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12 December 2014

The General Manager
Port Macquarie Hastings Council
Mr Craig Swift-McNair
PO Box 84
Port Macquarie 2444

Attention: Leanne Fuller

Re:
BHPA Submission on Urban Growth Strategy 2015-2036 Discussion Paper

Dear Craig,

Attached is Bonny Hills Progress Association's submission on Council's Discussion Paper on the proposed Urban Growth Strategy for 2015-2036.

We trust you find it useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. J. Hafey".

Phil Hafey
Secretary
BHPA

cc: Peter Besseling
Lisa Intemann

PMHC Urban Growth Management Strategy 2015-2036

Discussion Paper

Submission by Bonny Hills Progress Association

As BHPA Committee members are not technical experts we do not propose to comment on questions that require high levels of technical skills and/or in-depth background reading; nor do we attempt to be all embracing.

Our approach has been to set out what we consider to be important 'considerations' that should be embraced in approaching the task of updating Council's Urban Growth Management Strategy (UGMS), to comment on these, and as necessary to comment on specific issues.

General 'Considerations'

- **Council is not starting with a blank sheet** – the last version of the UGMS (2010 -2031) is still close to being 'hot off the press'.

That version is an impressive document which appears to have emerged from a great deal of prior thought and technical input. In the main, Council should be in the position of updating, refining and reorganising rather than undertaking wholesale revision.

As the obvious starting point the main questions should be what has changed since then; what additional knowledge do we have now that better informs the conclusions drawn previously; are there any areas/issues that are missing and can we present it in a more 'digestible' form.

- **Predicting the future accurately is by its very nature impossible**, even over short periods of time – and the scope here is 21 years, (with revisions every Local Government election cycle).

In many cases history will not be a useful guide. A clear example of this is in considering employment opportunities for young people. As Professor Suzanne Cory says in her 2014 Boyer Lecture¹ – “Many of the jobs our children and grandchildren will have when they leave school do not yet exist; indeed, we cannot even imagine what they might be”. We consider that the point about our imaginations being the limiting factor is likely to apply more generally.

As such the predictions that are most critical to sound forward planning (for example demographic changes), should be identified, ranked, and sensitivity testing undertaken to reveal the likely consequences of being out by a factor.

¹ Boyer Lectures 2014. The promise of Science. A vision for hope. P38.

The capacity for flexible or varied responses may be the key to dealing with such planning uncertainties.

- **The constant tension in formulating a sound growth strategy will be between the forces for expansive development, and the maintenance, if not enhancement, of environmental (and social) integrity.**

We know this for a fact – it has happened world-wide throughout history and it is still happening today [at an ever increasing rate given population and other pressures] - with the environment inevitably on the losing end.

And we know that the nature of the environment in our LGA features large among the reasons why people opt to live in this locale, and that compromising it will make our region less attractive to our community.

In our view the very best way to redress this imbalance is to have the UGMS developed in the presence of a well formulated Biodiversity Strategy for the LGA, along with the required policies and implementation guidelines.

We exhort Council to keep the development of the Biodiversity Strategy moving in parallel with the revision of the UGMS. Without this there is no solid framework to draw the required ‘lines in the sand’ for the environmental (and social) side of the ledger. Balancing triple bottom line outcomes has to be the overall objective.

- **Identifying the big changes since the last UGMS**

Council staff and their technical/social/economic experts should be in the best position to identify both the changes and the shortcomings of the previous UGS.

But to draw attention to a few:

Australia’s overall economic fortunes are coming under pressure with most pundits saying that the heady days of the mining boom are over and Australia is not in a strong position to take on new challenges and directions. On the other hand a shift in the value of the \$A should favour the tourist and export industries. The likely flow-on impacts for the LGA will be well worth examining.

The science of climate change has advanced to the point where there is no doubt that it is happening, with the rate being at the upper end of predictions, and already we are getting a sense of early impacts, such as increases in weather variability and the need for greater preparedness to deal with these. Other significant impacts can be foreseen eg sea level rise, geopolitical, population movements, but their extent and timing may be more difficult to predict.

What can be factored in for the LGA – given its current benign environment – is that this will continue to be attractive to people medium term, but the increased population pressures, combined with the expected impacts of climate change will

make it more difficult to maintain environmental integrity. And, as an example, the implications for water security and so the need for greater investment in water recycling?

A possible expansion of the coal seam gas industry into the LGA [eg the Lorne Basin] is also worth considering – there will be pros and cons to this judging by the reactions of residents in the Gloucester area. The perceived levels of both risk and benefits are at the heart of differences between the two sides of this debate.

Can we exploit the high level of installation of alternate energy systems throughout the LGA in some proactive manner?

The initiatives that Council and others have implemented in the LGA in recent years – for example infrastructure and platforms for improved health and education services, transport, tourism, cultural exchange – how do we best capitalise on the opportunities that these present?

Regarding questions being asked in the discussion paper:

As we said at the outset we do not intend to go through these and answer them one by one. But to take a specific example and develop it as a way of showing the degree complexity of thought that needs to be given to each question [and we only scratch the surface here]:

- **What would encourage younger people to stay and work here?**

Is this even the right question? Is this another case where our imaginations are to be found wanting in asking it? Why shouldn't we be encouraging our youth to go out and experience the world – many will want to do this anyway and for good reason.

Perhaps the right question is – 'how can we get young people back after they have had a more worldly experience?' What will be the attractions we can offer and what do we want from them in turn? And this should apply across the spectrum of employment from trades through to the 'high fliers'.

The real "competition" is likely to be the big cities both here and overseas. How well are we set up to compete?

Lower cost housing and a great environment for raising children should be big plusses but will this be enough for upwardly mobile young people? Will we be able to offer high fliers an exciting workplace in the global village? Can we ensure that we will have fast internet access via the NBN for example? Linking Education facilities, R&D, and [currently unimaginable?] business opportunities both here and abroad would be attractive – can we deliver the critical mass? How good are our transport options for linking to cities throughout Australia and the rest of the world? At another level, will there be sufficient work to encourage a significant number of young trades people to come here?

Clearly if we are serious about addressing an issue like this, a highly proactive approach would be required – and this would entail considerable expenditure and would carry considerable risks. Partnerships would need to be developed with other sectors – what incentives would they have for investing here?

A lower risk strategy would be to set up an UGMS that - as Lisa Intemann suggested (CRG Meeting, 27/10/14) is a way to consider the UGMS – “Council providing the appropriate framework for the LGA to evolve organically”. And this would probably fit more comfortably with mainstream thinking and the “Village Atmosphere” that many people express as their vision for how the LGA should look and feel.

Clearly there is a ‘philosophical crossroad’ to negotiate here in relation to what the future for the LGA should look like.

We have used the above example to demonstrate that thinking through just one of the questions posed in the discussion paper is not trivial and is generally beyond the scope of most people and organisations to do it justice. It will really come back to Council to do the ‘hard yards’. Even the glib answer of ‘yes this is a good idea, go for it’ may be wide of the mark.

This exposes the fine line that needs to be trod between effective consultation with the constituency and making sound long term policy and planning decisions.

But it also exposes that a significant issue will be getting the balance right, given that detailed responses to the consultation process are most likely to come from organisations with the capacity and vested interest to so do. It would be very useful for Council to have a transparent means for doing this.

Being seen to do this in an unbiased manner is what will engender confidence among the constituency in Council’s planning processes.

BHPA Committee
12/12/14