



The Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association Inc.

www.pbwba.org.au | PO Box 2 Palm Beach NSW 2108

COVID RECOVERY PLAN & DESTINATION NORTHERN BEACHES: CREATING A SUSTAINABLE VISITOR ECONOMY 2021

THOUGHTS FROM THE PALM BEACH & WHALE BEACH ASSOCIATION FEBRUARY 2021



Tourism/visitation strategies must be respectful of both the Community and the Environment.

Achieving the correct balance between residents, the environment and business/livelihood is paramount and very delicate. In the end, we will all suffer if we get it wrong. Council's DESTINATION NORTHERN BEACHES document recognises that there is resistance from residents in the area to promote the Northern Beaches for further large scale business/tourist activity. The scope of this project has to be of a truly sustainable scale. Sustainability must refer to the physical/natural as well as the cultural/social environments. The amenity of the area must be maintained (or better still improved) which is the very thing visitors are drawn to.

This document highlights the difficulty of planning for the Northern Beaches LGA as a whole, as this is such a large area broken into five wards, each ward with its own characteristics. In particular the northern end of the northern beaches (Pittwater) has unique geographical characteristics and a delicately balanced environment. It is valued for many reasons: it is seen as clean, green, safe, peaceful and relaxed. It has spectacular scenery, world class beaches and waterways, is accessible to everyone and enjoyed by all age groups.

NBC COVID RECOVERY PLAN

PBWBA supports the continued implementation of the Council's COVID-19 Summer Action Plan for Outdoor Public Spaces. This plan must continue particularly on weekends, public holidays and school holidays while ever the pandemic continues.

Palm Beach and Whale Beach - Observations during various lockdown periods.

- *most visitors are families and small group "bubbles".*
- *social interaction and mental health well being are as important as physical health*
- *just seeing or being in/on the water/ocean is very therapeutic in times of stress and anxiety.*
- *visitors from the NB LGA and outer suburbs (1-2 hours drive away) and Central Coast arriving via ferry predominate.*
- *a drive with family or friends is back!*
- *an area with water/ocean access for off-leash pet dogs is desired by many residents and visitors*
- *outdoor activities in open spaces, parks, beaches, for exercise, picnics, bbqs, quiet reflection, reading are very popular. Walking. walking, walking!*
- *increase in jetski and boat usage means management and infrastructure pressures on waterways.*
- *Maintaining public access to Pittwater for personal water craft activities (eg canoe/kayaks/supps), walking and swimming is important.*
- *The pandemic is expected to continue for much longer and international visitors will not be back for at least another year. Uncertainty prevails.*
- *Increase in residents working from home and staying at home*
- *Increase in permanent use of holiday homes by owners*
- *very limited long term rentals available*
- *very limited supply of homes for sale*
- *The constant description of "The Avalon Cluster" tainted the whole of the Northern Beaches.*
- ***The effect of the 3 week lockdown over the peak Christmas trading period was catastrophic for the local economy - and not just hospitality and tourism - water taxis, massage, beautician, boat hire, surf schools, retail, cleaning, laundry, florists, babysitting, party hire, celebrants and a myriad of associated small businesses etc etc etc were all severely impacted and many are still struggling.***

DESTINATION NORTHERN BEACHES: ALTOGETHER EXTRAORDINARY

The Northern Beaches is a valuable tourism asset for Greater Sydney and more broadly NSW and Australia.

The Northern Beaches is an extraordinary destination offering world-class beach and bushland experiences with vibrant villages that reflect a contemporary coastal lifestyle.

Great care must be taken to ensure that tourism/visitation strategies are respectful of both the Community and the Environment.

PBWBA supports Council's goals which are as follows -

1. Build awareness of a single, unifying identity for Sydney's Northern Beaches
2. Transition from day-visitors to overnight visitors and encourage greater regional dispersal
3. Increase yield, length of stay and repeat visitation
4. Address seasonality - increase visitation during low and shoulder seasons
5. Build awareness of a single, unifying identity for Sydney's Northern Beaches
6. Build a resilient and capable tourism industry and strengthen and enhance collaboration
7. Respond to COVID-safe practices and resulting market trends, desires or expectations.

FOCUS ON THE WORD "VISITOR" NOT "TOURIST"

DESTINATION: PITTWATER WARD (PITTWATER) Don't be afraid to use the word "Pittwater" - far more meaningful and descriptive than "the northern northern beaches"!

