



SAVE UTAS RESPONSE TO THE MOUNT NELSON AND SANDY BAY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ONLINE SURVEY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

SUMMARY

Over the last few months HCC staff have conducted a community engagement process for development of a Mt Nelson and Sandy Bay (MNSB) Neighbourhood Plan. The process began with meetings with 'stakeholders' who were carefully identified by the HCC. Armed with this feedback HCC staff prepared and distributed a lengthy Discussion Paper (and a Summary Discussion Paper). Staff then conducted community feedback sessions where the issues for discussion were carefully curated by HCC staff. These months of community engagement culminated in an online survey, again carefully structured by HCC staff to guide what HCC staff identified as the key issues. The survey closed on 1 January 2024.

Principal planning issues for the MNSB community are population growth levels, including implications like traffic and people movement, and the future of the Sandy Bay university campus. In October 2022, 74% of the Hobart community voted to oppose the redevelopment of the campus for housing and HCC councillors in December 2022 passed resolutions in support of this expressed community view. The bringing forward of the timeline for development of a Mount Nelson and Sandy Bay Neighbourhood Plan and the initiating of mediation involving stakeholders involved with the university campus issue were key responses by HCC councillors to the overwhelming community opposition to relocation of UTAS into Hobart's CBD.

It was therefore extraordinary that HCC staff prepared a Discussion Paper and an online survey, and conducted community feedback sessions, so as to give misleading information and to implicitly discourage exploration and feedback on the key issues for MNSB residents.

At a meeting with Acting General Manager, Neil Noye, and two senior HCC staff on 20 December 2023 because of the flaws in the community engagement process SaveUTAS (SU) requested that the work to date on community engagement be discarded and the process begun again. Mr Noye declined that request and said that any deficiencies would be rectified in the next phase.

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HAS BEEN FATALLY FLAWED

During the community engagement process neither the consultants used by the HCC nor HCC staff provided accurate information or an opportunity for the community to explore and discuss the two principal issues which are critical to the MNSB community: population/dwelling growth and the future of the university campus.

At stakeholder sessions (conducted by Urbis, a Melbourne firm with little familiarity with the area under study) participants were strongly opposed to campus redevelopment (echoing the views expressed in the Hobart elector poll). However, at these sessions HCC staff and Urbis did not reveal their intention to increase population in MNSB by 48%, a figure vastly in excess of ordinary growth, by eliminating the university campus.

Despite stakeholder feedback HCC Council staff then prepared and released a Discussion Paper stating MNSB would need to plan for 7850 additional residents, about 7000 in excess of the growth allocated to Sandy Bay in the [30-Year Greater Hobart Plan](#) (endorsed by the HCC, three other Councils and the state government), to be accommodated in 2630 new dwellings. Over the following weeks HCC staff ran community feedback sessions which were based upon the requirement for this massive population and dwelling increase. HCC staff structured the sessions so as to discourage discussion of the key MNSB issues and direct participants to less important matters selected by HCC staff. Just before this phase of the community engagement process closed in December 2023 and as a result of considerable public pressure, the HCC admitted that its dwellings target required the elimination of the campus. This had not been disclosed to the community in stakeholder meetings, community feedback meetings, in the Discussion Paper or in the online survey. The removal of the campus, essential to achieve the population/dwelling targets arbitrarily chosen by HCC staff, was carefully disguised in the Discussion Paper and online survey as merely an 'idea', a possible 'opportunity' or an 'option'. The future of the campus, the largest built feature in MNSB, was relegated to discussion alongside more minor considerations such as the improvement of small shopping areas.

THE DISCUSSION PAPER CONTAINED FALSE AND MISLEADING CONTENT.

1. No disclosure of the basis for the HCC population/dwelling growth target

Despite weeks of communication with senior HCC staff it has proved impossible to obtain the data and calculations which HCC staff have used to determine what they have designated as 'required' population and 'needed' dwellings. SaveUTAS was referred by senior HCC staff to state and local government data such as the [30-Year Greater Hobart Plan](#) (GHP), State Government Treasury data and the State Government's [Refreshing Tasmanian's Population Strategy – Discussion Paper](#), but none of these aligned with the figures used by the HCC.

