

Central to Eveleigh – Some REDWatch Concerns

UrbanGrowth NSW (UG) has just completed some focus groups about Central to Eveleigh (C2E) issues around a [Draft Concept and Key Issues summary - June 2014](#).

This was an important discussion but there were some other issues of the concern that were raised which REDWatch would like to see addressed. This paper seeks to explain these concerns and put them on record.

Background on REDWatch Involvement on the C2E site

REDWatch has been engaged with a succession of Government bodies since 2004 in discussions about the Eveleigh part of the C2E site. Over this time we have seen the RED Strategy, planning controls for ATP and Eveleigh, an approved Concept Plan for the redevelopment of North Eveleigh, Draft Plans covering the redevelopment of Eveleigh public housing, the North Eveleigh access road and Affordable Housing proposals, interminable discussions about Redfern station and an Interpretation Plan for Heritage across the former Eveleigh Railyards site.

Under the Redfern Waterloo Authority we were promised significant community engagement which was watered down to quarterly Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) meetings which provided some reporting but locked the community out of real discussions about what happened on the site. The Built Environment MAC (BEMAC) for example was excluded from seeing any of the design competition entries for North Eveleigh that were used to prepare the North Eveleigh Concept Plan. The BEMAC was shown the first Built Environment Plan (BEP1) that dealt with Eveleigh Railyards after it went on public exhibition, and just before exhibition in the case of the second Built Environment Plan (BEP2) dealing with public housing redevelopment. REDWatch was continually pushed into reacting to the plans Government put together behind closed doors.

Outside this process REDWatch invited the Government bodies like the RWA / SMDA / UrbanGrowth / Land and Housing Corporation etc to REDWatch Meetings to discuss issues of concern to REDWatch that we knew were being looked at internally. We also met with people from those organisations for briefing and off the record discussions.

With the Planning White Paper announcement last year being followed by the announcement of work on Central to Eveleigh, REDWatch saw the opportunity of taking the promise of upfront community engagement in strategic planning that was proposed for the new planning system and applying it to work on C2E. REDWatch asked UrbanGrowth and the Department of Planning to use Central to Eveleigh to model this new approach to strategic planning.

Resulting from this the Department appointed UTS to assist UrbanGrowth in planning its community engagement around this strategic planning. Geoff Turnbull (REDWatch Spokesperson and earlier BEMAC member) was asked to also participate as a community person in the planning process. That process lead to three sessions in 2013 (one with Government and key land owners, one of randomly selected people from the wider community and one with community groups around the site), the report from these sessions was made public in [Initial Stakeholder and Community Engagement Report - Jan 2014](#).

The group responsible for the initial consultation never met to review the process or to discuss the next steps. The report was finalised by email. KLA, the consultants finished up, the C2E project received an updated brief from Government and the C2E Project Manager changed. UTS was asked to undertake a new set of focus groups as a consultant of UG's rather than as a continuation of the earlier process.

When approached about the new focus groups REDWatch sent a note to UG raising many of the concerns in this paper. We also met with UG to discuss the note. Our aim was to try to get some of the broader issues about the shape of the community role in C2E strategic planning back on the table

and get this discussed with the other community groups rather than just REDWatch. REDWatch has argued, unsuccessfully to date, for a broader community reference group for C2E.

Finally it is worthwhile mentioning that as part of the Department of Planning's Culture Change response last year that it arranged for two busloads of staff from the Department to go on guided tours of the C2E corridor to learn more about the area and its issues. Those tours heard both from UrbanGrowth and REDWatch spokesperson Geoff Turnbull throughout the tour. There is, as a result of these tours, greater knowledge of some of the issues within the Department than there may have been otherwise.

Current Concerns

Prior to the latest focus groups REDWatch raised some concerns about the process proposed with UG. Of prime concern was that, for many of the community groups, the focus groups were their second meeting with UG and as key stakeholders there were other issues that also needed to be discussed. This was especially the case as there had been no follow up process from the initial stakeholder engagement. There were as a result continuity questions from the previous meeting and stakeholder issues that needed to be also discussed.

While the community groups' session did discuss some of the participant's wider questions and concerns, it also rehashed some old concerns without really addressing the questions raised by UG or making alternative suggestions. We did not get time for discussion of the issues which UG was raising, resulting in less than desirable outcomes in either of the areas discussed and a lost opportunity to engage around the questions UG were asking.

This could have been an opportunity to lobby for a new school, affordable housing, expanded green space, childcare and creative spaces. It could be a chance to influence place making and the shape of the master plan (if it goes that far). We should have looked closely at the ATP which will be the first cab off the rank probably and addressed the question on the sheet "if ownership of the ATP were to change....." which raises many questions about its future that we should have been pursuing.

The meetings need to be more focused and adequate time has to be allocated to address the different areas people want to discuss. As part of this there need to be time for the discussion of what UG wants discussed and time for what the community groups want discussed.

Below are some of REDWatch main concerns.

