

28 June 2007

Re: Johnsonville Town Centre Draft Plan

This submission is from the Wellington Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design, and in the promotion of good design in Wellington.

1) Support for the proposal

In the main we support the proposals, and see the current situation of Johnsonville as having key opportunities in terms of redevelopment. We believe it is important that these opportunities to create a pedestrian focussed centre, with active street fronts and appropriate levels of traffic and parking are taken up.

2) Current strengths and weaknesses

While there is much that is not successfully about the built environment of Johnsonville there are aspects of it which work well, including key buildings. The Salvation Army, the Library, the Community Centre provide key anchor points. The row of shops along the west side of Johnsonville, especially north of Broderick Street, is a successful example of active edges, providing a model for other areas of the town centre. The site also has significant changes in levels. This is not currently taken advantage of, but does provide good opportunities for underground car parking.

Weaknesses of the site include the amount of traffic currently on Johnsonville Road, the large areas of dead spaces - particularly surface ground carparking (e.g. outside the Warehouse, Woolworths, Countdown and the transport interchange), large areas of blank walls on street frontages, and the harsh wind. These all need strategies to improve the friendliness and usability of the town centre.

3) West-East pedestrian and cycle link between Johnsonville Road and Moorefield Road

The proposed improved West-East pedestrian accessway is the key link across the site. This needs to be developed to enable cyclist and skateboard traffic in addition to pedestrian access. It must be open 24 hours, and sheltered, but not an interior street. We suggest that vegetation could aid in defining an upper limit to the space and a more permeable screen of greater seasonal interest. The use of vegetation, in the form of well-chosen street trees, is also beneficial in strengthening the site line – reinforcing the value of the ‘in’-street experience, as well as movement to a point of arrival or finality.

The advantage of this link is that its orientation automatically provides pedestrian shelter from both the awful Northerlies and the cold Southerlies, and that it will provide access from the railway station to the two main fish & chip shops, Woolworths, and the Nada bakery, etc. This link should be clearly designated as public outdoor space, as well as being well lit. This Moorefield Road end should open out to and lead to both the public space and the railway/bus station such that a straight line of sight is achieved from Johnsonville Road. The walkway should appear open, rather than enclosed and narrow. The north edge building could be three to four storeys, accommodating residential apartments to both protect from the wind and provide natural surveillance. We strongly support the opening up of each end of this walkway into a well-designed public space, where pedestrian and cycle traffic are privileged over cars.



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4) North-South pedestrian and cycle route north of East-West link along Countdown toward Medical Centre

The current pedestrian access from the shopping mall to the Medical Centre is currently "unfriendly" and would be productively improved for good pedestrian and cycle access. Uneven paving and harsh blank walls currently make the route unappealing. Addressing this would increase the benefits of the West-East link.

5) Other pedestrian/traffic routes through the block perimetered by Broderick Rd, Moorefield Rd, and Johnsonville Rd

We believe the development site needs increased accessways across the site to strengthen connectivity, to increase the number of active edges, and to reduce the general barren windswept character of the existing site. There are several ways to achieve this. To be successful, we consider that the following key issues will need to be considered and addressed:

- the provision of shelter from the wind through mixed solutions including buildings and glazed cover
- natural surveillance (e.g. from strategically placed taller buildings (say three storeys) possibly with residential functions)
- the retention of key anchor points (such as the medical centre, community centre, and library) to ensure circulation paths across the site are meaningful
- the support of a well-scaled densification of the site, and a rationalisation of circulation and built form.
- security, hours of access, and lighting
- the relationship between open public space and privately owned development
- ameliorating the existing right angle bend (on the intersection of Broderick and Moorefield Roads), possibly rethinking the vertical relationships between road and rail traffic
- maximising the future potential for bus and train networks to service the surrounding suburban areas, supporting the aim for Johnsonville to be convincing as a Transport Oriented Development
- the provision of appropriate levels of well-designed car-parking to enable reduced car-parking on Johnsonville Road
- provision for cyclists and skateboarders along planned pedestrian routes
- maximising the contours of the site, particularly in relation to the provision of underground carparking

6) Proposed Public Spaces

We suggest that the proposed Johnsonville Road public space be the prime public space, and focus of community identity. This will require a reduction of traffic, achieved by encouraging traffic to use Moorefield Road. A model of pedestrian focussed street design which could be followed is Emerson St in Napier where the traffic flow has been successfully subdued in favour of the over-riding pedestrian interests. We suggest a reduction of traffic rather than the model of a fully pedestrianised "mall" for Johnsonville Road. The design of the Moorefield Road space will also need considered planning as this is a very windy site, and unless this issue is addressed it is likely to be underutilised. We suggest glazed cover providing rain, wind and UV shelter, and tree shading in these plaza spaces, as well as appropriately scaled built edges (e.g. active edges in the form of retail and food outlets). A clear line of sight is needed from the Moorefield Road public space through to the Johnsonville Road public space via the proposed West-East link.

7) Landmark buildings

We support the positions of the proposed landmark buildings, particularly if Woolworths is moved south of its current location. We note that the scale of these buildings need to address the scale of Johnsonville's built environment which is generally low rise and small scale. This suggests both that landmark buildings might not be tall buildings, and that any tall landmark buildings will need slim proportions to work successfully in the existing built context. We note that good quality "landmark" building will only occur by utilising good quality architects.

9) Transport

The identification of Johnsonville as utilising a Transport Oriented Development model (transit-centre and a key location for Park and Ride facilities) suggests the potential for Johnsonville to become a badly-designed giant carpark. Such a Transport Oriented Development model (TOD) would ordinarily be part of a much larger network of neighbouring TODs. The concept does not apply in the singular instance which Johnsonville is more akin to, and the rhetoric should be careful not to assume that the complete benefits of the TOD approach will be applicable because Johnsonville is currently a partial realisation of this model. In particular, the servicing of most of Johnsonville is questionable, with the Eastern part of Johnsonville being completely isolated from the town centre, and the suburban sprawl in the other directions not being serviced by adequate transportation either. Recognition of the geography of the town centre also places doubt on the 800m radius catchment area that is indicated – the uphill walk of most of the surrounding area will decrease that catchment radius from the ideal 800m (10minute) walking radius. Hence we see traffic and carpark design as critical issues for the town centre, which need sophisticated thinking rather than straightforward text-book responses.

We support the suggested motorway interchange (on and off ramps) at Helston Rd. We encourage the strategic use of underground carparking. We also support the proposed pedestrian access across Johnsonville Road, this will be successful as a narrowing of the road to allow limited car access through (two lanes maximum) and privileging pedestrian traffic. This would also encourage cars and trucks to bypass the town centre. The proposed pedestrian access across Moorefield Road, and across Broderick Road are also supported.

10) Relocation of Woolworths and Extension of the Warehouse

The current design of Woolworths and the Warehouse, with their introverted focus and sea of surrounding carparks, does not support the street (Johnsonville Road) as an active edge. We strongly urge the council to discuss this with the owners. This site needs to be reorganised by moving Woolworths to the south of the site and extending the Warehouse to the street edge. A line of shops and good quality cafes to provide a viable active edge linking Woolworths and Warehouse on Johnsonville Rd will define the street, and provide space for carparking between the Warehouse and Woolworths behind the row of shops. It appears that the site contours will allow for carparking under the Woolworths building, including access to the rear area of surface car parking. We suggest the council also investigate alternative exit/entry points to this rear carpark, possibly parallel to the motorway ridge, in addition to Johnsonville Road.

11) Car parking

We consider that reorganising carparking in Johnsonville Town Centre is key to the success of this redevelopment. As discussed above we propose surface carparking alongside the motorway edge of the Warehouse/Woolworth site, moved back from Johnsonville Road, behind a new row of shops and cafes. We also consider that surface parking is warranted adjacent to Countdown, though part of the current carpark could be incorporated into a more compact two level carparking building close to the mall. We also see the south-west corner of the development site, adjacent to the bus/railway station, as a useful space for a compact parking building replacing some carparks removed from Johnsonville Road and servicing new retail development along Broderick Road. This south-west corner parking building would be a landmark building, also accommodate proposed Park'n'Ride parking as well as shopper parking, incorporating the transport hub, with street-facing retail at the ground level.

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The council must actively ensure that all new development has a fine grain of active edges on all street frontages of the town centre. Walls such as that of Countdown on Moorefield Road cannot be allowed in new development, and existing examples of such civically irresponsible buildings must be recanted. New development must not be

introverted and selfish, but must provide a meaningful and interactive public facades, and so contribute positively to the town centre.

13) Existing Heritage

While Johnsonville Town Centre is not renowned for its fine examples of architectural heritage, a careful appraisal of the existing building stock should be undertaken. Community identity and heritage cannot be successfully fabricated and designed in an instant fashion, and Johnsonville must ensure that the architectural merit that does exist is kept. We understand for example that the Ford garage on Broderick Road was designed by Bill Toomath, and that there are buildings by Chris Brooke-White also in the area. The Community Centre on Moorefield Road is an assertive example of building which warrants cherishing, despite the hideous view it has of Countdown's blank wall. A thorough appraisal by appropriate expertise would be productive.

14) Key Developers

Johnsonville currently has an opportunity to be successfully redeveloped, because of the significant amount of property reputedly owned by Dominion Funds which will enable opportunities not available with multiple owners of sites. Woolworths and the Warehouse are also key players in determining a significant part of the success or otherwise of the town centre redesign. Ideally more information about Dominion Funds' intentions would enable better public consultation and community input. We strongly urge the council to ensure that reputable designers (an architect and an urban designer as a minimum) be part of Dominion Fund's design team from an early stage in the design.

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We consider that there is the potential for railway connections to Churton Park and Newlands (possibly as part of a loop including Johnsonville) which would productively extend Johnsonville's key position. The proposed plan needs to anticipate such rail extension, ensuring connections remain viable to suitable routes. We also believe that some of the problems with Johnsonville are due to neighbouring suburban development occurring without their own centres/transport connections. Further development of centres and infrastructure for Churton Park and Newlands will enable Johnsonville to act as a hub rather than become unreasonably burdened by the increasing developments wider afield.

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The proposal documentation has a number of shortcomings. One specific to Johnsonville is the lack of accurate contour information making it difficult to understand the physical nature of the site, and its potential for strategies such as underground carparking. A second point is more applicable to many council proposals. The graphic material (diagrams etc) is not always legible when printed out because of either low resolution text or because colour-coding rather than pattern-coding has been used to distinguish different parts of a diagram or map. The low resolution text, in particular captions, is not even legible on the computer screen. These are simple issues which could be productively and simply addressed, and addressing these would aid meaningful public consultation.

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