



**Michael Berkman MP**  
*For Maiwar* ▲

30 June 2021

Building Future Schools

Via email: [buildingFutureSchools@qed.qld.gov.au](mailto:buildingFutureSchools@qed.qld.gov.au)

### **Submission on a primary school for Maiwar - second round of consultation**

To the Building Future Schools team,

I welcome the opportunity to provide further feedback in this second round of consultation about the location of the new primary school in the inner west. Despite the very limited options considered, and the general lack of additional information provided in this second round of consultation, I am pleased the Department has responded to our concerns about the first round of consultation and proposed a second alternative site.

#### **Introduction**

I would like to make it clear from the outset that, while it was good to see the Department reopen consultation, limiting the discussion again this time to just two site options limits the feedback I can provide, particularly without useful information about all the other options considered, why the Department considers they aren't appropriate, or the broader suite of information I've sought from the Department for some months now.

Given the expected population growth in the inner city, it's likely the Government will need to deliver more schools in Maiwar in the coming decade, and I'd urge the Department to carefully consider this in the site selection.

Both options proposed by the Department in this round - the Indooroopilly State High School campus (**the ISHS site**) and the former Toowong Bowls Club and the SES Depot (**the Gailey Rd site**) - have significant problems. As I've indicated consistently, I would prefer the Department acquire new private land to find the best possible location, rather than taking relatively easier options that may compromise existing schools or much-loved community facilities and green space.

The urgent need for a new school has arisen in the context of ongoing densification in the inner west, under a planning system that prioritises the interests of profit-driven development, without the provision of necessary infrastructure to keep up with the growing community need, including public and active transport, parks, community spaces and schools.

This second round of consultation has brought these issues into sharp focus, since each of the options being considered to provide necessary education infrastructure risks negatively affecting existing community facilities and green space. It is unfortunate that a lack of forward planning about a more appropriate location for this school has left the community facing such a compromised outcome.

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At the same time, I am also conscious of securing the best possible outcome given the options on the table, and believe there are various steps the Department could take to mitigate the negative impacts as a consequence of choosing either site, that I believe would go some way to addressing the very real and significant public concerns in relation to each site.

### **My consultation with local residents**

As the State MP for the area, I consider my role in this process is to facilitate as much resident engagement as possible, to assist with the consultation process, and ultimately to work with your team and local residents to find the best possible location for our new school.

To that end, since the start of the second round of consultation, my staff and I have:

- Hosted two events to receive feedback in person
- Published a number of email outs and social media posts to ask locals what they think, received several hundred emails and social media comments with feedback
- Attended two out of the three of the Department's own drop-in consultation sessions
- Taken dozens of phone calls and held many face-to-face meeting with local residents
- Engaged in targeted consultation with the Toowong Harriers Athletics Club, the Taringa Community Garden, the volunteers of the SES Western Group, Communitify, Save Toowong Creek and Bat Conservation and Rescue Qld.

### **My nine principles for selecting a new school site**

In late 2020 I began a process of consultation with the community about guiding principles for how a site for the new school should be selected. On 6 January 2021, after talking to hundreds of local residents I published a list of nine guiding principles that I have tried to adhere to in the months since. They are:

1. **Consultation:** The location must be based on detailed community consultation with local residents by the Department of Education.
2. **P-12:** The new school should be P-12 if this is possible based on space. The State government has committed to a primary school, but we know that Indooroopilly State High and Kelvin Grove are both very full and that many west side high school students face a lengthy commute.
3. **Taringa:** The best general location would be around Taringa to fill the large gap in existing catchments formerly occupied by Taringa State School which was sold in 1997, and which would take the pressure off Toowong, Ironside and Indooroopilly State Schools.
4. **Traffic and transport:** A new school will cut traffic overall by allowing more families to walk, cycle and catch public transport, but the site must be located conveniently for public and active transport connections to minimise impact on local residents and maximise walking, cycling and public transport usage among students.
5. **Public green space:** There must be no net loss of public green space including parks and bushland. Any loss of green space must be compensated with new parkland or urban bushland in the electorate.
6. **Property acquisitions:** As a priority, the State government should acquire commercial properties or vacant properties, and should avoid compulsory resumption of existing homes where possible.
7. **Flooding:** As far as possible, the school should not be built in a flood zone.
8. **Vertical school and green space:** A "vertical school" is a viable option as long as students still have safe and convenient access to outdoor green space.
9. **Catchments and grandfathering:** Catchment boundaries for existing schools must be "grandfathered" to allow children to remain at their current school, and to allow children with older siblings at an existing school to attend that school if they wish.

