UNIVERSITY AND A MOVE TO THE CBD

Richard Flanaghan’s Talking Point ’Stop work until uni rebuilds trust’ (20 April) cries out for further examination of the details of the proposal endorsed by the University Council in April this year.

The Vice-Chancellor, Rufus Black,(Mercury 5 April) has outlined a move by the University from the Sandy Bay campus to the Hobart CBD. The rationale for this was based on report raising a number of issues. Two-thirds of the Sandy Bay campus building were assessed as needing replacement due to poor ratings for building condition and functionality. Only one out of the 67 buildings there were more than 10 years old.

The advantages according to the Vice-Chancellor stated were that a move to the CBD would cost $445 million and save the University $125 million as against $570 million in retaining the existing campus. Moving into the CBD was also held to allow an extra 9 per cent of students living across New Norfolk, Brighton/Bridgewater, Midway Point and Huonville to access the university within one hour.

The article has an accompanying map which show the location of redistributed faculties/schools around the CBD as well as the current locations of the Menzies Centre, Art School Media Centre and the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies

The questions that arise from these proposals, as the Vice-Chancellor rightly emphasises, will involve consultation over time with the community.

The report presented to the University Council has, to my knowledge, never been made public. There is therefore no accounting data given for the estimates made about the costs of renovating the existing buildings on the Sandy Bay campus. From my room in the Commerce building when I was there before retiring in 2002 I could view the sweep of the Derwent and the city. At the back there stretched 100 hectares of land belonging to the University. The cost of updating the present campus site could be met by the sale or leasing of land in this area. Already the University has sold the old Uniprint site to the Hill Street Grocer for their new supermarket. The $125 million the report claims a move to the CBD would save surely could be met by judicious sales/leases of this area above Churchill Avenue?

The traffic flows and congestion that a move to the CBD would cause is downplayed by the expectation that transport planning for Hobart will solve our current problems. Currently there are no clear proposals in place supporting better and efficient public transport or light rail. An increase of10,000 international students alone by 2022 would provide traffic congestion problems that the University’s sustainable transport section has yet to address The planned move to the CBD presupposes that these problems will be solved during the 10-15 year period of the transition, even though the potential traffic into the CBD generated by the move has not yet been taken into account. As Bob Cotgrove has noted (Opinion Mercury, April 17) daily traffic patterns of staff and students from Dynnyrne, Mount Nelson, Sandy Bay and Taroona will significantly increase flows along Regent Street and Sandy Bay Road which are already congested by heavy traffic on Macquarie and Davey Streets.

The proposal to move the existing University departments/designated to areas of the CBD strikes at the heart of what currently exists on the Sandy Bay campus It breaks up the interaction between staff, students and staff and students. The social focus on the present campus is in Lazenby’s ,the Staff Club and the open spaces from the Stanley Burbury building to below Law and the sports ground. All of this cannot be replaced in the CBD It is true that the Centre for the Arts, the new Conservatorium next to the Theatre Royal, the Menzies and Media Centres plus the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies are all central. However, relative to University campuses elsewhere, all these establishments are close to that of Sandy Bay

I was concerned at the AGM of the Alumni in December 2018 that although we were given a presentation on future growth of the University student numbers at the end although myself and others wanted to ask questions about the future direction of the University we were told there were to be no questions. There had been no mention of the University’s move to the CBD. I said very clearly; if this were a meeting of shareholders there would be no doubt about the right to ask questions of a board.

The Vice Chancellor is not got the backing of the University staff behind this plan. Only 16% of the those polled by the National Tertiary Education Union support the proposed moving the University to the CBD. The rest are strongly opposed. I support a public meeting on this so we get the full consultation which the Vice Chancellor accepts is needed.

John Livermore

Former Dean Faculty of Economics and Commerce