

Submission on the Lane Cove Plaza Upgrade – Stage 2

Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society (LCB&CS) has been advocating for the protection and maintenance of the environment, both natural and built, for the last 42 years. Our over 200 members are keen for us to continue this advocacy and it is for this reason that we are responding to the invitation to comment on the Upgrade of the Plaza. Our comments are considered and we prefer to make them in a written form rather than use the survey which we consider does not give enough scope for a detailed analysis to be made.

The Process

In the documents the list of Community Issues from Elton Consulting's report fails to list the majority of comments which asked that the Plaza basically remain as it is. It appears that those issues that are listed are there to support the rationale for the changes that some one has deemed necessary. We question what happened to the statement in the Executive Summary of the Elton Consulting report, page 1 Section 1.2 headed *What we heard-Summary of engagement outcomes*, which stated:-

Many participants expressed a preference for a smaller upgrade or refurbishment of the Plaza to refine Stage 1 works and further enhance the existing attributes of the plaza, rather than a larger scale upgrade.

This statement is repeated in Section 8.1 on page 33 under Engagement Outcomes.

Executive Summary

The real reason for the rationale behind the proposals is not outlined anywhere and indeed some of the changes seem to go against many of the issues that have been listed – eg *maintain a balance of public and private seating, improving pedestrian access and movement through the Plaza, incorporating a range of amenity improvements*. These will be discussed in more detail later in this submission.

The LCB&CS accepts that some minor infrastructure update may be desirable to the Plaza but we do not accept the premise of the wholesale changes that are proposed in these Concept Plans. There are some positive elements in the Plans which we will outline, but we oppose the principles of the package.

The positives are the timber platform and an increase in public seating.

The negatives are creating a formal space, the removal of so many trees, the increase in area given to commercial enterprises, the reduction of area for community stalls, displays etc and the paving material.

Positives

The change in shape and minor increase in area of the raised timber deck is a positive. This area has proved very popular with the public and the increase in area, the new position of the ramp up and the steps at the western end with corresponding increase in public seating, particularly if a number of 2 and 4 person tables are provided would be an added incentive to use the Plaza.

Increasing the amount of public seating elsewhere in the Plaza would also attract people to linger longer and use the space.

Negatives

- The “formality” being imposed by the very rigid fixed structures of timber, steel and glass roofing. We question the ability to clean and maintain this roofing. The statement at the workshop that high pressure hosing will clean it is not realistic in

the circumstances. When will it be done, how will 'stains' be removed by just hosing, where does the water flow to and will the debris hosed away block the drains that are necessary for the removal of normal rainwater from the roof?

- What is the purpose of the glass roof? It does not provide shade and could create very unpleasant conditions under it, notwithstanding to comments at the workshop that the embossed pattern will assist shading.
- The removal of 3 large plane trees which give character to the Plaza as well as provide shade in the hotter months but are open to sunlight in the winter months. The necessity of cleaning up the autumn fall of leaves is minimal compared with the advantage that they provide.
- The western most plane tree (outside the TAB) provides the only shade to the public seating area at that end of the Plaza. Any new tree here would take many years to provide anywhere near this amount of shading.
- The increase in private seating (approx. 32%) particularly towards Longueville Road. The existing round planter (which had its tree removed some time ago) could be removed and that area given back to the public but it should not be given to private seating as now proposed.
- The lowering of the planting along Longueville Road. The height has already been reduced adjacent to the cross walk which is acceptable, but further south the existing height should remain to separate the public areas from the traffic on the roadway.
- The use of grey slate paving. The existing brick paving gives a warmth to the more natural look of the space and ties in with the many brick facades along both sides of the Plaza. Grey slate is again a "formal" material.
- Any provision of cooking facilities in the private seating areas. Serving/storage units are acceptable but would be better if they could be removed to open up the space when the seating is not being used.
- The so called moveable "balustrades" around the seating areas which are unlikely to be removed when the area is not occupied or the weather allows fully open sides.
- Though not mentioned in any documents (but raised at the workshop) we oppose the leasing of the private seating areas as against licensing them for use as food areas.

We also provide more detailed comments to some of the specific issues/aims identified in the Community Issues.

1 Maintain the balance of public and private seating.

The report gives existing and new areas for private seating which shows an increase of 80m² – approximately 32.5% of the existing. No existing figures are given for the public seating, so we cannot see if there has been an increase or decrease in public seating area. The figures do show the new area, which includes the "grass" area – just on 39% of the total public seating. This is admittedly used extensively by parents and small children for seating and playing but we believe that it should not be included in the overall public seating area just to prove that there is more public than private seating.

2 Improve pedestrian access and movement through the Plaza.

We would argue that this statement has not been fulfilled.

We do not accept that the movement and access has been in any way improved. A freeing up of the area at the eastern end by removing the round planter has been off set by adding the area to the private seating thus not improving cross movement at all. The two new cross corridors are no wider or better than the existing. The corridor adjacent to the bandstand has two supporting posts hard against the steps to the bandstand and would inhibit the free movement along this corridor.

The call for covered cross movement does not seem to be a high priority with crossings at each end and in the middle not having covering.

The longitudinal movement is still confined to the area under the shop awnings and is no improvement whatsoever.

3 *Incorporating a range of amenity improvements.*

Some amenity improvements have been incorporated, such as better lighting, the western end of the raised timber platform and an improved seating at the western end. We see few other amenity points to justify the above statement.

There is still not enough garbage bins in particular recycling bins.

Bike rails should be placed in carpark areas and not in the main pedestrian areas of the Plaza. This would allow more space for rails which seems to be called for by the bike people.

The seating at the western end is directly open to the traffic rounding the corner of Burns Bay Road. The high walls required to provide the changes of level here do not open that end of the Plaza "*creating a greater sense of arrival*" which was a community issue listed.

The areas for community organisations to hold stalls and the public notice board have been reduced.

Conclusion

We do not believe that the first community issue listed in the introduction – "*enhancing the overall appeal of the Plaza*" has been achieved with these proposals. The existing appeal of the space is that it is informal and welcoming, it has a natural feel created by the existing materials, the sometime haphazard obstacles and activities occurring and in particular the greenery of the major trees. The use of more consistent detailing of umbrellas and street furniture could be an improvement, but basically we do not support the wholesale formalising of the Plaza that is shown in these proposals. In our opinion it is a waste of our ratepayer money which should be spent on other areas of the municipality which are in need of maintenance and improvement.

We do not accept these proposals and urge Council to listen to the community who do not want major changes but just to keep the informal and friendly atmosphere of the present space which has served us well for 35 years.

Doug Stuart for the committee,

Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society Inc

21st October 2013