

Kingston Traders left out of the loop on Manuka Oval redevelopment

The Canberra Times April 7 2016 Emma Macdonald

Kingston Traders have asked to be included in any consultation regarding the impact of the proposed Manuka Oval redevelopment on old Kingston – saying they had not yet heard a word from GWS Giants or Grocon.

Traders are concerned the proposed new retail, restaurant and allied health services hub surrounding the revamped oval may draw traffic away from established businesses in Kingston.

The Kingston Traders Group wrote this week to ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr for an assurance they would have a chance to understand, and comment on, the future impact of the proposed development.

According to spokesperson Dan Rayner, who operates Bittersweet in Green Square, "It is of concern to us that we have received no information nor consultation, to date, in regard to the developer-initiated Manuka oval re-development".

In the letter to Mr Barr he noted traders were "extremely disappointed to read in [*The*] *Canberra Times* of the attitude of GWS towards opposition to the proposed development. It singled out the Kingston & Barton residents group for particular unwarranted criticism, and then went on to say that their consultation process was '... the longest and most comprehensive Canberra had seen in years'."

Mr Rayner said the lack of formal consultation with businesses potentially affected by the redevelopment was in stark contrast to the level of co-operation being undertaken on Section 19 of Kingston, which was being redeveloped to accommodate a supermarket, other retail space and residences.

Mr Rayner said this project had seen "the best co-operative project in Canberra's recent history. The developer, the Kingston Traders Group, the Kingston & Manuka residents Group and the ACT Government have worked together tirelessly to obtain the best possible outcomes for all concerned."

"There has been no cross-party criticisms, no name-calling, no bullying and no slanging matches in this project. The co-operative approach has proved to be the best and most productive for all parties involved," the letter said.

Meanwhile, the Manuka Business Association had been included in early consultations on the Manuka Oval project with president Mary-Jane Liddicoat expressing some surprise at the lack of contact made with Kingston Traders.

"I am surprised they have not been approached given [the developers] were emphatic about their intention to be transparent."

But she expressed confidence that the "historic and prestigious" Manuka and Kingston shops would continue to attract trade despite new offerings at the oval.

"People are attracted by new developments which are sexy at the beginning, but they are never going to stop loving the established parts of the suburbs."

In response to a question from Fairfax Media on when they were going to engage the Kingston Traders, GWS Giants said: "Our comprehensive community consultation schedule sees us meeting with the Kingston Traders Group in the next fortnight. We're looking forward to listening to their thoughts and ideas in relation to the Manuka Green proposal and working with them throughout the next phase of the community consultation process.

"We believe the feedback from local traders is vitally important when discussing an upgrade to Manuka Oval and the surrounding precinct. To date we've been very grateful for the time afforded to us by the likes of the Manuka traders group and other important community stakeholders."