

Camden Residents' Action Group

Incorporated

Camden – Still a Country Town

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**Presentation to District Commissioner,
Greater Sydney Commission.
28 September 2016**

Provided on USB:

Camden Heritage Study April 2016

Correspondence with Office of Environment and Heritage on protection Camden Township

Timeline of community issues with Camden Council's Faction, Term 2012 to 2016

Heritage ruling: Land and Environment Court Case 1996

Camden Town Centre Vision December 2014

"The works" photos

Decked car park objections

Various other CRAG objections (Milk Depot, B4 Zoning, Town Farm, Urban Design Project (John St), Code of Meeting Practice)

Additional Information:

CRAG: <http://www.crag.org.au/>

Council Reporter: <http://camdencommunitynsw.weebly.com/>

Camden Community Alliance Inc: <https://www.facebook.com/Camden-Community-Alliance-Inc-1412589599049798/>

CAMDEN

One hour from Sydney.

A living community.

Established heritage conservation area. A compact area: a very walkable 10 blocks or so, which provides a vivid window on the past. (The Historical Society has available a heritage trail handout; also open to innovative developments such as a mobile app for example.)

Camden's history is not only of local interest but of national significance: there is justification for the claim that it is 'Birthplace of the Nation's Wealth'. Camden plays an important role in the early story of European colonisation in Australia.

We are extremely concerned about the dismantling of protections established on the nature of development deemed appropriate for Camden be conserved; constraints designed to oversee appropriate maintenance and foster appropriate development of our town. Council must be constrained to maintain them NOT preside over their dismantling (for example, the height provisions they deem to be 'unnecessarily restrictive' to development).

Appropriate development will foster further prosperity in Camden with community and businesses together championing our 'point of difference', which is our surest drawcard and is also of national significance.

Camden's unique community, in an ever expanding sea of 21st century development, will not survive if by degrees we just emulate that development.

CRAG's priorities for the area and proposals for district planning.

1. Retain the old Township of Camden as a heritage conservation area (HCA) and protect it under the District Plan from councillors who have little if any understanding of heritage significance (physical, social, cultural) and the importance of its conservation for future generations. The Council bloc¹ (formed after the 2012 election and continuing for another four years):
 - has made decisions behind closed doors to undo the LEP and DCP height and heritage controls of the existing legislated HCA (for reasons only known to itself as previous Councils have understood that Camden is historically unique);
 - produced a non-evidenced based "Vision" for Camden town centre which is not supported by the community including the Chamber of Commerce and which is at variance to all previous visions;
 - have engaged a firm, which makes no claim to have heritage expertise, to investigate changing the height and heritage controls and prepare a design, compatible with Argyle Street "improvements" for John Street between the iconic St John's Church and the town farm;
 - have implemented changes to Argyle Street (main street) which saw
 - the unwise use of \$3.6m of public money on modernising part of the main street, leaving an inharmonious streetscape of new and old (that on opposite sides start and finish at different points);
 - a waste of public money as it could have and should have been spent appropriately to restore and enhance Camden's authentic heritage value.
2. Stop the building of a decked car park adjacent to vacated Council buildings. The Bloc approved this car park but it makes no sense economically or logistically and would degrade Camden's heritage value. The cost per space is estimated to be in excess of \$60,000. The opportunity cost of this use of valuable land within the town to the community and future generations is enormous. To build the car park in the proposed position is to shut off being able to open up the large non-flood area behind the Police station and Court House, which for instance could be developed for dining and boutique shopping.

More appropriate options for additional parking are available but not considered (although the consultant's report concluded that additional parking was not needed in the medium term if business workers parked a little further away). Options include underground parking, the use of council land with an incongruous red brick bungalow near the civic centre, schools and shops at the corner of John and Mitchell.

¹ A close analysis of Council voting patterns is available at the Council Reporter <http://camdencommunitynsw.weebly.com/archive-liberal-bloc-blog>

3. Ensure zoning in HCA is appropriate to conserving its heritage. For example parts of the HCA were zoned to B4 in 2012 including residential streets around St John's Church. B4 zoning has the potential effect of degrading the townscape and its currently evident development pattern from a private planned town within the historical context of NSW and birthplace of the nation's wealth.
4. Instruct council to return the Town Farm to community land status. There was no reason to change it to operational land as indicated by the Hearing at the end of 2012, and the recommendation was to retain it as community land. Council did not have legal jurisdiction to contravene the terms of Llewella Davies' will.
5. Consider incorporating a heritage zone associated with the long agricultural history of the Macarthur family into the District Plan to cover the Macarthur heritage area : Camden Township, Belgenny Farm, Camden Park, Menangle.
6. Ensure flood damage to the Nepean River is repaired.
7. Protect the Scenic Hills under the District Plan.

