

GREGORY HILLS TOWN CENTRE CHARRETTE

Charrette Purpose

For Council and Dart West to agree to a conceptual design and set of statutory controls for the proposed Gregory Hills Town Centre (GHTC). The statutory controls will be developed into a Part B DCP.

Background

The South West Growth Sector was established in December 2007 through the Growth Centres SEPP. At the same time, a Part A DCP for the Turner Road area was gazetted. This Part A DCP set out strategic level development controls for the proposed Gregory Hills Town Centre (GHTC). These strategic level controls are contained in Attachment 1 to this report. The DCP required more detailed controls to be prepared as part of a Part B DCP.

Council and Dart West agreed to hold a design charrette on the 11th and 12th of July 2011 to agree on a concept design for the Town Centre and the detailed controls to form the Part B DCP.

The location of the GHTC site is highlighted in red below:



The Role of APP

The NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) is funding Jeremy Spinks from APP to manage the preparation of four DCPs in the Oran Park and Turner Road precincts, including the Part B DCP for the GHTC. Jeremy managed and facilitated the design charrette.

Design Charrette - Background

The design charrette was held at Dart West's Gregory Hills Land Sales and Information Centre on the 11th and 12th of July 2011. Council engaged Garth Paterson of Paterson Design Strategies to act as an urban design and town centre consultant. Garth has many years experience on similar scale projects for Stockland. Garth also brought landscape architecture and public domain skills to the workshop. Council also engaged Dean Brodie of Brown Consulting to advise on relevant traffic and transport issues.

Dart West engaged The Buchan Group to prepare preliminary concept designs for the site. DPS were engaged by Dart West to prepare the draft development controls arising from the charrette.

A detailed memo prepared prior to the charrette which sets out objectives, attendees, consultant procurement and the agenda is found at **Attachment 1**.

Charrette – Day One – Preliminary Presentations

Introduction

Jeremy Spinks introduced the charrette process and outlined the objectives and rules. Jeremy noted that Council recognised the importance of delivering a commercially viable centre. Such centres have to be viable in order to remain attractive to the community in the long term.

Council Objectives

Jeff Williams described the statutory planning framework including the SEPP and Part A DCP history. He then outlined Council's objectives for the GHTC, in particular that the centre feature activated streets and not be dominated by car parking and inward looking boxy buildings. Jeff reiterated Council's objective to allow for a commercially viable centre that also presented an attractive public domain for the enjoyment of the community. Jeff's presentation is included as **Attachment 2**.

Dart West Objectives

David Taylor outlined Dart West's objectives for the centre. Dart West want to deliver and maintain a centre they will be proud of and that acts as a community heart for Gregory Hills. The centre is deliberately located in the centre of Gregory Hills for that reason. Dart West is also starting to consider the design of the surrounding blocks. These will generally be for medium density residential, with a primary school site identified to the east.

