

17 March, 2014

Mr David Farmer  
General Manager  
Wollongong City Council  
Locked Bag 8821  
Wollongong DC NSW 2500

Dear Mr Farmer,

**Re: WCC Draft Cultural Plan 2014-18**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Wollongong City Council's Draft Cultural Plan 2014-18 currently on exhibition.

The Property Council commends council for its comprehensive consultative approach to the development of a cultural plan for the city, particularly its strong links to economic development related strategies which underpin this plan. These include the Live Music Action Plan and an Evening Economy Strategy, and the commitment to conclude the development of Creative Spaces and Public Art strategies.

The Property Council is the nation's peak representative of the property industry. Our 2,200 members are Australia's major investors, developers and owners of commercial, residential, retail, industrial, retirement living and hotel assets worth over \$320 billion.

Our industry is supporting more than \$1 billion worth of growth in this city, including:

- GPT Group's \$200 million expansion of Wollongong Central,
- Stockland's investment in the West Dapto urban land release and regional retail projects,
- Folkestone's investment at 43 Burelli St and commitment to continue to improve its NABERS energy rating via a capital works program
- Construction of the tax office in Kembla St
- Redevelopment commitment to other key city sites including Oxford on Crown and Dwyers

WCC already delivers many cultural opportunities for the city very well with limited resources and dedicated, professional staff. Whilst comments in this submission may be read as merely criticism, the intention is to be constructive and boost the positive work already started.

Our response to the draft reports is limited due to the need for further information on many strategies mentioned. The Property Council would like the opportunity to receive more information and provide more detailed input to WCC's cultural plan directions where it affects our industry. We recommend greater industry input *before* the finer details of these strategies are concluded, particularly where there is an inference of a business or development levy impost or understanding of the regulatory burden on the property industry and emerging businesses.

We also suggest that future draft documents provide consistent, coherent numbered recommendations to make it easier to respond.

Property Council also suggests many actions within the strategies need to be re-worded to be focused and deliverable, with some specific examples mentioned in this submission.

We know WCC used many community engagement opportunities to collate these reports, but we suggest gaining feedback on these draft directions might have been assisted by more engagement opportunities – perhaps a public forum to outline what the actions/strategies are so that comment can be relayed verbally, or even staff visiting venues/meetings to seek on the spot feedback.

**Overall recommendations:**

1. WCC numbers recommendations consistently and coherently in future reports, with the wording of actions to be focused to make it easier for people to respond.
2. WCC supports its comprehensive engagement process pre-report to “road-test” results for feedback. This could include existing regular meetings (such as the city centre forum), market stall stands, walking through the city/venue locations and briefing business groups like the PCA/IBC/AiG.
3. WCC provides the opportunity for further community/business feedback on particular strategies as they develop, BEFORE they are finalised. Eg, Creative Spaces Strategy and proposed changes to include social/cultural impact assessments to master planning projects.

**Draft Economic Plan Aspirations**

WCC's 2022 Strategic Plan vision for Wollongong to be a Creative, Vibrant City is commendable, as are the aspirations underpinning it, but we think culture needs to be defined from the outset and the language used consistently throughout the reports.

The Property Council suggests there is still an opportunity with the finalisation of the plan to be more focused, ambitious and visionary than the current draft plan.

Culture and the many elements of creativity, heritage and celebration that underpin it were strong themes that emerged in the Property Council's *Shaping Wollongong* project started in 2013, about the same time the research for this plan was being conducted.

In fact, some contributors to our project contributed to this research conducted by WCC.

The results of our project are free, publicly available and include successful case studies from locations around the world. SW aimed for a final document that was inspirational, strategically considered, provided insight into the next steps, suggested partners and successful pilot examples.

The SW approach is now being undertaken by other regions in Australia (led by councils/business collaborations), whilst the SW project results are already being used in a variety of contexts. This includes use of the document as an investor confidence building tool to show where the city is headed to inclusion of SW for funding applications and unique brand building opportunities.

There is research suggested in SW that has also been raised in the WCC Cultural Plan and we support these endeavours, as mentioned in this submission. But there are also other SW pathways, ambitions and case studies that could be incorporated into WCC's Cultural Plan to potentially boost the cultural plan's success and support more collaborative approaches to deliver initiatives.

This includes ideas and strategies in the SW Ambitions of Reveal, Nourish, Reinvent Inspire, Make, Spark, Intensify, Explore and Collaborate<sup>i</sup>.

