

Residents for Rural Character

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Prue Isenhood
Planning Workshop Australia

By email piisenhood@planningworkshop.com.au

Dear Ms Isenhood

Invergowrie Residents Submission New England Draft Development Strategy (Ref. No. 2049008)

The following submission has been prepared on behalf of residents of Invergowrie, Uralla Shire, by the Residents for Rural Character, a local community group.

The content of this submission reflects outcomes from the discussions held at an Invergowrie Village Meeting held on Sunday 19 October 2008.

The Village Meeting was attended by 24 residents.

Please feel free to contact the writer should you wish to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely



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Residents for Rural Character

Invergowrie Residents Submission New England Draft Development Strategy (NEDDS)

The following submission is made on behalf of residents in the Invergowrie Village, Uralla Shire. The submission is presented in accordance with the Rural Planning Principles, State Environment Planning Policy (Rural Lands) 2008, Section 7.

Various Recommendations are made throughout this submission. They are listed here together for ease of reference:

1. That the NEDDS be updated to include specific references, or a section, addressing the planning requirements and changes relevant to the village of Invergowrie, including the reasons why and likely impacts of those changes.
2. An Invergowrie Development Control Plan be developed with the purpose of articulating, promoting and maintaining the unique character of the area (and so perpetuate the intentions of existing Covenants).
3. The purpose and reasons for the proposed rezoning of Invergowrie to large lot residential needs to be made explicit within the written sections of the New England Development Strategy, particularly that this change will maintain and enhance the natural bushland setting and semi-rural character of Invergowrie.
4. An Invergowrie Development Control Plan be created with the purpose of promoting and maintaining the unique character of the area (as described above), minimum lot sizes (2 hectares), and the distinct characteristics of this large lot residential area that are different to others within the LEP, such as the Uralla township area (ie. Self-sufficiency for water and waste).
5. The New England Draft Development Strategy recognise the need for enhanced broadband, mobile telecommunications coverage and good quality roads to support further development of sustainable economic opportunities at Invergowrie.
6. NEDDS allow for appropriately zoned land on Invergowrie Road in the area of The Invergowrie Store for a commercial facility such as a cafe, restaurant or produce outlet.
7. NEDDS be reviewed to ensure sufficient 4-40 hectare productive agriculture landholdings are available to meet market demands and needs, particularly in the area surrounding the village of Invergowrie.
8. The exact boundaries of Invergowrie are clarified and marked on relevant planning maps.
9. NEDDS explicitly recognise the need for social and economic activity in the Invergowrie area to maintain and enhance the peaceful, quiet and natural qualities of the area. This particularly means that all future development does not generate dust, noise, vibration, nor significant resource use (electricity, water) or traffic volumes. Construction, including fencing, must maintain habitat (flora and fauna) and natural visual amenity.
10. An environmental survey be undertaken to identify existing, and potential, natural resources within the Invergowrie area to ensure such natural resources are maintained and enhanced by NEDDS. This survey particularly should record habitat, flora and fauna types, water systems, soil retention, wildlife corridors and bush fire risk.
11. The NEDDS specific development of the Diggings Fire Shed to allow for dual community use, including an external bio-toilet.
12. In addition to Recommendation 5, NEDDS allow for appropriately zoned land on Invergowrie Road in the area of The Invergowrie Store for a future youth facility.
13. The NEDDS incorporate potential for the development of a network of eco-trails for walking and bike riding throughout Invergowrie, and so leverage the benefits from existing natural assets, such as bush habitats, look-outs and wetland areas.
14. The NEDDS recognise the need for consistency with the New England Sustainability Strategy and NSW Government Climate Change Action Plan.

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Overview

Firstly, residents wished to convey their appreciation for the opportunity to comment and contribute to the long term development strategy for the Uralla Shire and New England Region. Residents recognised the value and positivity of this longer term and strategic approach to local environmental planning.

There was consensus of the community that the New England Draft Development Strategy (NEDDS) needs to include a specific references, or a section, addressing the planning requirements and changes relevant to the village of Invergowrie.