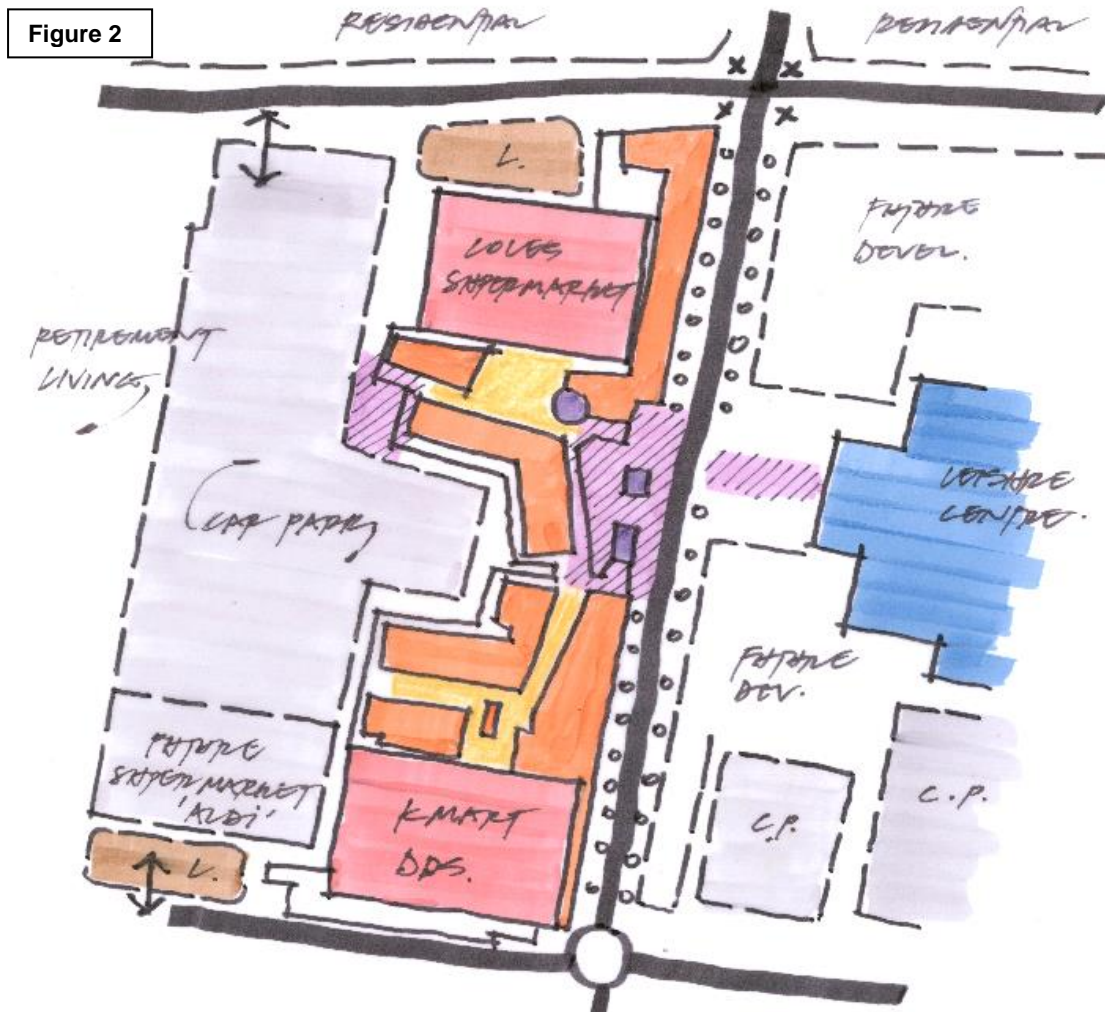
Dart West is keen for the GHTC to complement the nearby Gregory Hills Business Park, and to ensure that the Part B DCP allows the detailed design of the centre to evolve and allow for staged implementation. Finally, David noted that Gregory Hills Drive, once completed through to Campbelltown, will be the primary connection between Campbelltown and Oran Park, and will therefore have a high level of passing traffic.

Australian Current Practice

Garth Paterson presented three case studies of town centres of a similar scale. These were Stanhope Gardens in Blacktown LGA, Ropes Crossing, also in Blacktown, and Laurimar on the northern outskirts of Melbourne. All three feature an element of activated street frontages. Garth's presentation is included as **Attachment 3**.

Laurimar and Ropes Crossing provide an activated edge to one street frontage, with the bulk of retail in an air conditioned indoor mall. It was noted that these streets were not as busy as Gregory Hills Drive will become.

Stanhope Gardens in particular features a "hybrid main street" model – see Figure 2 below. The centre is anchored by a "major" at each end, and has shops fronting Sentry Drive. These are generally lower rent premises such as real estate agencies. The model is aided by the presence of the Leisure Centre across Sentry Drive, which provides passing pedestrian traffic. The Stanhope Gardens centre presents well to Sentry Drive, but not well to Stanhope Parkway, which features entries to the car park and a loading dock, some landscaping, a blank wall and some corner signage. An outdoor plaza with play equipment and limited eating opportunities is provided centrally, opposite the Leisure Centre.



Garth reviewed the location of the GHTC site within the wider development and concluded it was ideally placed to serve the catchment. Garth also reviewed some of the key factors that contribute to successful centres of a similar scale. These include

green links, hovering spots, play spots, spill out eateries, public art, well located free seating and shade trees. Garth noted the importance of aggregating elements such as shade, seating, bins and planted areas to provide an attractive and functional public domain.

Finally Garth reviewed the preferred concept design by The Buchan Group (see **Attachment 6**) and noted that it did not present an active edge to any street. The design also featured a dominance of car parking to the street edges.

Transport Overview

Dean Brodie described the surrounding street and transport network. Gregory Hills Drive will be classified as a four lane sub arterial road with a posted speed limit of 60km/h. The intersection of Gregory Hills Drive and the North South collector road at the north-west corner of the site will be signalised. This is the major corner for the GHTC. Gregory Hills Drive will require turning lanes to access the North South collector road. From the south, the collector road will feature two approach lanes to the intersection with Gregory Hills Drive. These will include a separate right turn bay.

At the north-east corner, defined by Gregory Hills Drive and the riparian corridor, Gregory Hills Drive will be raised above the level of the site to allow a bridge to be constructed over the riparian corridor. The bridge is proposed to be high enough to allow pedestrian and cycle movement under it along a trail network in the riparian corridor.

Dean illustrated where the key bus routes were likely to be, and advised that bus stops should be considered at the north west corner of the site on both Gregory Hills Drive and the North South collector road.

The road network has been designed to provide motorists options when travelling to and from the Town Centre.

Dean Brodie's presentation is included at **Attachment 4**.

DPS Overview

Nigel McAndrew presented the planning and design background to the Gregory Hills development. The presentation included a summary of the Part A DCP controls and some sample, aspirational images. Nigel's presentation is included at **Attachment 5**.

The Buchan Group Overview

Phil Schoutrop from The Buchan Group outlined the evolution of the 2008 concept design process. The design started from the ideal retail scenario of centralised space with minimal travel distance from parking areas. This however resulted in a "bullseye" or "donut" style layout with the retail space surrounded by parking, with a poor relationship to the street.

The Buchan Group identified key constraints and desires for the site.

Constraints:

- Slope – the site slopes gently from the SW corner to the NE corner. There is a 10m level difference across the site. Therefore despite the gentle gradient, there are still significant level changes to accommodate in order to provide a pleasant retail experience. The grade is also relatively fixed (within a metre or two) along the western site edge due to existing development and road heads.