Senior HCC staff have now told SU that additional documents will be made available, but it is now too late to make the community engagement process effective. As explained above, at no point during the entire community engagement process was the community told the basis (ie. data used and the calculations) for the population/dwelling figures used by HCC staff as the premise for the development of the MNSB Neighbourhood Plan nor given any genuine opportunity to explore the two main issues for MNSB residents. This could only have been deliberate.

There are a host of obvious issues arising from the HCC population/dwelling target that are crucial to MNSB residents and should have been at the forefront of the engagement process. Amongst these are:

- a. The population and dwelling figures used by the HCC implicitly will require a substantial number of apartment blocks. The height and density of apartment blocks were identified as an issue for residents at the Urbis stakeholder meetings.

There is no physical means by which 7850 new residents could be accommodated without the construction of scores of apartment blocks.

- b. People movement, traffic issues and services are particularly important to residents. MNSB relies on only two major traffic arteries. Many residents use motor vehicles, often for multipurpose journeys, and any increase in traffic will impact on the already congested two arterial road system. The load on these roads is exacerbated by the large number of schools in MNSB.

Massive population increase also raises issues such as impact on services like water, sewage, storm water run-off, and access to general amenities such as supermarkets and shopping.

The engagement process offered no relevant facts in relation to these key issues and implicitly discouraged their discussion by requiring the community to discuss minor issues carefully selected by HCC staff such as signage and access to beaches.

- c. The necessity for UTAS relocation was carefully disguised by HCC staff. In the Discussion Paper, the community feedback sessions and the survey the elimination of the campus was disguised as an 'opportunity' or an 'idea'. Not until just before closure of the survey did HCC senior staff admit that removal of the university was necessary to achieve what they had arbitrarily chosen as the population/dwelling targets for MNSB. Indeed, on 12 December 2023, in their response to community demands for full disclosure about the population figure, HCC staff revealed for the first time in the entire engagement process that without using the campus it could only identify 130 dwelling sites for the 2630 additional dwellings which the Discussion Paper asserted were needed by 2042 'to house future growth' (p.5)

The Discussion Paper, feedback sessions and the online survey relegated this principal issue to minor consideration besides the improvement of shopping areas, depriving the community from properly exploring it and its manifold implications.

- d. The intrinsic value of the campus as a feature of MNSB was ignored. A proper evaluation of the possibility of the removal of the university would have included consultation, discussion and response by residents about the intrinsic value of the campus (including the architecture, art installations and precious faculty collections), the CO2 implications of demolishing sound buildings, and the increase in traffic. Apart from its intrinsic value to the community the campus is valued as an educational facility and an unequalled site for Tasmania's only university, as so clearly expressed in the elector poll the engagement process was conducted as though senior HCC staff were not aware that elimination of the university was a major community issue.

Given that the community, through the elector poll and the Urbis stakeholder sessions, has made it clear how important the campus issue is. The structuring of the engagement process to suppress exploration of the issue was extraordinary.

2. **Other false and misleading content in the discussion paper** (page numbers refer to the summary Discussion Paper)

- a. On Page 5 the Discussion Paper falsely claims that 2630 new dwellings are 'needed' and that 7850 new residents are 'expected'. This is simply not true. The true facts are that little population growth is expected and (excluding the campus) only 130 new dwelling sites have been identified.

These facts should have been simply stated. There could then have been an 'Idea' for community discussion, which is that population and dwellings in MNSB could possibly be increased, and residents could have been invited to explore and discuss that Idea. Residents could have been informed about the [30-Year Greater Hobart Plan](#) 'When and Where to Grow' section, approved by Hobart City councillors as well as the state government. It states that the main area in Hobart municipality for infill and greenfield development is 'primarily in the Hobart CBD'. They could have been told that in the 30-Year Greater Hobart Plan, Sandy Bay is only proposed by the HCC (and the other participants in the GHP) to have infill growth of 800 (not 7850)[see [Appendix 1: Greater Hobart Plan Strategy](#) page 122, reproduced at end of this document].

SU notes that UTAS owns, but is not utilising, many key CBD properties which are ripe for the sort of housing development which the 30-Year Greater Hobart Plan suggests should be taking place right now. These properties have remained undeveloped for years and while they remain in the University's hands there is no prospect of development.

