

Cockburn Coast Dialogue Urban Design Issues

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Cockburn Coast Dialogue - Urban design issues

Contents

1. Introduction
2. The need for a more sustainable approach to urban design
3. The key principles of sustainable urban design
4. Specific issues
 - 4.1 *Precinct 1: North Coogee and the former Fremantle tip site*
 - 4.2 *Precinct 2 and 3: CY O'Connor Reserve and the power station environs*
 - 4.3 *Precinct 4: Rockingham Road pocket*
 - 4.4 *Precinct 5: Beeliar Regional Park*
 - 4.5 *Precincts 6 and 7: Woodman Point Regional Park and North Woodman Point coastal reserve*
5. Summary

Cockburn Coast Dialogue - Urban design issues

1. Introduction

Landcorp has engaged Mackay Urbandesign to prepare a discussion paper along with an associated fact sheet and presentation to the Cockburn Coast Dialogue participants, on the urban design issues that need to be considered in respect to the planning of various precincts on the Cockburn coast.

2. The need for a more sustainable approach to urban design

If we want to leave the world and lifestyle we create to our children and their children, it needs to be more sustainable. Our suburban sprawl is not sustainable. Our suburban sprawl is bad for our health, bad for our wealth, and bad for the natural environment.

More specifically, the low density suburban sprawl we have created in Perth over the last 50 years has:

- Demanded long lengths of expensive infrastructure, the maintenance of which will be an additional cost burden for future generations who already face the prospect of having to support the swollen cohorts of retired baby-boomers.
- Demanded that we travel further and further for jobs, services, education and recreation.
- Created a dependence on our cars, which are expensive to buy and run, and damage our health and the natural environment.
- Created isolation where people don't have access to a car through health, disability, or poverty.
- Created an urban environment that cannot support public transport without a massive cost to the taxpayer
- Created an environment where people no longer walk and gain the associated health benefits. Medical experts are already saying that because of endemic obesity, this generation of parents will be the first to routinely bury their children.
- Created a social environment where people no longer talk to their neighbours and then complain that there's no sense of community.
- Created an environment that encourages delinquent behaviour through boredom and lack of opportunity.
- Created a city that is divided between the haves and the have-nots where those who are most in need of access to jobs, services, education and recreation are least able to live close to them.
- Devoured hundreds of square kilometres of bushland and farmland.

- Polluted our rivers and the air that we breathe.

If we are to avoid making these problems worse, we need to change the way we plan our urban areas. We need a more sustainable approach to urban design.

3. The key principles of sustainable urban design

The key principles of a more sustainable approach to urban environment include:

- Providing more choice in where to live and how to live by allowing a greater diversity of housing types – family houses, cottages, apartments, townhouses, etc.
- Providing more choice in how to get around – on foot, by bike, car, bus or train.
- Creating a street network that is direct and interconnected so that travel distances are short enough for people to choose to walk if they so choose.
- Integrating new development with the existing urban environment, so that we can unite communities rather than creating a divide between old and new, and allowing the ‘newcomers’ to provide custom for, and benefit from, existing local services.
- Establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between land use and the transportation system; this includes creating opportunities for more people to live close to and, thus, use the public transport system, and locating commercial uses where they have exposure to passers-by.
- Improving access to local jobs and services whether by allowing more people to live close to them by increasing residential densities and improving walkability, or by creating a better network of local activity centres.
- Creating urban places in the right location, with enough of a critical mass, to attract a broad range of useful and desirable local services, and desirable enough for businesses to establish themselves there and create local jobs.
- Creating attractive and desirable places because they are more likely to endure for future generations if people want to be there.
- Adapting the urban environment to best fit with the environmental constraints.
- Using urban land more efficiently. Urban land is a valuable and finite resource.
- Creating adequate catalysts for the redevelopment of redundant, unattractive or contaminated land, or land that has been left over because it was previously considered too hard to develop.

