

Submission  
No 37

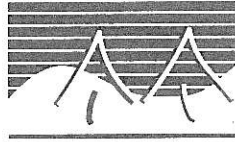
INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND  
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY  
CBD

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Our Ref:

28 August 2008

Mr David Borger MP  
Chair  
Public Works Committee  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament of New South Wales  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Borger,

## **Submission to the Inquiry into the development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD**

Thank you for your invitation to respond to the above enquiry and for the initiative to develop arts and culture outside the Sydney CBD in a fairer and more equitable manner that can only enhance the wealth, enjoyment and environment of the whole of New South Wales.

In response to the items that you nominated as being particularly interested in the following summary is provided.

Oberon Council does not have a dedicated Arts or Cultural Officer. This submission has been prepared by Council's Corporate Community Planner who has the responsibility of preparing facilitating and reporting on Council's Social/Community Plan.

Oberon Council resolved on 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1999 to adopt as a starting point a Cultural Plan prepared by a consultant provided by Arts OutWest. While various strategies in this plan may have been investigated over time there does not appear to have been any formal reporting, updating or integration of it into Council's broader Management Planning Process. However, Council recently developed its Social/Community Plan as required by legislation for the period 2006-2011. This planning process had the intention of gathering the aspirations of the community which could and did include issues of arts and culture. The rationale was that this broader primary planning process would drive whether secondary plans such as Cultural Plans were needed. At this point Council has not identified the need for a separate Cultural Plan. As this is not a legislative requirement and in light of anticipated changes to requirements for integrated planning it is not anticipated that there will be one in the near future.

Oberon Council does not have an annual program of spending for Arts and Culture with the exception that it maintains an annual membership to Arts OutWest. Most activities are driven by ad-hoc requests from the local Arts Council Group often in conjunction with Arts OutWest. Council has entered into funding partnerships to get certain projects done.

Oberon Council has had limited experience with the State grants process in regards to Arts and Culture. Oberon Council has recently entered into an alliance with neighbouring

Lithgow and Mid-West Regional Council's to share a grants officer. This arrangement appears to be working well and Oberon Council anticipates that it will now have better awareness and access to grant funding for its and the community's desired projects.

Oberon Council is a small rural council with a population of 5031. The elected Council have however expressed a vision to double this in the next 20 years. While this exceeds statistical forecasts the Council feels that Oberon is situated close to the sandstone curtain and consequently has the potential to attract a diversity of people living, visiting and using it as a weekend escape. To capitalise on this diversity Oberon needs the "hard" infrastructure and especially the "soft" infrastructure to create the connections or human interactions that encourages the flow of ideas between individuals and institutions and it is generally recognised as background paper provided states, that if this is captured effectively a competitive advantage of cultural uniqueness will be attractive to current and potential investors to the area. This has been specifically mentioned in Oberon Council's current Social Community Plan 2006-2011 as well as seeing the particular need for a Community Centre that has the desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity to create a hub.

The aim of this inquiry generally seems to be to come up with a better way of planning for arts and cultural infrastructure particularly outside the Sydney CBD so that assistance is fair and equitable as the State Plan suggests. This is not to be achieved with a \$/capita funding equations, ad-hoc planning and funding and the top down approach that appears to exist at the moment. This does not allow those areas left behind to catch up nor does it allow for the unique issues, strengths and challenges of local areas to be recognised.

How can the planning be done fairly and effectively to achieve the best outcome for all of NSW? How do we avoid only the areas that have dedicated arts and cultural officers and programs being able to obtain an allocation of resources? How do we prevent ad-hoc grant applications that are sourced because the money was there and an attitude that we may as well have it as someone else? How do local communities communicate up in a sensible manageable and timely way? How do we give Arts and Culture the clout that the community demands? It is submitted that the current reforms in integrated planning that the Department of Local Government are trying to implement will be the best way to address most of these questions and the planning issues that are raised in your inquiry invitation letter, if they are further integrated into regional and state planning.

The Department of Local Government has recognised that councils have too many ineffective plans. This may be due to plans being completed just for the sake of compliance, plans being prepared in silos and never fully integrated into a corporate strategy and may even demonstrate an overall industry deficiency in strategic planning. However, it may be that this diagnosis might equally be applicable to state government. It may be a classic situation of seeing the qualities in someone else that you in fact possess.

These reforms will require local government areas to develop a 10-year strategic community plan for the area. This plan will not be council-centric but rather will collect the aspirations of the whole community as well as integrate a lot of current separate planning processes (e.g. Cultural Planning, Statement of the Environment Reports and Social/Community Planning). They will hopefully line all the issues up together and the "softer" separate plans such as Cultural Plans won't be able to be put in the corner of the bookshelf and forgotten. They will be part of the comprehensive prioritised plan. They will provide the rationale for grant applications and hopefully avoid ad-hoc applications – if it is not a recognised aspiration of the community and consequently not in the strategy, no grant. If these plans are done well they will create an invaluable tool for state government with local governments doing most of the legwork for them. State government, regional organisations and committees like the Public Works Committee will be able to use these plans to gather a

full picture of the local issues and build them firstly into Regional Plans and then the State Plan. This will be a bottom up rather than what seems to be currently a top down approach. It will also avoid individual departments having to try and gather this information separately as you are trying to do now.

The 10-year community strategic plans if accompanied by fully partnered State of the Area Reports will reveal issues and needs that are not necessarily the responsibility of local government. Consequently each newly elected Council will be expected to develop 4-year delivery corporate plans for the actions it as an organization has recognised that it should deliver. It is also suggested that certain community groups will also be expected to put their hands up for certain actions that they are best suited to deliver. It seems only fair then that State Government should also commit to what it intends to deliver from its recognised responsibilities. It may also be appropriate that it assists by providing expertise and resources to achieve the best possible outcomes.

To achieve a truly fully integrated planning process the various state government departments, ministries, authorities and regional groups relevant to a particular local government area need to be involved at the outset. The Department of Local Government hopes to have the first 10-year Strategic Plans in by 2010 with a full faze in by 2012. It seems plausible that the Premiers Department which has the responsibility of developing the State Plan could create cross-functional panels of people from the relevant departments to assist in this process. This may involve:

- Developing an education process whereby local councils are informed of the current responsibilities and intentions of State Governments for the area.
- The development of strategic plan "templates" that enable the required information to be captured consistently for a "passing up" of information while still allowing for unique issues of the local area to be captured. This could also ensure that all aspects of planning are covered (e.g. access and equity, arts and culture, quadruple bottom line, the strategic themes of regional and state plans) not just hot local political potatoes.
- Participation in community forums to inform and collect information.
- Providing resources to ensure that this process is done as well as possible. It would seem important that these processes were facilitated independently to avoid possible perception of conflicts of interest or barrows to push.

In summary the committee for this inquiry is encouraged to integrate itself with the initiatives of the Department of Local Government in planning reform. These reforms recognise that neither communities nor plans exist in isolation – they are part of a larger natural, social, economic and political environment. The reforms open the way for councils and their communities to have important discussions about funding priorities, service levels and preserving local identity and to plan in partnership for a more sustainable future. The reforms also open the way for a very manageable process that has the potential for communities to shape their future direction. Local councils just need to be confident that all partners are really listening and want to be part of it.

Yours faithfully



**Bruce Fitzpatrick**  
General Manager