



October 2013

Retail Planning Report: Planning scheme amendment and planning permit application for Bellarine Gateway Plaza, Leopold.

1.0 Introduction

BMDA Development Advisory has been requested by Lascorp to provide an assessment of the proposed planning scheme amendment and planning permit for the expansion of the Gateway Plaza Shopping Centre (to be re-named Bellarine Gateway Plaza).

BMDA has been involved with the project through design workshops at Greater Geelong City Council and through a supporting submission to Amendment C254 to the scheme.

2.0 Summary of Opinion

- Lascorp, through its consultant team, is seeking the re-zoning of land at Leopold for the purposes of expanding the Gateway Shopping Centre from a convenience centre to a Sub-Regional Shopping Centre.
- The proposal would expand an existing activity centre in the most appropriate location for Leopold and centrally within the Bellarine Peninsula.
- Leopold town has been the focus of extensive planning work which supports the expansion of the shopping function onto the land identified for the amendment to Commercial 1.
- Planning Policy support for expansion of Leopold to a Sub-Regional Centre is provided in the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Amendment C254 which was implemented in May 2013.
- The project design, analyses and responses provided in the documentation provide a solid assessment of the fundamental issues including context, scale, pedestrian and vehicular access, integration with Melaluka Road and active sections.
- The proposal is supported by design, economic, transportation and planning assessments that provide a strong case for approval.
- From a commercial viability assessment, the project presents well and looks to have balanced the commercial design logic with the creation of a street front presence onto Melaluka Road. The design of the Plaza (and the linking sections to the Reserve) promises to provide a distinctive, local identity to the centre.

3.0 The Proposal

3.1 Planning Scheme Amendment C277

It is proposed to rezone the site from Farming Zone to Commercial 1 Zone, which encompasses the land adjoining the existing Shopping Centre (northwest corner of Bellarine Highway and Melaluka Road) that is situated to the immediate north and west, to Clifton Avenue of the Shopping Centre.

It is also proposed to change the Schedule to the Commercial 1 by inserting 30,000m² in place of 5,000m² for maximum Shop floor area for 621-639 and 641-659 Bellarine Highway.

Amendment C277 will apply the Development Plan Overlay (DPO26) to 621-639 and 641-659 Bellarine Highway and also to the property at 92-100 Melaluka Road, Leopold.

The planning scheme amendment will facilitate the growth of the existing Shopping Centre which is proposed to be undertaken in stages. The amendment will provide investment certainty for Lascorp and will support the future development of the Plaza. The first stage of the development will be subject to the accompanying planning permit as identified in Section 3.2. The future Stage 2 development will be subject to further planning approval.

3.2 Planning Permit

The planning permit application proposes the first stage of development to the Plaza. This development comprises the expansion of the existing Coles supermarket, a new supermarket, a single discount department store, speciality shops, offices, cafes, commercial premises, at-grade car parking, loading facilities and associated landscaping. The Stage 1 works will provide a total retail space of approximately 21,400m². The overall floor space of the Plaza will be 27,143m².

This planning permit will support Amendment C277 by facilitating the development of the land for a sub-regional shopping centre.

The proposed additional works to the shopping centre will result in the following floor areas:

Use	Existing (m ²)	New (m ²)	Total (m ²)
Discount Department Store	-	5,000	5,000
Coles Supermarket	3,200	1,000	4,200
Supermarket	-	4,200	4,200
Mini Major	-	900	900
Specialty Retail	1,600	5,535	7,135
Non-Retail	-	1,419	1,419
Office	-	2,380	2,380
Restaurant	-	350	350
Medical Centre	201	270	471
Kiosks		229	229
Post Office	117	-	117
Bank	180	-	180
Gymnasium	-	562	562
Total	5,298	21,845	27,143

The Stage 2 which will propose a second discount department store and additional specialty stores, will be subject to a further planning permit application.

4.0 Status of Planning Scheme and planning policy development in the Leopold area

The Greater Geelong City Council has applied itself to the tasks of strategic planning required for this rapidly expanding area on the Bellarine Peninsula. Over the recent period, Council has commissioned or completed reports focused on the Leopold area. The principle documents (in order of most recent to earliest):

- Leopold Structure Plan 2011 (amended January 2013);
- Leopold Activity Centre Urban Design Framework September 2010 (amended January 2013);
- Leopold Sub regional Activity Centre Master Plan Strategic Directions Report December 2010;
- Leopold Sub regional Activity Centre Strategic Background Report, December 2010;
- Leopold Memorial Reserve Master Plan 2011; and
- Leopold Structure Plan 2006.

