

Submission re Housing Affordability Schemes - A Case Study

Sydney City Council and the NSW Department of Housing are jointly proposing the redevelopment of 2 sites in Glebe. The first is a 20,000 square metre site on Bay Street owned by the Sydney City Council and occupied by it as a works depot. The second site is a Department of Housing estate comprising 16,000 square metres bordered by Cowper, Wentworth and Bay Streets, Glebe, owned by the Department of Housing on which are situated 129 flats occupied by Department of Housing tenants.

In respect of Bay Street site, it is proposed that the existing depot be demolished and rebuilt as part of a mixed residential, industrial and commercial development.

In respect of the Department of Housing flats, it is proposed that the existing 129 units be demolished, and replaced with new flats.

The resulting development on the combined sites is to comprise about 700 residential units plus the rebuilt depot plus some commercial development. The proposed development would be a 'Crown Development' and not subject to planning controls.

The Council and the Department of Housing are presently investigating the financial feasibility of the project and envisage that the project will be eligible for funding and/or subsidies pursuant to the Federal Housing Affordability Fund and the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

There are many 'Brownfield' sites such as the Bay Street depot where the establishment of residential development would be welcomed. The same cannot be said for redevelopment of the Department of Housing flats.

The Department of Housing estate was constructed in the 1950s as a walk up flat development. The flats are solid double brick, with balconies, established gardens and mature trees. New lifts were recently installed to service several of the blocks of flats. The flat sizes are generous by today's standards. The neighbourhood is quiet and settled and many of the tenants are long term residents of Glebe.

The land adjoins the Glebe estate and its density and use are consistent with surrounding development. The area is unique in that it comprises a largely intact medium density residential neighbourhood close to the CBD. Most other suburbs

close to the CBD, such as Pyrmont and Chippendale, are mixed use areas containing high density development.

The subject land and surrounding development have been consistently used and occupied as low income residential housing for about 140 years. The Glebe estate, which the subject land adjoins, was preserved by decades of benign neglect and more recently renovated conservatively by the Department of Housing in the 1980s for occupation by public tenants.

The proposed development of 700 units, plus industrial and commercial usages, on 36,000 square metres, will far exceed the density of the adjacent Glebe Estate. The Glebe Estate comprises some 1500 dwellings including in-fill development and is situated on land comprising about one third of the suburb of Glebe.

The proposed redevelopment would be out of character with and would dislocate an otherwise settled and cohesive community.

Affordability

The affordable housing scheme requires that a single tenant have a minimum income of \$39,351 to be eligible for a residential tenancy. A sole parent with 3 children would be required to have a minimum income of \$82,885 to be eligible. Up to two thirds of residents in this part of Glebe have incomes of less than \$500 per week (2006 Census). Up to 38% of residents are single parents with dependant children (2006 Census). The National Rental Affordability Scheme subsidises landlords rather than tenants, and the affordable housing scheme would not be affordable for most of the present residents of this part of Glebe. Federal funding and/or subsidies would be better deployed in areas where they will actually serve to reduce rather than increase rents payable by tenants.

One aim of the project appears to be to change the social mix of residents in this part of Glebe. It is said by those who espouse the project that its purpose is to provide 'key worker' housing although there is provision in the eligibility criteria for Federal funding/subsidies which would allow discrimination on the basis of occupation. In any event the trend appears to be that the labour force in Sydney is moving away out of the CBD.

It is also said that the project aims to improve social integration of the area. Glebe already is very well integrated in terms of the mix of income, ethnicity and age of its residents, unlike other Sydney suburbs such as Point Piper and Airs.

The project as presently conceived would not be suitable for the large number of children who live on the Glebe estate, most of who live in accommodation which provides some private outdoor space. The increase in traffic generated by the project would also present a hazard to those children. Traffic is fairly light in the area because many of the public tenants do not have cars. Similarly, demand for parking does not generally exceed supply. That situation is likely to change with an influx of better off tenants. Site constraints, including the difficulty in excavating the Bay Street site because of ground water, would limit the provision of parking for the project.

There seems to be no pressing need to commandeer existing public housing land into the affordable housing scheme. There are many other sites which could be used more effectively for affordable housing, including the Tooth's Brewery site in Chippendale, and the Harold Park site in Glebe, as well as many smaller Brownfield sites. A proposal which involves the demolition of existing flats is contrary to the principles of ecologically sustainable development because of the loss of embodied energy in the existing structure. Such demolition and the dislocation of residents does not seem to be an effective use of Federal funding initiatives, particularly since the resulting development would not be affordable to residents (apart from some Department of Housing premises which are proposed to be incorporated into the development for those tenants who wish to return after the completion).

In circumstances where the effect of Federal funding and/or subsidies will be to replace existing publicly owned low income housing with public/private developments with much higher densities and lesser amenities it is submitted that it would be inappropriate to provide such funding. The destruction of the neighbourhood, the dislocation of community and the loss of people's homes is too high a price to pay.

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