4. Specific issues

If a more sustainable built environment is the desired outcome, all of the previous principles of sustainable urban design must apply. In the case of the Cockburn coast, the most significant issues from an urban design perspective are:

- ***Making the most effective use of the metropolitan coastline which is a popular but finite resource.*** In the last ten years, there have been no new major developments on the metropolitan coast, despite the fact that there has been a significant increase in the population who use the coast, or would like to live near the coast. During that period, expensive residential subdivisions have continued to spread along our coastline.

The majority of people in Perth need access to the coast for more than just a swim and place to lay their towel. There are very few areas of vacant or underutilised land left to create people-orientated places on our coast, and existing coastal communities are reluctant to see any further development that might attract ‘outsiders’.

The reality is that our coast is becoming the reserve of those who can most afford to live there, and those residents are eager to preserve the value of their investment by ensuring that no further supply of development can take place to soak up the high demand for a coastal lifestyle.

The Cockburn coast is one of the last opportunities to create a vibrant regional coastal destination with a range of recreational choices.

- ***Planning and designing an urban environment that works for public transport.*** Providing public transport is important because the demand for road space and car-parking will only increase with a growing population trying to get to the beach. Furthermore, many of Perth’s residents and visitors do not have access to a car, and that proportion of the population is likely to grow as the population ages and the cost of car ownership increases.

However, public transport infrastructure is very expensive. The provision of public transport needs to be supported by an urban environment that:

- Allows public transport to be direct, frequent, and relatively fast.
 - Provides enough fare-paying people to ensure that the buses/trains/trams are well-used. That is, an urban environment that is dense enough within easy walking distance of the public transport system.
 - Locates destinations – the places where people travel to in order to shop, work, learn or play – within easy walking distance of public transport.
- ***Creating the settings for a diverse range of lifestyles.*** Contrary to public opinion, not everyone wants to live the “great Australian dream” on a quarter acre lot with a shed at the back. We are all different, we have different needs and we aspire to live our lives in different ways. Furthermore, we shouldn’t be so arrogant as to assume that the lifestyles we pass on to our children will suit them.

A major challenge in creating any new urban area is to ensure that the right settings are created to encourage housing of different types at different prices so that the place's appeal is broadened to different people both now and in the future.

- ***Ensuring the most appropriate relationship to Fremantle.*** Although the land being considered in the Cockburn coast dialogue process is within the administrative area of the City of Cockburn, the physical reality is that any development in the Cockburn coastal area will effectively be Fremantle's southern suburbs and provide valuable 'up-stream' catchment for the Fremantle city centre. Even if the development on the Cockburn coast includes a reasonable proportion of services and other employment and recreational activities, Fremantle will still be a major draw.

Apart from being Perth's second city, Fremantle is a strategic regional centre and with that designation comes an expectation that it contains important activities – and lots of them. To justify the establishment of major activities in any centre, the centre needs an adequate catchment. Development on the Cockburn coast will make a major contribution to Fremantle's catchment and help to ensure that Fremantle attracts and retains the major activities – whether they be health, commercial, education or recreational – that people in the southwest of the metropolitan area expect.

However, the Cockburn coast's contribution to the Fremantle catchment is only of value if the Cockburn coast residents can get to Fremantle. Therefore, the road and public transport links into Fremantle are extremely important.

- ***Ensuring the most appropriate coastal response for each part of the coast.*** Not all of the coast is the same; some beaches are better than others. One of the broad challenges for the Cockburn coast is to ensure that the urban response to the coast should reflect the character of the adjacent coast. For example:
 - Beach-related activity centres should be located adjacent to the best, most popular and safest beaches.
 - Man-made structures should be located to avoid adverse impacts on the best beaches.
 - The width of the foreshore reserve should be wider, and of an appropriate landscape character, at the best beaches where the demand for recreational space is highest.

Additionally, for each of the precincts identified in ***Figure 1: Precinct plan***, the following questions need to be addressed to ensure the best possible urban design outcome:

4.1 *Precinct 1: North Coogee and the former Fremantle tip site*

The urban design issues that need to be specifically addressed in Precinct 1 include:

- What development concessions (density and height) are required to justify the relocation of the existing industrial uses?

