

Big W Development Application – Salamander Shopping Centre – Approved

The following is a summary of the outcome of the Joint Regional Planning Panel held at Port Stephens Council Chambers at Raymond Terrace on 16.5.13 as prepared by Nigel Waters in an email to the many people who have been assisting TRRA Inc to work towards getting a much better outcome for our community. Nigel represented TRRA at the hearing. We were obviously disappointed with the outcome. His presentation is [HERE](#).

Email of 17.5.13 from Nigel (reprinted with his permission)

“You may have already heard that the BigW DA was approved yesterday – [HERE](#)

The Panel gave us a decent hearing but the Chair explained (almost apologetically) that they couldn’t take into account any issues arising from the 3 lot subdivision DA already approved by Council – we knew this was the ‘technical’ position but had hoped that we could get them to consider at least some of the issues on public interest grounds. It was pretty obvious that the panel had already decided to approve, with only minor changes, before they heard from us – the Panel system is really not able to accommodate major challenges such as the one we mounted.

The Mayor and Councillor Jordan took part despite us having challenged their conflict of interest as reps of the landowner and beneficiary of the sale. The Chair explained that it was up to them to declare any interest and neither of them considered they had a conflict! It seems strange that there is no independent judgement of their self-assessment.

Their participation was however immaterial as all three of the other independent members approved the DA. They did make some minor changes to conditions, some of which will be welcomed by local residents – a reduction in the size of some signs, and a switch off of the illuminated signs at 10pm rather than midnight. There should also be better noise monitoring arrangements and some shade trees in the car park.

Short of court challenges which we can’t afford, that is probably the end of the line on this after four years battle to try to get a better outcome.

The community may well be horrified at the result when the work is completed in a few years time (not to mention about the sand truck movements past the Wanda Beach shops during site preparation). More likely we will all welcome the new shopping, and most of us will just accept a continuation of the poor quality of the Centre, because we won’t know what we are missing in terms of ‘what could have been’ – an attractive modern mixed use development with better traffic and parking integration and less environmental damage.

TRRA will now consider what more it can do in relation to the Salamander Centre. I will recommend that our attention now turn to ensuring as good an outcome as possible for the two remaining lots – between MacDonalds and the Rigby Centre, and more critically the western Lot 3 which includes the current library complex and the child care centre, and which borders the Mambo wetlands. Council’s plan is obviously to ram the perimeter road down the edge of the wetlands, but we will at least be able to challenge this in the next DA.

We also need to continue to draw attention to the need for wider planning to take account of the relationships between the Salamander Centre, Nelson Bay Town Centre and the other local shopping centres, if they are all to have a future,

Thanks to those of you that have put so much time and effort into this campaign. Whilst we have lost at one level, we have hopefully made it clear to Council that they can’t act without public scrutiny, and we may just have made it a bit more difficult for them to get away with poor planning decisions in future.

Nigel Waters

Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc.”