

ORDINARY MEETING 26 SEPTEMBER 2012	5
---	----------

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION STAGE FOR PROPOSED MINISTERIAL DESIGNATION OF LAND FOR COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE – JCU DAINTREE RAINFOREST OBSERVATORY – 3701 CAPE TRIBULATION ROAD, CAPE TRIBULATION – LOT 3 ON RP740257 – DIVISION 10

Sean Lisle: 8/27/3: #3718960

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council provides the comments contained in this report to the Department of Housing and Public Works as part of the Public Notification Stage.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

James Cook University have applied to the Minister of Education and Industrial Relations to designate land at the University's Daintree Rainforest Observatory (Lot 31 on SP134294 located at 3701 Cape Tribulation Road, Cape Tribulation) for community infrastructure purposes under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*. The proposed site is shown in the aerial photograph in Attachment 1.

The proposed Ministerial Designation will re-affirm the current use, and facilitate future development of the site. The future development of the site will transform the Daintree Rainforest Observatory (DRO) from a monitoring and research station to a globally significant research, training and teaching centre. The proposed development of the DRO is shown in Attachment 2.

Council officers across planning, environmental and infrastructure departments have reviewed the proposal and provided comments detailed in the body of this report.

It is recommended that Council provide the comments on the initial Assessment Report for Public Notification contained in this report to the Department of Housing and Public Works.

INTRODUCTION:

In December 2011 Council received advice that the Department of Education and Training had engaged the Department of Housing and Public Works to process a Ministerial Designation request over land currently occupied by James Cook University's Daintree Rainforest Observatory.

Council also received the Draft Initial Assessment Report and supplied preliminary comments at that time.

On 31 August 2012 Council received the finalised Initial Assessment Report for Public Notification. Public Notification commenced on 3 September 2012 and closed on 21 September 2012. Council has received leave from the Department of Housing and Public Works to supply a submission after the deadline to align with Council's meeting schedule.

BACKGROUND:

The DRO at Cape Tribulation is one of five Long Term Ecological Research sites in Australia allied to the International Long Term Ecological Research Network, and is one of twelve canopy cranes in forests around the world. The Cape Tribulation monitoring plots are the premier research sites in the Wet Tropics, with more information being gathered on this site of rainforest than any other hectare of ecosystem in Australia.

The DRO currently comprises of accommodation facilities for up to four researchers and two permanent on-site staff, laboratory facilities, work areas and the crane. These facilities are serviced by on-site solar panels, power generators, on-site septic sewerage systems and water tanks.

The designation will re-affirm the current use, and facilitate future development of the site to establish the DRO to become a globally significant research, training and teaching centre.

The proposed future development of the DRO involves the construction of accommodation, living, laboratory and research buildings and areas to support up to 100 occupants (approximately 80 guests and 20 staff (including up to four permanent on site staff). The proposed development of the DRO is shown in Attachment 2.

Parking for two 25-seat buses and 10 passenger vehicles will be provided on site. 800m of single lane road will be constructed to provide access to the DRO from the Cape Tribulation Road.

In addition, a network of foot trails into the Daintree rainforest will be created connecting a series of research plots and monitoring stations including the installation of communications infrastructure to link these sites to the observatory.

The DRO will operate during and also outside of normal working hours including some nights and weekends as necessary to cater for research requirements. The educational and administration buildings may be operational seven days a week, between the hours of 6am and 8pm. The group accommodation, research accommodation and staff accommodation including associated facilities would be operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Crane may be operational 7days per week between the hours of 6am to sunset.

COMMENT:

Council reviewed the Draft Initial Assessment Report during the first round of consultation and supplied preliminary comments at that time. The Initial Assessment Report provides responses to Council's previous comments. Officer's final comments are as follows:

PLANNING

The intended designation will result in the development being exempt from assessment against the Douglas Shire Planning Scheme. However, consideration has been given to the relevant provisions of that scheme and the Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009–2031. The redevelopment and expansion of the existing DRO complements the intent and desired outcomes of both plans through the development of industries in tropical expertise, whilst not increasing the permanent residential population north of the Daintree River.

ENVIRONMENTAL

An Ecological Investigation Report has been undertaken in preparation of the application for designation. It is important that any works on the site are undertaken in accordance with the recommendations of this report, notably the finalisation of an Environmental Management Plan prior to any works commencing.

