

STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY SUBMISSION

Introduction

The “Focus on the Future” document nominates three areas that can be addressed by those wanting to make a submission to the State Sustainability Strategy.

Of necessity, this submission confines itself to answering the “key questions” as opposed to exploring “different perspectives” or addressing particular “sustainability issues”. It is felt that it is not possible for the Town of Cottesloe to comment in an informed way on the perspective of others. In addition, there are any number of particular sustainability issues that the Town of Cottesloe might address, but to a large extent, we are constrained by the need to consult our community and establish a consensus before we can adequately hope to portray the views of our community and our leaders.

The following pages are therefore confined to answering some of the key, and more obvious, issues raised by “Focus on the Future”.

Is sustainability a worthwhile pursuit?

The Town of Cottesloe is already committed to sustainability as a worthwhile pursuit. Our mission statement reads as follows:

*“To preserve and improve the unique village and coastal character of Cottesloe by using **sustainability** strategies in consultation with the community.”*

The overarching theme of Council’s long term planning is the concept of Local Agenda 21 – Sustainable Development, or in local terms, Care for Cottesloe.

What benefits could flow if sustainability was taken more seriously?

The effective integration of economic, environmental and social considerations in making decisions is one of the key principles of sustainability.

Economic development is often seen as being at odds with environmental and social considerations. Taken to an extreme, it could be argued that environmental and social considerations should take precedence over economic development in an established suburb like Cottesloe – particularly if the sustainability principle of precautionary behaviour is invoked in every instance of decision making. This principle says that where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

However, economic sustainability is of vital importance to Cottesloe residents and the residents of other suburbs in the Perth-Fremantle rail corridor. A number of economically sustainable industries need to be protected in order to sustain local employment and to reduce the dependence on the motor vehicle for transport to work. These industries include retail and commercial developments along Stirling Highway, major hospitals and private educational establishments. Care should be taken to avoid changes that may damage this sustainability.

Turning now to the **environment**, it should be recognised that Cottesloe is a highly altered area and that little of the pre-European environment remains intact. With the support of its Local Agenda 21 committee, Council, in association with the community, is working to retain and enhance what remains of the natural environment. It is working alongside active Coast Care groups. It supported the creation of the South Cottesloe Reef Fish Habitat Protection Area.

The Town of Cottesloe has converted its vehicles to diesel and LPG fuels. It is a member of "Cities for Climate Protection" and has reached Milestone 3 of a 5 milestone program. Over 50 different local actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have been identified for implementation over the next 5 years.

At a regional level, the Town of Cottesloe is a sponsor of the Earth Carers and TravelSmart programmes. Earth Carers promotes waste minimisation, recycling, composting and mulching initiatives. TravelSmart promotes other modes of environmentally responsible transport. One of its main thrusts is to discourage people from making short trips in motor vehicles and to use healthier modes of transport instead. Both the Earth Carers and TravelSmart programs have benefited from a regional rather than a fragmented local approach.

The Town of Cottesloe is the major sponsor of the annual Seadragon Festival which celebrates environmental volunteerism, encourages ongoing community participation in environmental activities and fosters the practical implementation of environmental initiatives at the household level.

With the assistance of the State Government, another initiative has been the undergrounding of electric power. Underground power has improved the amenity of the neighbourhood and fostered the development of street trees without the wasted effort of annual pruning and green waste disposal.

Within the **social** context and without detracting from the importance of environmental initiatives in any way, a potentially much bigger dividend for Cottesloe residents (if sustainability were to be taken more seriously) lies in increasing the *social capital* of the community.

Social capital values the social relationships that contribute to the health of our community. It is the bond of trust and relationship that a community builds and renews when people interact with each other in families, workplaces, neighbourhoods, local associations and a range of informal and formal meeting places and situations. Relationships provide people with a sense of belonging and a reason to participate in the community.

Social capital is built by developing strong networks between all sectors and by enhancing the ability of individuals to participate in their community.

When people with a common interest come together in groups, they form networks and relationships in which trust grows. These networks and relationships promote shared benefits as people help each other out. Partnerships and working with others can enhance our quality of life and result in favourable social opportunities. Engaging the whole of the community in the sustainability debate has the potential of being a significant and profound contributor to the social capital of Cottesloe.

