

## ***Post Focus Groups for MacKay Park Oct 2018 - SM***

(Disclaimer – these were my perceptions)

Hi all,

You no doubt have been waiting on my feedback re 'Meet the Architects' Focus groups for the MPark Arts/Aquatic centre last week. Apologies for the wait, and finally here 'tis.

I have also included comments from attending the Pool group meeting on Monday night, the 29<sup>th</sup> Oct.

### **Focus Groups**

First of all, it was great to meet the Architects, NBRs, who appear to have a keenness to deliver an iconic building that is usable and of value to the community.

However, that is complex and they have much to consider including:

- The helicopter pad nearby and the associated noise as the helicopters go over
- The two aged (care and residential) buildings, both within 100yards of the site as the crow flies, who have shut down music venues in the past
- Access to/from the bridge and CBD
- The possible (unknown) effects on the site lines, approach and functionality of what may happen on the old Bowlo site, which will not be developed for another five years, at which time the Centre should be largely completed (and so little flexibility to adapt)
- Orientation: they are keen to use the Beach Road approach as 'an avenue'. Will this work as there is NO overall plan for the Mackay Park precinct or the town (the latter is just beginning its update from over ten years ago)
- Competing interests, e.g. regarding the size of the auditorium. Local users want an intimate, acoustically sound (excuse the pun) 'small' space for some 200 users; the commercial lobby want a very large auditorium for large and traveling events. As the parameters are that this centre must be as viable as possible and generate a good, if not all, amount of its costs, these interests will need to be managed
- Room for extensions: whether this is for the pool complex or the arts complex will mean quite different things – up or out or both. Wait and see.
- The aging (sorry, that's us) demographic. We are nudging 40% over 60 in our population. Stairs and long walks will not be popular, or any steep gradients
- Distinctiveness of each section – how to show the inherent nature of the focus of each part (Arts and Aquatic) in one building
- Avoiding competing with local businesses: at present a 'gym' is included in the brief. When this was met with concern they suggested we call it a 'wellness centre', but what is in it will demonstrate if it is in competition or not. Wait and see.
- The council is still pushing a common foyer. This was not met with enthusiasm (understatement) and is an ongoing issue for reasons of crowding, mixing of very different activities and focus- Arts and wet kids for instance – and confusion of space

- Café/s – one or two? A utility café – Formica and steel?- and/or a comfort and quiet space? Again: a conundrum.
- All these issues come under the broad heading of ‘multi-purpose’, which hopefully is not ‘an animal designed by a committee’ (a camel), i.e. making spaces that meet various needs rather than spaces that meet no needs
- Not detracting from what we already have in the Community and Tourism centres, which are to be sold/leased out as a consequence of the build
- A high water table

Plus of course the usual things such as budget; site conditions; time constraints; RMS building a bridge next door (read ‘earth trembling, dust, noise, .....’); moving the MiniGolf (lease expires in 2020 approx); managing community and council expectations, .....

The Architects who attended were:

- Andrew Tripet – the main manager –Life and community architect
- Richard Stuart – theatre specialist
- James Ward – Coordinator (Director at NBRS Architects)

plus

- Peter Hogan and Rosemary Kelly – Public works
- Lindsay Usher and Stephen Phipps - Council

The attendees were

- Pam Hamory – spinners and Weavers
- Julie Stuart – Music society
- Robert Creed – Public Arts and foreshore Committee
- Myself for PerfEx
- Nina Poulton for the Pastel Society
- Myf Thompson and Chris Rozalis for the Museum
- Judy Laws for Sing Australia

Each person was asked what the people they represent want (we got the distinct impression that all community input to date had NOT been passed to the Architects – this was borne out by references in other focus groups)

On behalf of PerfEx and others we work with (Arts peoples) I presented them with a folder that had in it: my sketch plan ideas for the overall and foyer footprint/layout, the agreed design principles; a summary of the requirements put together from meetings with Arts reps, such as the one at the Soldiers’ club; an introduction to PerfEx and a brochure, plus a little overview of our expectations and experiences so far.

Also on behalf of PerfEx and the broader Arts community I requested

- They be clear on who they are providing for – locals or transient (events) customers,

- Stressed that if the centre was not viable out of tourist season it would not be viable at all
- It meet needs of local events character as is present already – periodic large events (Yearly and National Art shows) and recurring small events (Music Society, etc)
- Be affordable, accessible and inviting
- Essential to have a ‘small’ theatre with good acoustics plus expandable Art display areas
- Good flow in and out of the building and use of outside space
- Foyer issue – separate in access, reality and character between the two, but both usable by each other, as appropriate
- Not competitive with local businesses – e.g. gym
- Manage noise issues to allow freedom of activities
- Be aesthetic
- Manage what it looks like from the Bridge/Southside approach to encourage access
- Liaise with other event places and take inspiration from other event spaces (e.g. Four Winds; Milton theatre)
- That this is considered a community project and therefore direct three-way access (i.e. including direct community: architects access) would demonstrate that: Council, Architects and Community, and is requested
- Practicality and play as part of the design – reflecting the nature of the community (Tradespeople, dwellers and tourists)
- Accommodate the ebb and flow of the town cycle
- Submissions for the focus groups ended today (31/10/2018) – the time lines for responses are very quick and needs to accommodate people’s busy lives more
- Accommodate the breadth of the community

