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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

# George Town HUB

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*Presented to His Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the  
Public Works Committee Act 1914.*

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## MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Mr Harriss (Chairman)  
Mr Hall

House of Assembly

Mr Booth  
Mr Brooks  
Ms White

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To His Excellency the Honourable Peter Underwood, AC, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY

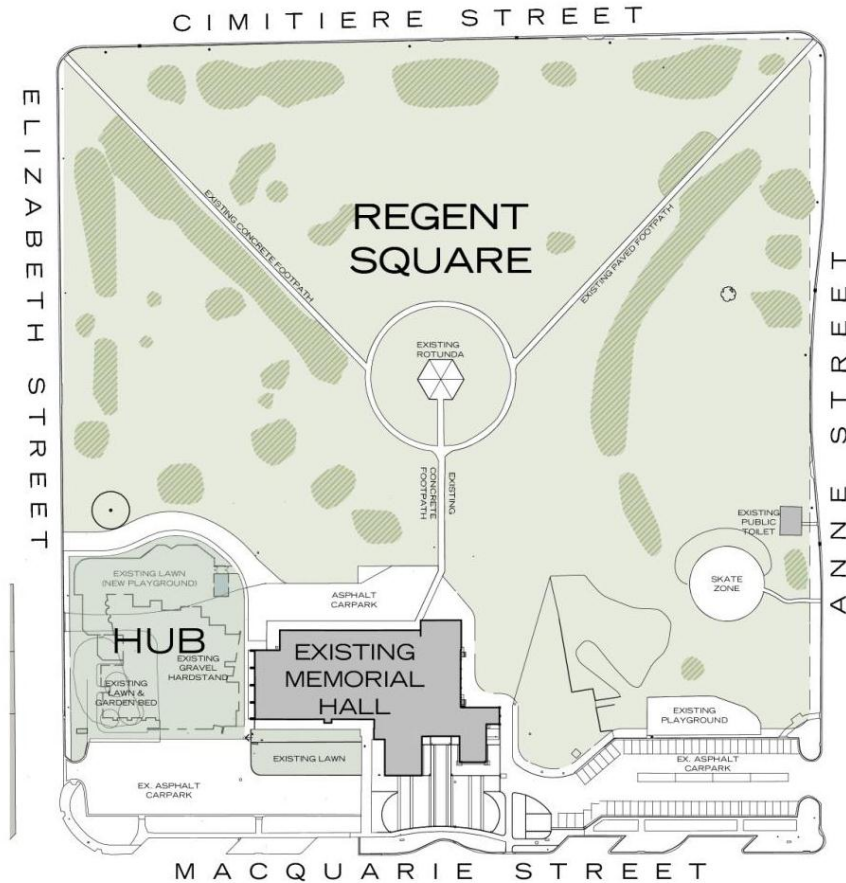
The Committee has investigated the following proposal: -

**The construction of a new George Town HUB which includes a Child and Family Centre, Service Tasmania shop and Library and Information Network Centre (LINC)**

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the Public Works Committee Act 1914 (the Act).

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This reference recommended that the Committee approve the establishment of an integrated services Hub to benefit the community of George Town. The proposed George Town Hub at Regent Square will operate as an integrated service centre, where the three principal partners, Learning and Information Network Centre (LINC) Tasmania, Service Tasmania (including Centrelink) and a Child and Family Centre (CFC), will work in collaboration to deliver a range of services for the George Town community.
- 2.2 The objective of the Hub concept is to bring together under one roof, a range of complementary State Government services that provide access to information, learning, government transactions and services for children and families in a friendly and welcoming setting.
- 2.3 The Department of Education (DOE) submitted that the placement of the Hub is crucial to its success. Centrally located in the town centre, the Hub is in close proximity to other services such as doctors, chemists, supermarkets and banks. The location is easily accessible and close to parking and public transport.
- 2.4 DOE submitted that the site at Regent Square had been chosen as it is open and flexible and makes it easy for clients to be exposed to, and join in, a wide range of services and programs. The new Hub is proposed to be located on the edge of the central public open space, Regent Square. It is sited directly adjacent to the Memorial Hall at the end of George Town's primary commercial precinct. This places the Hub in a central location for ease of public access to a building that provides numerous community civic services and functions.



