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

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<u>Introduction</u>

Gloucester is a small community at the northern most boundary of the Hunter region. It is a community steeped in history based around early settlement, agriculture and timber for a growing nation and then significant contributions to the growth of the nation. Its demographics indicate a mix of wealth from quite well off business people and tree change retirees to the less financially well off employees that are being marginalized by inflationary forces and limited incomes. Gloucester is some distance (an hour) from major centres and access to cultural opportunities that are more readily available and affordable in centres that have the volume and financial capacity to support them.

The community has a strong sense of self and a dynamic spirit which is exemplified by its pride in its facilities, natural and manmade assets and its expressions of self through events and functions. However due to traditionally low incomes there is a lack of capacity to offer truly inclusive artistic and cultural opportunities, and many of the events and programs are not affordable to the mainstream community. It is Council's belief that the objectives of the State Plan and any state based planning is, or should be about increasing the opportunities for every citizen , or at least the widest possible range of people within the state.

<u>Isolation creates disadvantage</u>

By its nature geographical location creates a key disadvantage for smaller rural or urban communities. Any strategy or planning process that looks primarily at developing cultural industry hubs will in themselves lead to a centralized approach through government and then by natural forces that process will draw the commercial organisations (not all, but significant numbers) towards that hub. A good example would be to focus on a regional basis, in centres like Dubbo and Tamworth. These are larger centres that have a critical mass of population and represent and support larger regions and are currently the recipients of a significant potion of both state and federally allocated culturally based funding.

However, these centres already have cinemas, Regional museums, large and professional cultural and artistic groups and thus already have the capacity to provide significant opportunities for their community. They also have more populace schools and colleges as well as possibly conservatoriums and thus have a significantly greater opportunity to develop and enhance opportunities and raise industry based funds than

do smaller less populous and less well off communities. They have vast local government budgets and special rate opportunities, to retain, develop and maximize the benefits from the built environment. They are the obvious location for Cultural Hubs for all these reasons, however those reasons and the lack of access from the regions are key reasons why to deliver hub approaches will not only create a significant enclave syndrome, but it will also tend to make sure new development takes the opportunities that arise within these hub precincts rather than develop around the creativeness that exists in outlying regionally based communities.

Current Funding Perceptions

If a review is completed of historical funding for the arts in New South Wales it is quite apparent that key infrastructure expenditures can be generally limited to the larger centres, retaining the majority of new capital and operating funds in those areas that have greatest current access to services and opportunities whilst providing a drip feed to foster development in the smaller regional centres. In addition key funding initiatives occur in Sydney, Newcastle, Ministry of the Arts funding, and has been consistently evident where National programs have delivered funding for artistic or cultural funding.

Not only does this process rob some smaller communities of their opportunities it also fails to take account of the intrinsic individuality that is the culture of each small community and the underpinning desire of each of those to retain their identity. There is no passion like the small town football team that goes into combat against the goliath of the region. In the same way none is more passionate about the Local Agricultural Show or the local amateur showing of Pirates of Penzance or the local art or flower competitions. Hubs will create strong collective of thought around consistent and singular themes that reduce the overall marketability of the diversity and intrinsic qualities of the myriad of smaller and individually dynamic communities.

Equity will never really apply to access to cultural infrastructure for all people living in NSW;

But efforts can and should be made to reduce that disparity of access for those less well off in our communities, and those less well off communities

Accords and Strategic Processes to Foster Cultural Planning and Development

Many communities, both large and small have taken up the challenge of developing cultural planning and cultural development processes, some very informally, but successfully and some in a more formal sense including plans and strategies to develop innovative and effective solutions for its communities. Some are based around facilities and infrastructure and some are based around networks and capacity building of individuals and organization. It doesn't matter too much about the basis of the approach it is all about outcomes for communities and the measure is the growth in

opportunities, or the retention of assets and the fostering of a culture innovation and outcomes.

The development of localized planning allows and fosters partnership building and encourages local participation in local events. These planning opportunities allow communities to develop sustainable cultural opportunities, allow them to determine aspects of asset definition and retention and allow them to decide where to, how quickly, in what stages and by whom.

The challenges with Accords, network arrangements and collaboration are the commitment of all of the partners and the development of consensus arrangements to move forward in collaboration.

