contributions plan. This is unacceptably low.

The housing affordability crisis in our inner city requires urgent action and serious commitments.

Affordable housing targets for new developments across the Central to Eveleigh project should be set in the range of 30% of new dwellings in all new developments, with dwellings permanently designated as affordable housing rather than being offered as affordable housing for 10 or 15 years then allowed to revert back to market rate private housing.

Conclusion

The community consultation carried out in the preparation for this EIS and surrounding the EIS exhibition period has given me little confidence that the developer is interested in working with or listening to the community concerns.

Given this, it is essential that the submissions made by individuals and community organisations impacted by this development are adequately reviewed and comprehensively addressed.

This site is too precious and too significant to simply allow private interests to dominate over broader public and community needs. I strongly urge you to heed the concerns raised by the community to ensure the ongoing protection and public access to this site.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Leong'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Jenny' and the last name 'Leong' clearly distinguishable.

Jenny Leong MP
Member for Newtown