

**A 2009 - NELSON BAY 2030 STRATEGY**  
**FOR AN AESTHETICALLY APPEALING, WELL MANAGED AND WELCOMING TOWN**  
**A contribution to discussion – August 2009**

The Nelson Bay 2030 Project (2009) is welcomed as a means of profiling and planning a sustainable future for Nelson Bay. This can be achieved as an appealing and welcoming town, above all for its resident population, the business sector, and for those who visit.

The reactivation of the Project with the workshop of June 22/09, provides new expectations and also opportunities to re-assess both the scale, scope and central themes of the June 2008 Draft Strategy and what now can be achieved in the immediate and medium-term through this new 2030 process.

This contribution will focus on what can be achieved in the short to medium-term and with the moderate levels of funding required. A future built environment will depend on market place investment which can be encouraged through an appealing, well managed and welcoming town. The 2030 Project should address this.

However, there are a number of what should be priority remedial and corrective works that will give the town the appealing ambience and amenity it deserves and before the projection of grand plans that are less likely to be funded or to come to fruition, even over many decades.

The traffic and parking management of the town is one such priority. The dominance and impacts of traffic on the town, particularly on pedestrian amenity, needs more than the usual engineering on-site quick-fix. It needs to be holistic in its scope and outcomes and should be addressed now. The basic starting points to a 2030 Project should be:

**1. Identifying, protecting and enhancing natural context and location -**

Nelson Bay is located in a small natural bay-side basin. The topographical context includes the verdant back-drop of Kurrara Hill, a sloping gradient to the water of the Bay and gently elevated ridgelines to the east and west. This natural context needs acknowledgement and prominence in a future plan.

**2. A Development Control Plan (DCP) –**

A new DCP must apply strict sustainability criteria for innovative design in all aspects of the plan, a built environment that is aesthetically and architecturally appealing, and for carbon foot-print reduction. Achieving this vision will require new building height controls (for example, five storey development at 16.5 metres rather than 15 metres), for improved quality in design and architectural merit, site concessions to open space, pathways accessibility, and landscaping..

**3. Nelson Bay traffic and parking management would include:**

The town is becoming one big congested parking lot, and certainly not conducive to the pedestrian access, flows and amenity so often being expressed as desirable for such a small and manageable centre. The 'car culture' pervades and distorts the livability of our cities, towns and villages. We are all affected by its advantages and disadvantaging features and the latter is being compounded for as long as we allow it with consequences for health, lifestyle, planning, and the town's economy.

People love their cars and that's OK, but with creative focus this can be managed:

- Vehicles can become a blight on our town-scape, this is particularly so at peak times but not only. The population growth projections for Nelson Bay guarantee growing and continuing pressures on the town
- Visionary management can give a small town like Nelson Bay the alternative amenity it needs
- The surrender of town street-scapes and spaces to vehicles can and must be reversed
- An alternative strategy can give us a more appealing town with enjoyable pedestrian amenity, a healthy town environment and safe access in a welcoming townscape.

This new 2030 Project should begin with that which is impacting detrimentally now on the amenity and the appeal of the town and as an outcome, on local business.

## 2.

Traffic and parking management is the priority that can begin to favourably transform the town by making it more appealing to local consumers. This should be a priority, will be cost-effective, and should include:

- Re-assessment of Town Centre boundaries – currently these are constraints on a holistic approach, EG, some of the town's main thorough-fares and streets, Stockton (south), Church, Laman, Tomaree, Dowling, Government Road and Victoria Parade, are excluded from the 'Town Centre'.
- The 40k Zone to include Stockton, Church Sts and Dowling Street west. The current 40K Zone entry points need to be moved outward from the town centre. This would demonstrate a well-managed town and puts further responsibility on driver behaviour. Large on-road signage is essential. Traffic management and controls that induce and command respect will exclude any need, in a well-managed town, for traffic lights.
- Closure of the left turn from Victoria Parade into Stockton Street – while eliminating 12 car places, this will also achieve three of the main objectives for a better managed, more appealing town, these are:
  - An end to the peak time gridlock that can paralyse traffic movement in the town centre of Stockton and Magnus Streets to the Stop Sign on Donald.
  - The achievement of a town square on the northern end of Stockton Street, (approx. 50m long X 20m wide) that should include street furniture, landscaping and overhead shading/shelter to create, not a mall, but open space and a small 'people's meeting place', and to also achieve.....
  - A focal point for pedestrian connection and flows to and from the foreshore and which, with the overhead bridge access, would meet the demand for greater interaction and connectivity between the town centre and the foreshore.
- Appropriate traffic calming measures – chicanes and speed humps where appropriate on main thorough-fares, including Church and Donald Street west, to further improve and provide safe pedestrian access.
- A Dowling Street town centre by-pass – on-road signage directing east and west bound traffic to a Dowling Street town centre by-pass, discouraging transit via the town centre and the foreshore.
- Abandonment of the Yacaaba Street extension to the foreshore – holistic traffic management as proposed here would require abandonment of any proposal that directs more traffic to the town centre as the extension proposal would certainly do. Any extension would be a traffic corridor only, making it unsafe and undesirable as a pedestrian access to the foreshore.
- Complete the Donald Street east carpark – this is not a favourable site for car-parking but it is there and most likely we have to live with it and the poor planning that made it possible. Take it to multi-levels and sell-off the remainder of the site to help meet the cost of construction. Multi-level parking stations are sorely needed, but despite being high cost projects, and as difficult as these are to fund, they are still included here as central to effective parking management and as support for the business and tourism sectors. Comparisons with other towns and cities are irrelevant.
- A second multi-level car parking station – on either the present Donald Street west site or preferably on the Bowling Club's car-parking site. There could be ground level parking for Club members and patrons, with the remainder for public parking alleviating traffic pressures on the town and providing safe pedestrian access to the commercial centre. The sale of Donald St. west would be an option, as would other properties, to help pay for a second station. This is so vital for best practice management.
- Abandon the Donald Street east supermarket proposal – to direct major new traffic flow to this part of the town centre would be counter-productive for good, sound traffic management and town planning. The transfer of an equivalent Coles parking clientele to this site would cause chaotic traffic congestion. A supermarket on this site would undermine and set back sustainable traffic management and planning into the long-term for Nelson Bay, probably for decades.