Over the last six months some of the above principles have been superseded as we have learned more about the situation on the ground, as explained further below.

#### *Future high school capacity*

For example, in relation to principle 2 above and based on reassurances from the Department, I am now more confident that a new P-12 school is not required on the west side in the short term. As long as it retains room to grow on its current campus, ISHS does have capacity to accept more in-catchment enrolments given its currently high proportion of out-of-catchment students.

In the medium term, I strongly support a new State high school on the west side to reduce the size of the ISHS catchment. Both ISHS and Kelvin Grove State College are large schools with very extensive catchments, and both will require relief at one point soon.

#### *Buying new land for a school*

Throughout the consultation process, in discussions with the community and the Department, it has become increasingly clear that there is very little in the way of suitably located commercial or other unused/underused land that could be resumed for the school. In that light, while resumption of existing residential properties should be avoided where possible, in line with principle 6 above, it appears necessary to at least consider this option in detail.

It remains unclear whether or to what extent the Department did consider land resumption throughout the site selection process, but I have been concerned by the Government's continued failure to allocate funds for the purchase or resumption of an appropriate piece of land. This has left me and many in the community questioning whether the Government has at any point been willing to spend what would be necessary to secure the best site and overall outcome for the community.

#### **Alternative sites considered**

It is regrettable that despite the Minister's promises of more transparency in our meeting on 23 February 2021, the Department's commitments to me on 2 June 2021, and the Department's own conclusions in its Community Engagement Report, a detailed list of other sites considered has not been provided. Departmental officers agreed on 2 June 2021 to pursue the release of the list of the "Top 11" alternative sites considered by the Department, but this has not eventuated in time to inform this round of consultation.

It is disappointing that residents were not given any information on other potential sites, including even basic information about why these two sites progressed for further consultation while other sites were ruled out.

#### **Limitations of the second round of consultation**

##### *Lack of detailed information*

As I have made clear on numerous occasions, I believe consultation must be supported by detailed, relevant information from the Department. A key outcome from the first round of consultation and a conclusion of the Department's Community Engagement Report was that residents required more and better information to allow them to reach an informed decision.

It is disappointing that the Department was not able to provide any significant improvements in the information base for this round.

The “heat map” the Department released was of some limited use, but it included only growth in enrolments over recent years, rather than total enrolments. That meant it was not able to give a full picture of the demand on the existing schools. My office raised this with the Department in mid-June and was informed the full map could not be released on privacy grounds.

Information that we requested but has not yet been provided as part of this consultation includes:

- A heat map of total enrolments at local State schools
- Demographic modelling of likely future growth in school-age population across the existing catchments
- Total built capacity after currently funded upgrades at existing schools including neighbouring catchments.

My office has been requesting the above data since January 2021, including a request in my first submission to BFS on 28 February 2021.

#### *Technical reports produced too late*

In the future, it would be beneficial if residents were given details about the issues with the sites (such as flooding, traffic, land contamination and flying foxes) at the time of consultation, along with details of how the Department considers these issues might be addressed. I understand that the Department has indicated they are currently investigating a number of these issues, however many residents didn't feel they could adequately comment on the site options without a more detailed technical assessment of issues like these.

This meant that the discussion for many residents during this round of consultation continued to be around the problems with the sites, and thinking about other possible locations. This has limited the amount of in-depth consultation that I have been able to do with the community, and detracted from the consultation process overall.

#### *Misleading precinct name*

One relatively minor problem with the second round of consultation was that the Department's consultation materials referred to the Gailey Rd site as the “Perrin Park Precinct”, instead of a more accurate description of the Bowls Club site (and potentially BCC/SES land) that was actually being considered. This resulted in many residents assuming that Perrin Park proper was where the school was proposed to be built. This caused significant and understandable confusion in the community, and undermined the efficacy of the consultation, as well as wasting the time of a lot of residents.

#### *Future consultation*

I would like to underline the Department's own conclusion in its [Community Engagement Report](#) that “*In the future rounds of consultation, the department will share sufficient data with the community to demonstrate the need for the new school, the viability of each site under investigation and possible design solutions to address key challenges.*”

I urge the Department and the Minister to take their own advice and expedite the release of crucial information in future consultation activities.

#### **Key concerns about the Gailey Rd site**

Through our consultation with residents, I have heard many concerns about the Gailey Rd site (referred to as Perrin Park by the Department).

### *Flooding*

Many residents have reached out to me concerned about the flood risk of the site. They have significant concerns about the safety, repair costs, interruptions to children's education and other issues on the site in substantial floods. Many residents remember all too well the significant flooding at this site, particularly in 2011 and 1974 flooding events, and others have recounted their experience of other lesser known flooding events including a serious flash flooding event on Anzac Day 1989.

Others have described their experience of Heroes Avenue being fairly routinely underwater during heavy rainfall, and others are concerned about the location of the pump station and potential release of sewage in heavy rain events.

As we see more severe impacts of climate change, we can only expect these flooding events to be more frequent and significant, which has left a number of residents feeling concerned at the suggestion that engineering responses are a feasible or appropriate response to these risks. I understand the Department is undertaking flood risk impact assessment, and that these risks would need to be addressed during the MID process. I would ask that this information be released to the public as soon as possible, to build public trust and to address concerns about this site, if chosen.

### *Ecological values and Flying Fox roost*

Toowong Creek provides a unique and ecologically significant wildlife corridor between the Brisbane River and Mt Coot-tha. Despite the extensive urban development around the Gailey Rd site, and the considerable modification of Toowong Creek near where it flows into the Brisbane River, the value of this corridor and the riparian ecosystems should not be underestimated in the assessment of the Gailey Rd site. Urban habitat like this is increasingly rare and valuable, and its preservation must be given the highest priority.

Locals are very familiar with the flying fox roost in the trees along Toowong Creek, and many regular park-users have raised concerns that the easy cohabitation they've enjoyed with this population to date would be lost if a school were to be constructed there. I understand that others with expertise on these issues will make their own submissions, but the main concerns relate to the likelihood that the roost will be disturbed, resulting in the spread of disease (especially the Australian Lyssavirus Bat Virus, which the bats shed when disturbed or distressed) and flying foxes relocating into residential areas.

In addition to the likely disruption during construction, others are concerned that complaints from families at the school about noise or smell could lead to a decision to attempt to disperse the roost. I understand this kind of dispersal has been largely unsuccessful across Queensland, often leaving many animals sick or injured and resulting in negative impacts on nearby residents from those flying foxes that do relocate. The volunteer organisations who do the important work of rescuing these animals (which larger organisations like RSPCA don't do) are already overworked and need more support to do the work they're already doing.

I understand the Department intends to engage appropriately qualified experts to investigate these impacts and whether they can be addressed if a school were to be constructed at this site, for example, by considering whether the school buildings can be built a sufficient distance from the roost to ensure no impacts. With this in mind, I encourage the Department to move quickly on this impact assessment and release its findings to the public as soon as possible so these concerns can be properly addressed.

Additionally, if the potential impacts on flying foxes can be addressed and this site is chosen, the Department should consider the need for children at the school to be educated on how to respond if they encounter a sick or injured animal.

### *Contamination*

As the Department is aware, there are also concerns about contamination of the site. I understand parts of the Gailey Rd site and Jack Cook Park have historically been used as dumps, which raises questions about potential soil contamination and water contamination in Toowong Creek. Similar to the issues above, I understand the Department is investigating this issue and I'd encourage the earliest possible release of these investigations to explain to the community the extent of the contamination and how it might be addressed.

### *Impacts on community facilities*

The community amenities immediately adjacent to the Gailey Rd site, including Perrin Park, the Taringa Community Garden and the dog off-leash area, are some of the best-used and well-loved in the area. Locals are quite reasonably concerned that the selection of this site would limit their use or even result in the loss of these facilities in the long term. Departmental representatives have indicated clearly to me that the intention is not to remove or limit the use of any of these facilities by the community, and I suggest that the Department should publicly and unequivocally rule out acquiring any of these facilities now or in the future.

While the Toowong Bowls club is no longer operational, it has been a valuable community hub and green space for many years, and residents are upset at the prospect of losing this for future use, as was intended under the lease Brisbane City Council has now offered to Communify. Countless residents have communicated their hope that, if this site is chosen, there can be a "land swap" arrangement, so there is no net loss of green space for the community. I understand this is the position Brisbane City Council has recently taken in respect of the possible use of the Gailey Rd site.

Toowong Harriers Athletics Club is the lessee of Jack Cook Park, and has used and maintained the athletics facility there for many decades now. I'm sure their own submission will outline in detail their concerns about any additional use of Jack Cook Park and how this will impact on the condition and the long-term maintenance of the grounds. I encourage you to carefully consider their submission and the value of this athletics facility to the broader community.

### **Possible local improvements for the Gailey Rd site**

#### *Public space at the SES Depot*

As reflected in my fifth site selection principle (set out above), the new school should not cause any net loss of public green space including parks, bushland and community facilities. In addition to a commitment that neither Perrin Park proper nor Jack Cook park would be impacted, any loss of public space must be compensated with new parkland or urban bushland in the electorate of Maiwar, and ideally within as short a distance as possible.

The most proximate and commonly suggested option to offset any loss of community facilities at the Gailey Rd site would be for the Government to expand Perrin Park by buying the entire SES Depot which occupies about 10,000sqm based on our estimate. This would also create the opportunity to create a new community facility in the vicinity of the Toowong Community Meeting Place, to replace the lost Toowong Bowls Club that has been offered to Communify under a lease for a community facility.

Other suggestions for the SES Depot land include a public pool to replace the lost Toowong public pool which was sold by Council and demolished in 2001.

Like the Bowls Club, the SES Depot land is owned by Brisbane City Council and routinely used by BCC officers for parks maintenance and operations, in addition to being the home of the SES Western Group. Importantly, this site flooded in the 2011 floods, and as a result I understand the SES had to relocate to Mt Coot-tha for a period of nearly 6 months. The SES could clearly perform its function better with a more appropriate site, and volunteers at the SES Western Group made clear to me that they have no concern about being relocated to a more appropriate site, as long as the group is not simply disbanded as an alternative to relocation.

#### *Buy back the ABC site*

The SES Depot is by no means the only option for the State to work with BCC to offset any loss of public greenspace, facilities or amenity.

For more than a decade now, the local community in Toowong has been calling for the old ABC site at 600 Coronation Drive to be brought back into public hands and repurposed into a landmark park. This is the last opportunity for a new riverside park in the inner west, and it is impossible to overstate how popular this option would be as compensation for the loss of the Gailey Rd site.

There is a [current development application](#) for the ABC site, but only for a reconfiguration of the lot. Additionally, BCC has committed to the construction of a pedestrian and cycling bridge between Toowong and West End that would land at the old ABC site, which means part of this site will need to be acquired for this purpose - I'm very confident that the community would universally welcome a funding contribution to ensure the entire site is converted to a public park.

#### *Expanding the Toowong Urban Common*

Alternatively, the Government could contribute funding to dramatically expand the long-planned Toowong Urban Common just 800m from the Gailey Rd site. The [Toowong-Auchenflower Neighbourhood Plan Code](#) envisages the expansion of the tiny park at the corner of Sherwood Rd and High St called the Toowong Urban Common. Under the Code, Council could have required the developers of the recently approved Aviary project to provide this park, but they regrettably declined to do so. The Aviary is a multi-storey residential development on the former Woolworths site due to commence construction soon.

Even still the construction of the Aviary will create an opportunity to expand the Toowong Urban Common by providing an alternative bus turnaround/layover area, allowing the existing small park at this location to be expanded.<sup>1</sup> This expansion will likely require the purchase of a small parcel of private commercial land on the corner of Coronation Drive and High St. Concept plans for the Common are provided as part of the Aviary development approval process.<sup>2</sup>

The Toowong Urban Common is a considerably smaller parcel of land, but is located in a highly strategic and fast-growing corridor. Property values are likely to be low, given the requirements for any future development at the location to provide a public park. It warrants consideration by the Department and discussion with BCC as a potential offset option.

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<sup>1</sup> Urbicus Pty Ltd, Public Benefit Statement, within [Urban Planning Report](#), page 25, submitted 21 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Nettleton Tribe [Architectural Plans](#), Structure Plan pg 33. Submitted 25 June 2020 and Appendix AF: [Urban Common Package](#), Response to Design Expectations, page 6, submitted 21 April 2020.

