

10 May 2016 Proposed decked car park and apprehended bias in decision-making process

There are obvious impacts of such a large scale structure on the heritage value of Camden. No one could argue that this car park will enhance the nineteenth century townscape. There are also very serious concerns within the community, including the business community, about the processes of Council in making the decision to build it. One only has to read the papers and go on social media to know that there is a perception within the community of apprehended bias.

The bias rule of procedural fairness is that a decision maker must not be potentially seen by an informed lay observer to be biased in any way. It is the public's perception (not necessarily the actuality) of neutrality with which the rule is concerned. The community, including the Chamber of Commerce apprehend bias for the following reasons:

1. **Decision was preordained** as it was made before community consultation as evidenced by Council's media release of 10 July 2014 "*Camden Council Launches Major Camden Town Centre Upgrade*".

2. **Need** Brown¹ found that that at this stage additional decked car parking is not required to accommodate current demands and that there appears to be minimal need for an increase in overall parking provision as capacity can be increased with both increased enforcement of existing restrictions and shift of existing long-stay parkers to more peripheral locations.

3. **Additional parking available** In any case much less expensive options exist to improve parking availability such as monitoring time limits. Also council owned land could be utilized, for instance one corner of John and Mitchell Street on which a small 1960s red brick bungalow inappropriately sits could easily be converted to a car park adjoining the Camden Civic Centre.

4. **Cost** No cost benefit analysis had been provided to the community about Council's proposed expenditure of other people's money. The cost per additional car space in money terms, not to mention heritage and environmental costs, is extraordinary. Research shows that on average open parking areas per space cost around \$3,000 and decked parking around \$20,000 per space. Depending on how calculated the estimated cost per space of the Oxley St decked parking per space is between \$63,000 and \$81,000. Outlaying more than \$3.3 m to produce so few additional spaces is reason enough to NOT proceed with this DA.

5. **Location adjacent to Council building** the car park rightly or wrongly is viewed as being mainly for the benefit of Council tenants and Council's income stream. Council argues that it will benefit

¹ Brown (2014) *Multi Storey Car Park Study April 2014 Reference Number: X13060.01*

Available at <http://www.camden.nsw.gov.au/assets/pdf/Major-Projects/2015/Camden-Town-Centre/Camden-Town-Centre-Multi-Storey-Car-Park-Study-April-2014.pdf>

Brown (2013) *Camden Town Centre Traffic and Transport Study September 2013 Reference Number: X13060.*

Available at <http://www.camden.nsw.gov.au/assets/pdf/Major-Projects/2015/Camden-Town-Centre/Camden-Town-Centre-Traffic-and-Transport-Study-September-2013.pdf>

patrons of the Civic Centre but it comes at the expense of trees and garden surrounds much valued by patrons of the Centre. In any case the council owned property at the corner of John and Mitchell would provide excellent adjacent parking for the Civic Centre at much less cost.

6. Moratorium denied Although supported by a petition of 4,219 signatures and a logical step to hold off a decision about the car parking until Council had vacated its John St premises the agenda for a decked car park was pushed through.

7. Funding Council intends to fund the car park by 'borrowing' the money from Narellan's accumulated S94 development contributions, thereby placing Camden into unnecessary debt, and delaying parking at Narellan where there is a self-evident need.

8. Exhibition of only two weeks including Easter, ending 12 April 2016 was surprisingly short and documents were not made appropriately available to the community in the libraries and Council offices

9. Voting pattern of Council Academic research shows that the current Liberal Party faction on council have voted against each other only 1% of the time, which compared to how independents vote suggests a distortion of democratic process and undermines community confidence in the impartiality of decisions

11. Latest "Vision" of Dec 2014 published 2015 is as variance to previous visions and is not supported by primary evidence nor is it considered by the community to represent its views.

All of the above factors lead the community to perceive a lack of neutrality and apprehend bias in the decision process about this car park.

The community will not forget and forgive if you destroy the heritage value and uniqueness on Camden with something it does not need or want. It expects that you will be fiscally responsible and vote as a representative of your community as your constituents expect in a first world democracy.