A summary of these follows (not in any priority or preferential order):

- An outside theatre
- Covered walkways
- Environmentally sound and sustainable: solar energy, rainwater use, etc
- Display areas – various sizes requested
- Food
- Multi-purpose
- Clear separation of water and Arts areas – including atmosphere – aircon, etc – and entrances/exits
- Intimate theatre for some 2-300,
- Excellent acoustics in the performance areas
- Beautiful, iconic, inviting and inspiring
- Affordable for Community – individuals and groups
- Bar access
- Green room/s
- Piano and piano storage space

- Interrelationship between town, foreshore, mangroves and the old Bowlo site
- NOT have its back to the main road
- Easy access and parking
- Designing for diverse clientele
- Outdoor/indoor integration
- Opportunities for public Art - pieces and sites
- Include Indigenous input
- Night lighting
- Colourful
- Disability access
- Movable panels for exhibitions
- Lighting and sun management for Art pieces
- Busking opportunities and impromptu theatre/activities/youth
- Workshop areas to have water and be easily accessible and cleanable (e.g. stainless steel surfaces)
- Free performances offered
- Good and plentiful storage
- Permanent space for changing exhibitions for the Museum – reflecting the issues of the day and a continuity of history of place
- Temperature controls
- Gateway value- not overshadowed, either literally or visually or character-wise – by the development on the old Bowlo site
- Footbridge or similar for access across highway (this is not in the Architects' brief and may mean access under the bridge via the foreshore)
- Audio visual capabilities inside and outside the building (to allow such things as 'Vivid' projections)
- Plenty of toilets – good ration between males and female amenities – (more female ones)

### ***Pool Group Meeting***

Monday night the Aquatic centre group had a meeting with Liz Innes, Lindsay Usher and Stephen Phipps present (the three Council people most directly responsible for the project).

There were some 25 people there, including representatives from the 50metre poolers, and PerfEx (me). I was glad to go to listen to what Council people gave as feedback from the focus groups.

Their feedback was a fair summary, though some statements such as "Everyone who wanted to come were able to". This was not true as neither the media nor certain individuals were allowed to attend. Nor was how the Indigenous folk and Visitors were included was not made clear. However...

- Some clarity was given of the **time line**: three sketched/plans/options by Christmas with community input open 6-8 weeks, till Feb some time (to accommodate holiday periods and movements)
- Final plans by middle of next year
- All the money is not in the bank – a letter from government has been received assuring the first 24million, and the recent announcement for another 25million is a statement that we are a step closer to getting that (moving onto next grant step)
- Operating costs will be met by fees and charges
- Not looking to duplicate the gyms in town- maybe wellness centre, Pilates etc
- Building must be affordable and viable
- Theme of the community images for the town: water, then environment, trees etc
- Create a link to the CBD
- To include a crèche
- Negotiations in progress to relocate Mini-golf
- No details were given re the staged approach and this should be clearer when the draft plans are released
- Re-statement of the significance of managing and having this much money and this big a project (and calls for transparency of that management)

The 50 meter poolers were encouraged to deal with Council directly re their concerns (e.g. release of details on costings of pools and maintenance), rather than the pool people in a pool meeting. I also reflected that we (the Arts community) were not yet guaranteed what we wanted as yet, either. The 50metre poolers may need to focus on the future and lobby for some years, as we and the pool people have, for the future development of a 50m pool – be it on MacKay park site or elsewhere (Hanging Rock/Corrigans/Moruya...). Time will tell.

In the meantime we will work with what we have to make the most of it.

So there you are. Quite a bit of detail. Hope it helps bolster your commitment for the next part of the process: onward and upward as they say!

PS: Council wants all communication with the architects through Stephen Phipps 4474 1389  
[Stephen.Phipps@esc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Stephen.Phipps@esc.nsw.gov.au)

**About NBRIS, the appointed architects:**

## **NBRIS Architects**

*“NBRISARCHITECTURE is a people focused, research based studio that aims to enrich lives. Above all NBRIS seeks to design environments that will have positive life changing affect.”*

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*Under ‘contact’ on the site we see:*

Please direct all enquiries to: **James Ward (who was present at our focus group)**  
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