Residents felt that there had clearly been an oversight with the NEDDS not mentioning Invergowrie at all, particularly since there are planned changes in zoning of land (from Rural Small Holdings to Large Lot Residential) and the village of Invergowrie being the second largest population centre in the Uralla Shire (Source: Uralla Shire Council website).

At the same time residents openly recognised that the 'village' and 'community' of Invergowrie is only just emerging, and the area has for a long time been colloquially seen as a 'dormitory suburb' of Armidale.

There was consensus that the time has come for Invergowrie residents to actively work together and create this village and community.

The community has commenced work on a website – www.invergowrie.org – as one step in this regard.

Recommendation 1

That the NEDDS be updated to include specific references, or a section, addressing the planning requirements and changes relevant to the village of Invergowrie, including the reasons why and likely impacts of those changes.

Distinctive Character of Invergowrie Village

Substantial discussion was facilitated to distil and record the distinctive character of Invergowrie, particularly with a view to informing the New England Draft Development Strategy so it can maintain and enhance this character.

The community of Invergowrie is a relatively young area within Uralla Shire, having been initially created through sub division of the *Invergowrie* property by the Moffat family in the 1970s.

While the land was previously been cleared in some areas there has been substantial regrowth, particularly of trees, creating the current semi-bush and semi-rural character of Invergowrie.

While the number of residents within the area has grown in the last three decades, the distinctive character continues to be in line with that intended by the Moffat family and described in the Covenant affixed to many Invergowrie land titles. A copy of the full Covenant is included as an Appendix.

Key points about the distinctive character of Invergowrie described in the Covenant are that the area is primarily residential in a rural setting, with the removal of existing “earth, stone, gravel and trees” only for resident housing, and that no “noxious or offensive trade... or any other purpose that would be a nuisance or annoyance to the neighbourhood” is permitted.

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Today Invergowrie is still characterised as being residential, peaceful in a natural bushland and rural setting – though there are commercial activities which are consistent with maintaining these characteristics (such as telecommuting, home offices for mobile businesses and small eco-tourism providing services such as therapeutic massage and day spas).

While the village is situated within a surrounding rural and agricultural area, it is recognised that the lands within Invergowrie itself are not productive for commercial agriculture. The consensus is that these characteristics of the land make Invergowrie ideally suited to low scale residential development with a rural-bush lifestyle and setting.

This natural character is consistent with semi-rural values, for example where keeping of some livestock, such as a horse or a few sheep, can occur while still maintaining the native wildlife and habitat.

Recommendation 2

An Invergowrie Development Control Plan be developed with the purpose of articulating, promoting and maintaining the unique character of the area (and so perpetuate the intentions of existing Covenants).

Rezoning of Invergowrie Area

There was consensus that the rezoning of the Invergowrie area to be large lot residential was a positive development and better aligned with its actual character, particularly as a semi-bush and semi-rural residential area than the present small scale agricultural zoning. This fact is supported by the above statements about the character of the Invergowrie area and the low agricultural value and productivity of land within this area.

At the same time residents expressed concern that the intended rezoning of Invergowrie was only identifiable on the maps within NEDDS and the underlying intention and purpose of this rezoning was not explicit within the written sections of the Strategy.

It was noted that a minimum lot size is required to be able to uphold the character of the area, particularly to maintain the visual amenity and bush corridors for habitat and wildlife. A minimum lot size of 2 hectares is proposed.

This minimum lot size has a further advantage of enabling individual landholders to manage domestic waste using irrigation and bio-waste processes and so avoid the unnecessary expense of reticulated sewage systems.

It was noted that consideration would need to be given for the rezoning to accommodate existing landholders operating small scale agricultural activity that is consistent and permitted within the current small rural holdings however will be inconsistent with the new large lot residential zoning, providing some kind of transition period of time for them to align their usage of the land with the new zoning.

Residents noted that the implications of this rezoning on rates will need clarification. This is especially since the proposed large lot residential area in the Uralla township will be serviced (water and sewerage) whereas Invergowrie will continue to be self-sufficient in these respects.