Council's Environmental Officer has also conducted a vegetation survey of the site and observed 8 plant species listed as *near threatened* and 1 *vulnerable* under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. The Initial Assessment Report states that development has been designed to avoid, where possible, these species. A suitably qualified professional will assess the site and identify the above species and ensure the proposed works do not result in any loss of these species.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Initial Assessment Report also states that any access road, parking areas and access from Cape Tribulation Road would be designed in accordance with FNQROC and/or relevant Austroads Guidelines and Australian Standards.

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure will also be designed in accordance with relative standards. The proposed Wastewater treatment system is likely to result in an improvement upon the current on site treatment system.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Corporate and Operational Plans:

This project is not being delivered under Council's Corporate or Operational Plans. However, the project reflects Corporate Plan Goal 3.2 – Deliver integrated provision of physical and social infrastructure in existing and future parts of the region.

Statutory:

The *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* provides a Minister the power to designate land for community infrastructure purposes. The designation will be undertaken in accordance with Chapter 5 of the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*.

The Initial Assessment Report states that Pursuant to Chapter 5 of the SPA, it is proposed to designate the land described above for community infrastructure. Ministerial designation is proposed in order to facilitate the efficient allocation of resources and enable the timely supply of the community infrastructure. The proposed community infrastructure is best described in the *Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009*, Schedule 2, Part 2 as follows:

(6) educational facilities; and

(15) storage and works depots and the like including administrative facilities associated with the provision or maintenance of the community infrastructure.

And further described as:

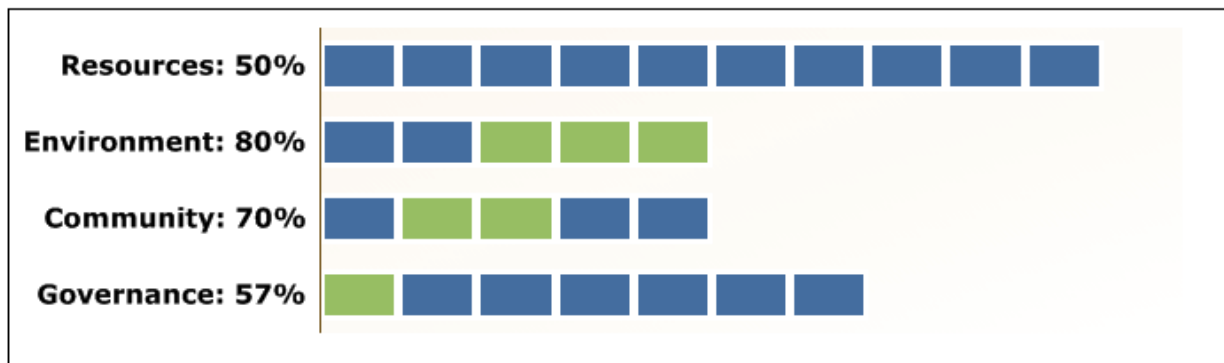
Research and teaching facilities; administration facilities; ancillary staff and student/researcher residential accommodation; foot trails; canopy crane; engineering and maintenance support services; storage facilities; car parking and transport infrastructure.

Policy:

Council has no policy applicable for Community Infrastructure Designations.

Financial and Risk:

There is no perceived risk to Council with James Cook University providing the proposed infrastructure to the community under the designation.

Sustainability:

Positive Neutral Negative

A Sustainability Scorecard has been created for the proposed Ministerial Designation. The majority of categories score neutral as this proposal has little effect on the use of Council resources. However, there will be positive community benefits and environmental protection outcomes associated with the establishment of a globally significant research and education centre in the Region.

CONSULTATION:

Council is not required to undertake any consultation as the Department of Public Works undertakes all consultation in accordance with the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (SPA).

Council Officers from Development Assessment, Infrastructure Management and Water and Waste have been consulted internally to provide comments on the Initial Assessment Report.

OPTIONS:

Council has the option to:

- a. Provide comments on the Initial Assessment Report for Public Notification; or
- b. Not comment on the Initial Assessment Report for Public Notification.

