

Woolworths Hawker expansion

Revitalising the existing Hawker shopping precinct

In town planning terms, it can make sense to 'densify' Hawker: it's a subregional centre, it has a useful variety of retail services, it's near a major road (Belconnen Way), it could become a bit of a transport hub (especially if some bus routes were diverted to pass through it), and more blocks of flats would promote local trade and public transport use.

1. What needs revitalising?

- Since construction of the shops commenced in 1975, there has been changeover of businesses in the various premises. Since Woolworths took over the Supa IGA store, the Olive restaurant has been established in both the former dry cleaners' shop and the adjoining restaurant/video store premises; the shop next door (the original chemist) was incorporated into the takeaway; and the butchery on the supermarket block was replaced by Woolworths meat section. The current pharmacy has expanded into the adjacent shop.
- The only shops to be empty for a considerable period of time are the former TAB premises (from 2015 to the present) and the small shop where the ATMs are located.
- The shops continuing from the beginning are Rocksalt (originally a formal restaurant, now a café) and the post office.
- So what revitalisation is needed?

2. Care and attention to the shop frontages

- Maintenance of the centre is the responsibility of the shop owners, except for the public spaces which are the responsibility of the government. Will expansion of Woolworths inspire shop owners to better maintain their premises?

3. The Village

- The shops have been constructed along a walkway extending from Springvale Drive in the east, through to the medical centre on the western side. It was originally intended to go through to Beetaloo Street but the construction of the medical centre blocked that.
- It is important that the walkway is not further disrupted in its course.
- There are two open areas along this path, one containing a children's play area and an outdoor area serving Rocksalt from where adults can easily watch their children. The second one leads to staircases to the shops at a lower level and facing due north. These have never benefitted from their exposure to sunshine and the construction of townhouses opposite.

4. The car parks

- Within easy commute from Hawker, there are a large Coles store at Jamison, a small independent at Cook, another Woolworths at Kippax (formerly an IGA), full-sized Coles and Woolworths stores in the Belconnen Mall and the sole remaining IGA in Florey.
- Further, the Belconnen markets are being expanded a mere two kilometres away. So why do so many drivers shop at Hawker?
- The bus routes do not, generally, provide efficient access to supermarkets, consequently, most people drive unless they are close enough to walk.
- The Hawker Centre is easily accessible for drivers coming off Kingsford Smith Drive via Belconnen Way, or off William Hovell Drive via Springvale Drive. The accessibility of the car parks, the ease with which vacant spots are identified and the confident likelihood of being able to find a parking spot attracts many non-local residents to these shops.
- In particular, these car parks are the only ones in south Belconnen where tradesmen in large vehicles can park easily and safely.

5. Why is Springvale Drive so named?
 - The farming land in the area of what is now known as Weetangera and Hawker was renowned for its springs. These arise from perched aquifers in the rock layers, which drain down the slope and become visible at lower levels. Early planners designed these two suburbs and the neighbouring Higgins accordingly. Each of these suburbs have a school at the beginning of the lower drainage site, followed by playing fields with a local shopping centre at the side. There are two floodway signs around the playground behind the Belconnen High School in Hawker and another behind the Kippax shops where the Higgins water drains beside the playing fields, over which Woolworths intends expanding.
6. Extending Woolworths into the block opposite the existing store
 - This block is L-shaped, which does not suit a large supermarket. It would, necessarily, involve removal of the playground, thus removing the convenience for parents.
 - To obtain greater space in the existing supermarket, the BWS liquor section could be moved to the former TAB site but this appears to be a bit smaller than the existing BWS site and would, most likely, require more staff for safety reasons, thus increasing the cost.
7. Building a new Woolworths on the eastern car park
 - This would be accompanied by basement parking, according to the information provided.
 - Basement parking would reduce the visible parking and, potentially, cause non-local customers to go elsewhere.
 - Given the proximity to springs and other drainage patterns, study by experts would be essential to ensure the wisdom of such a move.
 - Previous proposals have nominated undercroft parking on these sites.
 - This would also reduce the visible parking and potentially cause traditional customers to go elsewhere.
 - A large self-contained supermarket with parking would have the potential to become a world of its own to the disadvantage of businesses outside that building. It could become the Bunnings of the food retailing sector.
 - In assessing the potential customer base for such a business, it is important to consider that many Page residents, along with some other local residents, might prefer to continue shopping at the Belconnen Mall.