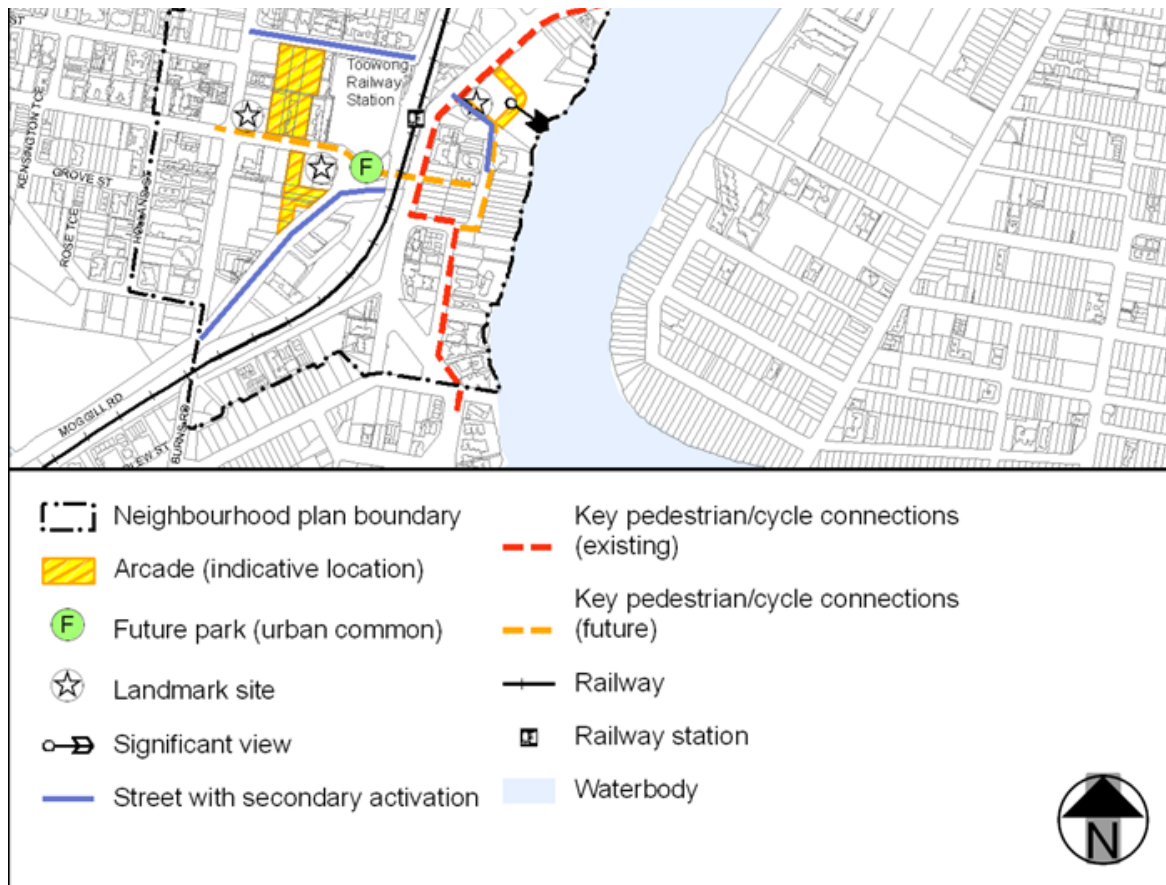


Figure b—Public realm

Excerpt from Figure B (Toowong-Auchenflower Neighbourhood Plan 2014)

### Key concerns about the ISHS site

#### *Transport and traffic congestion impacts*

As detailed in my submission from the first round of consultation, the overriding concern with the ISHS site was the impact on traffic congestion from adding a school of around 600 primary school students. The precinct already hosts more than 5,600 students at ISHS, St Peters Lutheran College (St Peters), Brigidine College and Holy Family Primary School.

Importantly, if it is appropriately located a new school will cut traffic overall by allowing more families to walk, cycle and catch public transport. But despite this, adding a primary school at the ISHS site would inevitably lead to an increase in traffic in the Lambert Rd precinct.

#### *Public and active transport solutions*

My team spent a few months running a large survey of parents and families at the existing four schools. We asked about their current choice of school transport and what would help them switch away from driving to school, and towards walking, cycling and public transport.

[My six-page report on cutting traffic by making Lambert people-friendly is available here.](#) It includes data on where and which schools the traffic comes from, and I believe this is the most detailed survey ever conducted about school traffic on the west side.