**SO MUCH ANGST ABOUT PARKING & TRAFFIC!!!
Barrenjoey Rd ends in a cul-de-sac!**

While creating a sustainable visitor economy we must -

- manage low key, "gentle footprint" visitation
- protect the environment both land and sea
- protect the Pittwater waterways
- embrace technology, online platforms, social media, QR codes, apps
- provide & maintain infrastructure
- protect the unique natural character of the seaside villages
- make moving around easier, safer, more sustainable
- acknowledge and promote the indigenous connection and history of the area.
- reduce the pressure on both Palm Beach & Manly by raising the profile of attractions in between and not just in summer.
- manage recreational and open spaces for the public so that they are not monopolised by large commercial or private events

CREATE A BRAND

Use the Coast Walk, Manly to Palm Beach, to promote the Northern Beaches as a whole and create a digital hub for information and services etc. This hub will assist locals as well as visitors and can be supported with advertising. As the Coast Walk stretches along the entire length of the LGA there is a wonderful opportunity for visitors to branch off into villages/points of interest along the way - not just Manly and Palm Beach.

"VISIT NORTHERN BEACHES" Website, social media is essential.

This would certainly enable a marshalling of resources and provide up to date information for visitors .

Topics could include -

- Events & What's on
- The Ocean & Beaches
- Pittwater Fun
- Indigenous Heritage
- Natural Wonders
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Eat & Drink
- Outdoor adventures
- Wellness & Leisure
- Walking
- Shopping & Markets
- Arts, Culture & History
- Drives
- Family Experiences
- Tours & Daytrips

- Sights to See
- Free Things to Do
- Real time Parking/traffic updates

www.visitnoosa.com.au and www.margaretriver.com are great examples of vibrant websites.

It must be a true representation of all areas, all types and sizes of businesses and include local "at the coalface" representation.

The Northern Beaches as a whole does not currently have much exposure or impact. It is only places such as Palm Beach and Manly – and this is a very fragmented / disjointed promotion by the tourism / hospitality suppliers. For many strong, viable tourist places, both domestic and international, the major attraction is a region not a specific destination eg The Hunter Valley, The Snowy Mtns, The Sunshine Coast, Tuscany, Provence, The Cotswolds, The Big Sur.

Northern Beaches needs to have a strong identity created and promoted. The destinations (or the Wards) or the town centres and villages eg Freshwater, Dee Why, Avalon, Palm Beach can then be sub brands.

Include a PODCAST which visitors can listen to while travelling here. This could be produced by those in the Arts & Culture industry who have been impacted severely by Covid regulations.

The Council website has a lot of excellent information in "Things to Do" but it is not prominent enough and gets "lost". This section could be completely separated into an easier to find "Destination Northern Beaches" section.

DESTINATIONS

The document re-enforces the concept that there are really only two "tourism" hotspots in the Northern Beaches: Manly and Palm Beach. As part of the push for a viable and sustainable tourism region, strong support must be given to develop attractions away from Manly and Palm Beach.

The document pays minimal attention to many sights/experiences "in the middle" which may help take the pressure off Palm Beach and Manly.

eg -

- Public golf courses - Long Reef, Mona Vale with fabulous scenery!
- Golf driving ranges at Warriewood and Terrey Hills
- Long Reef Aquatic Reserve
- Dee Why Wildlife Refuge
- Tania Park Balgowlah Hts - spectacular views
- Stony Range Botanic Gardens
- Warriewood Wetlands
- Narrabeen Lake and Lagoon and Environmental Centre - walking, bike riding
- Baha'i Temple
- West Head - walks, views, Indigenous carvings
- Equestrian experiences - Terrey Hills
- Public tennis courts
- Mountain bike trails Deep Creek
- Manly Dam

TECHNOLOGY

The Northern Beaches should be known as a "Smart" place to visit by using current and emerging technology to enhance and facilitate the visitor experience. Electronic guided walks / drives are just one example. Re-instate the excellent "Walking Pittwater" app (former Pittwater Council). QR codes are now a way of life and could be used extensively for providing information.

Smart parking technology is essential for sharing limited car parking.

Perhaps the currently closed, Council Customer Service Centre in Avalon Community Centre could be put to good use as a pop up tourist information centre and "Shop Local" or "Buy on the Beaches" hub.

ACCOMMODATION

A major influence in visitation success, as mentioned in the document, is the push to extend the duration of stays and increase the visitor spend (these two are often related). One major restriction in increasing visitor duration is the lack of accommodation – basically of all types. A major focus on increasing the return from visitors must be to increase suitable accommodation – without being detrimental to the fabric of our areas and to the residents (not an easy ask).

