

enquiries refer

John Truman

in reply please quote

Trim Ref: 1395-06, 17/13772



21 February 2017

Dear Resident

Re: Lake Ainsworth South Eastern Precinct Upgrade

Thank you for taking the time to write to Council to share with us your concerns regarding the Lake Ainsworth Southern Eastern Precinct Upgrade Project.

Lake Ainsworth is a special location in our Shire which is enjoyed by many residents and visitors. We therefore respect and understand the variety of opinions that exist within the community in regards to the options for us to improve the amenity of the area and protect the sensitive local environment. In response to our proposed project, we have received many emails and letters in support, and we have also received many communications, such as yours, which express a desire for the retention of the eastern road. The Council has debated this issue many times and the decision of Council is that, on balance, the project option which provides the best opportunities overall includes closing the eastern road. In response to your contact with us, I have set out below some information regarding the key issues which have been raised by some residents as concerns about the project and I trust this information will assist you to understand our position.

Firstly, I wish to confirm Council's objectives for this project are to improve the amenity, accessibility, safety of the precinct and to enhance the protection of the natural environment. By removing the eastern road, the Council will create substantial additional public space. This new public space will be supported by amenities such as picnic tables, shelters and water access points. The creation of this space allows Council to provide erosion protection for sections along the Lake foreshore embankment and rehabilitate the vegetation. The proposal will address road safety concerns in respect of the current situation where many pedestrians and vehicles share a small space. The project will also provide contemporary stormwater quality control for run off from the impermeable path surface. The design concept for the project was developed by a local landscape architect and I am sure the outcome will be a vibrant public space that will be enjoyed by the community.

Our response to the key issues that are being raised include the following.

Issue - Community Consultation

The development of this project commenced in 2013 with the preparation of a Masterplan. This plan was prepared by specialist consultants with inputs from key community stakeholder groups including the Lennox Head Surf Club, Lennox Head Residents Association, Lennox Head Chamber of Commerce, Ballina Environment Society, Lennox Combined Sports Association, NSW Sport and Recreation, and the Lake Ainsworth Holiday Park. From this consultation process, some suggested preferred options were considered by Council and a draft plan was placed on public exhibition. The exhibition included information and response stalls located at the Lake and in the Lennox CBD. These stalls were staffed by Council officers and members of the Lennox Head Residents Association and provided the community with an opportunity to provide direct feedback regarding the proposals.

In response to the community feedback from this exhibition process, the decision of Council was to amend the draft plan by including a pedestrian path only in the eastern area. To implement this masterplan, Council prepared a concept design and the details of this were published for the purpose of receiving community inputs and further consultation was undertaken with key community groups. The process of completing this design and adopting a final position included public debate by Council on a number of occasions. We understand not all residents are in support of the proposal, however it is our position that Council has provided many opportunities for community feedback and we have given careful consideration to all of the issues that have been raised.

Issue – Review of Environmental Factors

There have been comments that the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) has only been recently made available to the public. These comments are incorrect. The REF was prepared by Council's Civil Services Group and this documentation was assessed independently by Council's Development and Environmental Health Group and approved in October 2016. Recently the Civil Services Group made a submission to amend the construction sequencing proposed in the REF, this amendment was approved and published on our website. Importantly, this amendment did not make any changes to the previously approved scope of works for the project, or how the environment will be protected in response to the project.

Issue – Removal of Melaleuca Trees

The location of the new path was selected to minimise the amount of tree clearing. To achieve this, the path will follow the overhead power lines which already requires a cleared vegetation zone area for safety and maintenance. This does mean the removal of some melaleuca trees, however the Council will replace these trees and provide significant other improvements for the vegetation in the area.

Issue – Underground Power

Some comments have suggested undergrounding the power will enable Council to retain the eastern road and still provide an increase in the open space. This option was examined by Council's design engineers and irrespective of whether or not the power is relocated underground, it is not possible to construct a road and car parking areas, to the required standards, and new open space, without significant intrusions into the sensitive coastal dune systems. We do agree that undergrounding the power would improve the amenity of the area, however our investigation confirmed the cost of undergrounding the power to be in excess of \$430,000 and this is well beyond the resources of Council. Council therefore made a submission to Essential Energy requesting they complete this work as the asset owner, however unfortunately our request was declined.

