

Executive Summary.

Although still being developed with as yet no on-site community facilities Renwick presents as a contented healthy community, with a good-fit between its design and the “semi-rural” values of its residents - to the extent that many “trade-off” long weekly commutes for these broader “lifestyle” benefits, which many see as directly related to their overall health. Participants also report that they meet minimum recommended levels of physical activity. However most of this is via “moderate” recreation activities only (gardening and walking around the estate). These may not generate the levels of exertion required to achieve the health benefits, and may not be maintained. Renwick is also a low density highly car-based residential area. It risks being typical of the types of conventional suburban residential areas which have led to current concerns about the impact on residents’ health from resultant lack of exercise. The design seeks to be innovative in this regard, including adoption of National Heart Foundation guidelines, prompted by a concern to not repeat existing the high levels of obesity evident in the region. However there have been critical deficiencies in how these exemplary design intentions have not been carried through in implementation.

Ensuring residents achieve and maintain adequate levels of physical activity is considered to be the matter most needing on-going attention. However the master planning of the open space areas provides for passive activities only. A reasonably direct pedestrian and cycle link to Mittagong proposed in the master plan has not been achieved, and an alternative cycle route along the Highway is unlikely to be used given safety concerns and a railway line obstructs access to an existing well-connected cycle path. Although the development negotiated a bus route through the estate its frequency and legibility of service means it is little used. A monetary contribution for a new physical activity leisure centre has been (appropriately) re-directed to construction of a Police Citizens Youth Club, but without apparent attention to active transport links.

Residents cite good levels of social interaction, which should increase as the estate matures in terms of population and development of the Village Centre. However there is a strong desire now for a “neighbourhood focus”, to include some fresh food retailing; and the small market catchment leads to some doubt about the viability of the Centre. Imaginative ways to provide for these need to be explored, eg. by, variously, an interim café or like “pop-up” venues, food trucks, market stalls; and in the longer term by innovative tenures. The intended inclusion of a community centre to also serve surrounding residential areas is a positive in this regard. There is a good range of fresh foods in surrounding areas, however local provision will reduce the current “default” use of the motor car to access these, and encourage local active transport modes and incidental social interactions.

A lesser matter is a need to resolve the current apparent high turnover of incumbents in the well-regarded Community Development Facilitator position and “Welcome” program.

Overview of findings and recommendations.

So what does this say about you and Renwick?

It's a good place to live.

Yes.

It's a good investment.

It's nice...

Investment in terms of?

Well raising a family and yeah resale I guess for the house further down the track yep.

1. Although Renwick is only newly-established and still being developed with as yet no on-site community facilities, the Study has through close engagement with residents nevertheless been able to determine various lessons about the health-related objectives of the development. Renwick presents as a contented healthy community, with a good-fit between its design and the “semi-rural” values of its residents - to the extent that some residents are prepared to “trade-off” long weekly commutes for the estate’s broader “lifestyle” benefits.
2. Residents exhibit a certain possessiveness towards the open, rural and natural area components of the estate, which they see as directly related to their overall health. In turn there will be an expectation that these aspects are maintained as the master plan is developed to completion, and in future long-term management practices.
3. Renwick comprises an urban-fringe low density and generally car-based residential area. As such it risks being typical of such areas which have given rise to current concerns about the impact on residents’ health from resultant lack of exercise. The design seeks to be innovative in this regard, prompted by a concern to not repeat existing the high levels of obesity evident in the region. As such Renwick has the potential to be a model for similar areas elsewhere, and for the retro-fit of existing residential areas in the region and other urban fringe locations. However, any such “model” also needs to include the learning that there have been some critical deficiencies in how the exemplary design intentions in Renwick have not been carried through in implementation.
4. Ensuring residents achieve and maintain adequate levels of physical activity is considered to be the matter most needing on-going attention. Residents currently report that they meet minimum recommended levels of physical activity. However most of this is via “moderate” recreation activities only (mainly gardening and walking around the estate). Such activities may not achieve the levels of exertion required to achieve the health benefits of physical activity, and these activities may not be maintained. It is of concern that the master planning of the open space areas of the estate provides for passive activities only. Attention needs to be given to the promotion of greater use of active transport modes and to amending the range of open space facilities to be provided to include active recreation uses. Participants indicate a potential to cycle more with the provision of dedicated routes they feel are safe.
5. One component of the estate design is that it include strong links with the existing community, including the provision of new facilities to be used by all (and formalised in a Voluntary Planning Agreement). However already there have been changes that need close attention to ensure the original objectives are achieved:

