

1. Issue Name

SMB Islands Issues Paper

2. Contributors

Land Use Planning; Economic Development; Community and Social Planning and Corporate Planning Performance and Risk

3. Issue Definition and Scope

The Southern Moreton Bay Islands are unique and have a number of circumstances that set them apart from the mainland. This presents challenges unique to Redland Shire that is not typical to other councils in Queensland. The purpose of this paper is to highlight these issues so that they can be considered as part of the broader scan being carried out to inform the new Corporate Plan 2006-2010.

As part of the SMBI Planning and Land Use Study (1999), a community vision was developed and strongly endorsed through community consultation. This vision maintains a sound basis for developing this issue paper.

“The lifestyle enjoyed by the Island residents is directly influenced by the Islands’ unique location and environment. The built form is distinctive and reflects a style and character consistent with the Island lifestyle sought by most residents. Appropriate public infrastructure is in place to support this lifestyle. Development is supported by an efficient water-based transport service between islands and the mainland. A suitable road and pedestrian/cycle network supports the needs of residents and visitors. Employment opportunities include providing services to residents, Island based education and research activities, and catering for day tourism plus the recreational boating industry community.”

4. Executive Summary

The issues outlined in this paper highlight the fact that there are a number of challenges unique to the SMBI’s requiring specific policies and strategies to address these unique circumstances. These issues are similarly discussed in the Community Development & Human Services Issue Paper namely Issue 3 – Key Consideration 3: Specific Population Groups (page 9).

This suggests that Council’s services to the Island’s recognise and are specific to the Islands’ uniqueness. At the most fundamental level, the issue to be addressed in relation to the SMBI is the range of requirements for physical and community infrastructure and developing solutions specific to the Islands, the cost of infrastructure provision, and how it is to be staged and funded over the next 20 years.

The challenge is how this is reflected in the Corporate Plan to address the range of social, economic and environmental issues facing the Islands Paper.

5. Regional Cooperation

The most important issue from a regional and intergovernmental perspective in relation to the Bay Islands is the need for cooperation and assistance from Federal and State Government and its various Departments. Funding will be a critical part of this equation and may require innovative approaches to address the uniqueness of the Islands and the issues involved.

6. Background/ Discussion

Prior to coming under the control of Redland Shire Council, the Islands were subdivided and the lots sold. The resultant pattern and intensity of subdivision on the Islands has led to the creation of a number of longstanding land use problems.

Council is working with the community to address these issues which will assist the community vision for the Bay Islands to be achieved.

SMBIPLUS provides the preferred option for the development and conservation of the Islands. The island Vision and Ecological Sustainability were the two strategic principles which guided development of the SMBIPLUS.

Population

Prior to coming under the control of Redland Shire Council, the Islands were subdivided and the lots sold. The resultant pattern and intensity of subdivision on the Islands has led to the creation of a number of longstanding land use problems.

SMBIPLUS determined a sustainable population target of the Islands of approximately 22,000 people which equates to approximately 11,350 lots for development for residential purposes.

Council has significantly reduced the number of developable lots on the Islands through a range of initiatives and clearly identified those lots which are unsuitable for development. For example, Council has recently spent approximately \$4-5 million in purchasing and swapping environmental significant land.

Population growth on the Islands has remained relatively low by comparison to the rest of the Shire. In addition, the population on the islands has one of the highest levels of older people in the Shire. Over the next 10 years, this trend is likely to continue with even greater proportions of the population expected to be aged over 60 years.

Economic Development

Employment opportunities on the Islands are currently limited to a number of small population serving enterprises and trades, with the majority of the workforce commuting to the mainland for work.

The Islands ability to attract population supporting economic activity is limited primarily due to access constraints. Such activities would include manufacturing establishments together with industries or professions that serve a wider population than the Island residents. While this may be viewed as an impediment to the growth of economic activities on the Islands, it is also a characteristic which contributes to the Islands unique character.

Nonetheless, growth will likely require an increase in economic activities, which in turn need to be planned for. Integration of land use and transport planning can best be achieved through concentration of transport interchanges at the existing four ferry terminals. Business and services should, wherever possible, be located within walking distances of these terminals or at other designated transport nodes.

Transport

The SMBIPLUS focused on water based transport for island to mainland as Council's preferred strategy.

The strategy recognises that full integration with the land based transport system is essential for the operational success of the transport system. Recent investigations indicate that the water based transport system has no significant environmental impact. However, the SMBIPLUS identified the need for environmental monitoring to ensure it was ecologically sustainable. Council has prepared a draft Integrated Local Transport Plan for the Bay Islands through which the majority of transport initiatives should be implemented.

There has been a long standing debate about a bridge to the Islands. However Council and the State Government do not support such a proposal.

Ferry and Barge Services

The management of ferry services is a important for the SMBI community. Yet, frequency of service, hours of operation, whether or not there is a service to Cleveland, fare levels and fare structures, and the manner of operation of the ferries are not controlled by the community.