In addition a planning panels report dealt with the establishment of the shopping centre and other items. (Planning Panels Victoria: Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Am C65 and Am C100, June 2005).

Amendment C254

The most recent and relevant planning scheme amendment is Am C254 which became operable in May 2013. This Amendment recognises within the Municipal Strategic Framework:

- Cl.21.04: Leopold as sub-regional centre;
- Cl. 21.07-8: Leopold as sub-regional centre within the City of Geelong Retail Activity Centre Hierarchy; and
- 21.14: Amends this clause relating to the Bellarine Peninsula to reflect the recommendations of the Leopold Structure Plan and Urban Design Framework.

This amendment was publicly exhibited and considered by Council on 27th July 2012. Lascorp provided a submission to this amendment. The submission generally supported the amendment but made a number of recommendations which it considers would lead to a superior planning outcome for the changing town.

Following consideration of submissions Council's adopted a position generally in accordance with the exhibited document. Relevant to this proposal, the Council position supports the elevation of Leopold to a sub-regional centre supports the changes to Commercial 1 Zone and supports the expansion of the centre to the scale nominated.

Strategic Alignment of the Proposal with the Planning Scheme and strategic studies

The list of recent documents produced by Council reads as a strong body of work that sets out the development form for the Leopold area. Am C254 raises the status of the documents by

implementing them into the Planning Scheme. For all intents and purposes, the Leopold Structure Plan and the Urban Design Framework provide consistent and clear directions for the assessment of the proposals.

5.0 Leopold Structure Plan

The proposal aligns with the Leopold Structure Plan. One of the objectives in the Structure Plan is the creation of a sub-regional retail centre to serve the Bellarine Peninsula and to provide a town centre for Leopold residents. As part of providing the town centre, the planning of the centre is to include deliver local benefits including local employment, improved traffic access, better walking and cycling and public transport arrangements and linkages to the recreational and cultural facilities of Leopold.

The Structure Plan recognises that actual and planned population growth of Leopold. In 2010, the population was estimated to have grown from 6,783 in 2006, to about 9,500 persons, about 3% p.a. (this growth rate is consistent with the more recent 2011 Census data). Combined with the growth on the Bellarine Peninsula; the time has arrived when the planning for facilities and services in Leopold needs to be taken to a new level. The Structure Plan recognises that Leopold is placed centrally to the Bellarine Peninsula and is capable of playing the key services role, particularly in the supply of retail services. The plan does not identify a sub-regional role for Leopold for other non-local services, (such as health and education), probably because of the proximity of Geelong. The Structure Plan uses the Leopold Sub-Regional Activity Centre Assessment (Nott) to provide an analysis of retail floor space demand and forecast or requirements to 2021. For this (short period) Nott estimates a demand for in-centre retail floor space of 25,300m² plus bulky goods floor space of 20,000m².

Alternative concepts in the Structure Plan: The Structure Plan also considered alternative layout formations for the sub-regional retail centre, incorporating the core retail and peripheral/service retail forms. In the North Concept (Plan 1) the land subject to this planning scheme amendment was identified as part of the retail centre. While only at a diagrammatic level, the plans nevertheless illustrate a centre which would have the majority of its built form pushed well back from the Bellarine Highway; resulting in a frontage of large car parks without any built form relief.

Stormwater management within the Structure Plan: A related matter dealt within the Structure Plan is the challenge of managing stormwater in this comparatively low lying area. Future developments will be required to set aside areas for the retentions and pre-treatment of stormwater using methods such as artificial wetlands and sediment basins. Stormwater re-use is to be incorporated into design so as to reduce total volumes.

Transport Infrastructure within the Structure Plan: The role of Melaluka Road at Bellarine Highway and Portarlinton Road was identified. The highway intersection (corner of the Shopping Centre) is signalised whereas the Portarlinton Road intersection is not. The Highway is the commercial frontage for the town. There is no mention of Clifton Avenue and its intersection with Bellarine Highway, (notwithstanding that this road is identified in Plan 1 as a road from the Highway serving the activity centre). I consider that the local planning policy should have identified this access to the sub-regional centre.