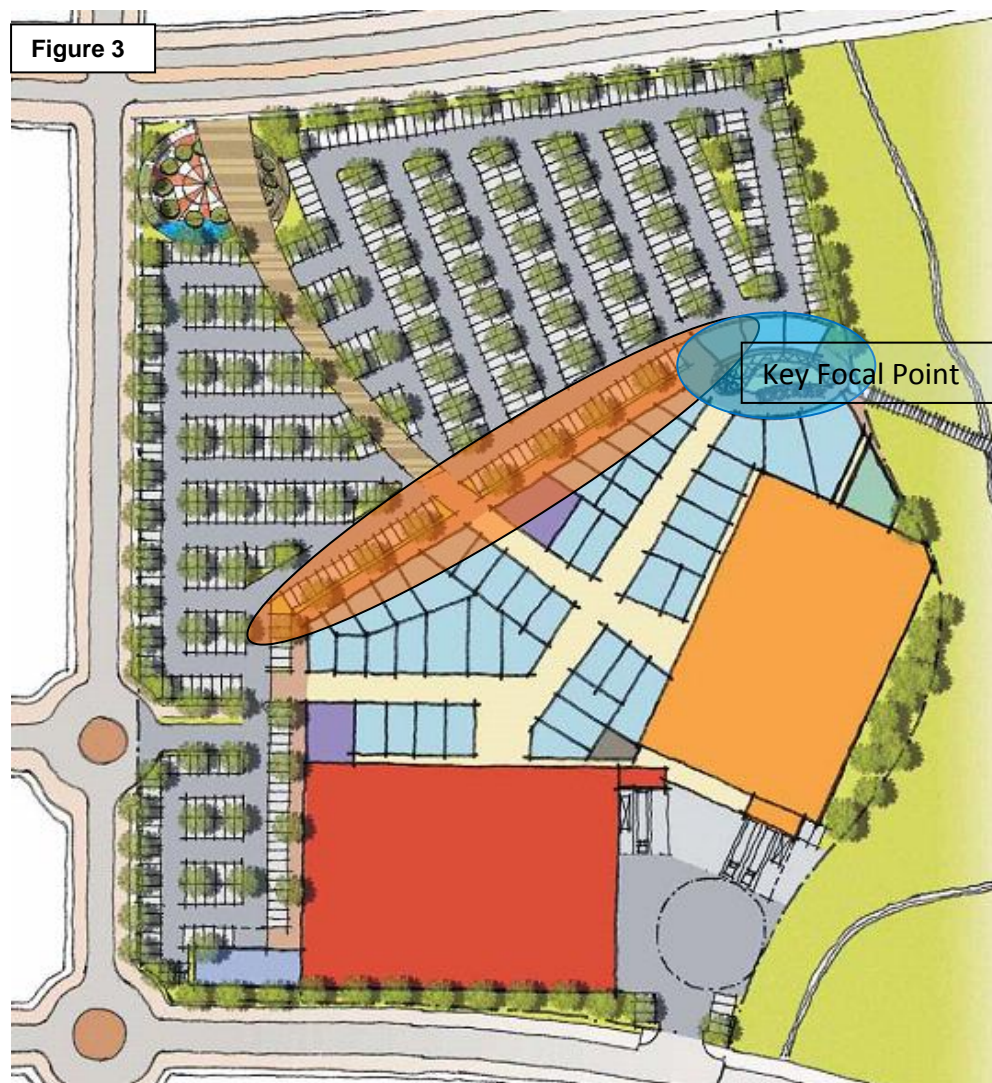
- Loading access – loading access off Gregory Hills Drive is constrained by traffic volumes, aesthetics and the proposed bridge over the riparian corridor.

Desires:

- Single loading area – more efficient use of space and minimises unattractive areas
- North facing, open air plaza sheltered from south and westerly winter winds with eateries fronting the riparian corridor, acting as focal point for the centre
- Relate strongly to the riparian corridor
- Parking area relates to retail entry points
- Active linkage or relationship to NW corner

Based on these constraints and desires, the design quickly evolved into a model with the retail area and loading bay located at the south east corner of the site, and the public plaza towards the north east interacting with the riparian corridor. This resulted in car parking areas along the northern and western site frontages.

Phil presented a modified version of the 2008 concept plan as shown in Figure 3 below. The orange elliptical area marked “A” shows an activated retail edge with shops facing outwards along a high quality landscaped pedestrian walkway. An illustration of this concept is shown in Figure 4.





This option has the retail consolidated in the south-east corner served by a single loading bay.

The open air plaza area is located adjoining the riparian corridor towards the north-east corner of the site, to provide a high quality, iconic visual element closer to Gregory Hills Drive.