Update: Outcome of 2016 Camden Council election

Following the recent Council elections (10 September 2016) the makeup of the Council became:

North Ward: 2 Liberal; 1 Labour

Central Ward: 1 Liberal; 1 Labour; 1 Independent

South Ward: 1 Liberal; 1 Labour; 1 Independent

Nett Result: 4 Liberals; 3 Labour; 2 Independent

This compares with previous composition:

5 Liberals; 4 Independents, BUT 2 Independents voted with the Liberals on almost all occasions.

The community hoped that the bloc was broken and that it would become more consultative and receptive to community concerns.

However the Independent of Central Ward, who promoted himself as a True Independent, has affiliated himself with the liberal party and as at last night's Council meeting the same Mayor and a bloc deputy Mayor were elected though his vote.

The voting Bloc has been re-established.

Background District briefing.

1. Retain the old Township of Camden as a heritage conservation area (HCA)

The Cowpastures. Discovery of lost cows from first settlement in this area which became renowned in the fledgling colony for its fertile pasture land.

Macarthur initial grant 1805. Founding of commercial export wool industry, wine industry, dairying, commercial cropping, horticulture.

Camden Park: an experimental farm in a different land.

Design and building of Township

Camden Town designed by Macarthur's sons (James and William) along with surveyor general Mitchell according to the first town planning regulations in Australia. Oldest remaining 'private town' in Australia.

Construction of St John's church. 'The plans were drawn up and the process of building supervised by Mortimer Lewis, the Colonial Architect, but it is likely that the style adopted – Decorated Gothic- was due to Emily Macarthur.' (Atkinson, p46) (Atkinson further quotes Morton Herman 'perhaps the finest example of early Gothic Revival in Australia.' p.46) The style, design, building materials and construction are all local and represent an outstanding example of Colonial building.

Church land for other denominations gifted by Macarthurs.

St John's stands today overlooking Camden, visible from anywhere within the town and from all approaches to the town, as was the original intention.

As well as the church, the Camden area is ringed by a collection of estates and 'Grand Houses' that are of singular historic and heritage value. Close proximity to Sydney means they attract visitors and are used for cultural purposes, including film.

Camden has always been a place of commerce and industry.

Establishment of dairy industry. The Macarthurs innovated and expanded the sale of milk and dairy products through Menangle and Camden. Camden became a foremost dairy area and the Macarthurs established the Milk depot and factory in Camden which was used by local farmers for processing and shipping.

Community involvement. One key reason for the continued success of Camden as an engaged community derives from the Macarthur's attitude to "their" town's people. They were renowned as leaders of the community and as benevolent landlords, which fostered an unusual level of

integration. Though Camden has evolved with the times the Macarthurs still live at Camden Park and remain active in the area.

The Macarthurs also endowed the community with Macarthur Park, Onslow Park and the show ground complex. The Camden Town Farm was bequeathed to the community by Miss Llewella Davies.

Council

In the past Council worked with community groups, including CRAG and Historical Society to oppose inappropriate development and encourage sustainable change and maintenance. Last upgrade took several years with extensive community consultation, resulting in changes and upgrades that were (and were until recently) met with general agreement and needed minimal change.

2010 Local Environment Plan (LEP) saw the long understood heritage area designated as a conservation area.

2012: new Council elected and voting bloc formed. General Manager (Greg Wright) dismissed (contract terminated). No public disclosure of reasons, nor were reasons provided to independent Councillors.

A "secret" group within Council, including the Mayor, but excluding most Councillors produced a plan for Camden. This plan resulted in different non-evidenced based *Vision* for the old town that pays lip service to heritage but foreshadows increasing the height limit and winding back heritage protections.

2014: Council start 'Community Consultation' based on the plan. Anecdotally, and also in submissions, the Mayor treated community members who questioned proposals during the "consultation" with derision and contempt. She also demonstrated limited knowledge of her own Council's documents.

"Consultation" results collated by JBA Consultants and Council to produce a confused, contradictory and misleading report, including duplications. **Faulty figures were presented to, and endorsed at a Council Meeting in November 2014.**

A detailed analysis of the data proves that the analysis of consultation data was wrong. (Copy sent to Ombudsman. Despite demonstration based on *Council's own documents*, of faulty and inaccurate findings, Ombudsman deemed no action to be taken.)

A deeply flawed analysis² is then ‘doctored’ to look like an endorsement of the Mayor’s plan.