6.0 The Site Context of the Proposal

In dealing with this matter it is important to appreciate that it is both a strategic planning (planning scheme amendment) and a planning permit application. This provides us with the opportunity to assess the proposal as a complete package; from idea to delivery.

The outcome can be tied back to the strategic thinking on the site and allows us to provide an integrated commentary. The comments will be structured around the key planning considerations (social, economic and environmental).

- Strategic planning
- Site Context
- The Design Responses and
- Commercial viability

Strategic Planning: As previously identified, the production of the expanded shopping centre follows the line of the strategic planning documents prepared by or on behalf of the Greater Geelong City Council.

Site Context: We refer to drawings prepared by CHC: 0751/TP100, TP101, TP202, TP203, and TP300b (September 2013).

These drawings place the site and the existing shopping centre into the Leopold town centre, located as it is on the western side of the established residential area. The difficulty in locating a large shopping centre into Leopold was addressed in the Panel report on planning scheme amendment Am C65 and Am C100 (June 2005). The Panel supported the current location after analysing alternative sites within Leopold, concluding that the “edge of centre” site best provided the scale of retail facilities required by the growing town. It also acknowledged the proposed connections included within the design that linked into the residential areas. We note that design workshops in 2012 gave prominence to improving further on these connections.

The diagrams effectively summarise the matters to be considered in the analysis of the proposal.

Urban Connections: The centre will have a sub-regional role and needs to be accessible to a wide population. Bellarine Highway provides the most appropriate address, serving the peninsula residents as well as the town community. Traffic and public transport to the centre form a direct route, avoiding the need to accommodate traffic within the residential streets. Melaluka Road and Clifton Avenue form secondary accesses and give the community alternative access points.

Connections to the business land to the north may occur through the site. It is important to appreciate that the Shopping Centre is a large, long building and its form will not be replicated by a similar building on the northern business land. The northern business land will have smaller, mixed use component and it is logical to plan for a smaller grid of roads within the site. Given this, the provision of a north-south connection (pedestrian or vehicular) into the northern service road makes sense. The important pedestrian connection into Memorial Reserve and the residential areas is emphasised.

Built Form Exploration & Built Form Creation: The extension of the Shopping Centre is shown in the diagram following; a logical east-west pedestrian spine. The transition from convenience centre to sub-regional centre needs to confront the siting of the existing supermarket and shops which is not ideal. Rather than having a direct connection into the east-west pedestrian spine, it sits on a “leg”

with a mall connecting it to the main spine. The retention of the south-eastern car park that serves this use will allow it to continue as a local convenience centre but tied to the larger range of shops.

Node Points: The design recognises that the new Bellarine Highway presence of the centre will be important and seeks to provide higher, commercial building forms at the south-western corner. The central node point will be a point of entry from the north and a key orientation point for visitors that arrive from shops to the east or west. The positioning of the food court off this node is sensible. It will allow visitors to relax in the food/coffee area or decide on their next direction.

The key node point on Melaluka Road provides the link into the Memorial Reserve. The road treatment should seek to ensure that traffic moves slowly; allowing safe, attractive pedestrian access across the road. I consider that there are opportunities for commercial/community uses to be positioned along the eastern side of the road and improve the main street presentation. The Memorial Park Master Plan does not consider this opportunity.

Environmental Integration: The design seeks to achieve a high degree of natural light into the central spine. The east-west orientation of the mall makes for a practical design. The opportunities to manage sun and heat penetration into the mall should be straightforward. Energy usage will be lower with the use of techniques such as night-purging of warm air through operable skylights and breezeways. Water management is already advanced on the site and will be included in the extension. Environmental sustainable practices are expected to be inclusions on the permit. I note that the architects have included an Environmentally Sustainable Design Statement as part of the documentation.

Active Edges: This element is generally hard to achieve commercially in shopping centres over extended lengths. There are advantages within the Leopold centre with the frontage shops east of Coles being established and being supported by a convenient car park.

North of the Plaza, the concept provides additional active frontage shops which are likely to be predominantly take away food premises and services. These can operate into the evening separately from the internal mall. They will be perceived as Melaluka Road shops rather than being within the centre.

Other opportunities for active edges are being taken. The Bellarine Highway frontage will support small scale offices and community uses. The major stores are “sleeved” with smaller retail or commercial uses. Some of these premises will attract lower rents which will increase the range of businesses and services on offer.

