Dear Mickey

The Planning Institute of Australia Northern Division would like to offer the following comments with regard to development proposal for the Old Darwin Hospital site.

Firstly we believe that the consultation time frame is far too short given the implications of the development of this site. It is a strategically important site being a large scale and one of the last undeveloped sites close to the Darwin CBD. It is too valuable for the consultation phase to be disposed of in such a cursory way, particularly as no previous strategic vision promoted by the government has designated the site for the development illustrated in the material shown to the public.

The proposal purports to be the first project of the Northern Territory Government’s Ribbon of Green program to circle Darwin City yet the press release regarding Ribbons of Green dated 28 August 2007 stated:

We will protect and expand green open spaces to surround the Darwin city peninsula in a ribbon of green, including $6 million improvements to Myilly Point Headland and Flagstaff Park. We will also:
- upgrade the Nurses Walk to connect the Myilly Point parklands to Little Mindil Beach
- Landscape parklands at Little Mindil Beach
- Build a boardwalk along the Little Mindil foreshore to connect with Mindil Beach
- Create links to a redeveloped old Darwin Hospital site

Thus in August 2007 the site was still mooted for redevelopment. We question the origin of the proposal that the site should be used for parkland. The site is zoned Tourist Commercial which is to provide for tourism including commercial and residential activities. Where is the strategic background that underpins the implicit rezoning of the site and conversion to parkland and housing?

We note that there are large tracts of land already zoned for public open space in the vicinity of the Old Hospital site, including most of the Myilly Terrace precinct. Much of this land remains in an undeveloped state, yet the material that has been made available to us shows a grand landscape vision which we doubt can be implemented in the manner illustrated for the cost mentioned. Clearly, what is lacking is an intelligible open space master plan for the inner city, which should include a plan to implement appropriate landscape treatment for the existing open space inventory.

We are concerned that the process (on the basis of the information provided) is ad hoc and not strategically justified. The process of the development of open space in Darwin has been disappointing in that there are now notable examples of a loss of existing open spaces, such as Little Mindil Beach and the Darwin waterfront.

With regard to specifics issues:


There should be considerable justification for the housing component and clarification of what a ‘signature’ building would look like.

If the site is to be developed as parkland, it should be tropical parkland, with a character that reflects our history, geography and climate. Features like the maze strike us as being somewhat contrived, and it is our view that a maze is not appropriate in this setting.

The sound shell feature does not evidence any “memory” of the fate of similar features in our public parks. It is surprising to see such a feature proposed for the Old Hospital site when persistent residents’ complaints have forced the virtual closure of a similar facility in the Gardens, to the point where the Gardens sound shell can only be used rarely for public entertainment.

The acceptability of a sound shell is doubtful, but we agree that some space for public events should be included.

We acknowledge that there has been ongoing debate about the future of Myilly Point for nearly two decades. This consultation process should be seen as but one step in the process rather than as a definitive platform for an incompletely articulated strategic direction or concept design.

We would like to be involved in further discussions regarding the future of this important site.

Yours sincerely

Jan Salmon
Planning Institute of Australia
Northern Division