3.

#### **4. Improved town amenity and beautification –**

- Town and foreshore streets and roads should be tree-lined, with landscaped median strips and pedestrian refuge areas to facilitate safe access. Covered and sheltered areas with street furniture in Magnus and Stockton Streets. Improved town amenity and beautification will attract local consumers to the centre.

#### **5. Infrastructure improvements for best practice outcomes –**

- Improved waste and recycling management to sustainable standards for all businesses and special events
- Energy and water efficiencies with emphasis on reducing power and water usage and the town's carbon footprint
- A one-stop medical centre and early construction of a new Ambulance Station
- A focal meeting point and monument to local history. Depicting indigenous presence and culture, European discovery (Cook-1770) and early settlement (Cromarty-1824). The naming of Nelson Bay from Teramby Village to the local use of Lady Nelson's Bay, officially to Nelson Bay. Accompanied by engravings of Aboriginal figures and motifs, and of the vessels that have played a role in local history; including the Endeavour, Lady Nelson, Francis, Lambton, Fame and William the Fourth. Our local history is reasonably represented in the available literature but unlike well managed towns, there is no physical focus or monument to local history. This is a failing that must be corrected.

#### **6. For an end to sewage ocean outfall –**

Combined town and council representation to the New South Wales Government for an end to the sewage waste water outfall at Boulder Bay and the upgrade of waste water treatment to potable standard with a view to its reuse. The current ocean outfall is an unacceptable and unsustainable imposition on the Port Stephens / Great Lakes Marine Park and severely compromises both the sustainability and therefore the marketability of Nelson Bay, the Tomaree Peninsula and Port Stephens.

#### **7. For a representative Nelson Bay Advisory Body -**

Nelson Bay urgently needs such a body that will provide a consultative and effective advisory role on the town's infrastructure, its planning and governance.

Such a focused advisory body is currently absent. As a result the town's capacity is fragmented, leading to ad hoc outcomes with dependency on external roles, influences and decision-making. The town needs a capacity to help provide leadership and solutions to town issues and its future. This 2030 Project must see an end to the indecision, malaise and limitations on local town responsibility. The need for a town advisory body is urgent.

#### **8. With 'visionary' grandeur –**

We've had more than ample servings of 'visionary' grandeur. Much of it, though not all, totally out of context with the small natural bay-side basin the town occupies, some examples of it so far include:

- Ten and eight storey blue glass, sealed corporate style towers and a ten storey tower on Donald St. east (2007/08), and before that (1988/89), a 15 storey hotel and 12 storey towers in Magnus Street.
- A floating (joy flight) helipad off the marina break-wall.
- A state of the art dolphin interpretive centre (1990's) on the eastern groyne: needed but never adequately funded and certainly not to be located on the eastern groyne.
- Re-alignment of Stockton St.
- Extension of Yacaaba and Magnus Streets, both would certainly exacerbate traffic congestion.
- The ambitious, although feasible, Lands Department / PSC plan to 'improve' the Nelson Bay foreshore with business investment, an underground car park proposal and reconfiguration of foreshore access roads. Traffic congestion and the parking station remain very contentious.

4.

Thankfully not too many, if any of the above are ever likely to make it into reality, they are either totally out of context, never to be funded, or just simply overblown grandiose proposals and ideas.

Nelson Bay needs to think deeply about its context and its future, what can and can't be crammed into its tiny dimensions, and what can be achieved with limited funding which is increasingly difficult to obtain.

Achievable proposals, including a new Development Control Plan, must be registered in a future statutory Local Environmental Plan (2010/11) for immediate, medium and long-term implementation.

**9. The suspended June 2008 Draft Nelson Bay 2030 Strategy -**

- This controversial draft purports to identify 1200 new dwellings and 1500 new jobs for Nelson Bay, quoting the NSW Lower Hunter Regional Development Strategy as its source. These figures, gleaned from the LHRD Strategy, refer to the entire Tomaree Peninsula, not Nelson Bay alone. This is an error that needs to be addressed.
- The draft fails dismally to address town traffic and parking management and it also avoids the related congestion problems and the practical proposals that will provide open pedestrian places and connection to the foreshore. The draft, in fact, exacerbates the problems. Any vigilant observer can see, in this draft, a town jam-packed with vehicles and with proposals that would very substantially increase them. It submits entirely to an unmitigated car culture and shows inclinations of support for it.
- This draft is loaded with rhetorical 'promise' about the commercial benefits from erroneous future population and job figures, as well as about people's amenity and open spaces, while it actually provides for none. Rather than projecting achievable future promise, this draft is yet another lost and squandered opportunity for Nelson Bay to get its act together. Glean from it what is relevant and achievable. The re-activated 2030 process is welcome if it avoids the excess, the grandiose and the unachievable vision of the June 2008 Draft.
- The opportunity has arrived to get it right in a staged process for a sustainable town. We must not let this opportunity pass us by.