CONCLUSION:

James Cook University have applied to the Minister of Education and Industrial Relations to designate land at the university's Daintree Rainforest Observatory (Lot 31 on SP134294 located at 3701 Cape Tribulation Road, Cape Tribulation) for community infrastructure purposes under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*.

The designation will re-affirm the current use, and facilitate future development of the site to establish the DRO to become a globally significant research, training and teaching centre.

It is recommended that Council provide the comments on the initial Assessment Report for Public Notification contained in this report to the Department of Housing and Public Works.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – Aerial Photograph

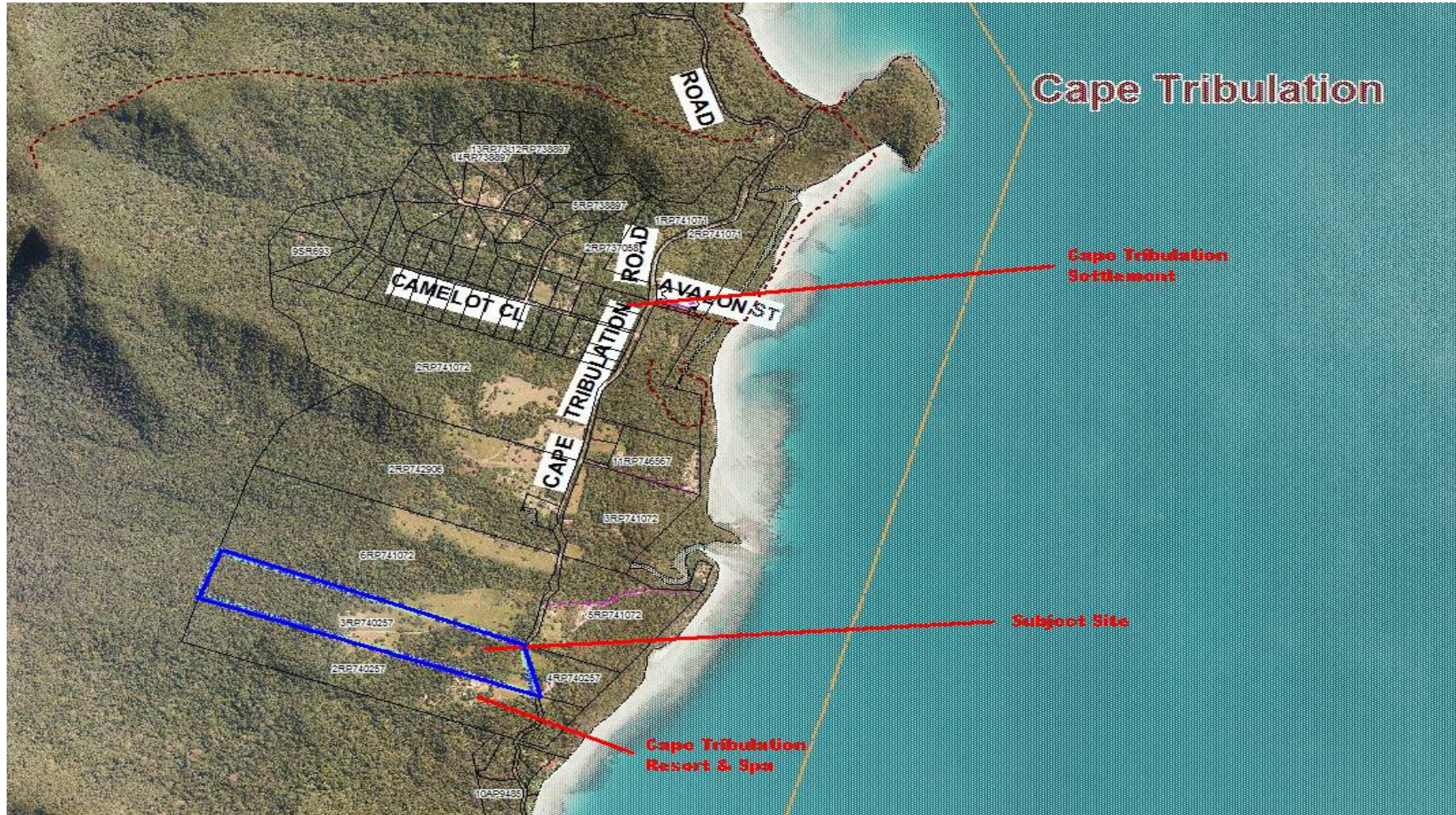
Attachment 2 – Proposed Plans

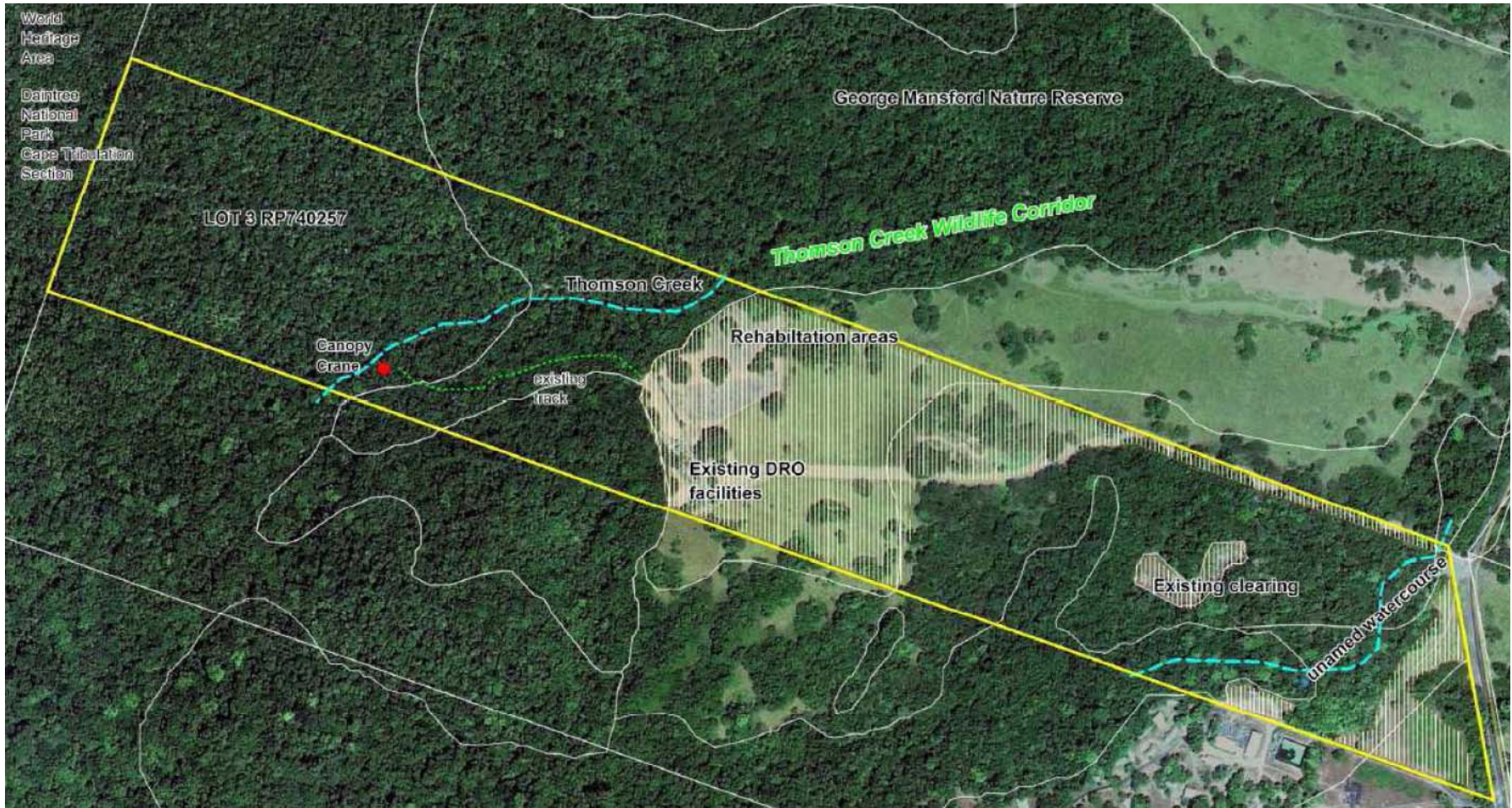
Sean Lisle
Strategic Planner

Peter Boyd
Manager Planning Strategies

Attachment 1 – Aerial Photographs







Attachment 2 – Proposed Plans

