
ORDINARY COUNCIL

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SUBJECT: CAMDEN TOWN CENTRE VISION REPORT
FROM: Director Planning & Environmental Services
TRIM #: 15/13612

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Council's endorsement of the Camden Town Centre Vision report.

BACKGROUND

In mid 2016, Council's administrative operations will be centralized in a new administration building in Oran Park. This move will leave Council's current administration offices in Camden and Narellan vacant.

In light of this, Council officers have been developing a range of strategies to support the Camden and Narellan town centres and secure their continued viability into the future. These strategies include a review of the Camden Town Centre Strategy which was adopted by Council in 2008.

As part of this work, Council has undertaken a number of expert studies to inform its decisions for the future of Camden.

In early 2013, Council engaged consultants to undertake a comprehensive traffic study. On completion of the traffic study, an Argyle Street Concept Plan was prepared taking into consideration the findings of the traffic study and the 2008 Strategy.

In early 2014, Council engaged consultants to undertake a retail and commercial study that would inform the preparation of a new vision for the town centre. The scope of this work included a detailed review of the economic drivers and engagement with stakeholders to obtain information and identify opportunities to create a vision for the town centre.

On 8 July 2014, Council endorsed for community engagement a series of recommendations for enhancing the public domain and the location of a single decked car park and commenced an eight (8) week community engagement process.

The community engagement process sought stakeholder and community views on the public domain enhancement works as well as the vision for the town centre.

The community engagement process included:

- advertisements in local papers and road side banners;
- surveys with business and community representatives;
- information and regular updates on Council's website, Facebook, and media releases;
- information displays at various locations including Council Offices and Libraries;
- update letters throughout the consultation period;
- letter box drops throughout the town centre;
- an online survey and three (3) street surveys; and

- questions included in Council's Sustainability Indicators Survey 2014.

The community engagement period ran from 23 July to 17 September 2014. Three (3) community forums were held on 29 July, 27 August and 3 November 2014 and individual consultations with various agencies including the Police, Historical Society and chambers of commerce.

During the process, Council engaged with over 600 people from a broad cross section of the community and 587 submissions were received with over 3,000 individual comments. The submissions indicated strong support for the proposed public domain enhancement works and provided consistent themes for a vision for the town centre.

On 25 November 2014, Council endorsed the public domain enhancement works.

In relation to the retail and commercial study and vision, 293 comments were recorded from the community consultation process. The overwhelming majority of comments received related to maintaining Camden's character. The submissions included general comments such as valuing the country town feel to specific comments such as maintaining building heights. Another popular theme was the promotion of tourism. A number of comments were also received in relation to access and movement, including areas such as roads and public transport.

The comments received from the community have been used in the development of the vision as well as the strategies and initiatives recommended to implement and achieve the vision.

A Councillor Briefing was held on 17 February 2015 to provide an update on the vision.

It is recommended that Council endorse the Camden Town Centre Vision, including the strategies and initiatives recommended to achieve the vision.

A copy of the Camden Town Centre Vision is provided as attachment 1 to this report.

MAIN REPORT

Since the adoption of the Town Centre Strategy in 2008, various macro and micro factors have impacted on Camden. These include, high population growth in the area, expansion of the Narellan town centre, relocation of businesses and services such as Ford and Holden, Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) and Police and the relocation of Council in 2016.

In addition, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) altered and reduced spending patterns whilst a shift to online retailing has affected consumer demand in town centres.

The challenge for any town centre is to use its strengths and opportunities to achieve a future that is both resilient and sustainable.

The development of the vision

The following steps were undertaken in the development of the vision:

- Understanding place – this involves an appreciation of Camden – the place, people and planning.

- Building the evidence base – research and analysis into the key technical matters of transport and traffic and the retail and commercial economy.
- Engaging the community – ensuring stakeholders are provided with ample opportunity to be involved in shaping the vision.
- Defining the challenge – identifying the challenge to ensure the vision is focused on the right issues.
- Developing the vision and key outcomes – developing an aspirational but pragmatic vision and key outcomes for the future of the town centre.
- Developing and weighing up choices – developing and considering the relative strengths and weaknesses of different ideas in relation to economic, social and environmental criteria.
- Generating strategy and initiatives – working up the most beneficial ideas into strategy and initiatives.
- Implementation – preparing a comprehensive implementation strategy that outlines responsibility, timeframes and sequencing.

Retail & Commercial Study - Camden Town Centre

A retail and commercial study was undertaken to inform the development of the vision. The retail and commercial study was carried out in two (2) parts, firstly to consider opportunities and issues, and secondly to explore economic feasibility and recommendations.

A summary of the findings is provided as Attachment 2 to this report.

Stakeholder Engagement

As noted above, Council undertook an extensive engagement process to seek stakeholder and community views on their vision for Camden. Throughout the community engagement process, in written submissions and at the community forums, the following key findings and themes were raised:

- Strong focus on town atmosphere and sense of community sets Camden apart from other towns in Sydney;
- Need for public realm improvements including footpaths and town beautification projects at strategic locations;
- Need for stronger focus and promotion of tourism;
- Strong focus on access and movement within the town centre;
- More specialty shops and tourist attractor facilities such as art house cinemas;
- More hotels and tourist accommodation;
- More cultural attractors such as galleries and pop up events; and
- An education hub to attract younger people to the town.

Camden Town Centre Vision

The intent of the vision is to protect and strengthen the town centre's distinct character whilst facilitating appropriate change and growth.