- b. On page 5 the list of principal features in MNSB ignores the largest property and most significant built feature of MNSB, the university campus. It is treated as though it does not exist.
- c. On page 5 the bold assertion is made that there is a 'necessity' for more 'medium density dwelling types'. This claim is not supported by any information, and it is simply not true. More than some Greater Hobart areas MNSB already has a wide variety of dwellings many of which are medium density, and Sandy Bay is already the second most densely populated suburb in Greater Hobart. This baseless assertion in the main document upon which this phase of community engagement is based is an example of the contrived and misleading use of unfounded claims and the misidentification of key issues which renders the engagement process fatally flawed.
- d. On page 7 HCC staff have been careful not to mention the massive population and dwelling increase which they have arbitrarily chosen as the main 'Direction', though it is in fact the main premise upon which HCC staff have based the whole community engagement process.
- e. On page 8 there is no mention at all of the principal biodiversity feature of MNSB, the 'leafy green' (to use the phrase used in the Discussion Paper to describe an attractive environment) university campus with its densely-developed infrastructure, devoted to higher education, its parkland, its bushland and its intrinsic value to the community (see [Significant and Collectables Inventory](#) of campus features, many of which are of high value to the MNSB community and to all Tasmanians). This key page is presented as though there is no campus in MNSB and that the baseless population/dwelling targets selected by HCC staff are not open to community discussion.
- f. On page 18, the false claim is made that the campus has 'ageing building stock' and that this provides an opportunity for demolition and redevelopment. The same claim was made on the HCC website but, after it was pointed out as being false, it was removed in December 2023. The [UTAS Sandy Bay building condition and functionality report, July 2018](#) prepared by UTAS and available on their website, shows that most buildings were sound and those that required maintenance could still be utilized with suitable investment. The Discussion Paper completely ignores the CO2 implications of demolishing usable buildings.
- g. On page 18 the ridiculous claim is made that redeveloping the campus site will provide an opportunity 'to continue contributing to the existing character of the community' (presumably with the apartment blocks for the 2500 dwellings which the HCC says are required to achieve its population target). This is an absurd and highly misleading statement for senior HCC staff to make. They know that the scores of apartment blocks which the population target chosen by HCC staff requires would be opposite in character to surrounding residential areas.

- h. On page 21, the list of 'special places' to be 'celebrated' and 'improved' ignores the magnificent campus. The community has been denied an opportunity to discuss the intrinsic value of the largest single area of land in MNSB, what value the community places on it, and how the community can best enjoy it.
- i. On page 23, the walkability Idea discussion doesn't even acknowledge a key issue, the obvious tension between slow-moving pedestrians and fast-moving 'active transport' users (mentioned in Idea 12), each competing for the use of narrow MNSB footpaths and roads.
- j. No recognition is given to the already congested two arterial road system that would become almost impossible to navigate with thousands more cars, or the impact on residents if forms of transport other than motor vehicles become the only way for residents to move about. This is glossed over with rhetoric about increased public transport, pedestrianisation and use of bikes and e-scooters, ignoring the needs of commuters and the unique features of the suburb such as the terrain and the multiplicity of schools, with parents dropping and picking up children from all over Greater Hobart at peak times.

THE NEXT PHASE

SU requests that the next phase redress the complete failure of the engagement process to this point. We ask for a fresh public Discussion Paper which contains accurate and full information (in an easy-to-access form including a bibliography of data sources) and which highlights the key issues, being population/dwelling growth and the future of the campus together with all the implications arising with each of these.

The community should be given an opportunity for feedback, including face-to-face sessions, and a simple questionnaire which is styled to elicit responses on these key issues and others that relate to them including motor vehicle transport, CO₂, and the intrinsic value of the campus and its features.