Focus Groups:

As well as focus groups UG needs to also consult about all relevant issues with community groups. To do this it is necessary to allow adequate time for input from community groups through their representatives. Ideally groups should be able to discuss the issues under consultation with their committees and general meetings. If the process is rushed then there should be flexibility to allow representatives to feed-back input from their groups in the weeks following the focus group. Focus groups are not the only engagement Community Group's should have with UG over C2E. As stakeholders they should be involved more broadly in discussions about the project and its processes.

The initial consultation last year had a randomly selected focus group that excluded people who were members of residents groups or involved in planning or development. This is not a random selection especially in an area where lots of professionals live and there are many residents groups. We are advised that such people were not excluded in the focus groups undertaken in June 2014 and hopefully they will not be in the future.

Where there is not existing expertise within groups they can be more easily influenced by the input provided by the facilitators. The inclusion of an independent observer in the 2013 initial consultation was aimed to provide some external monitoring of the process. Describing the groups as deliberative was dropped as a result of this process.

Focus Groups should not be an alternative to input from a wider range of stakeholders be they residents groups or developer lobbies who bring perspectives from their experience and knowledge of the development and planning processes. So called independent deliberative processes need to have access to the broad range of views including that of community groups.

In the case of the focus group for community groups there was also the need to report on and check the process between the focus group meetings – how did we get from there to here? Did we record correctly what you said last time? This is what we have done with it. The specific process issues which needed to be addressed included:

- Feedback on consultation report – any concerns?
- Were the undertakings we made last time honoured? - Was the appropriate material posted on the website – Architectus report, background material on the area? Were there any problems with the material currently posted?
- UG reworked the 9 key themes from the December consultation report into the 6 points presented to the second meeting – is this OK? Are there any Issues?

Transparency

The C2E process must be as transparent as possible so that the community can understand what is happening and be involved in the discussion. Up-front strategic planning requires transparency, opportunities to understand what is being proposed and why, and time to comment on it. Strategic planning is not about preparing plans out of public view and just involving the public during a limited exhibition. In part strategic planning is about minimising the surprises for the community and taking them on the journey of its preparation and addressing the issues along the way.

This requires a good communications strategy. This was not delivered in the preliminary consultation phase and apart from Ministerial announcements remains lacking in C2E. UG should have provided at least a timeline for Communications Strategy to the community groups and by now should have had one in place.

In the absence of an UG Communications Strategy it falls to community groups to find out what is happening and to pass on what is known about what is happening to our networks and to encourage their understanding of and input into the issues under consideration.

There is a need to advise the community and to discuss the issues with them. Almost a year down the track a small number of community group representatives and some people randomly chosen for focus groups remain the only people in the local community who have been engaged in the process.

We welcome the www.central2eveleigh.com.au link and the public provision of a number of documents used in the process so far. We await details of some of the initial market soundings and the UTS input into the preliminary consultation. We are of the view that if a flythrough of what the site could become was important enough to fund, present to the Property Council and to make available to Channel Nine then it should be released to the community rather than it only be available on YouTube and in stills from the Channel 9 news on the REDWatch website.

REDWatch currently awaits the release of many studies undertaken by the RWA / SMDA / UGDC, such as a review of the area's community facilities that remain locked up until the Government decides to release them as part of the exhibition of planning controls by UG. REDWatch does not think withholding reports until the end of the process is a good way of undertaking planning or community consultation, and we encourage UG to make public as many reports as soon as possible throughout this process.

Regular Reporting

There need to be mechanisms for regular reporting to the community. This needs to be both broad and covered by a good Communications Strategy and it also needs to be with local community

groups that allow the local group representatives to ask questions and gain an understanding of what is happening. In RWA terms this could be a bit like the RWA BEMAC – meeting quarterly for a briefing on what has been happening.

Some parts of the site lend themselves to long term strategic discussions but there are other parts of the site where planning deadlines are more immediate – eg taking to market ATP development sites or making arrangements for the CME’s building. There needs to be opportunities for discussion about a range of issues of concern to the community not just those determined by UG.

Some of the information that is of interest to REDWatch and should be available to all groups at the moment includes:

a) Update on what has happened in UG since last community groups’ meeting

- Report back to Govt in 2013 – what was proposed & what did Govt decide
- What is overall timeframe and next steps
- Explanation of expanded study area shown on C2E maps
- Basis and reason for fly through preparation and its use and the issues raised – eg who thinks it is OK to put a new building through the Loco workshops?
- What can be made public about the work undertaken by C2E to date?
- What work / studies are currently being proposed – eg EOI’s currently out for Urban Design Services - what is their scope? etc
- C2E working with City of Sydney Council – MOU & practical involvement in process- What has been agreed and what is envisaged? Concerns about UG MOUs on WestConnex. What is happening in case of CoS to ensure genuine involvement on CoS expertise at a high level in the project rather than just embedding a CoS staff member like proposed for WestConnex?

b) Updates on what is happening across the C2E site

- ATP – building sites – outcome of EOI process – who is handling?
- ATP privatisation / restructure – what is happening in this discussion?
- South Eveleigh Public Housing – How is LAHC involved?
- Railway Corridor – Report on Transport Master Plan & Second Harbour Crossing
- Redfern Station – Timeframe and any indication of our promised lift?
- North Eveleigh
 - Proposal for Stabling yards on fan of tracks – is this still on?
 - CME’s building & Scientific Services going to market?
 - Access Road to North Eveleigh and cracking of nearby houses
 - Other three sites and main park (moving electrics progress)
 - Place of Carriageworks and Arts in this precinct
 - What is mechanism for resolving issues on NE site?
- Central Station (including explanation of what is being “offered” internationally on Central to Eveleigh by NSW Government Trade & Investment Offices – China in Investment Opportunities Tourism and Property).