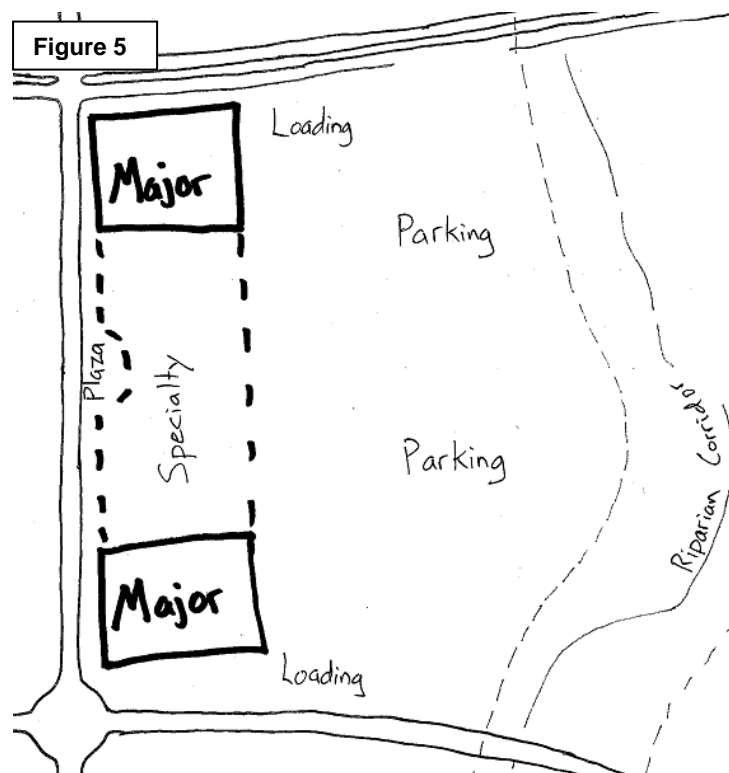
The north-west corner features a landscaped entry feature.

Charrette – Day One – First Working Session

Hybrid Main Street option

The charrette team investigated how a hybrid main street model such as Stanhope Gardens could be applied to the GHTC site. This option, illustrated below, would feature the following:

- retail fronting the North South collector road;
- strong built presence to the NW corner of the site at Gregory Hills Drive;
- an outdoor plaza area located midway along the North South collector road;
- parking located on the eastern half of the site adjacent to the riparian corridor;
- and
- two loading areas accessed off Gregory Hills Drive and the southern boundary road.



The strengths of this option are:

- A strongly activated North South collector road; and
- A strong built element to the highly visible corner of Gregory Hills Drive and the North South collector road.

The weaknesses of this option are:

- Two loading zones results in a less efficient use of space;
- A loading zone accessed off Gregory Hills Drive will result in an unattractive frontage to that road, and has difficulties associated with changes in level coming down from the bridge over the riparian corridor;
- Poor frontage to, and no interaction with, the riparian corridor; and
- A less attractive location for the outdoor plaza.

Transport and Access Issues

The charrette then considered detailed issues of transport and access.

The following conclusions were reached:

- The recommended access from Gregory Hills Drive is left in only when approaching from the east. This would more than likely be via a slip lane. This will need to take account of level changes associated with the proposed bridge over the riparian corridor to maintain adequate height clearance to allow pedestrian and cycle movement below.
- Bus stops should be considered on Gregory Hills Drive and the North South collector road close to the signalised intersection. This intersection includes pedestrian phasing across all legs of this major intersection.
- One vehicular access point should be provided along the North South collector road to the car park, via the existing identified roundabout at the intersection with the minor side street.
- A second vehicular access point should be investigated from the southern boundary road, towards the western edge. This may be left out only, and will be dependent on levels and the distance from the intersection of the North South collector and southern boundary roads.
- A single loading area should be provided with access from the southern boundary road towards the eastern end of the site boundary. Loading from Gregory Hills Drive is not recommended due to traffic speeds and levels, as discussed above.

Vision for Riparian Corridor

The Hybrid Main Street option effectively turns its back on the riparian corridor.

Dart West spent some time outlining the vision for the corridor, which is intended to be an open, urbanised pedestrian and cycle corridor forming part of the wider pedestrian and cycle network, while also forming an integrated connection between the GHTC and the proposed primary school and medium density residential to the east.

The corridor is proposed to be well lit at night and feature low, open planting and meandering paths, similar in concept to the image below.

This will provide an attractive setting for the proposed public plaza, as well as promoting pedestrian movement between the Town Centre to the west and the medium density residential and primary school to the east.



The riparian corridor is also a key link in the wider pedestrian and cycle network. Dart West proposes providing a pedestrian and cycle underpass under Gregory Hills Drive to allow continuous pedestrian and cycle access to and from the north of the Town Centre.

The plaza space is proposed to seamlessly flow into the riparian corridor to provide a high level of amenity for users and passers by. Figure 6 below is an illustrative concept of the plaza.