SU requests the opportunity to contribute to the design of this next phase. Unless the community is given the true facts about the issues for MNSB residents the entire MNSB Plan development will fail. It should be noted that the bringing forward of the development of this Neighbourhood Plan was in specific response to the elector poll and yet the result and underlying message of the poll has been ignored.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

An unfortunate consequence of the flawed community engagement process conducted by HCC staff is that by misleading university management into thinking that its relocation project has some support it will have unwittingly discouraged the university from selling its

substantial collection of under-utilised properties in the Hobart CBD. The conduct of the process is directly contradictory to the December 2022 resolutions of councillors which showed that HCC councillors respect the strong community opposition to redevelopment of the campus site and wanted to take steps to give effect to the community view.

HCC staff appear to be unaware that publicly available records (see the SaveUTAS website) show that the university has never had a relocation proposal which was either affordable or practical (all university operations simply can't be squeezed into the limited CBD land owned by the University). Its campus rezoning application was withdrawn following 155 queries by HCC staff. The application was unlikely to have ever received the support of HCC councillors and would certainly not have been approved by the Tasmanian Planning Commission.

An holistic view of Hobart's best interests should have led HCC staff to the obvious conclusion that their efforts should have been devoted to working with the University and the community to optimise the use of the campus for higher education, and for community enjoyment, while encouraging the University to make its under-utilised properties in the CBD available for urgently required housing, consistent with the 30-Year Greater Hobart Plan's proposal for more dwellings in the CBD.

Instead, HCC staff have wasted substantial resources and many months on a community engagement process which was carefully designed to ensure that MNSB residents would never be able to discuss the key issues which will influence the development of a MNSB Plan.

APPENDIX 1

Expected Urban Growth – distribution of additional population and dwellings by 2050

No.	Precinct	Population	Dwellings
GLENORCHY			
1#	Northern transit corridor – alongside northern transport corridor including Moonah CBD (infill)	5,000	2,540
2#	Northern transit corridor – alongside main road/rail corridor and within and around Glenorchy CBD (infill)	5,000	2,540
3#	Claremont CBD area (infill)	980	500
4	Granton – from the Upper Hilton Road to the Black Snake village (greenfield)	3,280	1,600
5	Austins Ferry through to Granton – a few individual larger parcels (greenfield)	700	300
6	Scattered northern Glenorchy infill – western fringe areas of Claremont, Chigwell and Rosetta (infill)	620	280
7	Scattered southern Glenorchy infill – western fringe areas of Montrose, Glenorchy and West Moonah (infill)	920	440
TOTAL		16,500	8,200
HOBART			
8#	Within and immediately surrounding the central Hobart CBD (infill)	10,000	5,150
9#	Northern transit corridor – North Hobart and New Town (infill)	2,100	1,050
10#	Sandy Bay (infill)	800	400
11	Scattered Hobart infill – within existing residential areas of Lenah Valley, West Hobart, South Hobart and other parts of Sandy Bay (infill)	7,500	3,700
TOTAL		20,400	10,300
CLARENCE			
12#	Rosny Park CBD surrounds including Warrane, Rosny, Bellerive etc. (infill)	1,150	650
13	Tranmere Rokeby peninsula – including Droughty Point (greenfield)	6,100	3,000
14	Risdon Vale area – particularly both sides of Sugarloaf Road (greenfield)	900	450
15	Glebe Hill, Rokeby and Oakdowns area (greenfield)	1,300	650
16	Paranville east of Pass Road (greenfield)	2,550	1,250
17	Clarendon Vale – north & east extensions (greenfield)	1,850	900
18	Lindisfarne and Geilston Bay fringe development (greenfield)	750	350
19	Scattered infill in Lindisfarne area (infill)	300	150
20	Scattered infill in Howrah and Shoreline area (infill)	400	200
TOTAL CLARENCE (Metro)		15,300	7,600
KINGBOROUGH			
21#	Central Kingston CBD and surrounds including Kingston Park and south-west of CBD (infill)	4,900	2,500
22	Spring Farm/Whitewater Estate on south-west edge of Kingston (greenfield)	120	50
23	Huntingfield south (greenfield)	950	450
24	Scattered Kingston, Kingston Beach and Blackmans Bay infill – plus some very limited Tarooma infill (infill)	1,900	900
TOTAL KINGBOROUGH (Metro)		7,800	3,900
TOTAL GREATER HOBART (Metro)		60,000	30,000

- Part of existing STRLUS Densification Area