Aside from protecting and enhancing ecological integrity, the other great motivator for community involvement is the desire to ensure equity within generations. There

is an emergent realisation that present activities should not compromise the right of future generations to a healthy and dynamic environment.

What opportunities exist to pursue sustainability?

The massive changes to Cottesloe's natural environment and the introduced landscaping in roads, reserves and private gardens provide a somewhat limited habitat for bird life and other fauna.

While the avenues of Norfolk Pines provide visually appealing green corridors, there is a real need to complement these corridors with native vegetation corridors. A draft green plan for the Western Suburbs has identified the Perth-Fremantle railway reserve as a potential native bushland green corridor, together with Broome Street, Grant Street, Jarrad Street and Marine Parade. As and when these corridors are fully established, the linkages between remnant bushland reserves, estuarine and coastal environments will be considerably strengthened.

We anticipate that the success of these green corridors will permeate back into the community with a heightened appreciation for native flora and fauna. That, in turn, should see individual householders creating their own complementary micro-environments and fostering bio-diversity at the household level.

On the beachfront, bio-diversity initiatives are already underway with the assistance of the Cottesloe Marine Protection Group and the South Cottesloe Coast Care Group. Sand dunes have been rehabilitated and improvements continue to be made to the beach infrastructure that minimise adverse impacts and heighten the awareness of people to the marine environment.

At the town planning level, the Town of Cottesloe is opposed to increased housing development densities. Issues of lack of privacy arising from increased housing development densities now tend to dominate the Town Council's town planning agenda. The traditional solution has been to physically screen the activities of one family from another but that, in turn, just adds to feelings of increasing isolation within a more densely populated area. Rather than blocking out the landscape, we should be opening up the landscape in a sensitive and planned way.

Increased housing development has also seen the backyards of many existing residences losing their native and introduced flora to the tar and cement of new residences. Mulching and composting opportunities are being severely limited on blocks of land that are increasingly being given over to brick paving.

The Town of Cottesloe believes that the social and environmental issues surrounding higher density developments have not been fully explored and deserve further consideration – particularly within existing residential suburbs and before it is too late.

In short, housing density is an issue (or an opportunity) that needs to be addressed within a sustainability context.

What is the role of government, business and the community in facilitating change to become sustainable?

At the State Government level, we believe that a number of government agencies and departments need to embrace the principles of sustainability rather than simply complying with their own governing legislation. As an example, the Town of Cottesloe has seen little evidence to suggest that the Liquor Licensing Directorate has effectively embraced the economic, social and environmental aspects of

sustainability with respect to the licensing of hotels in Cottesloe. There is absolutely no doubt that some of their decisions have adversely impacted on the social wellbeing of our residents. However social considerations seem to count for little when decisions are being made that affect our community.

At a local government level the Town of Cottesloe believes it has a leadership role to fulfil in terms of driving sustainability issues. By leadership we mean *vision*, *persistence* and *community involvement*.

Our *vision* for the future is settled and there is little doubt that it is demanding organisation-wide *persistence*. The third element of leadership, *community involvement*, demands the allocation of scarce local government human resources.

If we are to involve the community in an ongoing dialogue regarding sustainability, then by necessity we must redeploy or create new human resources. Capital or technological resources are clearly incapable of maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the community!

While volunteers can provide invaluable support in promoting the message of sustainability, official clout or endorsement is demonstrated only when paid human resources are in evidence at a meaningful (rather than token) level within any organisation.

There is a dilemma here as there is a clear expectation from within our community that levels of service, particularly in core local government areas, should be improving with the employment of fewer human resources and a compensating reliance on capital or technological resources.

Sustainability has not yet reached the level of being recognised as a core local government service and furthermore, as being a service which demands additional human resources.

State and Federal governments therefore have a role in providing “seed funding” for human resources at the regional or local government level so that sustainability eventually becomes a part of the community and local government mind-set and is accepted as a core local government service.

At the business level, the Town of Cottesloe believes there is significant scope within its own community to tap philanthropic funds for sustainability issues – particularly if donations to local government sustainability initiatives were to be made tax deductible in much the same way as donations to the Australian Sports Foundation are for sporting purposes.

