

Proposed Redevelopment of Headlands Hotel, Austinmer

The very first article I wrote for the Society was on the History of Tourism in Thirroul and Austinmer. The article closed with a remark that only a major economic depression would save Austinmer from overdevelopment. This was a decade ago and fortunately an economic depression (and some good luck) did keep the Headlands site free of development.

The new proposal for developing Headlands has surfaced and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which has resulted proved really quite amusing. I present the following observations (culled from my written objection to the development application).



"HEADLANDS"—AUSTINMER

Premier Guest House of the South Coast. Every Comfort Available.
Excellent Cuisine and Good Service.

— WHERE THE MOUNTAINS MEET THE SEA —

Hot and Cold Water in every Bedroom Septic Sewerage System Electric Light Comfortable Lounge 6 Lock-up Garages Music and Dance Room	Radio Library Five Tiled Bathrooms and Showers with hot and cold water service Tennis Court Putting Green	Car to meet every train Motor Tours to Bull Pass, Sublime Point, Bald Hill, Wollongong, etc., arranged Swimming Pool Surfing — Croquet Lawn
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MODERATE TARIFF **PHONE: THIRROUL 146**

1) OVERESTIMATION & UNDERESTIMATION OF TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE SITE

According to the latest statistics available only 10% of visitors to the Illawarra Region stay in Hotels and Motels. Moreover, the greatest share of visitors were low income earners (under \$10000 per annum) - a share far higher than for the state as a whole.

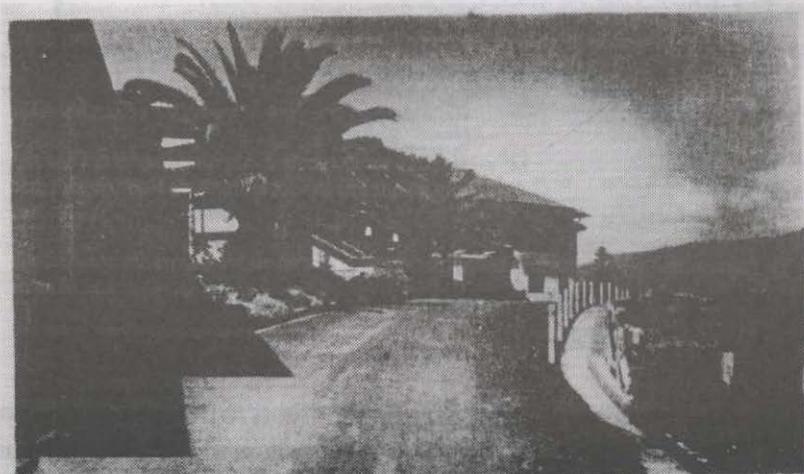
The three-star development proposed is both too expensive for the majority of Illawarra tourist clientele and not sufficiently up-market for either the five-star site or the creation of a genuinely sophisticated five-star residential tourist and conference destination.

As a simple economic proposition, the redevelopment is under researched and is likely to take customers away from other Illawarra operators rather than creating the new tourist destination niche market the region so urgently requires: a medium scale five star resort and small conference centre which has no current competitors.

2) VISUAL MASS

In the light of the above it is clear that, despite the feeble attempts of the EIS to argue the contrary, the proposed redevelopment, is an overdevelopment of the site which, while maintaining a suitably low profile to the houses faces Yuruga Street (10.4.4.) will dominate the headland when viewed from "houses further up the escarpment or any one of the number of lookouts at the top." (11.2)

It is not height that is the problem but the overdevelopment of the entire headland site with buildings, roadworks and parking. There is a clear need to replan the redevelopment to allow for retention and refurbishment of the existing western wing and this is an issue



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DRIVE & FRONT ENTRANCE, HEADLANDS, AUSTINER, N.S.W.

the EIS does not even canvass. Reducing the development to a figure of about 70 rooms would be just about right for the site, if the savings thereby gained were ploughed into making this a five star development suited to its five star site. The Headlands land parcel provides Illawarra with its one clear chance for genuine high class eco-tourism.