The Property Council suggests WCC work with the SW Partnership to further explore project alignment to determine if some of the Cultural Plan strategies might be enhanced or realized and sometimes even led by other stakeholders.

The Property Council also recommends WCC strengthen the aims<sup>ii</sup> of the plans to reflect a greater commitment to work in partnership with key business areas for implementation, including economic development and tourism, rather than the ambiguous "make connections".

In fact, this partnership approach is recommended for the cultural plan to support economic development opportunities throughout the city and improve livability attributes, as researched so comprehensively in the accompanying Cultural Plan background report.

It was particularly gratifying to read WCC's intentions for the cultural plans for the city to be part of the region's economic diversification and to showcase examples at the public workshop from local, creative, successful entrepreneurs making a living in this sector.

In reading through the Live Music Taskforce Report, the City Centre Evening Economy Action Plan and the Cultural Action Plan it appears that no matter what the tools and the support WCC may have developed or will develop, there is a real opportunity to improve existing good work in this sector by addressing communication issues in the planning and marketing stages of activity. We recommend WCC look at measuring the effectiveness of its current communication strategies (and the use of stakeholder partnerships' communications) to trial different solutions, and measure the outcomes for improvement. Obviously there are more irregular events that gain more mainstream media coverage, but there are a host of great initiatives that are just not utilised to their full advantage. Likewise, there may be a waste of ratepayer resources by expensive mail-outs done without any analysis of the database.

**General recommendations:**

4. WCC works with the Shaping Wollongong partnership to explore the project's alignment with the aim of enhancing and supporting a more ambitious Cultural Plan.
5. WCC strengthen the aims and themes of the Cultural Plan to be more focused: eg. a greater commitment to work in partnership rather than the ambiguous "make connections"; partner instead of "leader" to enable grassroots initiatives to thrive and so the expectation isn't always on WCC/ratepayers.
6. WCC review the effectiveness of its communication strategies, trial different approaches with various partnerships and measure improvements and failures to improve communications and enhance the success of events and venue patronage. A comprehensive events calendar should be pursued.

**Cultural Plan Action Plan**

WCC's Action Plan 2014-18 is to be commended for the direction of its goals and strategies.

The Property Council supports the commitment for reviews or investigations, including cultural connectivity, databases, use of particular spaces such as the lower Town Hall, the desire to build a mentor program, development of a cultural tourism strategy, a register of underutilised properties and an evaluation of the regulatory environment (strategy 39).

The reviews/investigations obviously have to occur before further specific actions are more finely outlined in many instances. In some cases the intention is clear, in other strategies it isn't. More information is needed on who is responsible for a review, the intention/aim, how success will be measured and timeframes. If this is to be a strategy for the next four years, what projects will be started this year and beyond and how does the timing of projects fit into an overall cultural plan. Is WCC to lead/manage and fund all these strategies? If so, has that commitment been secured across WCC's divisions to ensure effective, collaborative implementation is assured?

The Property Council recommends the final cultural plan should provide a better indication of how/who these strategies will be managed, and milestone indicators to measure success in specific timeframes. Perhaps the creation of short, medium and long term goals would assist all involved.

Specifically, the Property Council is concerned about the wordy, vague, repetitious and/or lack of focus in some strategies which may inadvertently inhibit the intended outcome, waste limited resources and, in some alarming instances, potentially impose more taxes to our industry.

For example, strategy 1 aims to "*extend the reach of arts and cultural activity*" while Strategy 2 seeks to "*extend opportunities for cultural exchange*" – is this the same intention?

Another example is strategy 14: *Undertake social and cultural impact assessment studies as an integral requirement of urban design, land use planning and master planning projects in a timely manner from project concept to design and construction.*

This strategy doesn't indicate what projects are incorporated into this expectation (only WCC projects, major projects, key site projects?) who will be responsible/pay for these studies, what level

of detail will be expected to gain approvals and what city goal is desired? Whilst the Property Council would support quality design and amenity for our city more detail needs to be provided here in consultation with industry.

Another example is strategy 38: *Investigate opportunities through local planning regulations, Section 94 and potential business levies to encourage developers and business to contribute to vibrant public spaces and incentives to provide for utilization of safe, affordable and accessible buildings, factories and warehouses.*

Strategy 38 simply isn't clear – does it mean developers/ businesses will be taxed more to realise this ambition or will WCC investigate the current plethora of taxes to allocate existing funds, or provide incentives to the industry for use of their spaces? What goal does this seek to deliver?

WCC already receives substantial rates and levies from developers and business owners, particularly in the CBD where additional levies and rates are imposed.