- 2.5 The full submission of the Department of Education in support of this reference is published on the website of the Committee at:-

<http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Joint/works.htm>

### 3. PROJECT COSTS

- 3.1 The following tables set out the funding source for the project and a breakdown of the elements which comprise the total project cost:

<b>Source of funds</b>	<b>Amount (\$)</b>
Capital Investment Program – Learning Infrastructure Network Centre (LINC) and Child & Family Centre (CFC) funding	6,900,000
<b>Total project funds</b>	<b>6,900,000</b>
<b>Project costs - description</b>	<b>Amount (\$)</b>
Building works, site works and services	5,000,000
Contingency allowance	300,000
Architectural fees – design, documentation and contract administration	540,000
Architectural & sub-consultant fees – RMPAT appeal process	70,000
Statutory approvals (authority fees and permits)	30,000

Furniture and equipment	600,000
<i>Art for Public Buildings Scheme</i>	80,000
Other costs – escalation allowance	100,000
Miscellaneous costs	30,000
Post-occupancy costs	150,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,900,000</b>

- 3.2 The following table provides a breakdown of the indicative costs of the major components to the building works, site works and services:

<b>Project costs - description</b>	<b>Amount (\$)</b>
Building Works	2,850,000
Site Works and Landscaping	700,000
Mechanical Services	650,000
Electrical Services	600,000
Plumbing and Drainage	200,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,000,000</b>

#### 4. EVIDENCE

- 4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry on Tuesday, 22 October last with inspections of: the site of the proposed works; the existing State Library facility; the existing Service Tasmania ‘shop’; the ‘Fire Station School’, located in the Uniting Church Hall, Goulburn Street; and proposed alternative sites at Friend Street and Anne Street.
- 4.2 The Committee conducted public hearings in the George Town Council Chamber, Municipal Offices, Anne Street, George Town on 22 October and 26 November last and in Hobart on 12 December last. The following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-
- Andrew Finch, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Education;
  - Jenny Rayner, Director, LINC Tasmania;
  - Cheryl Larcombe, Principal Project Officer, Early Years and Schools, Department of Education;
  - Heath Clayton, Principal, Artas Architects;
  - Dr Sennin Charles;
  - Karen Rabbett;
  - Dr Jane Zimmerman;
  - Richard Nicholls;
  - Lorraine Wootton;
  - Desmond Wootton;
  - Debbie Rainbow;
  - Peter Cox;
  - Graeme Neilson;
  - Helen Flanagan;

- Gerald O’Doherty;
- Brenda Gunst;
- John Watts;
- Daryl Camino;
- John Austin; and
- Justine Brooks-Bedelph.

## Overview

### 4.3 Mr Finch provided the following overview of the proposed works:-

*Our submission seeks the approval of the committee to establish an integrated services hub to benefit the community of George Town. The proposed George Town hub at Regent Square will operate as an integrated service centre, where the three principal partners, LINC - Learning Information Network Centre - Tasmania, Service Tasmania and a child and family centre will work in collaboration to deliver a range of integrated services for the George Town community. The hub will bring together under one roof a range of complementary state government services that provide access to information, learning, government transactions and services for children and families in a friendly and welcoming setting. The hub model ensures that clients who visit the building for any one service are exposed to a new range of opportunities including adult literacy support, adult learning programs and services vital to the health and development of children.*

*The hub will provide library and information services, computers and internet access, public meeting spaces, community training programs, and learning and literacy support.*

*Child and family centres are multi-service centres which aim to meet the health and wellbeing, education and care needs of local children from before birth to age 5, as well as supporting and empowering families in their parenting role, strengthening local communities and offering pathways to employment. Child and family centres are part of the government's comprehensive strategy to give children the best possible start in life. The vision is that children are healthy, safe and curious learners, nurtured by confident, capable families, living in supportive communities.*

## Location

### 4.4 The proposed location of the Hub was a focus of many submissions and witnesses. Mr Finch provided the following evidence in support of the proposed site:-

*In terms of the specific location of the hub, this is considered crucial to its success. The following principles have been used in considering an appropriate location: close to shops and other services such as banks, supermarkets, cafes, to attract clientele whilst performing other business; high level of street appeal and visibility to passing traffic; easy pedestrian access for convenient parking or public transport points, and the ability to undertake multiple tasks from a single starting point; suitable for out-of-hours access, good street presence and visibility with activity levels after hours to increase security of staff and clients; land in public ownership; the budget does not include a land acquisition component.*

*The Regent Square site meets all the above principles for the hub. It is centrally located in the town centre. It would be in close proximity to other services, such as doctors, chemists, supermarkets, banks and the council. The Regent*

*Square location is easily accessible and close to parking and public transport. The new building has been designed to minimise the impact on the square. It has been designed to sit alongside other civic buildings that are already on the square. The new building will only take up around 6.4 per cent of the total land area.*

*Importantly, numerous other sites were considered, however, these did not meet all the above principles, particularly the central location of Regent Square, better public access and proximity to shops and other services.*

*In conclusion, the selected site was chosen by key community stakeholders. The Department of Education has followed all due processes over several years throughout the planning, consultation and development stages of the project and also through several statutory processes including town planning and heritage considerations, with the best interests of the community in mind.*

- 4.5 The Committee questioned the witnesses as how the site selection criterion that ‘the facility be located so as to provide access to the maximum number of people distance of services on the centre of the town’ was arrived at and in particular an explanation of ‘pram walking distance was sought. Mr Finch responded:-