Finally, residents noted that Invergowrie has the same post code as Armidale. This has practical implications (such as higher insurance premiums). Residents noted that increasing populations at Invergowrie may warrant investigation of the benefits for an Invergowrie post code which could also further develop the emerging Invergowrie community and village.

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Recommendation 3

The purpose and reasons for the proposed rezoning of Invergowrie to large lot residential needs to be made explicit within the written sections of the New England Development Strategy, particularly that this change will maintain and enhance the natural bushland setting and semi-rural character of Invergowrie.

Recommendation 4

An Invergowrie Development Control Plan be created with the purpose of promoting and maintaining the unique character of the area (as described above), minimum lot sizes (2 hectares), and the distinct characteristics of this large lot residential area that are different to others within the LEP, such as the Uralla township area (ie. Self-sufficiency for water and waste).

7(a) Promotion and protection of opportunities for sustainable economic opportunities

The most sustainable and appropriate economic opportunities for Invergowrie are those already approved and existing such as telecommuting, home offices and small scale eco-tourism businesses in the area.

As the community and population of Invergowrie continue to develop there will be increasing scope and demand for social facilities, such as a cafe or restaurant.

Recommendation 5

The New England Draft Development Strategy recognise the need for enhanced broadband, mobile telecommunications coverage and good quality roads to support further development of sustainable economic opportunities at Invergowrie.

Recommendation 6

NEDDS allow for appropriately zoned land on Invergowrie Road in the area of The Invergowrie Store for a commercial facility such as a cafe, restaurant or produce outlet.

7(b) Recognition of the importance of rural lands and agriculture

Residents noted that there is an economic opportunity for Uralla Shire and the New England Strategic Alliance of Councils to ensure NEDDS allowed for appropriately zoned land to meet the increasing market demand and need for 4-40 hectare productive small agricultural land.

Residents were unsure whether this need could be met from land within the Invergowrie area (due to unclear boundaries on planning maps), though it is likely to be able to be met by surrounding land (which could build on employment and business opportunities for Invergowrie businesses and residents) and more broadly from land across the Uralla Shire and NESAC area.

Recommendation 7

NEDDS be reviewed to ensure sufficient 4-40 hectare productive agriculture landholdings are available to meet market demands and needs, particularly in the area surrounding the village of Invergowrie.

Recommendation 8

The exact boundaries of Invergowrie are clarified and marked on relevant planning maps.

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7(d) Balance the social, economic and environmental interests of the community

The various presentations throughout this submission are purposely made to balance the social, economic and environmental interests of the Invergowrie community, Uralla Shire and NESAC Region.

The recommendation to create a Development Control Plan (Recommendation 2) for Invergowrie would most significantly ensure this end, as will the promotion of appropriate economic development (Recommendations 5, 6 and 7).

In addition to these submissions, residents particularly noted the need to ensure that social and economic activity were consistent with the peaceful, quiet and natural qualities of Invergowrie. These qualities are explicitly dealt with in the Covenant and residents expressed the value in NEDDS ensuring this continues.

Recommendation 9

NEDDS explicitly recognise the need for social and economic activity in the Invergowrie area to maintain and enhance the peaceful, quiet and natural qualities of the area. This particularly means that all future development does not generate dust, noise, vibration, nor significant resource use (electricity, water) or traffic volumes. Construction, including fencing, must maintain habitat (flora and fauna) and natural visual amenity.

7(e) The identification and protection of natural resources

Residents noted the significant natural resources of the Invergowrie area such as tree coverage, native birds and wildlife (such as koalas, wallabies and kangaroos), however recognising that no extensive formal environmental surveys are known to exist.

Further enhancement of under story habitat is required for the health of the environment, preservation of visual amenity and improvement of water and soil retention.

At the same time significant risks exist to these natural resources due to unclear and conflicting planning controls. The recent 'improvements' to a property in Adina Road where 8 foot high metal perimeter fencing highlights this case, resulting in the 5 acre block effectively becoming excluded from the area for land-based wildlife. This development sets a dangerous precedent as were more properties to erect such inappropriate fencing the natural resources would literally be decimated.