A Community Reference Group?

Ideally a one way flow of information does not make for good strategic planning and it is important that both local groups know what is happening but that also local knowledge is fed into the process. In an ideal world there should be a community reference group to help guide how C2E engages with the local communities around it.

Such a reference group does not preclude working groups or taskforces that might come together around particular issues or problems. Indeed REDWatch continues to push for the re-formation of the Redfern Waterloo Heritage Taskforce that earlier met under the RWA and which worked on heritage issues across the Former Eveleigh Workshops and beyond. Such working groups bring in

specialist expertise that is invaluable to the process. Such specialist groups do not however replace a wider Community Reference Group.

REDWatch is of the view that there should be a number of people / groups with a variety of views involved in a Community Reference Group. This does not mean that individual groups still cannot engage UG on issues they think are important but it removes any perception that UG is only talking to a limited number of individuals or groups. It also provides a broader set of inputs to UG that will better reflect the opinions of the communities they are working within.

Community Engagement

Tapping community knowledge and networks are particularly important in the discussion about how C2E engages more broadly with the community. As an example Community Centres in Redfern and Waterloo service a broad range of community groups and activities across the area – this is evident each year at the Redfern Waterloo Volunteers awards – they are a key resource in reaching out to people and groups in the community. They are just one example.

Some of the Community Engagement Questions are:

How do we go about engaging the broad community so that:

- The broader community know what is happening and can have a say and own the process
- C2e can get best community input

What should we be engaging on:

- The initial discussion that only 20 reps were involved in
- The next steps
- Not until there is something concrete

Who has not been engaged to date that needs to be involved in this discussion and suggestions for the how and when of their engagement?

- Existing stake holder groups with an interest in the site – North Eveleigh Working Group, ARAG, CRIG, FOE – are some public meetings the best way of starting conversation with these large stakeholder groups?
- The local human service agencies, community centres, politicians offices and media that people go to with questions or look to for information
- The planning professionals that live in the area that have a professional interest
- The broader engaged community
- Those that are not engaged but need to understand and own C2E if the “1 in 4” referred to by Minister Hazzard is to be engaged

What is the role and process for focus groups in the process and how will they be conducted?

- Eg non exclusion of professionals or the engaged unless genuine / monitored (who should do this?) deliberative process. Process needs to be made public and subject to scrutiny due to suspicion about the process.
- What is the purpose of this consultation and what is the role of focus groups and ongoing engagement with locals involved in the focus groups?

Make it clear what the community can influence and what it cannot

- In all community engagement it is important for those undertaking the consultation to be clear about what it is they are consulting on and what they are prepared to change. This stops people being frustrated by thinking they can change something in the process that they can not.

- If we know what is negotiable at the start then we can decide if we want to participate in the process or try and change the process.

Where to from here?

In the absence of UG taking up broader community engagement it is up to community groups to let their memberships know what is happening and to solicit their views. Currently REDWatch is doing this by alerting people to the materials on the website and encouraging them to respond to UG C2E. REDWatch also had C2E as the focus for our July monthly meeting.

REDWatch has found that it is not desirable to wait to be consulted, but to be more proactive and to initiate discussions about the issues. As part of this REDWatch for its meeting on 7th August will hold a session with Peter Phibbs on the Economics of Development to help us understand the economic imperatives that drive development. We have also asked Peter Phibbs to consider trialling around C2E a Planning for Non-Planners seminar he is developing for the Department of Planning to improve people's understanding of the planning system. We encourage other community groups to also look at how they can resource and engage their communities to be able to have a say around C2E.

There also needs to be a multi-group mechanism for the community groups to discuss C2E issues with one another and with UG. In the absence of a mechanism initiated by UG then REDWatch will call a meeting of interested group representatives and invite UG C2E to attend and provide an update quarterly.

Big picture (strategic) planning is not something that has been done well in Australia, especially not with significant community engagement. This was recognised in the work done about the new planning system. While the future of the new system is not clear, improved strategic planning is not dependent on this progress. Community groups should be expecting of Government and its agencies like UG that they will deliver world's best practice community engagement in strategic planning. This is what REDWatch asked the Dept of Planning and UrbanGrowth for last year and it is still what we want to see happen around Central to Eveleigh.

Conclusion

We hope that this document provides some useful background to some of the issues of concern to REDWatch regarding the C2E processes midway through 2014. It is produced to encourage discussion and debate about how we can make the best of the current opportunity to deliver the best possible outcomes for our communities.

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