Rather than approving even more shoptop housing developments in commercial zones - which would only create even more unnecessary shops - could the possibility of boutique overnight accommodation developments be explored? This would help achieve the aim of increasing the length of stay and support existing and surrounding local businesses.

"Party Houses" and "event" houses located in quiet residential areas - short term holiday rentals whose guests are not respectful of the local community - must be able to be better managed by Council and NSW Govt regulations and authorities.

Currawong Cottages & The Basin camping are wonderful, unique resources which should be promoted as such - especially out of summer.

COST OF BEING A VISITOR

Excluding perhaps a day at the beach, The Northern Beaches is not a cheap place to visit. The document recommendation seem to be targeting the upper "high yield" end of the market. There should also be promotion to attract the more cost conscious visitor and families. Review of parking rates in off season for affordability would be welcome and suggestions for free things to do. Money would probably still be spent in cafes, takeaways, kiosks and retail.

"BACKPACKERS" & INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A major part of the current (pandemic aside!) visitor value is the "backpackers" and international students. Whilst not necessarily a big \$ earner, they are critical, in many places, to businesses for employment. Backpackers and international students must be added to our target market.

DOMESTIC TOURISM

Looking at the Pittwater economy, a large % of visitors and \$\$ come from domestic daytrippers who live within 25 kms – this market is excluded from both the research and the targeting. Again, especially for Pittwater, this market must be considered and attracted. VFR (Visiting Friends & Relatives) is a very important sector. This will continue while the pandemic prevails.

PALM BEACH/WHALE BEACH SPECIFICALLY

It is interesting to note from the Council survey (summer 19/20) that Palm Beach visitors predominantly came from other areas of Sydney (62%), while only 23% came from overseas. (Eight per cent each came from interstate and regional NSW.) Visitors tended to be older this year in Palm Beach, with a spike (vs. previous years) in those aged 40-59. The beach was the most important reason (75%) to visit with walks second (26%) [note this is 101%???]. 64% of visitors surveyed stayed overnight with family & relatives, 26% used AirBnB or similar.

Things to do in or from Palm Beach/Whale Beach include - amongst other things - ferries, Currawong Cottages, The Basin, Barrenjoey Lighthouse, "Home & Away", boat hire, seaplanes, whale watching cruises, Hawkesbury cruises, wedding venues, golf, Club Palm Beach cruise + lunch, learn to surf school, paddle-boarding, kayaking, the Coastal Walkway and walking in general, Palm Beach markets, sailing, beaches, swimming and surfing, fishing, cafes and restaurants.

WEAKNESSES

- Limited accommodation options
- Perceived cost and limited parking capacity and traffic congestion at peak times
- Constraints of transport and access to the Palm Beach/Whale Beach area
- Influence of weather and seasonality of visitation
- Limited product experiences for Aboriginal and nature-based tourism
- Limited access to points of interest especially water-based places
- Constraints on recreational spaces and open spaces
- Perceptions of over-tourism
- Concerns of overcrowding and environmental degradation of key assets and attractions
- Increase in boat ownership placing pressure on boat ramps, parking, traffic flow

STRENGTHS

- Spectacular Pittwater, beaches, environment
- world renowned Barrenjoey Lighthouse
- strong Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market
- Coast Walk - eventually Manly to Palm Beach
- The Walkway from the Wharf to the ocean beach is now complete and a real asset.
- Popular weddings and small events destination
- Clean, green, peaceful, relaxed, safe
- suits families and all age groups
- ferry link from Central Coast - huge visitor pool without vehicles.

ESSENTIAL

- Designate the northern Northern Beaches as "Pittwater" sub brand. (Mona Vale to Palm Beach). Easier marketing. Don't be afraid to use the word **PITTWATER!**
- Provide visitor information in Palm Beach itself, especially at The Wharf, Gov Phillip Park, the ocean beach. This should be a combination of digital and "real" signage ie a map.
Real time traffic and parking info ahead of arrival and continued implementation of NBC Summer Action Plan for traffic and crowd monitoring is essential.