Issue – Emergency Access

The eastern road currently terminates at the Sport and Recreation Centre. Emergency vehicles will still be able to use the new path to be constructed in the eastern area. Therefore the project does not negatively impact on the existing emergency management access for the area.

Issue – Western Road Capacity

After an analysis of traffic data, it is our opinion there is sufficient capacity for the western road to function safely and effectively following the closure of the eastern road. The western road is maintained by Council on a regular basis and this will continue. The road's condition will be monitored in accordance with our existing programs and we would like to provide a bitumen seal for this road in the future when sufficient funds from our roads program can be made available.

Issue – Access for Dog Walkers

Under Council's current policy, dog walkers will be able to access the off leash area by either walking along the beach from the surf club or by walking along the new path in the eastern foreshore area. The project does not impact on the options available for the future management of dogs in the area should the policy need to change. Council is planning to review the options again in the near future, however this policy process is independent of this project.

Issue – Maintenance of the Lake Area

A number of comments have made reference to funding Council receives from Crown Lands, stating that Council is receiving approximately \$120,000 for the maintenance of the eastern road. That comment is incorrect.

The background to this comment is that in 2010 Council resigned as the Reserve Trust Manager for the Shaws Bay (East Ballina), Ballina Central (Ballina) and Lake Ainsworth (Lennox Head) Caravan Parks. These caravan parks are now directly managed by the North Coast Holiday Parks Trust on behalf of the State Government. One of the conditions of the resignation requested by Council was that we receive an on-going payment from NSW Crown Lands, starting at \$112,000 per annum plus CPI, to assist with the maintenance of the crown reserves outside the caravan parks. The crown land areas in question are substantial and Council spends well in excess of the monies received from NSW Crown Lands on maintaining these reserves, along with all the crown reserves across the Shire.

Issue – Car Parking

There are approximately 63 informal car park spaces currently available along the eastern road. The Council has constructed 58 new formal car parks in Ross Street and opposite the Surf Club. The project for the southern road includes the construction and formalisation of car parks and this will further increase the parking capacity for the precinct. Subject to final design, 70 parks are expected to be provided on the southern road. During the initial community consultation phase for this project, Council invited feedback in respect of parking. It is fair to say some residents preferred more car parks to be provided compared to what is available presently, while other residents desired less car parks as they were concerned the car parks consume valuable community land and thereby negatively impact on the amenity of the area. To achieve the best balance overall, the Council has developed its plan for the area with the objective of maintaining the same total number of overall parking spaces, albeit some of the parks have been relocated.

Issue – Disabled Access and Access for the Elderly

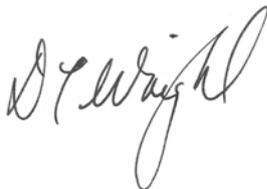
The grade and surface of the new path means it will be fully accessible. Improved disabled access will be provided at the southern end of the lake and a new disabled access ramp is included in the project for the eastern foreshore. Formal disabled parking will continue to be provided in the south east corner and the risk of an incident between a pedestrian and a vehicle in the eastern area has been removed.

Issue – Pedestrian Safety Southern Road

There have been comments in respect of pedestrian safety on the southern road, in particular concerns have been raised regarding children crossing the road after exiting the holiday park. The design process for the southern road will address this issue and in this regard Council is consulting the holiday park owner, NSW Crown Lands. A boundary fence is proposed under improvement plans for the holiday park and the details of this are being used to inform the design options for the road. The design options being considered include improvements such as traffic calming devices, shared zones, and pedestrian facilities.

In conclusion, I again thank you for taking the time to ensure we are aware of your concerns regarding this project. We have carefully considered all the issues associated with this project and the community feedback for a long period of time and, as noted above, a majority of Councillors have decided that on balance, creating the new public open space with its associated facilities and replacement car parks is the preferred direction to improve the amenity of the lake area and assist us to protect the natural environment. I trust the above information will assist you to understand our position in this matter.

Yours faithfully



Cr David Wright
Mayor