

Northbridge Progress Association Inc.
PO Box 357 Northbridge NSW 2063

February 16, 2006

The General Manager
Willoughby City Council
PO Box 57
CHATSWOOD NSW 2057

Dear Mr Owen,

Re: Draft Willoughby Property Plan

We have reviewed the above draft Property Plan as it applies to Northbridge. In principle, the Association strongly supports Council reviewing from time to time its property portfolio and making short term and long term plans about each Council-owned property in the City.

However, we have a number of issues with the draft Plan as it currently applies to Northbridge and have several specific comments about it, as detailed in the submission attached.

The draft Plan involves possible future relocation of many Northbridge community services such as the branch library, the baby health care centre and child care facilities. It also accepts that Northbridge Plaza shopping centre will be expanded and implies that the ownership of the Plaza car park could change. As a general comment, the Association believes that these matters are vitally important to residents of Northbridge and we urge Council to consult extensively with our 300 members and with Northbridge residents generally before making any decisions about them. The Association would be pleased to assist Council in arranging such consultations in the short and longer term.

Yours sincerely,

John Becroft
President

Copy: Sailors Bay Ward Councillors

Northbridge Progress Association Inc

Submission on draft Willoughby Property Plan

February, 2006

Northbridge Plaza car park

The Association notes that, in regard to car park sites not located in the CBD, the Plan (on page 14) states that: "Opportunities may exist to redevelop these sites maintaining car parking spaces and generating additional income for Council or providing community facilities. Each site will need to be studied in detail. In particular, Northbridge Shopping Centre Car Park will need to be examined in conjunction with the owners of the shopping centre ..."

Also, in the Register (page 492), the Plan states: "Review the long term ownership of the site following review of shopping centre Masterplan and having regard to: 1. Retention of public car parking. 2. Options for Northbridge branch library. 3. Options for early childhood centre."

NPA's position:

The Association's long held position is that the Plaza car park is public land with a covenant over it committing Council to maintain it as a free car park. The Association would object strongly to any plan to change the ownership of the car park land or to develop the land for anything other than car parking.

We are opposed to any major expansion of the Plaza shopping centre because of the consequent increase in Northbridge traffic congestion and the impact on residents in the vicinity. The Association believes it would be inappropriate for the Plaza to become a major regional shopping centre in a residential suburb like Northbridge, where massive traffic flows through the Town Centre are already a key issue for residents.

The Association has made several substantial submissions to Council about the Plaza shopping centre and car park, notably in October 2003.

Northbridge Baby Health Centre

We note that on pages 2 and 8 of the Plan, it is stated that the Baby Health Centre in Willoughby is "to be relocated to an expanded Northbridge site". The Plan states that: "Properties at 11 and 13 Eastern Valley Way provide opportunities for the expanded Baby Health Care facility, whilst there are also opportunities to seek space in any redevelopment of Northbridge Plaza. This would free up this site for possible sale, alternative use such as a branch library (long term) or inclusion in the Northbridge car park."

In the Register (page 168), the long term future is stated as: “Determine location of combined Willoughby/Northbridge Early Childhood Centre. If to be located on site, a Masterplan to be developed considering options for other combined facilities including options for a branch library and community rooms. If to be relocated, look to dispose of site or amalgamate with Northbridge car park.”

NPA’s position:

The Association does not object to the amalgamation of Willoughby and Northbridge baby health care centres provided the Northbridge facility is expanded to cope with the additional use and its current services to Northbridge babies and mothers are maintained or enhanced.

We have an open mind about relocation of the Northbridge Baby Health Care Centre to another location within Northbridge (such as to the Northbridge Oval area). Any relocation should only be decided after extensive consultation with mothers and the community generally. Key factors in a decision to relocate would be access and parking considerations.

The Association is opposed to the Northbridge Baby Health Centre being located in an expanded Plaza shopping centre because we are opposed to an expansion of the Plaza and to any deal between Council and the Plaza owners which trades off public land for development approval.

Northbridge Branch Library

The Association notes that the Plan (page 2) mentions the relocation of Northbridge branch library as one of the Plan’s 10 priorities.

The Plan (on pages 15 and 16) states: “The current Northbridge Branch Library at Northbridge Oval has poor access, is too small and the adopted Masterplan for this site includes the relocation of this library”. The Plan mentions four options to relocate the library, namely to the Masonic Hall, to Castle Gardens (135 Sailors Bay Rd), to any redevelopment of Northbridge Plaza and to a new facility in conjunction with the Baby Health Centre at 11-13 Eastern Valley Way.

In regard to the branch library, the Register (page 156) states that in the short term: “Investigations be undertaken to source alternate locations for the Northbridge Branch Library; building to be used for indoor recreation should an alternative library location be found.

NPA's position:

The Association agrees that the present Northbridge branch library is too small and does not provide the range of facilities required by a modern library. We agree that the library should be enlarged and enhanced.