- How can the planned road structure best accommodate the existing industrial uses until they relocate?
- How do people from the south pass through the precinct to get to Fremantle to use, and thereby enhance, the range of available services?
- What local road network is required to allow people to walk directly to the beach, public transport and local services?
- What density (and height) of development is required to viably support the establishment of local shops, services, and public transit?
- What density of development can be realistically achieved in the context of a wide foreshore and a freight rail between the development and the beach?
- What is the best form of development close to the existing freight rail where noise and vibration may be a nuisance?
- If the density of development is high enough to support more than a bus system – say, light rail – is it better to run the service along Cockburn Road central where it is central to the catchment and close to potential jobs, or run it along the existing railway reserve where it is closer to the beach?
- What planning mechanism is required to best coordinate development of land that is owned by many different people?
- How much quality open space is really necessary given that the precinct is sandwiched between the coastal foreshore and a regional park?
- What intensity of development is required to offset the cost of remediation of contaminated sites?
- What intensity of development is required to offset the remediation costs of the former tip site?
- Is the identified primary school site in the best location and is it sufficient to service the whole of the Cockburn coast? (the answer to which will depend on the planned residential density and the proportion of non-residential uses)

4.2 *Precincts 2 and 3: CY O'Connor Reserve and the power station environs*

The urban design issues that need to be specifically addressed in precincts 2 and 3 include:

- How can the setting of the power station be enhanced to stimulate the viable redevelopment or reuse of the power station and its curtilage?
- How much commercial development can be justified in the context of the proposed marina and Port Coogee village centre just to the south?

- How, where and how frequently, can pedestrian crossings be established across the existing rail line?
- What is the role of this section of beach compared to other beaches in the area, and what is the appropriate width and treatment of the foreshore for that role?
- How can passive surveillance of the foreshore (eyes on the street to reduce antisocial activity) be best achieved given the constraints of the railway line location and the width of the precinct?

4.3 *Precinct 4: Rockingham Road pocket*

The urban design issues that need to be specifically addressed in Precinct 4 include:

- What are the best land uses along Rockingham Road - residential or commercial?
- Is it better to treat any residential development as an exclusive enclave and achieve the best real estate result, or integrate it with, and add value to, the existing community to achieve the best social result?
- How can residential development be best connected to, and integrate with, the existing area?
- What density of development is most appropriate given that on the one hand it is close to transit and services, but on the other hand adjacent to a low-density suburban area?

4.4 *Precinct 5: Beeliar Regional Park*

The urban design issues that need to be specifically addressed in Precinct 5 include:

- Is the loss of a small amount of parkland an acceptable trade-off to allow existing Spearwood residents easy access via a new road to the coast through the parkland?
- What is the most appropriate interface between the park and the proposed development areas?
- What is the physical impact of the by-pass road on the hills to the east of the Port Coogee development?

4.5 *Precincts 6 and 7: North Woodman Point coastal reserve and Woodman Point Regional Park*

The urban design issues that need to be specifically addressed in Precincts 6 and 7 include:

- What is Woodman Point Regional Park's role in the context of the greater metropolitan area?

- What facilities are required to enable the park have greater potential as a tourist destination?
- How can access to the beach be improved?
- What treatment is required to Cockburn Road to provide safe and convenient access to the coast from the residential hinterland?

5. Summary

In summary, the Cockburn coast area is one of the last opportunities to secure coastal development that caters for a broad range of the metropolitan population – an opportunity that is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve.

On the Cockburn coast, the representatives of the community have a clear decision to make on whether to squander the land on low density real estate for a privileged few, retain it as an industrial area with great ocean views, or take a more sustainable approach to how we plan for the urban area that we will ultimately bequeath to future generations.

Pursuing a more sustainable urban form means making some hard decisions, particularly in the areas of height, density, connectivity, and the mix of different uses and different people. The approach of recent years is to take the easy road and avoid making the tough decisions – the resulting suburban sprawl is, in effect, the environment of the lowest common denominator. A more sustainable urban form will be to the benefit of more people in the long run, the question for the forum is whether the short term pain in delivering a more sustainable outcome is worth the long term gain for future generations.

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