Clifton Avenue: The major design intent onto Melaluka Road raises the role of Clifton Avenue. This road will be signalised at Bellarine Highway and provide access to the western section car park.

Town Centre: The design involves connecting to Melaluka Road by setting up a free-standing retail element as a “bridge” between the road and the internal mall. In urban form, this will link the street through/past the cafe use and the northern-oriented public space and then into the centre. Users of Melaluka Road will view the road edge buildings as an element within the main street. There are many examples where strip shops sit behind a shallow car park as proposed. The design of Melaluka Road will need to accommodate pedestrian crossings/refuge and be attractively presented. A quality landscape treatment is called for.

Green Edges: as expected the centre will continue the quality landscaping and water sensitive urban design that exists. This will extend to the introduction of green walls.

In summary, the urban form analysis provides a thoughtful analysis of the way that the centre will be developed, while retaining and strengthening the connections into its town context.

7.0 The Design Response

TP202 and the more detailed plans set out the design response. The items deliver on the analysis, showing how the active edges, pedestrian spine and node points make for a logical diagram. The development is proposed to be staged, with the planning permit seeking the stage 1 proposal. The stage 2 works which will include an additional discount department store and speciality stores, will be subject to a future planning permit application. This response has been adopted in response to Council's consultant Mr Nott's report titled "Review of economic evidence in support of expanding Bellarine Gateway Plaza June 2013".

The northern service road sets up opportunities for the adjoining business lands to the north. The pedestrian connection into the food court area provides a point of entry and link into this area. The internal pedestrian spaces are generous and promise a high quality centre. More importantly, the Plaza section east of the mall entry and extending to Memorial Reserve will become a new "signature" for Leopold, being a collection of public and private spaces. It would be hoped that the design is "seamless" and integrated; achieving a landscape treatment over the 30-45 metre wide area. The design must work across the various elements of the plaza, pedestrian areas, buildings, car parking, access areas, and Melaluka Road, introducing prominent trees and urban art.

The addition of multi-level commercial buildings towards Bellarine Highway will add a mature element and provide premises for local businesses and employment. The established medical clinic could be a likely tenant, moving from the existing premises, with that space taken by smaller, newer, businesses. The re-location of viable businesses into newer and larger premises is a phenomenon of developing commercial areas where the economic rent for a new space is higher than the market rent payable by new businesses. By moving the more successful businesses into the newer (and more higher rent) premises, the cycle of tenant attraction can continue.

The design achieves the sleeving of the major stores on all sides except for the northern service road. I consider this a positive outcome. Loading activities are largely removed for customer activities.

8.0 Commercial Viability Comments

Market: The retail analysis carried out by Macroplan Dimasi indicates that the population of the Bellarine Peninsula has expanded rapidly and that the provision of the additional retail facilities in 2015-16 will be readily accommodated and not have unreasonable trading impacts on existing centres.

The design looks "right". As a major investment in Leopold, the Centre developer is being entrusted by many national and local business operators to create a Centre where the potential for retail sales and profits are optimised, (if not maximised). The positioning of most shops along a central mall is a strong design, with the majors providing the drawing points for weekly and general shopping. The

balance of car parking has been compromised by the determination to connect to Melaluka Road. The number of car parks is much higher on the western side of the Centre. This will encourage the use of Clifton Avenue.

9.0 Conclusion

The planning scheme amendment has come about after lengthy area planning in the Leopold area.

The planning scheme amendment and planning permit application are supported by the studies undertaken by the Greater Geelong City Council and the developer.

The design recognises the unusual situation where the retail centre is situated on one side of the majority of its primary trade area catchment. This is not new occurrence with the existing Gateway Plaza Shopping Centre having proved this arrangement successful for Leopold over the past few years.

The design has “bent” the conventional shopping centre design by sliding the centre towards Melaluka Road to create a street front section. This provides the condition for the Melaluka Road to have a commercial and community role. It sets up the opportunity for Council to participate with active uses along the eastern side of Melaluka Road should it desire to do so.

The plan and components provide a practical and viable layout. The use fulfils the primary purposes of the Commercial 1 Zone and the level of documentation provides sufficient detail to satisfy design and development guidelines within the planning scheme.

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Principal

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