

COMMENTS FROM THE ROTTNEST SOCIETY ABOUT THE PROPOSED LONGREACH BAY HOTEL

6th November 2010

A guiding principle in restoration of native vegetation is to work from established vegetation patches outwards to areas of little, or no remaining, vegetation – building on what is in place. This principle might well be applied in the issue of providing more accommodation on the island – build on the existing base.

A very large base of Rottnest visitors has established a relationship with the island which, for many, goes back generations, and which keeps them returning year after year – unlike many other destinations in WA, apart from a number of remote beaches to the north of Perth. Some people are lost to the island because they believe it is too expensive. Others are lost each time there is new development. However, many continue to visit until there comes a point beyond which they feel they cannot continue (for financial reasons or for cultural reasons). There are likely to be more people lost to the island because they think that the model of this proposed hotel will change the island culture too much. The TNS report identified the nature of this connection with the island that so many people feel and acknowledged that this was a feature which could be built on.

This sense of relationship with, and ownership of, the island means that there are a great many people who are extremely concerned about the impact on the island's utilities, traffic, environment, finances and social and cultural values – who take a particular interest in such things. The attitude of the RIA seems to be 'just trust us – it will all be OK. Nothing will change. We know best'. As far as we can tell the RIA has not done anything to assess the potential effects on amenity, social and cultural values, or even on the natural environment. We believe that it has, however, estimated the likely impact on the island's utilities.

The RIA, to its credit, does have in place good Planning and Development Guidelines and we understand that the intention is to adhere to these. However, the public has a somewhat jaundiced view because in so many cases good guidelines are subverted, ignored, overturned or just plain forgotten in practice.

The TNS Report found that, while both day and overnight visitors agreed that more accommodation was needed, an 80-room, 4.5 star hotel was easily the least attractive to respondents, and the one thought most likely to be detrimental overall. Rather than listen to its large base of visitors, many of whom would be happy for there to be some extra, more affordable, accommodation to cater for the overflow of people who would like accommodation in summer, there has been a decision taken (where exactly we do not know) to impose a 4.5 star luxury hotel with swimming pool and spa on the island.

What will this luxury hotel do to cater for the large overflow of people who cannot get accommodation on the island in summer and other peak periods. A more modest development should cater for them - including singles and couples, as well as families. Further, it should encourage them to enjoy Rottnest for what it is.

Many people who applaud the advent of a 4.5 star hotel (particularly those who have never been) are also likely to be people who want more and more facilities to give them 'something to do' on the island – leading to further loss of recognised social values and ultimately a loss of a loyal visitor base.

DESIGN

BUILDING SCALE AND BULK - Development Planning Guideline No 06: Buildings proposed are to complement the existing low, scattered nature of buildings on Rottnest Island and are not to detract from the visual amenity of the area.

Scale and Scope:

- This hotel, as it is, is too big for this site for reasons of visual, social and cultural amenity, are not 'low or scattered' and will detract from the visual amenity – possibly of quite a wide area.
- It will dominate the landscape from a number of vantage points (see below). This is not in keeping with other buildings on the island which tend to nestle into the landscape (with very few exceptions).
- This would seem to depend on how much reshaping of dunes is allowed. However the highest dune is visible from several points as it currently is. Any attempt to give every room 'expansive views of Longreach Bay' would mean that existing dunes would need to be built up in the low spots – which would make the hotel more imposing yet
- The RIA should impose an absolute height limit above the AHD for all buildings on the site.
- The plan appears not to meet the State's Coastal old setback requirement of 100m. It surely will not meet the recently announced 150m Coastal setback requirement.
- Lowering dunes and restricting building to single storey would go a good way to solving the issue of amenity (dominating the landscape).

An excerpt from Planning Minister John Day's media statement on 16/11/10 announced that:

For new development on a sandy coast the impact of an increase in vertical sea level rise value from 0.38m to 0.9m will result in an increase to the horizontal setback of 52m, increasing the total setback for the general guide from 100m to 150m. The new setback provisions will be applied to new development, with existing development being allowed to remain, and infill development (within an established developed area) also allowed.

Design features

Most buildings on Rottnest are of designs not found anywhere else and they have become part of the built heritage of the island. They contribute to the unique character of the island. Even the most recent addition, the Dome café, is of a design that has very quickly come to belong in the settlement landscape. It is difficult to see how this design will do that. It could be anywhere.

Development Planning Guideline No 06 a) ensure all development employs quality design principles that contribute to the unique character and fabric of Rottnest Island; b) ensure all built form development contributes significantly to the sense of place, adds visual interest and contributes to an active community place; and

The concept plans as published lead us to believe that the RIA does not have staff associated with this project with sufficient design experience to ensure that their own criteria in this regard will be met. These plans do not contribute to the 'unique character and fabric of Rottnest Island' nor to the 'sense of place' since they are not in harmony with other buildings on the island, have no internal harmony, will be an imposition on the landscape, and will reduce the amenity in a number of areas. Perhaps the RIA should consider employing a suitably qualified person with a know interest in Rottnest to advise them on this important matter.

- External colours illustrated do not reflect the Rottnest palette of colours – apart from the occasional splash of ‘Rottnest orange’.
- A lot of attention is paid to ‘Materiality and Interior Design’, however there is nothing to indicate what the buildings will be constructed of or what material is used for the external walls. They are not in harmony with other buildings on Rottnest. In fact they are quite pedestrian on the whole.
- Reverse skillion roofs of the accommodation buildings are not in keeping with other buildings on Rottnest – and look cheap.
- The overall concept lacks a coherent design premise. The differences in style between the central building and the accommodation units are very marked – almost from two different eras.
- Privacy would appear to be in issue with the use of what appear to be glass panels between balconies, and the outer walls of individual balconies.
- The overall concept also shows different roof colours which are inconsistent together.
- The inclusion of a swimming pool and separate spa facility (and perhaps even small plunge pools in some units) is totally inconsistent with the RIA’s expressed intention of minimising water use on the island, with its expressed intention of sustainability, or with a shortage of water on the island.
- An adventure playground is anathema to the island culture for kids – the island itself is a great big adventure playground. The island is one remaining place where children can explore nature, ride bikes, snorkel and so on.
- The proposed use of largely indigenous plants is good, however we understand that such plants do not do well if transplanted as mature plants and must start as seedlings. This would mean it would be some time before the site had a developed landscape.
- Although some of the buildings are north facing a number are not. Surely they should all face north, particularly as minimisation of energy use is required to be a focus.
- This site is very windy. One person knowledgeable about this site advises that a 25 knot wind at sea level translates to a 38 knot wind on this site – it has its own microclimate. This is where the wind turbine is located. For that reason alone the site should be modified so that the buildings nestle into it rather than imposing on it.

AMENITY

Amenity – visual

As we can see in the image below one dune in the designated area can be seen from the Fay’s Bay Headland so that two storey buildings built from this base will be very visible. The site varies in height with high and low points. Because of the steep rise from the beach, and the dune above the beach, the hotel may not be very obvious from the beach immediately below the hotel. However there are a number of other places on the island where we believe the hotel will be very visible indeed.

We are seriously concerned about visual amenity from a number of vantage points eg from Fay’s Bay Headland (see photo next page), probably from the Causeway, from the Golf Course, from Geordie Bay, from the Geordie Bay Rd in several places, possibly from Digby Drive and from parts of Bovell Way. It may even be visible from parts of the main settlement. The potential for this should be reduced to an absolute minimum. This could probably be done by reducing the height of the existing highest dune. The visual impact could be further reduced by limiting it to single storey buildings.

<p>The developer should be required, as part of the EIA, to carry out a survey to determine where the building will be visible from other parts of the island – if this is not part of the EIA requirements then the RIA should commission such a study.</p>



Amenity – traffic

Limited vehicular traffic is a highly valued feature of the island's culture

No information has been made available to indicate that the RIA has assessed the potential impact of approximately a third of say 200-300 guests arriving and departing each day – particularly in the summer months – on traffic between Thomson Bay and Geordie/Longreach. The Rottneest Society has been assured that there is sufficient capacity on the existing Shuttle and Bayseeker services and therefore that there will little increase in traffic. We would like a firm guarantee that guests will be required to use the existing services. This will be vital. Even so - has consideration been given to whether those services could in fact handle large additional numbers if most guests chose to arrive and depart the hotel at or around check-in, check -out times.

Amenity – beaches

The amenity of neighbouring beaches is an important consideration given the significant increase in number of likely users. There does not appear to have been any attempt to determine what hotel guests will want to do during their stay. Are they more likely to want to stay by the pool and/or spa? Are they more likely to head out on bikes or on the Bayseeker? Are they likely to head out to the nearest beaches once or twice a day. The public has every right to expect that the RIA should have seriously researched this and started to plan for how to handle the flow of people and for how to protect fragile dunes and headlands.

Amenity – Noise

Noise from the hotel is a potential amenity issue for people in nearby Longreach villas. What has the RIA done to assess the potential for this?

ENVIRONMENT

MONITORING

The RIA's development Planning Guidelines make require the developer to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment, and if so determined, an Environmental Management Plan. It is evident as we have considered various aspects of this proposal and its potential impacts on the natural environment and on the social and cultural that and EMP will be vital. It should determine base criteria and a monitoring programme of a number of key items and it should be publicly available.

Neighbouring beaches, headlands and dunes

We are seriously concerned about the environmental impacts on the neighbouring beaches, headlands and dunes given the likely addition of a fair proportion of 200-300 people each day heading out to the neighbouring beaches. A short walk to Little Parakeet via the coast is very pretty but would it stand up to so much extra traffic? The dune at the eastern end of

Longreach beach is already very degraded with tracks all through it. The little headlands (Fay's Bay and the between the Basin and Longreach) may not be able to take such an increase.

As far as we are aware the *Sustainable Visitor Research* report has not been released to the public. We understand that Little Parakeet Bay was identified in that report as being under threat from too many visitors. We would like to see that report released as soon as possible.

It is imperative that there is an Environmental Impact Assessment, and, if so determined, an Environmental Management Plan, carried out by the developer, as per the RIA's Development Planning Guidelines. And it should be made public.



UTILITIES

Many members of our Society, and of the wider public, express serious concern about the impact on the island's utilities, however there has been no information made available to the public which quantifies the existing capacity of the utilities, or details how the RIA plans to cope with the extra demand.

The Rottneest Society is, however, aware that the RIA has in recent years carried out a Utilities Master Plan, although we have not seen this document. We have however seen the RIA's document inviting Expressions of Interest for *Provision of Power Generation, Water Production, Gas Supply and Sewerage Treatment and Utilities Supply Services on Rottneest Island*.

Utilities – Water

There is no information available to the public about the projected water consumption and the energy costs associated with providing this water. However, we note from the EOI document that:

The water demands over the next 20 years have been projected to grow beyond the current capacity of the water production system, taking into account **a dramatically increased short term requirement due to the programmed development of a new hotel in 2008-2010** and other improvements to accommodation and replacements over the next five years. Over the 20 year period ordinary growth/usage expectations are projected to increase by around 3% per year. **(From the EOI document).**

1. We are concerned that the removal of this catchment area eliminates the potential for the future restoration and recommissioning of an important source of potable water in the event that it was needed in the future.

2. We wish to know what impact, if any, the additional requirements of this hotel are expected to have on the borefield, particularly given the extended dry period of the last decade.
3. We would also like to know what impact, if any, the additional requirements of this hotel would have on the bores which supply the desalination plant.
4. We believe that a swimming pool and spa is totally incompatible with a much-vaunted culture of minimal water and power use, particularly on an island which is short of water, has to produce its own water power, and aspires to be a model of sustainability.
5. What chemicals will be required for the pool and spa? How will their use be monitored and any possible impact on the underground water.
6. How will the use of fertilisers for any lawn affect underground water resources?

Utilities – Gas

We note that from the EOI document that:

The projected major new user of LPG on the Island will be the new Hotel development at Mt Herschel which can be supplied from a central reticulation system.

Utilities – Power

We note from the EOI document that:

The Utilities Master Plan report identifies **a projected increase of almost 60% in demand for power on Rottnest Island over the three year period to 2011 from the Island's current power maximum demand of 1,140 kW, due to key major developments.** Additional to this is a 3% per annum usage growth over the 20 year predictions period.

The current base power generation capacity of 2,140 kW meets today's demands, however does not provide for any reserve to cater for the increased requirements of the customers and developments planned. The power supply system also has inadequacies that need to be addressed to ensure an uninterrupted supply is maintained to all customers.

We do not know how much of the projected 60% increase in demand was attributed to this particular development, or how this was calculated. Is this related just to construction, or is it related to the operation of the hotel? If it is the latter it would seem to indicate an expectation of considerable draw on power. We would like to know what is projected for the hotel's usage.

The theoretical maximum number of beds in present accommodation on the island is 2401 Thomson Bay, Geordie/Longreach/Fays Bay, the Rottnest Hotel and the Lodge plus 635 in Caroline Thomson, tent sites and Kingstown – a theoretical total of 3,036 (from the *Rottnest Island Taskforce Report*).

1. The proposed hotel appears to have a theoretical total of 300 beds – a 10% increase. What increase in power usage is expected for the hotel?

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability - financial

The public has been given no information about the anticipated financial benefits of the proposed hotel – nor about anticipated costs – to the RIA itself, nor to the large base of Rottnest visitors, or indeed to taxpayers.

Developments should be economically viable. We are not aware of any feasibility study or market research carried out for such a hotel on the island. If there is one it should be made

publicly available. If there is not, then that seems to us to be a derogation of responsibility. If there is, then it should be available to the public.

Whilst we understand that a number of people in the tourism industry have no doubts about the financial viability of this model there are many in the community who are very doubtful. This doubt is at least partly because there are not many other facilities of a similar standard (if any) and there is a belief that people likely to patronise such a hotel would not because of this lack. Many are concerned that the RIA and/or the taxpayer will be left to carry the burden if it fails.

It is possible that financial sustainability might be more likely if the development was of a slightly lower standard and somewhat more affordable – and set out to cater more directly for the overflow of people who cannot get accommodation in summer (an already established market).

In a more reasonable public comment process the Authority would have provided information about their assessment of the impact of the hotel on the utilities, the natural environment, the social and cultural amenity, and traffic. It is hard to escape the conclusion, from the evidence available, that the only area where there has been any assessment of the potential impact is on the utilities. This fails the RIA’s own commitment to the public.

THE MYTH

RE: FAQ’s available on the www.longreachbayhotel.com.au with this proposal are perpetuating a myth – the Rottnest Island Taskforce report did NOT recommend this type of hotel on this site. The Taskforce made 103 recommendations and not one of them referred to accommodation on this site. **The Report did say: ‘However, in the future it (the RIA) should undertake further research to establish what type of development might be appropriate in the Mount Herschel area’.**

That research did not (as far as we are aware) take place.

We remind you that the public has NEVER been asked to comment on what KIND of development, if any, should be built on this site and the RIA should stop perpetuating this myth.