On-Island Bus Services

There is significant potential to integrate these services with the ferry services to provide a complete public transport service for island residents. In addition, continued reliance on private transport will put pressure on parking facilities at the ferry terminals in locations that are visually sensitive, and the focal point for community life.

Council implemented a bus service subsidy trial in February 2004. Patronage was very low and after tenders were called recently, Council decided not to continue to provide the subsidy. Council is continuing to advocate and liaise with Translink in an ongoing effort to address bus services and public transport networks in line with Island development.

Pedestrian / Cycle Networks

Pedestrian and cycle networks have been prepared that integrate with current and future land uses. Significant progress has been made on establishing complete cycleway/ pedestrian paths along the spine roads of Russell, Macleay and Lamb Islands.

Parking

Council has recently completed significant upgrades to ferry terminals and car parking facilities. However these facilities still remain under pressure and many are operating at or near capacity. The design of expanded ferry terminal parking should aim to minimise visual impact and protect other development opportunities that this strategic gateway to the Island locations provide. The need for additional parking can be minimised through a strategy of integrating bus services with ferry services and with bicycling and walking infrastructure both on the island and on the mainland.

Recreational Boating

There is an immediate need for the provision of additional boat ramps on Macleay and Russell Islands. The options include some ramps designed to QT requirements, and others of lower standard facilities suitable for at least use at the half tide to reduce illegal access.

Physical Infrastructure - Sewerage

As the intensity of dwellings increase so will the likelihood of septic tank failure on the small allotments, leading to public health risks and potential environmental degradation.

An investigation in 1996 recommended that the Islands should be progressively sewered, with priority given to those catchments over 50% developed. Recent investigations confirmed that on-site effluent disposal is unsustainable in the longer term on lots smaller than 2,000 to 2,500m² in size.

Council completed a Sewerage Options Study for the Islands in 2002, and the Draft Redlands Planning Scheme identified three potential sites for waste water treatment plants, one on Russell and two on Macleay Island.

The critical issue is how provision of sewerage on the islands can be funded. The 2001 estimate of this infrastructure was in the vicinity of \$120M and in today would be closer to \$200M.

Physical Infrastructure - Roads

Lower dwelling occupancies combined with a limited range of destinations is likely to lead to lower traffic volumes on the Islands than would occur in similar-sized mainland suburbs. The road network design and construction accordingly needs to minimise disturbance to the landscape and negate the need for ongoing maintenance.

Stormwater

The original subdivision pattern on the Bay Islands made little provision for the conveyance of stormwater flows. The Drainage Constrained Areas Mapping prepared as part of the SMBIPLUS and subsequently refined by Council identifies those allotments that will be effected by various drainage and flooding constraints.

Water Supply, Telecommunications & Electricity Reticulation

All of the islands are serviced by reticulated water supply, electricity and telecommunication services. While most of the Islands are fully reticulated, in those areas where reticulation does not exist connections are provided following building approval from Council. The environmental impact of service provision needs to be considered during the planning and construction of these services.

Waste Management

The need for sustainable waste management practices on the Islands will become increasing important as the Island population grows. The ability to dispose of waste on the Islands is limited by their size and location within the Moreton Bay Marine Park, and at present waste from all the Islands is transported to the mainland for disposal.

Community and Social Development

It is currently difficult for the residents of the Islands to access what is considered to be the normal range of community facilities and services necessary to sustain the social health of the community. The situation is exacerbated by the fragmentation of the community across the four Islands and the fact that each community has a local focus, and differing expectations and needs.

Despite this however, the SMBI has an unmistakeable strong social fabric consisting of organisations, clubs and networks that flourish on the Islands. These groups have evolved in the absence of appropriate social infrastructure.

This social fabric will be tested over the coming years to support the ageing population and the likely probability of social isolation amongst seniors. The provision of adequate and appropriate social infrastructure including public transport will be a significant issue for seniors.

Young people on the Islands are at current and future risk of disadvantage having limited social infrastructure available to them. The most recent example of this was the reported deviant behaviour of some youths on Russell Island resulting in the widespread misperceptions of all youth on the Island.

The SMBIPLUS recognised the bay islands as a whole when considering threshold populations for the provision of community services and facilities. It also identified strategies to improve accessibility to community facilities and services but also recognised that the Islands will always remain reliant on the mainland for high level facilities and services such as high schools and hospitals. The concept of providing an alternative lifestyle implies a trade off between Island living and urban level of services.

Island self sufficiency can be enhanced if the population of the Islands as a group is used as the basis for determining the threshold for the provision of future community facilities and services.

Natural Environment - Flora and Fauna

A detailed assessment of flora and fauna of the Bay Islands was carried out as part of the SMBIPLUS, updated in 2001. Based on these assessments, four levels of Conservation priority were allocated across the Islands.