There is also an untapped “intellectual knowledge” base within our community that is willing to contribute to the resolution of meaningful sustainability issues. The knowledge base is there and waiting and is evidenced by our own community-based “Design Advisory Panel”. This panel provides technical and professional advice to Council on a range of planning related issues.

What best-practice examples exist, if any, to demonstrate how sustainability is being progressed?

Best-practice examples do exist – particularly amongst some of the larger local governments. These examples are well documented simply because the local governments in question have the commitment and financial resources to promote their efforts at a State and Federal recognition level.

For smaller local governments however, the opportunity to promote sustainability initiatives is far more constrained where dollars and public relations skills are scarce and action on the ground has a greater priority. This is both a blessing and a curse. Smaller local governments tend to deliver an immediate response to local needs but do not promote themselves widely enough in this regard.

From a motivational point of view, it would be helpful if the State Government could “discover” the smaller unsung heroes. Cottesloe might count itself amongst them, but cannot do so because it has very little with which to compare itself.

What research and development is needed to ensure sustainability outcomes can be achieved?

Base-line data in terms of economic, social and environmental aspects of every discrete local government area would seem to be a natural starting point. The task may seem impossibly huge but trade-offs between these three elements of triple-bottom-line accounting are currently undertaken in the context of a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis.

In other words subjective analysis rather than objective analysis tends to cloud any decision-making process relating to sustainability at the local level. That is not to say that gut-feelings should not prevail over cold, hard logic in decision-making processes, but often the resolution of issues comes at great personal expense to elected members, staff and community members.

A key principle of sustainability is that “...*where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.*”

The principle is fine, but as an example how do we determine whether Curtin Avenue should continue to function as a heavy haulage route from a sustainability point of view? How do we reconcile the social benefit to Cottesloe residents of restricting traffic against the broader regional cost of increased pollution arising from the forced detour of heavy haulage?

Some basic analytical tools and an explanation of the ways of discovering base-line data would be useful from a research and development point of view.

In a more general sense, what else should Western Australia be doing to contribute nationally, regionally and globally to progress sustainability?

Mention has already been made of possible taxation concessions for businesses and individuals contributing to local government sustainability initiatives. The range of local government works and services is broad and obviously taxation concessions may be subject to some abuse.

The State Government, in conjunction with WA local governments, should give some thought as to the type of sustainability initiatives that might be eligible for taxation concessions. It should lobby the Federal Government on potential taxation concessions within the context of National Competition Policy.

At a regional level, the State Government has a role to play in facilitating co-operation amongst local governments. Most local governments in WA suffer from a lack of technical and professional expertise – mainly because of a lack of economies of scale and the tyranny of distance. This is not an argument for the amalgamation of local governments, but rather that it should be recognised that smaller local

governments tend to be more passionate about their local environment and that this passion complements the implementation of sustainability initiatives from within existing defined communities of interest.

Regional support and access to professional or technical resources would therefore be welcomed by many local governments.

Seed funding for new human resources is another initiative that has already been spoken to at page 4 of this submission.

Conclusion

The Town of Cottesloe has attempted to answer the key questions posed by “Focus on the Future” from a local viewpoint.

Our answers are not definitive as there are obviously a lot more issues out there at the local and regional level that need to be addressed.

We pray that the State Government is committed to sustainable development, that it will provide the necessary resources to help us engage the community in the sustainability debate and that it will assist us in the development of a climate that allows the Town of Cottesloe to move on to the practical implementation of sustainability principles.

STEPHEN TINDALE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

24 April, 2002

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30 April, 2002

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Dear Professor Newman

In addition to the submission sent to you by the Town of Cottesloe by email on Tuesday, 30 April, I further advise that Council at its meeting on 22 April, 2002, resolved that the following comments be incorporated into the submission:

“Council is deeply concerned, particularly about the issues in the section titled “an Australian perspective: and considers the highest priority should be given to:

- a) the reduction in unemployment, with a target to be set of 1.8% within 5 years;
- b) increased health services to aboriginals;
- c) increased steps to reduce poverty;
- d) the defence of Australia, for without adequate defence for Australia, there could be no sustainability or anything else.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN TINDALE
DHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER