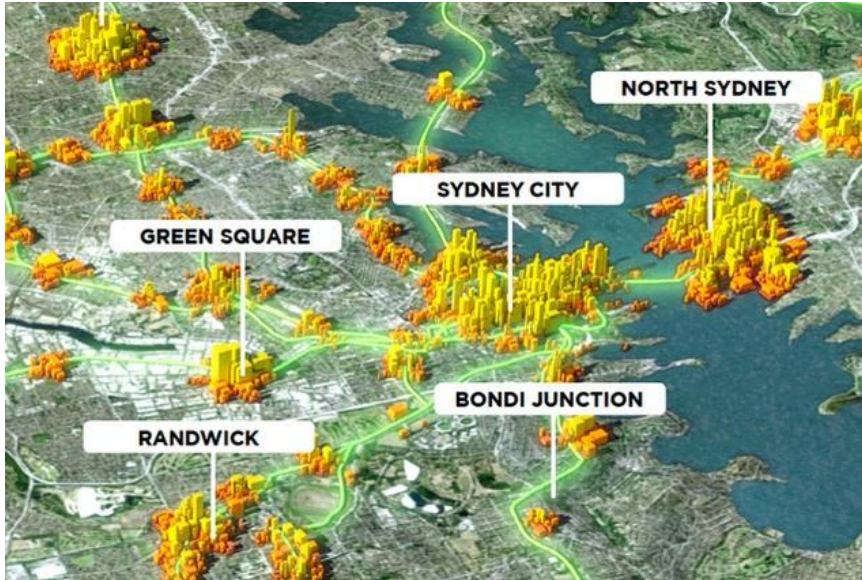


Population Growth vs Sustainability

“If we’re going to talk about density, then we need to talk not just about hard infrastructure, like transit, but the soft infrastructure we need, like culture, education, affordable housing...”



Last week a new publication ‘*Towers and Transport*’ by the Urban Taskforce was launched by Vishaan Chakrabarti of SHoP Architects (also a director of Columbia University’s Centre for Urban Real Estate (CURE) and formerly with the Manhattan Office for the New York Department of City Planning) with reference to density in a global sustainability perspective.

<http://architectureau.com/articles/do-5000-towers-make-for-a-healthy-city/>

As a strategy to accommodate 1/3 of the projected increase of 1.6m houses and apartments needed if Sydney is to maintain its current growth in natural and immigration increase up to 2050, the Urban Taskforce strategy is to consider a range of high density development models along the rail corridors - alternatives to doubling Sydney's metro footprint, or a doubling of density right across the existing footprint that would lead to increased traffic congestion, and greater pressures on open space and infrastructure. Both latter options are questionable in terms of sustainable urban planning and liveable environments.

The media has also been running hot on concerns about overcrowded schools and limits of existing infrastructure, and then the Baird government confirmed amalgamation ‘incentives’ for local councils, with Lane Cove touted as part of a super council that could include North Sydney, Mosman, Hunters Hill and East Ryde.

Lane Cove has a unique location being just a 10 min express bus ride from Wynyard or 15 min ferry trip to Circular Quay. Not being on a railway corridor does leave us off the map for towers around our village, but does not absolve us from responsibility to help take some of population increase which is occurring in the medium density typologies.

Such initiatives help take pressure off some lower density areas and precious open space, but will not solve the problem of satisfying needs for our educational, cultural and recreational activities that must also respond to increased densities. Many sites and buildings are under-utilised, so there should be strategies to look for more shared and multi-use facilities. In Lane Cove a new recreation amenity and Scout Hall planned for the Blackman Park sports field is being designed to allow for a range of other user groups to share. This is a great precedent that could be applied elsewhere.

The Rosenthal car park site (about 0.6 Ha) is at present being considered for a 500 space car park and more retail, and Council also intends to have a large landscaped space on top, with the northern half identified for a 'future use' in a multi-storey building. Lane Cove has a major shortage in cultural facilities, and there is a strong community call to consider how the Rosenthal site might help, and perhaps even see a small Dendy or Palace style cinema complex. As well as meeting local needs, this might help stimulate local cafes and restaurants both day and night, adding to the local economy.

Lane Cove Council could also be proactive and innovative in considering how, if amalgamation happens, a new super council HQ might fit on the Rosenthal site. A new council chamber could double as a multi-purpose hall/theatre, capable of adaptation to various uses at different times. This could be a civic place catalyst for further stimulus in the village, with a range of possible other activities to take the pressure of the fast disappearing plaza. Then the existing council site could be a significant development opportunity, able to provide both new commercial space and apartments with excellent proximity to the village, public transport and the Lane Cove Aquatic Centre and gyms – and all within a walkable distance of the village to add economic stimulation while minimising car activity.

For a more sustainable urban environment, we need our leaders at local and state levels to be more proactive and visionary, but beyond currently carbuncles erupting in the Plaza. This new work is adding another clunky layer of over designed structure sacrificing public space for commercial gain. Such short term 'tack-on' public domain works will further diminish the quality and amenity of our village. If this work is a precedent for the Rosenthal project, the potential will be lost for a real civic heart to Lane Cove that could incorporate the best of small start-up commercial, cultural activities, usable landscape space and social outcomes for whole community, and not just commercial returns.

The need for vigilance seems to be a clarion call at present – but threats can be indirect as well, so the community radar is very much in need. Stay tuned for an action call in the near future.

Jon Johannsen

18/9/14