- Very High Priority - areas which should be protected from development (eg. through purchasing/using funds from Council.s environmental levy and/or regulation).
- High Priority - areas where conservation would be highly desirable.
- Moderate or Medium Priority - areas for which stringent controls on development would be desirable to reduce loss of vegetation.
- Low Priority - areas for which vegetation retention within the built environment would be desirable.

Council developed a conservation strategy based on the updated assessment and the major mechanism to protect environmentally significant land was through a voluntary purchase and land exchange program.

Natural Environment - Water Quality

The location of the Islands in Southern Moreton Bay is an important consideration in water quality management. The surrounding areas host several rare or vulnerable marine animals, as well as a variety of habitats - mangrove, saltmarsh, seagrass, macroalgae, coral, rock, sand and intertidal sediment.

Several large freshwater wetlands are present on Russell and Macleay Islands, which have varying degrees of catchment development. All of them show some signs of water quality deterioration and vegetation changes resulting from nutrient enrichment. Development introduces a variety of threats to water quality that need to be managed. These threats include contamination of stormwater runoff, disturbance to acid sulphate soils which are common in coastal areas below five metres AHD, erosion and sedimentation and discharges of septic tank effluent into surface or ground waters. Such impacts can in turn threaten the sustainability of marine, intertidal and freshwater aquatic ecosystems.

Council initiated a voluntary purchase program in 2001 to acquire lots that were drainage constrained and this provided water quality benefits associated with natural drainage systems.

Open Space, Recreation and Landscape Values

The SMBIPLUS identified the need for additional future active open space requirements, such as on playing fields, parks and the like. The Strategy also recognised the need to link these areas with open space corridors along drainage lines and, where possible, the foreshore. This work was advanced by further investigation and analysis conducted in preparation of the Shire's Open Space Strategy.

The Draft Redlands Planning Scheme has recognised the future open space needs of the Islands community through an open space zoning and incorporated the recommendations of the Redlands Open Space Strategy.

Heritage - Indigenous Cultural Heritage

Indigenous cultural heritage includes archaeological sites and places containing evidence of ancient Aboriginal occupation such as shell midden sites, quarry sites and burials. It also includes places of anthropological significance in accordance with indigenous tradition and social significance in accordance with concepts of Aboriginal social and cultural identity.

The Quandamooka people are the traditional owners of Moreton Bay, including the Southern Bay Islands. Places of Aboriginal heritage significance may be found on all landforms of Russell, Macleay, Lamb and Karragarra Islands.

Heritage - Historical Cultural Heritage

The Southern Moreton Bay Islands have a rich history of European settlement. Since the time of first European settlement in the 1860's the Islands have been associated with a range of diverse industries. These include the oyster industry, timber cutting, the salt industry, maritime transport and farming. A number of buildings and sites remain today as a legacy of these past activities on the Islands. The SMBIPLUS records some 32 historical heritage sites identified by the community which have been assessed as being culturally significant.

- Sources: SMBI Local Area Plan – Statement of Proposals: May 2002;
- SMBI Integrated Local Transport Plan Discussion Paper (May 2002)

OPERATIONAL OUTCOMES

Infrastructure

Council has recently engaged consultants to prepare a priority infrastructure plan for the entire Shire including the Islands. There is merit in developing and documenting a geographic component in the Priority Infrastructure Plan relative to the Bay Islands. This being part of a process, which also addresses the issues of staging, cost and funding of Island specific infrastructure.

Recent legal advice has confirmed the ability to:

- Charge for dwelling house development in the case of the islands.
- The Priority Infrastructure Area (PIA) can be geographically based
- Standards of services can vary from the mainland, including what is defined as trunk infrastructure.
- Justify the funding component cost for various infrastructure items. (issue of cost allocation).

Ferry and Barge Services

There is no State Government regulation, control or price support for regular commuter services to captive communities. Ferry services should be continually reviewed and a submission made to QT in advance of the 5 year formal contract review.

The existing barge service is running at capacity, and the operator is reluctant to invest in additional carrying capacity because of a lack of certainty of tenure in relation to the service routes.

There are a number of options that could be considered, including a submission to QT supporting the regulation of barge services, shore-based barge facilities to come under Council control, or a lease arrangement with operators to provide security of tenure in exchange for minimum service requirements.

Recreational Boating

Further investigation of the sites nominated as possible water access points is required.

Additional locations for moorings should also be considered concurrently with boat ramp provision. There is an opportunity for some pile mooring and possible marina facilities at the southern end of Macleay Island. The environmental impacts of recreational boating around the Southern Bay Islands should be included in the recommended monitoring program.

Physical Infrastructure – Roads

Progressive gravelling and sealing of the road network has commenced and should continue. Sealing width should take account of the on road cycle network where this applies.

Community and Social Development

Undertake strategic planning to develop strong and healthy communities. This strategy should incorporate the special needs of SMBI particularly in relation to the aging population, high need groups as outlined in the Community Development and Human Services issues paper; prevalence of social isolation; and youth and cultural participation.