3) UNDERESTIMATION OF PARKING REQUIREMENTS

As the major income of the site (on all available tourist figures and estimates and projections for Illawarra) is purported to come from three star accommodation facilities, the current parking requirements have been grievously underestimated. Functions, concerts (even descending to the level of the rock bands being offered by the present management) restaurant facilities and cafe patronage, will have to become the mainstay of the development's income if insolvency is to be avoided. This means that the remark that "On peak days, about 200 car spaces may be required during the evening" and the subsequent remark that this situation "is not likely to occur more than once a month" (3.3.2) makes the estimated parking figures offered in the EIS either, at best, highly inaccurate, or (at worst) cynically duplicitous

4) ALIENATION OF PUBLIC RESERVE UNDER THE GUISE OF 'REGULARISATION' OF PARKING

The developer (perhaps with Council's complicity) clearly covets the existing public reserve, car parking and tennis courts as adjuncts to their private holdings. (7.1)

There is no community demand for 'regularisation' of these public facilities and no reason to offer them on a plate to the developer.

The impact of any 'generous' offers to 'regularise' these facilities through a pathetic monetary contribution to their upgrade would be to create a defacto private beach for the development near the existing boat ramp.

5) COMPLETE IGNORANCE REGARDING THE NATURE & HISTORY OF TOURISM IN THE REGION

The EIS statement that "Tourism is in it's [sic] infancy in the region" (14.0) is indicative

of the complete absence of historical research into the nature of the commercial developments which have been on this site since the early 1920s.

An advertisement from the 1933 *Wilson's Rail-Road & Sea Guide To South Coast & Southern Highlands* show that for 40 years prior to its redevelopment as a hotel in the 1950s, Headland's was *the* premier guesthouse in all Illawarra. It began as a five star development and must be retained as such. See also illustrations of the structure in the 1950s

6) ZERO RESERACH ON THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ORIGINAL WESTERN (YURUGA STREET) WING OF THE SITE.

The delightful statement that "overall the current improvements have no architectural significance and reflect no specific era or style of construction" is possibly the most breathtakingly ignorant heritage disclaimer ever to appear in an EIS.

If it were true then the Headlands buildings would be worthy of World Heritage Status as no building ever constructed anywhere has been able to achieve this.

The EIS is based on based on zero heritage research and I will not dignify it with a criticism but politely ask that our planners refer to the 1950s photos included with this submission for a glimpse of the taste, style and sophistication which went into the construction of the Yuruga Street Wing.

This wing is an unusually large Californian bungalow style development with French Chateau-inspired excrescences on the north-eastern and south-western ends. It is a unique structure in the development of tourism within Australia and Council should not be blinded by the fact that its own heritage study was either too indolent or too ignorant to list it as an item of State Significance.

The NSW Heritage Council needs to be alerted and an investigation should be commenced as to why both this building nor the 1930 Austinmer pool, promenade and associated structures were ignored by Council's own heritage study. Because of such omissions, Council has already lost the only liver-brick art-deco beach kiosk in all Australia and it must now make a serious effort to ensure that the proposed headlands development is as fine as Ron Forbes' superb Austinmer Surf Club which replaced the criminally unregarded kiosk.



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THE DRIVE, "HEADLANDS" GUEST HOUSE, AUSTINMER, N.S.W.

An EIS without an accompanying heritage study of existing improvements is not acceptable in 1997. The Northern Suburbs Community is not about to lose a heritage structure simply because of Council's attempts to deny its status by refusal to list it.

7) RETENTION OF PALM TREES IN EXISTING POSITIONS.

The study proposes to remove these two trees at the western entrance of the current improvements. They are an essential part of the heritage value of the existing western wing and should not be removed.

The Arboricultural part of the EIS overestimates the palms' ages by some 30 years. Their other recommendations should be considered in the light of this glaring inaccuracy.

CONCLUSION

In short, a smaller scale 70 room five star redevelopment which manages to incorporate and preserve the existing western wing into its design is the surest way to create a financially viable redevelopment of the site. Only a truly five star design will be capable of cre-

ating a new niche market to attract the class of high-spending tourist the region so desperately needs and not simply the low to middle-low income earners that will be attracted to yet another bland design built to exacting standards of cost minimisation.

The site is a five star treasure. It needs a five star design possessing a full understanding of the special qualities of its location, an appreciation of the surrounding public reserves and an informed approach based on the kind of research and local knowledge of which the current EIS is totally bereft.

There is no more amusing indication of the EIS and its lack of on-site research than the remark under the exalted heading 'Climatic Characteristics' that "Westerlies are presumably modified by the Illawarra escarpment." (10.7.1)

Joseph Davis