Indeed some of the current levies accrued have not been spent. Property Council review of WCC's Annual Report 2012-2013<sup>iii</sup>, showed WCC was holding 60% more in s94 contributions at the end of FY2013 than the end of FY2012, which at the end of FY2013 was \$11,758,000 in unspent s94 funds.

There are also additional WCC plans referred to in the background report (and others which are not), that should be considered for integration into the Cultural Plan actions to boost the effectiveness of this plan, ensure a whole-of-council approach and determine who will implement what strategies.

Examples include, but are not limited to, the Wollongong Heritage Strategy and Action Plan 2011-14, the Illawarra Food Strategy 2013 led by WCC, any plans being conceived by a Wollongong Bicentennial committee, Destination Wollongong's business plan and WCC's Creative Spaces Strategy. The Property Council couldn't even find some of these strategies to provide feedback.

#### **Recommendations:**

7. WCC refines its strategies to be clearer and consult with relevant industry members where changes are implied BEFORE they are finalised.
8. WCC looks at the use of existing property industry and rate payer funding allocations to support the Cultural Plan and not impose any new taxes business. Reduced levy incentives should be considered in consultation with the business sector and property industry.
9. WCC incorporates the excellent work across its divisions and their plans to boost the Cultural Plan and incorporate cross department strategies and outcomes for which they are all responsible.
10. WCC's final Cultural Plan strategies indicate key responsibilities, partners and milestones, potential funding sources and the short, medium and long term aims of the plan in its 2014-18 timeframe.

#### **Live Music Taskforce Action Plan.**

WCC is to be commended for leading the Live Music Taskforce, for the research undertaken and the positive, comprehensive directions indicated in the Live Music Background report and Action Plan

It was particularly interesting to note the intentions by venues to include more live music in our city and the economic reality to make this work, not only because of current licensing restrictions but also the delicate balance between the noise created and the needs of inner city residents.

Many of the issues and intentions identified in this report (and the broader cultural plan) were raised in the Property Council's *Shaping Wollongong* project.

The diverse stakeholders engaged in SW included people not typically attending live music venues in the city, yet many of the actions to be considered would not only support the live music community but the general resident population who also indicated a desire for more cultural activity, including music. Many of these participants indicate they travel outside the city to gain these opportunities.

The Property Council considers this report and additional actions will be better informed by the Public Places, Public Life Study and Built Form reviews to be undertaken by WCC in 2014, and the recommended building stock matrix/policy reviews/noise study mentioned in the report. Much of the focus in this report is about current live music venues, the Town Hall and the Arts Precinct – there doesn't appear to be any research into additional potential venues or underutilised spaces, including outdoor areas within the city and the Crown St Mall. Whilst the actions are commendable, it would be a lost opportunity not to consider the CBD in its entirety for its live music potential, and the appropriate balance needed between residents and activity to ensure the city has vitality.

We recommend that more diverse actions be determined after this research pieces are concluded, with those actions being benchmarked annually to measure live music activity, patronage patterns, city centre assault incidents and safety perceptions (the latter can be via the Property Council's *My Cities Poll* benchmarked annually for example). This would determine whether actions improve the issues identified and enhance live music opportunities in Wollongong.

Likewise, the small business development assessment team is obviously an asset to entrepreneurs seeking to pursue a cultural/live music opportunity in the city. Supporting this initiative with adequate information and staff is essential, as is measuring enquiries, problems, costs, resolutions, successful opportunities and failures. Perhaps written information and workshops can be tailored to make it easier to assist the sector.

WCC is to be commended for its regulation recommendations on page 35 because of their positive intent to develop appropriate development in the city centre which supports cultural development, including live music. This includes the recommendation to consider non-traditional and temporary venue use. It is an important positive breakthrough of internal WCC planning attitudes to measure the economic contribution of this cultural sector when determining DAs, variations and compliance matters. Property Council also recommends the inclusion of strategic planners in this education process as these issues need to be incorporated as WCC begins its research to determine new planning guidelines that support a viable, vibrant and safe city centre.

WCC is to be commended for its generic DA applications across the city. However, these applications were lodged sometime ago and need to progress urgently so the city can pursue events to coincide with the completion of major city development projects, such as the GPT shopping centre expansion and the Crown St Mall works later this year.

More information is needed on encouraging opportunities to include the music and creative sector in current industrial zones before this is determined. DoP&I has commissioned an audit of current employment lands (including industrial zones) – we recommend the outcomes of this research need to be understood first so that further industrial development of these sites is not precluded by its use for creative endeavours.

