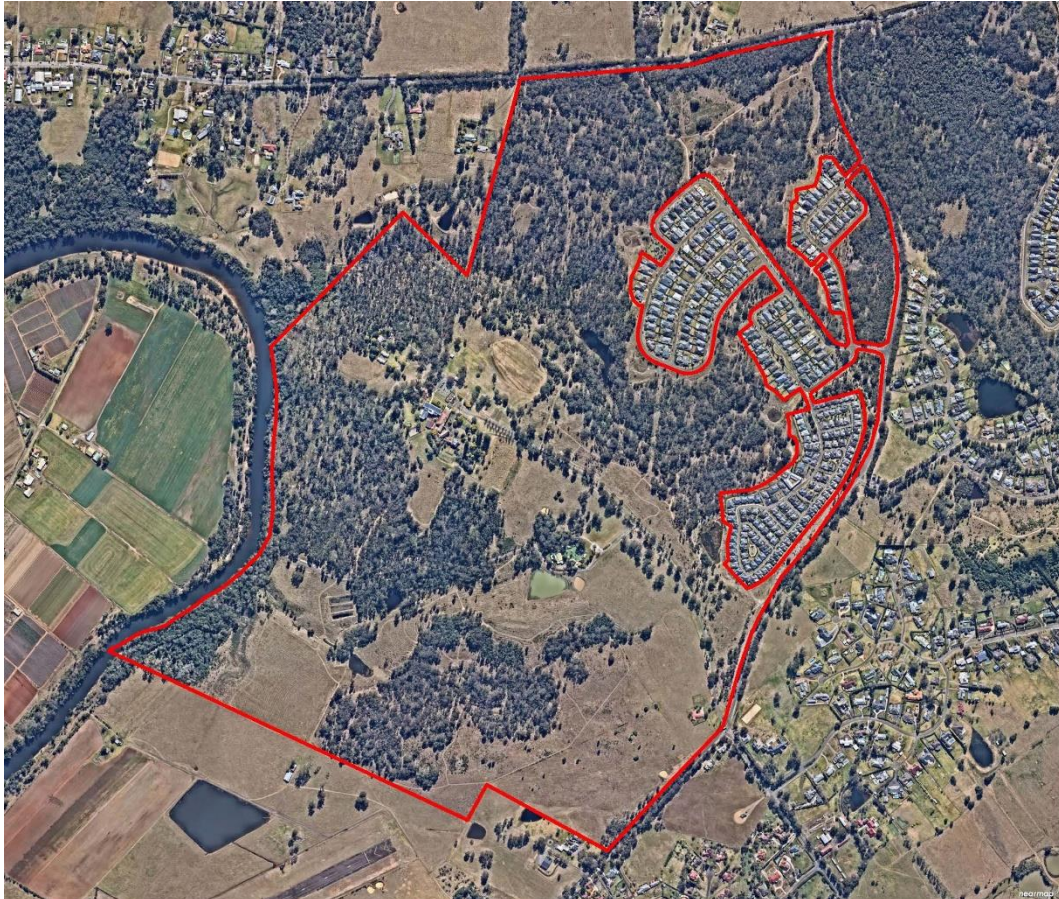


PLANNING PROPOSAL REQUEST

No. 229 Macquarie Grove Road, Cobbitty

(Camden Council)



Prepared For:
Trustees of the Sisters
Of the Good Samaritan
Prepared By:



Volume 2
Annexure "L"
Camden Rural Lands Strategy and
the Metropolitan Rural Area – the Mater Dei case

October 2021

Camden Rural Lands Strategy and the Metropolitan Rural Area – the Mater Dei case

(1) Introduction

Despite the laudable overarching conservation objectives of the Rural Lands Strategy (RLS) there are, however, some fundamental flaws in this body of information and moreover the conclusions derived; such being addressed briefly below. Further, the RLS should be considered in the broader context of the Metropolitan Rural Area (MRA) introduced in the Western City District Plan (WCDP).

(2) “Rural land” as a Concept

Initially, the term rural is synonymously used to infer agricultural landuse. Yet by definition the term rural is noted to refer to areas away from towns and cities, ie. areas away from urban areas. Indeed, they are seen to constitute Non Urban Lands. In doing so not all non-urban lands by logical extension are devoted to agricultural production. Moreover, they are seen to represent the country (derived from the Latin word “rus”) or in common parlance, the countryside.

Simply expressed, not all rural land constitutes agricultural land and “not all land with rural land qualities is zoned rural”. (Refer to Booth Associates pg. 9)

(3) Agricultural Lands Classification and Agricultural Productivity.

3.1 – Overview

With the loss of large tracts of Classes 3 and 4 land and a small area of Class 2 land to the South West Priority Growth Area (3,964ha), only 15% of the balance of rural land in the Camden LGA comprises highly productive Class 1 or Class 2 arable (438ha) land suited for intensive cultivation (horticulture) or regular cultivation (1,229ha). (Booth Associates Pg. 29). This land generally comprises the highly fertile Nepean River floodplains and floodplains of the Nepean’s tributaries.

Conversely, the majority (80%) of the balance of rural land in the Camden LGA is Class 3 and Class 4 land, suited to grazing and occasional cropping. (Booth Associates Pg. 29).