Key findings from my report are:



- Right now many students already use public and active transport. Around half of all students travel to school by car, especially primary-aged students. ISHS had the lowest mode share for car journeys and Holy Family the highest.
- Almost half of all car journeys were made by students and families at St Peters, one third were from ISHS, with smaller numbers from Brigidine and Holy Family. The three non-government schools together accounted for two-thirds of all car journeys.
- There are more than 2,000 high school students from three schools who currently drive, but encouragingly, at least 50% of families who drive indicated they would be willing to switch to public or active transport if improvements were made.
- Better and more frequent public transport was the most popular suggestion that would encourage people to switch away from driving.

The report identifies:

- A detailed list of sixteen pedestrian and cycling safety improvements and six public transport improvements which Council and the State government could fund, and
- A list of five steps schools could take to help ease congestion, including non-government schools with significant resources like St Peters.

If the ISHS site is selected, I will be seeking State government and Council support for all of the above improvements to manage traffic in the Lambert Rd precinct. Regardless of where the new school is built, I am committed to working with Council and the State government to improve pedestrian safety and improve public and active transport in the Lambert Rd precinct.

If ISHS is selected, the solutions provided should support both students at the new primary school and students at existing schools, including high school students, to take public and active transport to school.

#### *Impacts on ISHS*

Many residents, especially parents of students at Indooroopilly State High School, have raised their concerns over how selecting this site would negatively impact existing students. Most are concerned that this proposal would mean less space for the ISHS students, especially as the suburb's population continues to grow. The Department's consultation material indicated that the ISHS site would require reallocation of part of the oval for use by the primary school. Parents are worried about the loss of green space for ISHS students and the limited green space for students attending the new school.

When considering the future of this suburb, it's important to recognise that populations on the inner west side will continue to grow. With this in mind, many are concerned that the school being built on the existing ISHS campus will restrict that school's ability to meet their future enrollment demands. Similarly, I've heard many express concern that this site will leave the new primary school with very limited ability to expand if necessary. Beyond these consequences for the existing and future schools, it worries residents that we may need to go through this arduous process of finding a site for a new school again because the chosen site does not allow for future growth.

Many from the school community have indicated that a fence may be necessary on the site to separate the primary and high school students. They worry that this fence will break up the cohesion of the campus. ISHS and the surrounding community have endured a lot of construction in the past few years. Many parents are concerned that, if this site is chosen, the students will be plagued by construction at their school for the entire duration of their high school education.

#### *Flooding*

Similar to those at Gailey Road, there are concerns of flooding at the ISHS site.

## Conclusions

The overwhelming response I have heard from residents is that they do not like either of the proposed sites. Instead, they would prefer that the State Government acquire a more appropriately located parcel of land that better suits the needs of the community. I agree with this sentiment and, while I accept that there is no ideal site in such a densely populated area as the one I represent, I maintain that the Government could have planned for this inevitability much better and commenced the acquisition of an appropriate site years ago.

Focussing on the feedback I've received on the two proposed sites, the Gailey Rd site is preferred by more local residents. While there is almost universal opposition to building the school at ISHS, I've heard a genuinely mixed response on the Gailey Road precinct. Importantly, support for the Gailey Rd site is predicated on the Department ensuring that there is no loss of amenity in Perrin Park and the adjacent community facilities, that any environmental impacts can be thoroughly mitigated, and that some replacement is provided for the lost community facility at the former Toowong Bowls Club.

No matter which location is chosen, the Government must deliver appropriately tailored solutions to address the main concerns of the local community that I've outlined above, whether related to traffic and transport, environmental issues, or provision of comparable community facilities.

For both of the sites, increased traffic is a key concern that needs to be addressed. I am keen to work collaboratively with the state government and Brisbane City Council to ensure we get sensible, active and public transport focused solutions.

As planning for the new school progresses, I would very much appreciate the opportunity to have regular (e.g. monthly) meetings with the project team and the Reference Group including Brisbane City Council if appropriate. This would allow me to better communicate with the community about the process and to convey any community concerns to the team - I believe this kind of open and ongoing communication is integral to the success of this project.

I am very appreciative of your work on this project, and look forward to collaborating closely in the months and years to come. Please do not hesitate to contact my office on 3737 4100 if I can be of assistance, or if you'd like to discuss any aspect of this submission in further detail.

Kind regards,



Michael Berkman MP