- (i) reasonably direct pedestrian and cycle links to Mittagong illustrated in the master plan cannot be achieved because they were proposed on land under different ownership, thus potentially reducing the uptake of these active transport links/modes. It is not known how this is to be addressed. An alternative cycle route along the Highway is unlikely to be used given safety concerns by residents, and the railway line presents a major obstacle to achieving a link to an existing well-connected cycle path.
 - (ii) contributions to a proposed leisure centre to provide for physical activity needs, have been replaced by contributions to a new Police Citizens Youth Club (under construction at the Mittagong sports centre at the time of this Report). This appears appropriate given an existing extensive range of active recreation facilities in the locality and the specific need for youth-focussed activities. Attention needs to be given to ensuring there are good active transport links to those existing facilities and to the new PCYC, and that the range of activities provided meets needs.
6. Residents cite good levels of social interaction. This should increase as the estate matures in terms of population and with development of the Village Centre and open space facilities. A particular local feature comprising a stroll around the estate meeting neighbours and checking out developments has been cited. This is worth investigating and promoting as a possible Renwick “institution”, being positive for both physical activity and social interaction.
 7. There is an expressed desire for an interim “neighbourhood focus” prior to establishment of the Village Centre, which may not occur for some time. This should be investigated, possibly by early establishment of a permanent café or the like, or by temporary “pop-up” venues.
 8. Given the small local market catchment, the proposed Village Centre will prove a challenge in terms of providing the range of facilities participants expect, including fresh foods, and with opening hours that cater to commuters’ hours and weekend use. An innovative approach to the design and tenure arrangements will be critical; “conventional” responses may not yield the desired healthy built environment results. The intended inclusion of a community centre to also serve surrounding residential areas is a positive in this regard given the potential to increase patronage to Centre businesses.
 9. There are no issues in respect to the availability and access to fresh foods even though there are no existing shops in Renwick. Access is facilitated by the “default” use of the motor car in any case for all other activities. That said, the provision of healthy fresh food in the new Village Centre will reduce this dependence and encourage local access by active transport modes, and incidental social interactions. Again, the provision of such shops may require specific innovative attention given the small local market.
 10. The “Welcome” program and Community Development Facilitator position received favourable comment. Care will be needed in terms of timing the completion of this program to ensure there is no “gap” prior to the community centre and other more informal social engagement facilities (eg. recreation facilities, the Village Centre focus) coming on-stream. The current apparent high turnover of incumbents in this position needs to be resolved.
 11. Two “annoyances” expressed by participants should be addressed as part of ensuring overall “wellbeing”: the speed of traffic on Renwick Drive, and the availability of medical services.

Physical Activity
“Getting people active”

Facilitating “active transport”

Facilitating recreational physical activity

Current condition

There is no use of active transport modes given: infrequency of bus and train services, cold temperatures discouraging cycle use (particularly when commuting late), poor bike parking at railway station, no direct pedestrian or safe cycle route to Mittagong or nearby facilities (which are otherwise close in a straight-line), and a general culture that this is a rural car-based area. Original direct cycle and walking route through estate to Mittagong in Master Plan not now (if ever) achievable.

A willingness to use cycles (for non-work trips) expressed – but requires a safe, direct route (which could also then be used by children).

Little apparent thought given by residents to future transport needs when not able to drive a car (due to age or disability).

The “casual” nature of the bus service (hail the driver, no designated stops) does not induce use – but rather confusion.

Current condition

Recommended hours of activity are achieved, but mainly by walking and gardening which may not achieve required levels of exertion. Activities also currently limited by short length and variety of walking paths, lack of exercise stations and other facilities. An expectation that these be provided with development of the open space areas – but the plans currently propose only passive pursuits, and funding for a leisure centre now allocated to a police youth club. Long commutes for some workers limits available time mid-week. Little apparent use of existing good range of active recreation facilities elsewhere in the local area (and which currently generally require car access). Footpaths on one side of roads cited as a frustration, but is unlikely to impact on activity levels (more a safety problem for young children).

Response

Master planning of cycle routes should be re-visited - respondents indicate potential for more cycling if direct, safe routes established to Mittagong and other local facilities. Cycle route along to Hume Highway unlikely to achieve this given safety concerns. Safe bike parking facilities need to be established at these destinations.

Existing bus service needs to be promoted, and made a more legible.

The proposed Village Centre should promote local walking and cycling (but direct routes from the eastern precincts will be required).