3.2 – Classes 1 and 2 Land

The highly productive Class 1 and 2 lands (also identified as Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land by the NSW State Government – Booth Associates Pg. 31) will continue as the backbone of productive sustainable agriculture in the Camden LGA and must be preserved. Their largely flood affected nature will reinforce this prospect by negating speculative “land banking” activities. Council’s energy in respect of these lands should be devoted to ensuring landuse compatibility with adjoining flood free urban and rural residential lands.

3.3 Classes 3, 4 and 5 Land

These lands comprise the bulk of the “remnant” rural lands. Such lands are initially noted to be significantly impacted by topographical (related geotechnical), vegetation and bushfire constraints. (Booth Associates Pgs. 38, 40 and 42) Further, they are highly fragmented in nature as is depicted on pages 44 and 45 Booth Associates.

The preceding landscape will not provide for viable rural activities on essentially constrained grazing lands. Industry analysis has noted that at a base case land value of \$30,000 per hectare each hectare supports approximately 2 animals, thereby equating to \$15,000 per animal per hectare per annum investment in a low intensity grass fed system. In comparison the industry maximum capital value per head is in the order of \$7,000 per animal per hectare or approximately double the rate of return of the Camden example.

The viability is further adversely impacted by the availability and cost of supplementary feed.

Horse studs, horse agistment and spelling may produce greater returns than grazing of livestock. However, the number of such facilities are noted to have declined of recent times and/or are not being reinvested in. This situation is not addressed in the Booth Associates Study.

Intensive agriculture in the form of controlled environment poultry production and horticulture are not displaying signs of significant growth. The economic rent of the land seems to dictate against major capital investment in these farming forms in the Camden LGA. Further, the fragmented and relatively small scale of holdings increases the challenges of landuse conflict with rural retreaters/hobby-farmers/lifestyle aspirants. Wollondilly and Goulburn/Mulwaree Shires appear to be more highly sought out locations for these farming forms.

The suggested landuse compatibility strategies of Booth Associates despite optimism are likely to discourage investment in capital intensive agricultural forms.

(4) South West Priority Growth Area Rural Displacement

The larger productive agricultural enterprises with a genuine desire to remain in agriculture will largely relocate to Local Government Areas beyond Camden where land speculation (“land banking”) is not widely evidenced in land costs.

Many of the smaller intensive horticultural activities are conducted on leased land of approximately 2 hectares. Such parties will find it almost impossible to relocate in Camden given the 40 hectare minimum lot size and the lack of access to reliable, economic water supplies. Owners reaping the rewards of urban land sales will largely retire from the industry or seek more viable land opportunities beyond the Camden Local Government Area.

The optimism/opportunities noted at Section 9 of the Booth Associates Study are considered to be poorly founded and not likely to be reflected in practice. Even Booth Associates concludes “Council cannot easily influence or facilitate agricultural enterprise relocation” (Pg. 64).

Whilst a peak industry agriculturalist has noted that :

“The proposition that existing agricultural businesses will relocate to RU1 land is fictitious at best. They will locate far and wide to more cost effective land. It would appear that there is a romantic unrealistic “agenda” in Council’s terms of reference for Booth Associates to create an illusion of agricultural viability. This myth cannot be supported by any financial analysis.”

(5) Rural- residential/Low density residential – Urban Transition

The need to manage the interface of the Priority Growth Centre and surrounding rural land is raised in the Booth Associates Study at page 69, with the concept of an RU6 – Transition zone suggested.

(6) Biobanking

The “biobanking” opportunities for many of the Class 3, 4 and 5 lands, having regard to their existing qualities and demand for local biodiversity offsets, may represent the future of many existing largely vegetated rural precincts and should be more comprehensively explored as a strategy for the long term conservation of such rural lands.

(7) Metropolitan Rural Area

The Metropolitan Rural Area (MRA) is a key plank in the WCDP’s sustainability strategy. It seeks to assist in delivering the GSRP Objective 29 in “protecting and enhancing the environmental, social and economic values in rural areas”.

It is importantly noted to highlight the multi-dimensional nature of the “rural area” including functions beyond agricultural productivity alone.

“The Western City District’s rural areas contribute to habitat and biodiversity, support productive agriculture, provide mineral and energy resources and sustain local rural towns and villages” (Planning Priority W17)

(8) Conclusion

The initiative of the Rural Lands Study and Rural Lands Strategy are seen generally as having positive intent in seeking to largely preserve the declining local agricultural base and many related positive landscape images.

As detailed in the preceding critique, however, many of the conclusions and proposed strategies, upon further examination of the purported evidence base, are revealed to be flawed.

Preservation of the Class 1 and 2 lands is a given. The more marginal Classes 3, 4 and 5 lands have limited potential for long term sustainable productive enterprises given the prevailing topographical/geotechnical, vegetation and bushfire constraints. Biobanking opportunities and their attendant sustainable positive ecological and landscape impacts should potentially be explored in respect of many of the latter lands. (ie. Classes 3, 4 and 5).

Council has been encouraged in response to such conclusion/s to review the Camden Rural Lands Study (Booth Associates) evidence base and the Camden Rural Lands Strategy in the light of the foregoing. The suggestion of a review is reinforced having regard to the Mater Dei

case as an exemplar of compliance with the principles of the MRA advanced in the WCDP and not agricultural productivity alone.