However, we are not convinced that an alternative location is desirable. We understand that the library is well used by primary school children and by older residents of the peninsula. Furthermore, there will be adequate and safe parking adjacent to the branch library when the Northbridge Park redevelopment is complete. It is not clear to the Association that a move to 11-13 Eastern Valley Way would be convenient to older peninsula residents and primary school children; if it is moved, the library could lose its main customers.

The Association is also concerned that the construction of a new library at 11-13 Eastern Valley Way would be prohibitively expensive and, because of other priorities for Council's scarce resources, may never happen.

39/135 Sailors Bay Road

We note that the Plan (page 8) advocates this site as "an opportunity to locate the Northbridge Branch Library on a short term basis. The site is more accessible and much larger than the current site. Long term, this site provides opportunities to locate other communal facilities and utilisation as a library in the short term may ensure other uses are more readily accepted in the future."

NPA's position:

This space was designated for community use during the development of Castle Gardens residential units. The property has been vacant for about eight years, earning no income for Council, because of Body Corporate opposition and Council inaction.

Whilst it suffers from the same relocation and access issues for present branch library customers as would 11-13 Eastern Valley Way, the vacant space would provide a low cost, practical option for a branch library relocation and substantial expansion. However, the Association understands that (contrary to the draft Plan) Council has recently decided to sell the property.

Northbridge Oval

The draft Plan (page 2) states that a review of the implementation of Northbridge Oval Masterplan is one of the 10 priorities of the Plan. The Plan (page 18) also states that the Masterplan “has recommended the relocation of the library and after school care facility, in order to allow better use of these buildings on the site. These buildings should be subject to further review including the scout hall and Guides facility to ascertain if there is an opportunity to consolidate buildings and establish a larger multi-use facility.”

The long term plan for the Northbridge Oval area (Register, page 162) is: “Develop Masterplan which would see all existing buildings demolished and incorporated into a single facility offering: childcare option; community space for scout, Guides and other community groups; sporting facilities including change room, public toilets, equipment storage, canteen and multi-use room for sports and recreational use.”

NPA’s position:

The Association initiated the concept now documented in the Northbridge Oval Masterplan about six years ago as a way to improve the safety of pedestrians, especially pre-school and primary school children. We supported the Masterplan when it was exhibited in 2003 (although we did not comment on any proposals to relocate the library or childcare facility).

We note that the Plan’s long term concept to demolish all existing buildings has been proposed before and defeated, mainly because it did not preserve the interests of the many community groups involved. To support this concept in future, the Association would need to be convinced that community groups would not be disadvantaged and that the current recreational space and general amenity of the area will be preserved.

Childcare facilities and the RSL Hall

The draft Plan (page 11) recommends that: “Council should resolve that it aims to be a long term facilitator of childcare” rather than a provider.

The Plan (page 12) notes that Northbridge Oval has been identified as a potential childcare site: “Whilst Long Day Care may not be suitable ... preschools should be considered. In order for these to be established, Council’s Open Space Zoning would need to be altered to allow childcare. The RSL hall at Northbridge provides an opportunity to expand childcare.”

In the Register (page 162), the short term plan is: “The Out of School Hours (OOSH) childcare facility be relocated to the Northbridge RSL Hall in Northbridge Park or other suitable location within easy walking distance of Northbridge Public School and St Philip Neri School. Review viability of OOSH care in Northbridge to determine if required. Assess need for long day and pre-school day care in Northbridge area.”

NPA’s position:

As the demographics of Northbridge change, there appears to be an increasing need for childcare facilities –long day, pre-school and OOSH - in the suburb. The Association would support any reasonable plan to increase such facilities. We also agree with the Plan’s recommendation that, because of lack of resources, Council should be a facilitator, not a provider.

We have an open mind about potential sites for childcare facilities, however, we would need to be convinced before we would support any re-zoning of Open Space in Northbridge.

The current location of the OOSH facility at the Pavilion is convenient for school parents and it’s not clear to us that there is a pressing reason to move it. The RSL Hall offers a possible alternative site but the recent development of the adjacent (and very popular) BMX track may now present risks for small children and parents. Access and parking may also be issues.

We would not be in favour of a childcare facility in the Plaza shopping centre (Register page 492) because it would doubtless involve a major expansion of the centre.

Northbridge Golf Club and golf course

We note the Plan’s comment (page 18) “This site is leased and has 13 years on its current lease. Should the Club wish to upgrade the site and, in particular, the clubhouse, opportunities to include community facilities such as meeting rooms and art workshop space should be considered.”

NPA’s position:

The Association views the Open Space occupied by Northbridge golf course as a priceless asset of Northbridge and the lower North Shore. We would resist any move by Council to change any part of the golf course zoning or to use any part of it for further development.