

21 April 2011

The Director,
Strategic Assessments
Department of Planning
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Director,

Re: Huntlee New Town Stage 1 Subdivision and Works

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Huntlee New Town Stage 1 Subdivision and Works. This proposal has been reviewed by the Hunter New England Local Health Network (HNE LHN) Planning and Performance and Population Health teams.

HNE LHN (as HNE Health) has previously submitted three responses regarding the Huntlee New Town Development (dated 6 June 2007, 11 February 2008 and 29 October 2010).

Developments such as that proposed by the proponent are significant and can affect the health and well being of a community through impacting on:

- Access to health services
- The social determinants of health (including housing, education and employment)
- Health risk behaviours (including participation in physical activity and consumption of healthy food)
- Exposure to environmental health risks.

The following recommendations are provided in regard to the Huntlee New Town Stage 1 Subdivision and Works, and examine the proposed development in respect to these various influences on health and well being.

Access to Health Services

If approved this development will result in significant population growth in the area. As stated in our previous responses, new developments such as this are more likely to attract families with young children, and this along with the current ageing population, will increase demand for health services in the longer term. Depending on the extent of demand for services locally, it is likely that there will be a need, sometime in the future, to expand public health services in the Branxton area.

The current lack of public transport links to the Branxton area is of particular concern, especially given the distance to health and other services. Acute hospital facilities are some distance from the proposed Huntlee development:

- Singleton Hospital (23 Kms)
- Cessnock Hospital (25 Kms)
- Maitland Hospital (25 Kms)
- John Hunter Hospital and Calvary Mater Newcastle (55 Kms)

Across the Cessnock LGA there is also limited access to GPs and other specialist services (such as mental health and drug and alcohol services). In order to encourage location of these services, consideration should be given to the development of an integrated primary health care facility that could incorporate GPs, dental, nursing and allied health and some outreach and specialist services. HNE LHN

would like to take this opportunity to reiterate previous requests that 0.2 ha of land be set aside for such a health facility as part of the proposed development in the Branxton area.

Irrespective of that request, access to health services in this area, that must be considered as part of the considerations for this development include access to:

- GPs, during and after hours for medical care
- Aged care beds (particularly low care residential beds and aged care packages)
- Affordable and available transport options
- Private healthcare providers such as dentists, allied health professionals, alternate health practitioners and optometrists
- Support health care providers such as pharmacies

Environmental Health

In relation to environmental health concerns, consideration should be given to protecting the health of the community from potential environmental health hazards, which may be created through the future development. As illustrated in the *Healthy Urban Development Checklist*, health is influenced by the quality of our environments (natural, built, social and cultural) and how they are managed and maintained is paramount in protecting human health and the health of the environment. To alleviate the key environmental and public health concerns the following recommendations need to be considered. These include:

- Provision of a reticulated water supply and sewerage system to alleviate environmental and public health concerns. The reticulated water supply must be of sufficient quantity and quality for the population size. Any increase in population reinforces the need for the water supply to meet water quality standards as per the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 2004.
- An assessment of the slope, soils and geotechnical characteristics should occur to inform planning for a suitable and sustainable on-site waste water disposal system to ensure the protection of public health and the environment. The local Council's installation and approval requirements must be considered in this process.
- NSW Health supports the installation and use of rainwater tanks for all **non-potable uses** where there is a reticulated potable supply available to residents. These uses could include garden watering, washing machine and car washing. The collection of rainwater conserves the potable supply and assists in reducing the potential impacts of stormwater.
- A mosquito risk assessment should be included in the planning of Huntlee New Town. An assessment of the terrain's features will ensure any potential mosquito breeding sites are identified. A mosquito management plan should also be developed incorporating artificial wetlands and addressing the potential impacts of individual detention sites discussed in the plan. By reducing mosquito numbers, a mosquito management plan will reduce both nuisance biting and the potential for disease transmission in the population

Health promotion – health risk behaviours and social determinants of health

In relation to health risk behaviours and social determinants of health, a number of recommendations were previously provided and included:

Connectivity and public transport

Given the proposed development of Huntlee, it is essential that access to public transport be reviewed to allow equitable access to employment opportunities and education and health services. Improved public transport in and to this area will also enable: connectivity between the proposed development and the existing communities of Branxton and North Rothbury; the creation of an environment that allows for ageing in place; and, a reduction in car dependency.

Planning for the area should include allowances for direct bus links between the Huntlee area and Cessnock, Maitland and Singleton. It is recommended that the proponent liaise with bus service providers and Transport NSW early in the development process to discuss options for public transport routes and links. Current and proposed railway stations and bus stops through the area should comply with Crime Prevention through Environmental Design principles and provide shelter/shading for passengers.

Housing: affordability and ageing in place

The Plan mentions that there will be a mix of housing types including affordable housing. HNE Health recommends affordable housing options be located where access to public transport and community services is maximised. Housing appropriate for ageing in place, such as accessible, low maintenance dwellings, should also be located close to public transport and community services and amenities.

Open space and community facilities

When planning areas for open space and community facilities, HNE Health recommends that these facilities be available for the whole community to use, have flexible/mixed uses (for instance, be able to be used by a range of age groups and for different purposes) and be positioned so that resident access is maximised (400-800m from all residential lots). We commend the commitment to provide footpaths on both sides of the street and to providing cycle ways. HNE Health also recommends that footpaths be shaded by appropriate street trees and that they predictably link residents with destinations via a grid street design.

To encourage the building of social capital, it is recommended that all open space areas be freely accessible to the public. This will enable equitable access to open space and community facilities, encouraging active transport (walking/cycling for transport) and planned physical activity across all population groups within the community. It is also recommended that public domain areas are provided with wide footpaths, shade trees and ample seating.

Traditional neighbourhood design

HNE Health commends the proponent's adoption of the Traditional Neighbourhood design represented by mixed use, pedestrian friendly communities of varied population. This design is more conducive to the promotion of health and wellbeing than other designs such as suburban sprawl. It is recommended that mixed use facilities include provision for retail outlets which provide affordable healthy food options.

Access to Fresh, Healthy Food

The opportunity to create a community garden in the precinct areas is highly encouraged as this would improve the local availability of affordable/healthy food and facilitate increased physical activity through active transport and less car dependency. In addition, the provision of a public space suitable for farmers markets would increase access to fresh, local fruit and vegetables, and reduces air pollution associated with food transport.

Community cohesion and consultation

HNE Health recommends ongoing community consultation throughout all stages of the development of the Town and each Precinct, as this will encourage improved community cohesion and build social capital. Community feedback on current access to services and community facilities should be sought, given the significant increase in population and development being proposed.

Importantly this consultation should include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the area. Ongoing consultation with the Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council is of particular importance.



Access to services

Given the scale of the predicted population increase, effective ongoing consultation will need to be undertaken with service providers to ensure the needs of the future community are met.

The above recommendations are still valid for the development of the proposed Huntlee site.

HNE Population Health has recently been involved in research examining what constitutes a liveable community. Guidelines have been developed which support many of the recommendations provided above. I am pleased to include an electronic copy of the *Building Liveable Communities in the Lower Hunter Region* with this submission, which may be passed onto the proponent.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like any further information.

Yours sincerely

Kim Browne
Director, Population Health
Health Reform Transitional Organisation Northern

ⁱ NSW Department of Health. (2009). *Healthy Urban Development Checklist*. NSW Department of Health. For access: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2010/hud_checklist.html