

Analysis of the options

The key factors to be considered in making the decision and ratings on how each site addresses these factors are set out on the attached table (Att 6.) The factors chosen are those seen as being important in planning terms, and values have been attributed to how satisfactorily each option addresses these factors.

This technique, while open to discussion about individual ratings can be valuable in making overall assessment of planning issues.

Transport Analysis

The "bottom of the hill" (BOH) options are poorly linked to the proposed rail station, the location of which is broadly fixed due to the geometry of the rail line in the vicinity. In the long term this is clearly a disadvantage for a centre that is planned to be not only a retail precinct but a town centre with all the services that go with that for a wide range of people...doctors, government services, cinemas etc; all services likely to be used by those with limited access to personal transport.

However the BOH options are closer to Sparks Road and have less potential impact of traffic intrusion on adjoining areas. However this offset in part by the impact of the east west link road through to the Wyong Employment Zone.

The compact nature of the centre, the good potential for a strong nodal interchange between public and private transport around the station and the strengths of the links to the west (see next analysis) gives the TOH option a clear advantage in this area, with the MOH being better than the BOH options.

Design and Aesthetics

The protection of the green ridge is an issue often discussed. In this and in environmental matters generally there is little difference between the options. The BOH options have residential development, of a medium to high density nature on the area around the ridge which will be little different to the massing of the TOH option. The latest revision of the TOH option, which is what is being reviewed here is compact and keeps to the west of the ridge.

As this is a long term plan one item that seems to have been down played previously is the aesthetic value of the rail being in cutting alongside the town centre. By and large rail lines and town centres do not meld well together and the huge opportunity of having a rail line that does not visually clash with the town centre is a great advantage of the TOH option.

The design for the TOH option is clearly a more fully developed town centre/retailing design, whereas the BOH scheme proposed is a conventional car based retailing centre similar to a number that already exist in the area. The TOH option aligns more closely with the stated desires of Council in the principles adopted for the Centre than the other options.

Finally, as briefly mentioned in the transport analysis the link to the west is a key issue for the future and this is enhanced by the TOH option, this being at grade without any conflict with the train lines.

Economic Issues

While for the two preceding categories the TOH option is clearly superior, this option is less clear cut with the bottom of the hill being marginally preferred primarily due to the fact that this is closest to the

existing major entry at Sparks Road (but further from the future link road) and the fact that the design is for a conventional car based centre that is similar to existing shopping centres and less of a town centre, therefore easier for a developer to move ahead in the short term.

The cost of the TOH option will also be marginally higher due to the earthworks involved however Council reports show the difference to be not significant.

Discussion

In this analysis emphasis has been placed on the long term health of the town centre, as a focal point for the local community for social, business as well as shopping purposes.

The analysis undertaken has attempted to take into account input from as many interested parties as time has permitted as well as the written reports previously produced.

In 2002 a working group was set up to assist Council in the design of the town centre. This comprised Landcom and Council. Following a series of studies and an exhibition of a variant of the MOH option, the working group appointed BN consultants to undertake a peer review of the exhibited masterplan and this identified some significant concerns with the proposal. Following a further series of consultations BN produced a master plan for the Middle of the Hill option. Landcom were not in favour of this option.

Following this a working party comprised of representatives from Council, the Premier's Department and Landcom set up an expert design committee to review all the options and make recommendations on the best location of the centre. This review recommended the TOH option exhibiting a new approach: a shorter Main Street which allowed the centre to be more compact, reduce earthworks and reduce the impact on the main ridge. The Working Party endorsed this proposal and in collaboration with the Department of Planning (DoP) employed GM Urban Design Pty Ltd to detail the TOH proposal.

This proposal was recommended to Council in May 2006 by Council officers but rejected by Council in favour of the MOH option.

The recommendation of the design review and subsequently Council officers to proceed with the TOH option is noted as is the position of the Council in its recent resolution.

The TOH option is clearly the best in design and planning terms with this having the best potential to be an exciting vibrant centre for a wide range of users that provides, as well as good shopping, an interesting town centre for the community.

One point previously used against this location is the ridge line argument. However there is unlikely to be significant difference between the residential proposed in the BOH options for the ridge site and the commercial uses proposed in the TOH option. With the shorter Main Street than considered in earlier options the town centre keeps to the west of the key part of the ridge.

The BOH option is the simplest to put into place in the very short term but its distance from the proposed railway station, poor relationship with the rail line, poor access to the west of the rail line and lack of difference from many others centres in the area are its drawbacks. In the long term this option is seen as being inferior.

The compact bottom of the hill option did not have significant benefits over the BOH option.

The MOH option provides a compromise between the other options but is seen as not having the benefits of either of the other two schemes while not addressing their shortcomings.

In summary, the TOH option is the clearly the best overall option and this is exemplified by the scoring set out in Att 6 where there is a very significant difference between the top of the hill option and the others.

Issues Going Forward

There are a number of points that should be carefully considered in the development of detailed plans on the site and these are:

1. A careful analysis of the operation of the modal interchange around the railway station with the location of bus stops, commuter parking and parking for employees and shoppers and customers of the centre needs to be analysed.
2. Analysis of the servicing requirements of the Centre.
3. The preliminary design of the rail station does not appear to be harmoniously designed with the surrounds and in particular does not make best use of the topography. This should be reviewed.
4. More detail is required on the treatment of the public spaces in the Main Street.
5. Careful attention has to be made to the activation of the frontages on to Main Street and the "sleeving" of the DDS and Supermarkets.
6. The "underground" parking should be a key feature of the site from its outset.
7. The vista from Sparks Road is crucial and should read as a "village" town centre rather than a conventional shopping centre.
8. Careful treatment of the rail line in the areas on the base of the hill will diminish the poor appearance that this will have on the area.
9. The overall design of the centre should be commensurate with a significant town centre rather than the more common car based shopping centre.
10. Consideration has to be made about mechanisms that will enhance an appropriate level of competition in the centre.
11. The design of the town centre should take into consideration any implications of the review being chaired by the Premier's Department of the provision of Social Infrastructure in the region. The key issues arising from this relate to the need for the Centre to have the key Social Infrastructure services located in close proximity to shopping and the transport nodal interchange for the centre.

Recommendation

This review recommends the "top of the hill" option be adopted for the development of the centre and the basis of further planning for the State Significant Site at Warnervale.

Thanks

I wish to express my thanks for the support given to this review by Councillors and staff at the Wyong Shire Council, the Department of Planning, and the Premier's Department, and local landowners, their representatives and their professional consultants.

Peter Seamer
15 September 2006

Atts. 1 to 6