

Report of Community Engagement and Consultation – North Rocks Garden Village Project

Introduction:

EG Funds Management (EG) is developing a comprehensive Planning Proposal for the Royal Institute of Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) site in North Rocks. In determining key elements of the planning proposal, EG has undertaken a detailed community listening program to help inform the urban planning and built-form priorities for the site.

Background:

The Institute was formed in 1860 and is Australia's largest provider of therapy, education and diagnostic services for people with hearing loss or vision impairment. The Institute moved to the current 13.5 ha site in the 1960s but no longer needs the campus style facility for the delivery of core services and programs.

EG has secured the site and is working with the Institute in their relocation to modern, purpose-built facilities in Macquarie Park designed to meet their needs for now and the future.

Consultation and Listening:

EG recognises the importance of engaging with local residents to understand their needs and preferences for the area. Several methods of engagement were used to ensure an accurate cross-section of community views and input was received.

Methodology:

Engagement with the community comprised the following key components:

- Independent Qualitative Surveys; and
- EG-led face to face meetings and briefing with key groups and local organisations;

The feedback from both forms of consultation were analysed and informed key elements of the planning proposal.

Overview of Qualitative Research:

The survey participants were predominantly drawn from the North Rocks suburb with a small number of respondents from nearby and adjoining areas, including Northmead, Carlingford and Oatlands.

The survey sought views on what respondents most value about the area; what they think could be improved; what they want for the area in the future; and what they want to avoid for their area in the future.

The following comments and issues were identified as priorities for the community through this process:

What residents' value about the area...

- Proximity to services, schools, local shopping centre and public transport;
- Leafy greenness of the suburb and garden vibe;
- Neighbourly feel;
- Relatively quiet, low scale suburb;

The areas where residents thought the area could be improved included;

- Better links to public transport and more frequent services;
- Improved traffic flow and less congestion;
- More and better parks and open spaces

Features residents want for the area in the future include:

- Parks with play equipment for children;
- Walking/cycling paths
- Sporting fields for organised sports;
- Improved access and frequency of public transport services
- Aged-care facilities and improved public amenities

Features residents want to avoid for the area:

- Didn't want 'Carlingford' style development in local area;
- Don't want high-rise apartments;
- Overdevelopment, congestion, and poor amenity from design
- Congestion and more cars/traffic

Overview of Face-to-Face meetings with local groups:

Recognising the importance of consulting key local groups and associations, EG undertook an extensive engagement program to ensure the project reflected the needs and preferences of the community.

Over the course of the consultation program, more than 25 separate groups, associations and key individuals were contacted. Meetings and briefings were held with groups and organisations including:

- Rotary Club of Carlingford (users of the current RIDBC site)
- 1st North Rocks Scout Group;
- Rotary Club of North Rocks
- North Rocks Soccer Club;
- North Rocks Softball Association;
- Federation of Indian Associations of NSW
- Muirfield High School Principal;
- North Rocks Public School Principal

Feedback from Face-to-Face Meetings:

Meetings and presentations were made to a number of groups where information was sought on the key priorities, concerns and preferences for the future use of this strategic site. There was strong support for the provision of active open space such as sporting fields/oval to address an identified shortage in the local area.

Respondents also identified the need for a casual meeting place where locals could go to meet up with friends at a café. Many others commented that they wanted attractive and green places to walk and didn't want the area to feel out of character with the existing housing. The importance of options for older residents to downsize to low maintenance accommodation and potential for seniors housing was also identified by numerous groups and individuals.

Key Issues Arising:

Collectively from all methods of resident engagement, the research identified resident priorities and preferences for any project being undertaken in North Rocks. Key issues include:

- The support and desire for more public transport was identified (25%) as a way of improving their community and 72% indicated that more local parks would greatly improve the quality of life for people in the community;
- Residents also identified new local parks (33%) and library (37%) as their most preferred new community facilities;
- While the proportion of residents who are renters is relatively small (reflecting the high proportion of home ownership in the area), 54% of renters said they were either very likely or fairly likely to move over the next 2-3 years. The main reason given for this (26%) was affordability;
- Of all respondents, 83% indicated they felt that housing is becoming unaffordable and 46% agreed they would like to see more diversity of housing including aged care, seniors housing and apartments.

Response to Community Sentiment:

The analysis of resident feedback and sentiment obtained from surveys and direct engagement with local groups and individuals has helped inform EG's concept proposal.

Issue/Concern	Response
Need for more public transport	EG is working with Transport for NSW to develop a free shuttle bus service to operate during am and pm peaks to transport residents to the M2 Busway stop. The service would operate from within North Rocks Village Green and service the local shopping area.

	Outside of peak hours, the service could operate as an on-demand service for local commuter trips in and around North Rocks.
Preferred new community facilities	Reflecting the very strong community support for a new local park and local library, EG's proposal delivers a full-size sporting field as well as 6 new local parks. The Village Green element has been designed to accommodate a local library and community hub to meet the needs of residents and the broader community.
Response to affordability and diversity	<p>The predominate housing typology in the North Rocks area is detached single dwellings. Consequently, the local housing market does not readily support first home buyers or downsizers. EG's response is to include sufficient, well-designed and generously sized housing in low-mid rise buildings (predominately 4-6 levels) as well as townhouse style and small lot housing.</p> <p>This diversity of housing responds to the shortage of choice in the current housing market and will provide options for first home buyers, young families and those looking to downsize from traditional detached housing.</p>

Conclusion:

The extensive community engagement and consultation undertaken by EG has been critical in informing the concept masterplan for North Rocks Village Green. The result is a proposal that respects the character of North Rocks while providing housing choice, as well as improved and additional passive and active open spaces.