Figure 6



Therefore, the town centre should aim to provide a seamless attractive interface to the riparian corridor.

Modified Buchan Concept Plan

The charrette returned to the Buchan option. A key difference between this option and the Hybrid Main Street option is the strength of the relationship to the riparian corridor and the ability to create a public plaza that is highly landscaped and which offers an attractive outlook.

The charrette explored ways in which the Buchan preferred concept could:

1. strengthen the street address to Gregory Hills Drive and the north south collector road;
2. provide an active outdoor retail edge; and
3. minimise the perceived visual dominance of car parking when viewed from the street edges.

Strengthen the street address

A landscaped “edge” structure similar to the image below but at a larger scale will provide a strong visual marker for the Gregory Hills Drive street frontage. Such a structure could incorporate banners, lighting, signage and even bus stops. This type of structure will also soften the visual impact of parking areas when viewed from the street.



This type of structure should be constructed along significant portions of the northern and western street address to give emphasis to the north west corner of the site. The structure could be used to reinforce the key pedestrian path from the north-west corner to the shops.

Active outdoor retail edge

The north western façade of the retail area is proposed to be an outward facing retail edge. This strip was explained to have outward facing shops, a wider pedestrian walkway and a palette of street furniture and shade trees to provide a high quality environment. Phil Schoutrop presented several images to illustrate the concept. Some of these are presented below.



Minimise the dominance of parking

Landscape options to soften the appearance of car parks were explored. Changes in level need to be addressed, which provides opportunities for landscaping. Other options included treatments that provided consistent paving materials, consistent grades and appropriate use of low planting and shade trees.

An illustrative image is provided below.

The landscape edge structure will also soften the appearance of parking areas when viewed from Gregory Hills Drive and the north south collector road.



Day One Wrap Up

Day One of the charrette featured presentations from all the parties. The hybrid main street model was explored, with similar sized examples shown from Stanhope Gardens, Laurimar and Ropes Crossing. This model was superimposed on to the Gregory Hills Town Centre site. Based on the strengths and weaknesses of the model, particularly difficulties with loading access and the poor relationship to the riparian corridor, this model was considered less appropriate for the site.

However Council was not satisfied that the Buchan concept provided an appropriate street address. Options to improve this were explored.

Day Two – Morning Session

Jeremy Spinks summarised the proceedings from Day One. Overnight Jeremy had prepared a matrix based on the Part A DCP provisions to test the Buchan concept model. The matrix considers to what extent the Buchan concept model addresses the Part A DCP provisions. The assessment is subjective and based on Jeremy Spinks's opinion, however it still serves as a useful guide to test any town centre structure plan.

The matrix is presented below.

DCP Control	Extent to which provision is met		
	High	Medium	Low
15,000sqm GFA	✓		
Central focus for the community	✓		
Supported by higher residential densities	✓		
Maximise exposure to Gregory Hills Drive		✓	
Provide vibrant and active civic square, plaza	✓		

or main street			
Consider future noise conflicts	✓		
Consider future amenity conflicts		✓ (trucks)	
Allow a range of building heights	✓		
Buildings to be visible from and have a presence to street frontages.		✓	
Where buildings are not built to street frontages, minimise setbacks			✓
Buildings to take advantage of proximity to open space areas, including riparian corridors	✓		
Building and landscape design is to be complementary to ensure legible, safe access for pedestrians from the street frontages, within the centre and to adjoining land		Detailed design	
Blank walls visible from principal streets and the public domain are to be limited		✓	
Large format retail uses to be sleeved with active uses			✓
In other circumstances, building design and landscaping shall minimise extent and visibility of blank walls		Detailed design	
High quality built form and energy efficient buildings that promote a sense of place and contemporary character		Detailed design	
Waste storage and collection areas are to minimise impacts, particularly within mixed use developments	✓		
Provide high amenity pedestrian streetscapes to and within the centre		Detailed design	
Walking and cycling to and within the centre is to take priority over traffic circulation		✓	
Provide continuous weather protection for pedestrians	✓		
Provide adequate solar access to key pedestrian streets	✓		
Design site servicing and loading to minimise visual impact on public domain and neighbours	✓		
Incorporate CPTED and Safer By Design		Detailed design	
Provide high quality landscape including street furniture and lighting that enhances the character of the centre		Detailed design	
Provide street tree and open space planting to provide generous shade for pedestrians		Detailed design	
Coordinate signage and advertising		Detailed design	

The matrix indicates that the Buchan model performs well on most criteria, with some measures only able to be addressed through detailed design.