Similarly, another recent development has resulted in significant loss of natural resources (trees and habitat) in order to comply with rural fire service requirements because of significant clearing required both due to the type of dwelling (timber) and the site location of the dwelling (in a high fire risk area of the block). Residents felt that only developments that could maintain habitat should be permitted within the Invergowrie area.

Soil erosion and runoff are key issues due to the sloping nature of the Invergowrie landscape and the soil types of the area. Key practices include maintaining ground cover, trees, understory and incorporating soil retention into all future development.

Wetlands and water ways are another key aspect of the Invergowrie area needing work to ensure effective water retention, flow and quality.

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Recommendation 10

An environmental survey be undertaken to identify existing, and potential, natural resources within the Invergowrie area to ensure such natural resources are maintained and enhanced by NEDDS. This survey particularly should record habitat, flora and fauna types, water systems, soil retention, wildlife corridors and bush fire risk.

7(g) Consideration of impacts on services and infrastructure and appropriate location

While residents openly recognised that the 'village' and 'community' of Invergowrie is only just emerging, the consensus is that the time has come for Invergowrie residents to actively work together and create this village and community.

This consensus also recognises that the size of the Invergowrie community is also growing, with several substantial new sub-divisions currently underway.

At the same time there is a strong sense of self reliance (particularly for water and waste) and an aspiration to be even more sustainable – such as renewable energy, carbon neutral and local food production.

With combined effort and strategic development there is potential for Invergowrie to become a model sustainable residential bush-rural village over time.

These qualities of Invergowrie reflect in relatively low level expectations of services and infrastructure – see Recommendations 4, 5, 6 and 9.

This lower service demand is something that Invergowrie residents expect to be reflected in lower council rates, particularly relative to the new large lot residential development in the Uralla township which will have services such as water and sewerage.

Residents would like to see a modest development of infrastructure reflected in the NEDDS to enable further development of the community facilities, specifically an expansion of the Diggings Fire Shed to incorporate dual usage (community and fire service) in a way that overcomes the current health and safety issues that require an authorised person to be in attendance at all times. An external bio-toilet at Penelope's Playground is also desired.

The most popular community activities in Invergowrie are walking and bike riding. The community would like to see this reflected in the NEDDS with scope for the development of walking and bike-riding trails, which would be an eco-tourism asset for the Uralla Shire and NESAC Region.

Longer term the residents see likely demands for community transport, particularly for elderly and youth, as climate change and peak oil affects deepen.

The other social infrastructure already identified is the scope for a cafe and perhaps some future youth facility.

A minor however important point raised was the need for regular and continued maintenance of bus shelters. The Mt Mitchell Road bus shelter was identified as requiring immediate maintenance.

Recommendation 11

The NEDDS specific development of the Diggings Fire Shed to allow for dual community use, including an external bio-toilet.

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Recommendation 12

In addition to Recommendation 5, NEDDS allow for appropriately zoned land on Invergowrie Road in the area of The Invergowrie Store for a future youth facility.

Recommendation 13

The NEDDS incorporate potential for the development of a network of eco-trails for walking and bike riding throughout Invergowrie, and so leverage the benefits from existing natural assets, such as bush habitats, look-outs and wetland areas.

7(h) Ensuring consistency with any applicable regional strategy

There are two key regional strategies currently under development that residents wish to see recognition of within NEDDS:

1. The New England Sustainability Strategy
2. The NSW Government Climate Change Action Plan

Residents are aware that there are several other Regional strategies under development specifically to address the adaptation and mitigation affects of climate change.

Residents recognised that the likely favourable, or at least less unfavourable, impacts of climate change on the New England Region are likely to bring pressure from population influx and agricultural productivity. While these are not yet visible trends, residents believe it important for NEDDS to recognise these scenarios to best ensure future local environment plans and development strategies incorporate them as appropriate.

Recommendation 14

The NEDDS recognise the need for consistency with the New England Sustainability Strategy and NSW Government Climate Change Action Plan.