- Gov Phillip Park PoM upgrade essential. "Home & Away" fees must be transparent, set at fair market value and reinvested in the Park itself. Parking should be charged to the film unit and they should not receive free parking passes for the LGA. There needs to be an increase/upgrade in public toilets and change room facilities in Gov Phillip Park. Garbage facilities, recycling bins, public amenities must be monitored and cleaned frequently. Mature trees planted near picnic tables for shade. Fit for purpose audit of picnic tables and bbqs as they are well used.
- Urban Night Sky Park: this gets strong coverage which is very concerning as it has not been approved yet. The advantages or disadvantages this will offer for local businesses is unknown. A great deal of promotional energy and budget could be expended for dubious local return.
- 250 000 plus visitors to the Lighthouse annually and increasing. Management of visitors is important. Are the toilets located at the top now permanent? Council & NSW Govt must work cooperatively to manage this area and provide the latest technology for state of the art visitor information.
- There needs to be a strong focus on efficient and easy public transport to Palm Beach. Use Careel Bay for overflow parking at peak times and as a Keoride hub. Could some 199 buses be express from Manly Wharf to the beaches which are right beside the bus route such as Newport, Avalon then Palm Beach? What a great day out - ferry from Circular Quay then straight to the Pittwater Beaches. "The Beach Bus" loop from Careel Bay/Avalon (park and ride) to Palm Beach/Whale Beach should be explored. Investigate the use of an electric, solar powered or other "green" powered bus which could be "on show" from an innovative manufacturer? Mid to longterm traffic and parking is likely to become a barrier to the peace and enjoyment visitors seek here. Eventually a characterful hop on hop off public transport must be the solution.
- Active travel should be encouraged between places of interest, beaches, villages, parks etc via footpaths. A footpath along Barrenjoey Rd between Careel Bay and Iluka Rd (south) is required. Wayfinding signs and keeping public pathways and rights of way in public hands is essential. As a start the "Walking Pittwater" app is a very valuable resource and should be rebooted. Encourage residents to maintain scenic streets as per the "Scenic Streets Register" so views can be enjoyed by all when walking along public footpaths.
- There needs to be careful attention paid to parking for the local businesses and residents and providing as much as possible for visitors. Wayfinding signs and real time parking information are essential for an improved visitor experience. Use of smart parking technology for turnover and sharing of limited spaces. Reduce parking rates in off season to encourage off season visitation. Remove trailers, boats etc from streets in commercial and high use areas to allow for turnover/sharing of parking. Pittwater Park parking times should allow overnight parking then be adjusted to (daytime) 4 hours Western side and 2 hours Eastern side using smart parking technology and monitored regularly. The 1P, 2P & 4P zones in the Palm Beach commercial precincts should be monitored particularly at weekends and public holidays.

- There should be more government support for the Blue Highway (ferries) as this will improve transport and accessibility for visitors and the local community. Encourage tours by boat/ferry to explore Pittwater waterways (with bus or Keoride links) and move people off the roads. These could be themed eg art, history, geology etc to appeal to specific groups. It is interesting to note that the luxury French small ship company Ponant has listed the Hawkesbury/Broken Bay as an overnight stop in an itinerary along the East Coast in September 2021.
- State/local Government needs to remove barriers where appropriate to create more accommodation options for visitors. The current lack of options is forcing the growth of the Air BnB style accommodation which causes other pressures on the community.
- Waterways - safety issue of jetskis and swimmers . Are popular swimming areas designated for swimming only eg Station Beach, Clareville so jetskis have to stay away?
- The Pittwater waterway is particularly vulnerable to large craft which contribute to erosion and noise pollution. The mangroves in Careel Bay are of particular concern as a valuable habitat for fish, birds and sea grasses. RMS & Council must work together to manage this.
- Boat charter and accommodation on boats is welcome but caution and community consultation is required regarding approval for moored houseboats.
- Free camping near beaches and waterways has become an issue in many coastal areas - eg Crescent Head, Hat Head, South West Rocks, Byron Bay.
Is Council alert to this? Are strategies in place to provide sites in appropriate places?
- Ensure that, as far as possible, infrastructure, beach and waterway access, open spaces, points of interest, accommodation and visitor information are accessible to people of all abilities, particularly those using wheel chairs and walking aids. Lets be known as "smart" via technology and "accessible" for all abilities.
- Visitation out of summer is to be encouraged, particularly in winter. Christmas in July? Pittwater seems to have it's own microclimate and is often sunnier and warmer than other parts of Sydney in winter.

The Palm Beach and Whale Beach Association is very appreciative and protective of this unique and fragile environment and welcomes the opportunity to work with Council and State Government to preserve the environment while balancing and managing the impact and expectations of visitors, the amenity of residential neighbourhoods and coastal villages and the needs and nurturing of business/livelihoods.

Prof Richard West AM
 President
 14th February 2021