The areas where the concept model could be improved relate to street address and activation.

Improving Street Address and Activity

On-street retail

Garth Paterson developed an idea that had briefly been discussed on Day One to provide a small retail building approximately mid block along the north south collector road. This could contain a uses that provide convenience retail, or that operate outside the normal hours of the rest of the centre, for example pizza shops.

Dart West agreed that this could be incorporated into the concept plan, provided that it was supported by on-street parking. A quick analysis by Dean Brodie indicated that at least 12 on street spaces plus a bus stop could be provided on the north south collector between the intersection with Gregory Hills Drive and the entry to the car park.

Active uses across the street

The charrette considered the zoning of the site and the possibility of allowing commercial activity on the western side of the north south collector road. Council and Dart West agreed that this could be done, which would allow a range of uses such as dentists, general practitioners and other commercial activities. It may be possible to locate a community building along that frontage too.

These uses generate more pedestrian traffic and visits compared to residential uses, and would increase the activity along both sides of the north south collector road. This in turn requires the street to be more pedestrian friendly through the detailed design. Such uses will increase the reason to visit the town centre, thereby improving the potential viability and creating more of a community focal point. With one trip people can pick up children from school, go shopping and visit the GP.

Key Design Elements

The charrette broke into smaller groups to prepare a series of drawings to illustrate the key agreements, particularly relating to the north-west corner, the north-south collector road and the active retail edge of the main retail building. **Sketches are included below – JS to scan and insert sketches where available.**

Day Two – Final Session

Key Agreements

Following the design work the group reconvened and agreed on the following key elements.

1. The public plaza is to be a high quality landscaped space that interacts with the riparian corridor and has a strong presence when viewed from Gregory Hills Drive. As noted by Dart West this corner is a gateway to the “new Camden”.

2. The Gregory Hills Drive street frontage is to feature a strong landscape “edge” or framework structure, which may include lighting, banners, signage and shade through planting or lightweight materials.
3. This structure should also extend a reasonable way along the north-south collector road.
4. The north-west corner of the site may contain a taller landmark structure identifying the centre as a whole, however should not contain specific retail branding – e.g. Coles or Woolworths.
5. A small retail building with at least 2 shops should be provided on the frontage to the north south collector road.
6. Commercial uses should be encouraged along the western side of the north south collector road.
7. The interface between the north-south collector road and the parking area shall be landscaped with quality materials to encourage safe pedestrian movement and to soften the visual impact of parking areas.
8. An active retail edge opening outwards to a landscaped pedestrian space is to be provided to the north-western edge of the main retail building.
9. The long eastern and southern façades of the main retail building are to be treated architecturally and with landscaping to soften their appearance.
10. The riparian corridor, although not forming part of the Part B DCP, is to be treated as a safe pedestrian and cycle corridor, with wide paths, open landscaping and lighting.

Council wished to record that its acceptance of the Buchan concept plan was predicated on the key agreements achieved in the charrette being expressed through the Part B DCP.

Draft Part B DCP

The charrette concluded with detailed discussions over specific controls. Significant progress was made. DPS agreed to continue working on the draft document, and to ensure that all provisions in the Part A DCP were addressed in the Part B DCP.

Charrette Conclusion

All participants recorded their thanks to Dart West for hosting the event, and to each other for the spirit of cooperation and openness with which the event was conducted.

Dart West, the Buchan Group and DPS undertook to produce a draft DCP which would then be reviewed by Council, Garth Paterson and Brown Consulting. Council also advised that the draft DCP would need to be reviewed by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure before being placed on public exhibition.