WCC is to be commended to the commitment to investigate the development of a multi-day, varied use festival site. This was also an initiative identified in 2013 in SW, via Ambition 1: Reveal Wollongong<sup>iv</sup>.

Reveal suggested incorporating local creatives into the development of a brand and the establishment of signature events, including a digital/arts/music festival in multiple venues like the South by South West Festival in Austin, Texas. The SW approach could be considered for this action.

Communications/marketing, as previously mentioned, need to be enhanced and measured for effectiveness – particularly for residents/venues in regards to basic information (as suggested on page 41) and beyond that for cultural events. In addition to updating information on WCC's website, perhaps a Facebook site could be considered with limited shared responsibility to market venues/events. Several communication options are suggested in SW, from developing a Talk of the Town (perhaps a funkier name for music related activity?) to a collaborative hub (Ambition 10: Collaborate Wollongong).

#### **Recommendations:**

11. WCC undertake the actions as recommended on page 22 (of the Live Music Action Plan), including the wider CBD as part of the matrix study and potential capacity for live music in the city, including annual benchmarks to determine positive measures.
12. WCC include Live Music information as part of their communication analysis, perhaps incorporating venues/hours/gigs into the Wollongong City App being developed. Potential benefitting venues could be approached to “sponsor” this initiative.
13. WCC Cultural Reference Group includes a Live Music Taskforce representative and measures ongoing initiatives of the action plan for their effectiveness.
14. WCC continues to support an appropriately resourced small business DA team for the city centre and investigate developing simple sector relevant information that can be utilised across council departments and in workshops for applicants to ensure council supports live music development for its economic and social value.
15. WCC should seek the support of the Department of Premier & Cabinet to review current agency and council policy inconsistencies which inhibit licensed premises to viably operate in a way that supports more live music.
16. WCC incorporate Live Music marketing into an effective communications review. An independent portal could again be “sponsored” by venues that benefit from the service.
17. WCC investigate some of the suggested strategies and solutions in SW which align with issues raised because of the effective case studies/opportunities investigated.

#### **Wollongong City Centre Evening Economy Action Plan**

WCC is be commended for developing an evening economy action plan, which considers some initial activities, retail considerations, marketing and a host of strategies to address issues obviously identified in the research for this action plan.

The Property Council supports the direction of this action plan, with the exception of needing more information on WCC's Creative Spaces Strategy (point 1.8) which we couldn't find to review.

We suggest that some of the intentions of the evening economy action plan will be assisted by other recommendations we have already made, including the need to drive and measure the success of these strategies in partnerships both within and beyond council, as identified in points 1.1-1.3.

**Recommendations:**

18. WCC pursue the actions in the evening economy strategy, in consultation with stakeholders as indicated, developing milestones for the short, medium and long term to measure effectiveness.

**Conclusion:**

In summary, the Property Council commends WCC for its intentions and research conducted in the Cultural Plan suite of strategies.

As stated, this is a great starting point from a well directed council who are already achieving great cultural outcomes in Wollongong and for the benefit of the wider region. This is evident in the plethora of new venues and opportunities our residents and visitors can experience – if only sometimes by accident and by the passion being shared by stakeholders, as was evident in our SW project. But there is still considerable work to be done both within the council, in connection with its cultural services delivery agents largely funded by WCC, the cultural communities in the city and stakeholders beyond these traditional sectors, including the property industry, to form meaningful partnerships that help deliver the cultural ambitions for our communities.

The Property Council remains a supportive business advocacy body, whose members and staff members are committed to working in partnership with stakeholders, including Wollongong City Council. Like you, we seek to deliver better outcomes for the region which enhance the quality of our built environment, protect our natural assets and improve the livability for our residents – cultural opportunities form a part of the experience in these intentions.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide some comment on this process. Please don't hesitate to contact us should you require more information.

Kind regards,



Amanda Kunkler  
Regional Policy Advisor  
Property Council of Australia



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<sup>i</sup> Shaping Wollongong, Property Council of Australia/Hello City, 2013

<sup>ii</sup> WCC Cultural Plan 2014-18, page 5

<sup>iii</sup> WCC's Annual Report 2012-2013; Attachment B: General Purpose Financial Statements: Notes to the Financial Statements for the financial year ended 30 June 2013, Note 17. Statement of Developer Contributions, p.68

<sup>iv</sup> Shaping Wollongong, Property Council of Australia/Hello City, 2013, page 21-23