Communities that develop strategic and well managed processes need to be rewarded, in the same way that outcome measures anywhere else might be applied, however they also need to be free to progress the outcomes that they measure as important valued and supportable by the community, rather than to follow a one size fits all edict that can and does tend to come from a more centralized approach. Clearly in adopting a State Planning Process the second key factor in the process needs to be;

The recognition and maintenance of diversity and that can best be achieved through a process of allowing for community autonomy rather than a prescribed stricture being applied.

Strategic Planning at the Top

The State Plan may offer a direction for Cultural developments, but a concept as complex, with the diversity of interest and obvious divergence of views, needs much more than a generic and poll driven target benchmark to guide and focus attention around the development of an overall strategy. There needs to be a cultural planning process at a State or Federal level, but clearly one that focuses on diversity and the wide array of opportunities. It is important to have a State Museum or the National Ballet and infrastructure like Homebush Bay and the Sydney Opera House, but without the Meekathara Hall and annual Christmas Party or the Purlewaugh Bachelors and Spinsters Ball what does all of that matter? The diversity of cultural and artistic pursuit around the Nation is incredible and around the State as well from things like the Deniliquin Ute Muster to the Sydney Royal , the Royal Ballet and Opera in the Paddock. At the end of the day, funding of cultural adventure, must address with equal importance the aspirations of all of the many different community groups and communities in general.

The hardest task is the decision of where to place scant (really they are, in real terms) resources amongst the needs of the sector. There needs to be a consistent approach

that recognizes diversity and encourages development of original artistic and cultural expression. Be that through heritage building, planning stage show and productions or the development of artistic pieces.

<u>Links To Tourism</u>

There is an intrinsic link from culture to tourism, and in fact one is the other or a component of and there also needs to be a strong and recognized link between them as the focus on Tourism grows much closer to the culture of our communities rather than has historically been the case of the natural highlights. The tourism industry now is much more an experience based market than it was ten to fifteen years ago and as much as the bulk of them are destination and attraction orientated the majority of them (from Council's investigation) are also focusing on more embracing of the local environment including its many and varied cultural idiosyncrasies.

<u>The Gloucester Experience</u>

As a small Council Gloucester has limited financial resources, yet has been quite proactive in regard to Cultural Development. In 2005 it established a Cultural Development Advisory Committee and appointed a part time officer to support the community based committee with a charter of developing increasing capacity and artistic and cultural opportunities within the community. That direction was a product of the region have a dynamic cultural artistic sector and also recognized the increasing demand from our community for access to cultural opportunities. Council has also been very proactive in seeking to retain heritage value within its retail and commercial sectors and has a strong focus within its planning instrument which recognizes local historical icons. It must be said that it appears the community has strongly embraced Council's approach to these matters.

The community has a significant cultural presence despite the financial limitations and is blessed with a number of cultural, artistic and historical organizations and structures which predominantly are conducted by bands of enthusiastic volunteers. The community is constantly on the trail of grant funding to add value to existing facilities and existing and new programs, but a number of those organizations can attest to the series of hoops and disappointments along that trail.

So it is that this community seeks to develop opportunities through strong business partnerships, resource sharing and joint ventures to drive the dollar much further than would ordinarily occur. Those relationships tend to be event or program orientated, and may include sponsorship, one off or continuing grants or even administrative assistance or goods given in kind. The arrangements quite often are with bigger companies, but also include smaller companies and organizations that see value in or have commitment to the host organization's goals.

Hence our strong sense of a need for all successful applicants to demonstrate a strong self help mentality and commitment to partnerships as part of the application assessment review and funding commitment processes.

Summary of Issues

Council acknowledges that the process of centralized planning creates significant opportunities in that it provides a clear and accurate direction, as well as providing some key leadership components that provide communities and organizations with targets and potentially incentives. However in acknowledging those points it needs also to be recognized that centralized planning can create a one size fits all mindset and can create an unspoken but agreed criteria around assessment that can hamper the development of innovation and points of difference. *An, those points of difference and innovation are at the very heart of what culture is, and what it means to communities everywhere.*

Council strongly believes that any centralized planning process needs to take account of:

- The very different dynamics that drive communities

- The disadvantages that come from isolation – most importantly for smaller and disadvantaged communities.

- That creation of Cultural Hubs can unless carefully considered bleed smaller communities of opportunities

- That accords and partnerships including with business community not only support but are a crucial component in self sustainability, and should be a prerequisite to government support.

- That cultural and tourism planning at a central level should have some demonstrable linkages and synergies

- That despite any process of central planning understanding, recognizing and fostering individual autonomy is a key component in developing and retaining the valuable diversity of culture within this state