April 2015: A glossy document (dated December 2014) is published, outlining the Council bloc's *Vision*. Saturated with photos, the minimal text outlines intended ‘up-grade’ to the town centre, with mock-up projections of the ‘new look’. These are meaningless. Buried within it is the intention to overturn parts of the LEP, most notably the height restrictions, as being inhibitors of economic activity and ‘development’.³

In contrast, *A Vision for Camden 2025* was the product of comprehensive local and professional consultation, and produced a report that was recognized at State planning level as ‘best practice’. The 2012-2016 Council bloc ignored the community.

Council: The Town Centre Works

Disregarding public protests, Council commenced ‘up-grade’ in July 2015, promising to have the first stage of works completed by November, in time for the ‘Light-up Camden’ celebration, one of three major annual events in Camden, the other two being Camden Show and ANZAC day. Revised date was Australia Day, which was not achieved.

The works have been declared as complete but present as incomplete.

Features of the works include:

- No master plan. 5 unrelated decisions, connected only by proximity.
- Ad hoc decisions made.

² For example, only 186 (out of 587 total responses – ie 32%) commented on Oxley Street as a site for Decked Car Park. Of these, 116 were in favour; 67 against; 3 neutral. Council claimed this was overwhelming support and stated the figure to be 62% in favour. This was deliberately misleading. Actual figure is 20% of the total submissions. Furthermore, the research question in the consultation lacked any specifics, and was pointedly vague and general only.

³ For example:

p.19 *despite underlying demand pressures ... development in the town centre is unviable due to a range of constraints such as LEP height limits.*

p.26 *Weaknesses and Constraintsplanning controls such as heritage and height that constrain development*

p.73 *Priority initiatives ... a prosperous Town Centre....investigate current zoning and height and consider amending the LEP in response*

p.74 *Initiative.... prepare a place focussed performance based DCP (in Q1 2016); investigate current zoning and height and consider amending the LEP in response (in Q1 2016)).*

p.77 *...the current LEP height for 2 storeys is overly restrictive and may constrain the form of development desired in the town centre. On this basis, it is recommended that council investigate increasing from 7m to 8.5m or 9.5m as part of the urban design framework.*

- Basic works such as kerb and guttering needing to be re-done, up to three times, due to confused 'plans'.
- Patchwork of inconsistent paving.
- Major trauma to jacarandas and other trees, notably box trees at corner of Argyle/John Street. The trees at the intersection subjected to long periods of roots exposed, without appropriate remedial care.
- Prolonged disruption and loss of trade experienced by businesses. (Complaints were made but Council reacted in an intimidating manner).

Issues arising from *The Vision*

1. Why Council chose to use a survey/consultation as a binding agreement between Council and community.
2. Why Council overrode protests from the community (including public meetings, letters to the editor, addresses to Council, emails/letters to Councillors, street protests, radio interviews etc.).
3. Why Council sees it as a necessary part of development to remove/limit the heritage protections of the LEP and DCP.

One recent development that may indicate possible outcomes from the publically foreshadowed altering of the LEP and DCP was the proposal to develop the Camden Milk Vale Depot into a Conference Centre with a height of 12 metres. Despite community submissions to oppose the development which Council ignored, it was two significant events that caused the proposal to be halted:

- The intervention of Mr Alan Jones of 2GB, who visited the site accompanied by the Mayor, and
- Flooding of the area in June 2016

2. Stop the building of a decked car park adjacent to vacated Council buildings

NOTE Council has relocated to new offices in Oran Park, freeing up approx. 100 car spaces.

NOTE Woolworths threatened to clamp down on customers staying longer than 2 hours in their car park, opposite Council Chambers. Threat withdrawn after public protest. Major reason for this proposal: **Council workers used the car park for all day parking.**

Matter of crucial and urgent concern

Protection of the Camden township:

- *Vision* needs to be scrapped and redone with all references to amending the height limit and heritage protections removed.
- John Street proposed development as a Town Square be revisited and the nature, objectives and design of the proposed upgrade to be revisited by community and recognised experts in concert with Council.
- Oxley Street Decked Car Park be stopped. Alternatives to be sought.
- St John's Church precinct and surrounding residential areas: inappropriate B4 zoning within HCA to be rescinded.

Matters of immediate concern

- Ensure flood damage to the Nepean River is repaired.
- Protect the Scenic Hills under the District Plan.
- Development of an appropriate and sustainable vegetation plan for public plantings.
- Watering of main street trees.
- Redirect a proportion of the excessive dollars being spent on annual flowers to rescue and maintain Camden's old established tree-scape.
- Re-instate a publically accessible significant tree register.
- Town Farm: Returned to the community as per the original bequest that the land be 'community land.'
- Milk Depot development proposal to be suspended, pending suitable uses for this heritage listed building.
- Community access to and possible re-uses of the empty Police Station and Court House buildings.
- Readdress Council's controversial decision to relocate Camden's dog pound to Campbelltown.