Otherwise, “active transport” unlikely to ever comprise a large proportion of trips in this semi-rural area – other recreational physical activities will be needed to compensate.

Response

The progressive development of open space areas should be re-planned to include formal and informal active recreation facilities, and organisation of group activities investigated. Development of walking and cycling paths in the open space and other areas should include a *variety* of circuits and interconnected routes to maintain interest and choice of length. Connecting paths to Mittagong and existing local active recreation facilities should be provided – as both access to those facilities and destination routes in themselves (worth reviewing existing Bicycle Plan to now incorporate needs and concerns of Renwick residents now that the estate is occupied). Planning of activities within and access to the PCYC important to ensure it is well-targeted to youth physical (and social) activity needs.

Social Interaction.
 “Connecting and strengthening communities”

**Facilitating incidental
n’hood interaction**

Making community spaces

Build for crime prevention

Current condition

General feeling that there is a satisfactory level of interaction from incidental meetings on the streets, notwithstanding there is no specific neighbourhood focus as yet. Suggestion this is due to the semi-rural “country” ambience (and an identity as more than a dormitory suburb). Interesting suggestion by residents of an occasional evening social stroll. Some potential for future eastern precincts to be more “isolated” from this early established “community”. Good appreciation of the work of the Community Development Facilitator cited.

Current condition

A clear request for early establishment of a coffee shop/ cafe to act as a neighbourhood social focus, plus a more formal space for activities (which will be met in the future with the planned community centre). Favourable comment about the rectangular street design, suggesting it is seen as a positive community space. But also safety concern from speed of through traffic on Renwick Drive (in turn causing stress). Existing community spaces in Mittagong could possibly be “extended” into Renwick by provision of better “active transport” access.

Current condition

Residents feel safe, and raise no issues or concerns. Street lighting, although sparse (to retain the “rural” night-sky) is considered acceptable for the locality.

Response

Existing street interactions and “country” ambience likely to remain, but worth promoting as newer precincts open. Incidental interactions should increase when the village centre focus and recreation facilities in open spaces developed. Active transport links and common recreation facilities between the older and newer areas will be important. The Community Development Facilitator function is important – care needs to be taken in determining the finish date and to resolve an issue of high turnover.

Response

Development of the planned village centre will generate a needed neighbourhood focus. Consider early (or interim) establishment of a coffee shop/café/food van to meet an expressed demand. Development of open space should include specifically designed social foci (refer also response on need for active recreation facilities). Make provision for better connecting pedestrian and cycle paths into Mittagong itself. Deal with traffic speed issues in Renwick Drive.

Response

No existing issues or concerns requiring a response. Ensure detailed design of future parts of the estate, particularly the Village Centre and silo area re-use adopt “safer by design” criteria (as cited in the *Healthy Urban Development Checklist*).

Nutrition
“Providing healthy food options”

Facilitating access to healthy food.

Promote responsible food advertising.

Current condition

Availability of fresh food is not a problem, though entails a car trip (as evidenced in the sales brochure-below!) to Mittagong and/or local farmers markets (but a need for a fresh fish retailer is cited).



Current lack of local shops cited more in relation to lack of a local social focus and convenient purchase of forgotten items. Propensity to grow own food is variable – some do others cite time and climate as constraints. An earlier “herb network “ established as a community development” exercise. Interest in a community garden cited, but requires an allocation of land. Quality of diet not a particular concern, but quantity is for some.

Current condition

Awareness of the importance of fresh food does not appear to be an issue. There is no current advertising or availability of any food (healthy or non-healthy foods) in Renwick itself. The residential zoning of the suburb means prominent advertising panels are unlikely. A community garden or allotments, and the possibility of market stalls or food vans and the like will give a presence to healthy foods.

Response

Ensure the design and tenure management of the Village Centre gives prominence to healthy food, and provides spaces for different food outlets. It is not known if the Renwick population will support local retailing of all fresh food needs – but provision of larger floor space premises may encourage regionally-targetted business(es). Allocate some of the (extensive) open space areas for a community garden/allotments as a valid “open space” use. Establish an associated management structure. The herb network may need to be re-invigorated. Establishment of a safer, direct cycleway to Mittagong may encourage “active transport” to food shops there.

Response

Ensure the design and (lease) management of the new local shopping centre gives prominence (including advertising) to healthy food shops, and diminishes prominence of less healthy foods. A community garden or allotments and possible re-invigoration of the herb network will give healthy foods a presence in Renwick. Provision of managed spaces for different food outlets (market stalls, food vans and the like) can also increase the visibility of healthy foods.