

Silky Oak Edition
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 81 Cullen Street
 Nimbin 2480
 phone 6689-1148
 email: goodtimes@nimbinaustralia.com

Nightcap nightmare

Tweed 'village' proposal sounds alarm bells

A development application lodged with Tweed Shire Council for a \$137 million 'village' development near Kunghur has raised the ire of a growing number of residents of the Caldera. Around 100 people attended a community forum concerning the proposal on Sunday at Uki hall, organised by the Caldera Residents Action Group, which was formed in August.

Developer Peter Van Leishout's plans for the site include 130 three story houses, 300 residential dwellings, a 100 bed motel, a 100 bed backpackers and up to 20 shops on the 48 hectare site. The DA anticipates this will add 4,500 car movement per day – mostly impacting upon the Murwillumbah - Kyogle road. Mr Van Leishout also owns the adjoining 3000 acres of land.

"The DA went on display during the school holidays, and we've had only 28 days to respond – about the same amount of time as for a DA for a shed – but this is a mammoth proposal. It's been impossible to get our hands on a copy until very recently. It was only when I quoted Section 12B of the Local Government Act, that by law they must make copies available to the public, that we were then told we could buy one for \$500," Mr John Donvito, president of CRAG, told the meeting. "Our requests for an extension on time for submissions were refused," he said.

The proposal will see the 'village' develop in three stages over 15 years, and ultimately house 920 estimated residents. This will be four times the current size of Uki, set on a 48 hectares. All the village's infrastructure will be privately owned and managed. Issues discussed at the forum ranged from concerns over the increase in traffic, proposed traffic lights, visual impact, sewerage, lack of employment opportunities, threats to biodiversity, public transport, flood access and whether more similar developments would follow. The viability of the proposal for a motel and backpackers was also a subject for conjecture.

Water catchment was a hot issue. Questions over whether the site generated enough catchment to supply the estimated 140 litres of water per person per day and whether there would be pumping rights given to the developer to pump from the Tweed River.

"No SEPP 44 (Koala study) or EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) has been done on this proposal. We have been unable to get an answer from council as to how this site got zoned as 'village' in the first place. We feel this kind of development is inappropriate for this site. Public consultation on this has been less than transparent," Diane Wilder, secretary of CRAG, said.

"The developer has asked for a reduction in the minimum



Inappropriate? Example of Nightcap Village housing as sourced from the Development Control Plan, Nightcap Village Development Application DA06/1054 prepared by Urban Systems Pty Ltd, August 2006.

block size from 450m2 for the existing zoning, and the DA also shows that infrastructure such as sewerage, roads and pumps, is to be located outside the zoning – which is illegal. But let's be clear that this is not a personal issue with Mr Van. Our issue is with the proposal. We'd oppose it whomever was behind it," said Mr. Donvito.

Another angle was offered by one local resident, claiming the proposed development was situated on the site of a massacre

of aboriginal people, that the site had been cursed many decades ago and subsequently the project was bound to fail.

Despite inviting several local MP's to the forum, the only political representative in attendance was Andy Gough, Greens candidate for Lismore, who commented "On the face of it this proposal is high impact and unsustainable. It's more evidence that the farmer's last crop is going to be brick and tile." Mr Gough also informed residents that due

to an electoral boundary change, the controversial development will be part of the Lismore electorate as of March 2007. Diane Wilder said she had contacted Thomas George's office but was told by his secretary that "I don't think Kunghur is part of Mr. George's electorate".

Jon Squires, owner of the nearby Sphinx Rock Cafe, was philosophical about the project. "If I was a business man, I'd be jumping up and down with joy about the village. It would mean more customers, for sure, but business is good at the moment and still growing, which it will with or without the development. But I'm not concerned with the money, my heart is with the community. If it goes ahead, this place will definitely change," he said.

Tweed council will decide the outcome of the DA over the next three months. If the DA is rejected, CRAG expects that the developer will take the issue up with the state government and approach Planning Minister Frank Sartor to overturn the decision.

CRAG has raised over 600 hand written objections to the proposal through market stalls and community action, and hosted the community forum to gauge community feeling. To find out more about the Nightcap Village proposal, visit the CRAG website at www.crag.asn.au



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