The vision does not call for radical change rather it is a guide for the evolution of the town centre.

Underpinning the achievement of the vision are the following principles: attract more people, revitalization, evolution, and establishing the right conditions.

Based on the findings of the retail and commercial study and the community engagement process, the following vision is proposed for the town centre:

“By 2031, Camden will be:

- **a distinct town centre** – a town centre that embraces its unique character and sense of place.
- **a prosperous town centre** – a town centre that has a strong, thriving and resilient economy.
- **a vibrant town centre** – a town centre that is lively, exciting and interesting.
- **an accessible and connected town centre** – a town centre that people can readily access through a number of transport choices and is easy, safe and comfortable to move around.
- **a town centre for all** – a town centre that is welcoming and offers something for everyone.”

The vision is supported by 15 broad strategies:

- Strengthen Argyle Street
- Balance character with development
- Protect and strengthen heritage
- Create well designed buildings and places
- Promote a complete town centre
- Develop a diverse business base
- Connect and engage
- A dedicated resource
- Make it easy to do business
- Sell the message
- Facilitate development of catalyst sites
- Celebrate and interact
- Improve car parking
- Encourage alternate movement choices
- Establish a central gathering place

Initiatives

From these broad strategies, the vision report recommends a series of priority initiatives to achieve the vision. The report also provides timeframes and responsibilities to deliver these initiatives. The suggested timeframe for the delivery of most of the initiatives is two (2) years.

The initiatives recommended to achieve the vision are:

A distinct town centre:

1. Implement strategic public domain upgrades
2. Prepare an urban design framework
3. Prepare a public domain and streetscape plan
4. Prepare a place focused, performance based DCP based on the findings and directions of the above studies

A prosperous town centre:

5. Investigate current zoning and height controls and consider amending the LEP
6. Investigate preferred future uses and development strategy for council land assets

7. Undertake master planning for the John Street precinct
8. Connect and engage with key local employers and institutions such as Camden Hospital
9. Appoint a co-ordinator
10. Prepare and implement a marketing strategy with a dedicated stand-alone website
11. Consider developing an integrated program of business incentives
12. Consider longer, more consistent opening hours, including a trial aligned with a major local event
13. Consider relocation of the visitor centre to a town centre location

A vibrant town centre:

14. Invest additional resources into the Taste Food Wine & Music Festival.
15. Investigate initiatives to increase utilisation of the Civic Centre.

An accessible and connected town centre:

16. Undertake detailed concept design of a decked car park
17. Prepare a way finding and signage strategy
18. Investigate better public transport connections to the South West Growth Centre

A town centre for all:

19. Commence detailed investigations for a new public square

Where to from here?

If Council resolves to endorse the vision, work will commence on implementing the recommended initiatives subject to appropriate funding being available.

It is acknowledged that some initiatives are already underway and funded, such as the public domain enhancement work.

The vision supports the public domain enhancement work and acknowledges that government investment in public domain areas can have a positive flow on effect and encourage greater patronage and stimulate private sector investment.

In relation to Council's property assets in Camden (and Narellan), work will continue on exploring development strategies for the future of these assets.

In Camden, Council's administration staff currently occupy two (2) sites, namely 37 John Street (Council's main administration building) and 27 John Street (previous SES office now Council's Environment and Health Branch).

The report identifies these sites as potential catalyst sites that due to their location and size could have a major impact on the town centre. If appropriately developed, catalyst sites can have positive flow on effects on the surrounding area.

In this respect, the commercial and retail study identified a demand for retail, commercial and residential floor space in the Camden town centre. This provides Council with a strong basis for considering a range of development strategies, which could include selling or leasing its property assets for various purposes.

Some of the recommended initiatives will require further investigation to ensure funding is available. Accordingly, it is proposed that if Council endorses the vision, a further report be presented to Council in May on its implementation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A number of the initiatives can be funded from Council's adopted budget, whilst other initiatives will require additional funding, including the work required to review the DCP and LEP and the appointment of a town centre coordinator.

It is envisaged, that if endorsed, the coordinator role will be a two (2) year contract position responsible for the implementation of the initiatives contained within the report, including facilitating Council's relocation and the implementation of the development strategies for Council's property assets.

Funding for these initiatives will be included for consideration as part of Council's quarterly review and 2015/16 budget.

CONCLUSION

Whilst it will be relocating to Oran Park in 2016, Council is committed to investing in and supporting the Camden and Narellan town centres to secure their continued viability into the future. The preparation of the Camden Town Centre Vision reflects Council's commitment to the Camden town centre and its future.

The Camden town centre is valued by both the local and wider community for its distinct and attractive character. The vision has been prepared based on sound technical research and analysis, and informed by extensive stakeholder and community engagement.

The principles underpinning the vision are to attract more people, to integrate economic, social and environmental initiatives to revitalize the town centre, to build on the strengths of the town centre and to establish the right condition for business to prosper.

The vision is supported by a series of strategies and initiatives. If endorsed, the vision will be used to guide Council's decisions on development, public domain and investment activities.

It is recommended that Council endorse the Camden Town Centre Vision including the strategies and initiatives recommended to achieve the vision.

RECOMMENDED

That Council:

- i. endorse the Camden Town Centre Vision report; and**
- ii. that a further report be presented to Council on the implementation and timing of the initiatives contained within the report.**

ATTACHMENTS

1. Camden Town Centre Vision
2. Summary of Key Findings