

Giralang Residents Action Group

GRAG response to community meeting to discuss “Restart Giralang” Shops concept plan

On 5th December, at a packed meeting of residents at the inadequately small Giralang Community House, the leaseholder for the Giralang Shops site, the Nikias family, released a concept plan for re-development of the Giralang Shops.

The concept is for a ground floor 1000 square metre supermarket, four ancillary retail outlets and 54 apartments spread over 3 further floors. With a basement carpark, this would mean a 5 storey development.

Giralang Residents are rightly frustrated and angry at not having had local shops for 14 years, and the meeting expressed the view that something had to happen with no further delay. The community was clear that it would accept some form of mixed development as it is fed up with the present situation.

However, among the numerous issues raised from the floor of the meeting, three key concerns emerged. Without successful resolution of these matters, it is unlikely that the leaseholders will gain community support for their plans, despite the clear wish by residents for progress to resume urgently.

Firstly, the community is not necessarily convinced that a 1000 square metre Supermarket as proposed is viable and sustainable in the long term, given the close competition from Coles at Kaleen. As the Nikias family is unable to guarantee a long-term supermarket tenant at this time (and given the difficulty in other suburbs of sustaining small outlets) Giralang is in effect being asked to buy a pig-in-a-poke in regard to provision of shops at the shopping centre. Blind faith has not worked in the past, and is not the basis for resolving the situation now.

There appear to be two possible solutions here. The Government could rescind its arbitrary and retrospectively-imposed size limit on the Giralang local supermarket, and at the same time make it illegal for competing businesses to impose such restrictions on similar new developments through private anti-competitive agreements (as we are told has happened at Giralang). This would allow an increase in the size of the supermarket to improve its viability to prospective operators.

Alternatively, and possibly more expediently, any approval of the redevelopment could be made conditional on the leaseholder being required to ensure that a 1000 square metre supermarket space, and additional loading bay and goods access, is permanently available in the development. This would provide an incentive for Nikias to find a tenant at reasonable rent, as otherwise it would be deadweight for the investment they are making. As such a space is already in the plans, it would not be a burden to Nikias, but would give some assurance to the community about continued provision of a supermarket.

Secondly, the amount of parking allowed for in the redevelopment was seen by residents as inadequate. The community knows full well that simply providing the minimum number of parking spots required under regulations will NOT be sufficient for the residents of the apartments and for shop traffic. Concerns about excess vehicles crowding out the school carpark, and blocking local

streets were raised. When soccer matches are played on the ovals, gridlock was anticipated. It was unclear how new technologies such as number plate recognition would be able to prevent apartment dwellers' cars using the spaces assigned to visiting shoppers.

As the number of apartments determines how many residents' cars there are likely to be, and how many of the basement carparking spots would be allocated exclusively to that purpose (and so limiting spots available for shoppers) the solution may be to reduce the number of apartments. There is no reason to think that the proposed number of 54 apartments is absolutely essential for the proposal to proceed (in fact it was suggested at the meeting that the number was simply derived from the number of carparking spots available in the already constructed basement). This brings us to the 3rd concern.

Thirdly, a five-level development (which would be the facade on the school side of the site) was seen as well out of proportion in relation to the suburb and school. The suburb is seen as a low rise area, and adjoining sites across Canopus Crescent are single level.

Several speakers proposed removing one storey from the concept plan and, in so doing, reducing the number of apartments. This would also address the parking concerns above.

In summary, the clear view of the meeting was that the community wanted the re-development to proceed but that the current proposal was NOT yet endorsed, and would NOT yet gain community support without revision and credible further analysis of parking and traffic impacts. Other suggestions such as including professional suites in lieu of apartments, and some form of community facilities were also raised. Few believed that Nikias can determine the type of people who would purchase apartments or the number of cars that would cause congestion at the site and neighbouring streets.

Residents expressed their strong view that prior to a DA being lodged a further community meeting should be held at a more adequate venue to judge the extent to which the concerns above have been addressed, and the assessment of traffic and other impacts on the community have been taken into account.

In the meantime, GRAG calls on the Barr Government to clearly indicate that it will be pro-active in supporting the expeditious approval of an agreed, community supported DA for our shops, and that it will play its part by investing in complementary community and civic infrastructure to assist the project's viability.