*They are our criteria for when we design something.*

*...Because it's right in the centre of the city. It has a range of transport and access options, and it was part of the earlier SIPS process that we undertook.*

*(Pram walking distance) is the same as any walking distance ... but what we've got to think of is that obviously people have to push a pram.*

*... I guess what we're trying to do is limit the distances as much as possible, and again, make sure that the service is provided as close as possible to other services and other transport options.*

- 4.6 The Committee questioned the witnesses as to where in the George Town area most families that would use the facility would be resident. Ms Larcombe responded:-

*The information that I have George Town is that the families with young children are spread fairly widely around the community, and also that some families live in outlying areas. We have those figures and we have the number of children in that age range. It seems that while some will be able to pram-walk, many families will have to be transported or use a vehicle to get the child and family centre.*

*...The SIPS data does provide a zonal breakdown but because the SIPS data was done at the beginning of the project and that would have been in 2008-09, that wouldn't be absolutely current but it would give some idea of the location of where families who have children in that age range, live.*

- 4.7 The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether it was fair to say that most clients of the Family Centre would be resident closer to the Port Dalrymple Primary School. Ms Larcombe responded:-

*Some of them do live closer to Port Dalrymple School.*

*I'm not sure about the majority but some do. But, for a number of reasons which Andrew has already alluded to, Port Dalrymple was not seen as the preferred option by the families with children in this age group or the community at large.*

- 4.8 The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether other locations or alternative ‘stand-alone’ configurations of the various services were considered. Mr Finch responded:-

*We have had discussions around sites, as I mentioned before, over the last three to four years given that there might have been some risk associated with the prime site that is considered the number one priority. It is natural for people to do that. Importantly, this site, for all the reasons that we have already talked about in terms of its proximity to services and accessibility, is the prime site. As we have already said, we do want to establish a hub. We don't want to have a stand-alone CFC and a stand-alone LINC because that will not let us deliver the key policy objectives about bringing services together under one roof and providing complementary joined-up services for the community. There are many benefits in that integrated approach and I have mentioned some of them - even our staff having a multi-skilled workforce that can work across all clients that come in and improve customer experiences. There are more opportunities for engagement and more efficient use of resources, capturing people that fall through the gaps. Our staff are trained so that when someone comes in with one enquiry, we might observe that they have some literacy problems; we can quickly refer them for literacy assistance. We would lose all of those benefits if we have stand-alone services.*

*... We have provided information about various sites and issues with sites. We have done significant work following on from what the community did around site identification. We have done work with the council around sites. The secretary of the department and myself came to the council early last year for the purpose of discussing and considering other sites. Following the donation, we looked at a bit of detailed consultant-based analysis of the Anne Street site and took it out to our stakeholders. But again, the prime site of Regent Square remains the site considered the best one to deliver these joined-up integrated services for the George Town community.*

- 4.9 The Committee cited evidence provided to the Committee on a previous inquiry into the George Town District Hospital where Phil Morris, A/Manager Strategic Development, Aged Rural & Community Health said “Our aim here at George Town, as we consider this building, is to have a new and integrated one-stop facility which combines hospital services along with community health and welfare services. This notion of a one-stop facility was one of the crucial phrases when we first started talking about this back in 2000. I think it is a neat little phrase which encapsulates the idea that health and community welfare services are all in the one spot so everyone knows where to go ... We want to try to strengthen our health promotion and community health approach and obviously, again, this one-stop facility will give us the capacity to improve our information with the community.” The Committee questioned the witnesses as to why the current proposal did not fall under the scope of the services envisaged to have been provided out of the George Town District Hospital. Mr Finch responded:-

*This hub is providing different services because we are providing LINC. The major partners in this project are the LINC services, the Service Tasmania services and the ... important third partner to this project is the CFC.*

Ms Larcombe added:-



It sounds to me that you're talking about a health centre whereas what we are talking about within the child and family centre and the LINC is very much focused on learning and the capacity for learning across the spectrum for children, families and for other adults in the community, as well as Service Tasmania for those transactional services. We are about early childhood education, children's health and wellbeing, adult learning and family support services, and combinations of services.

...The focus in a health centre is on a much more clinical approach to the provision of services, whereas we are looking at something that is much more available to all of the community, not a segregated or siloed focus on a deficit. We are looking at trying to focus on what's available for everybody within the CFC for all families in that age range.

## **Community consultation**

### **4.10 The Committee questioned Mr Finch as to whether he was able to confirm role of the Local Enabling Group (LEG). Mr Finch responded:-**

... in about 2009 when a LEG group was formed, broadly constituted with parent representatives, members of Neighbourhood House, members of Gateway, Anglicare, our community inclusion worker and community member from the department, representatives of schools - a broadly constituted committee. They met on several occasions and agreed that their preference was to integrate with the LINC, for all those reasons that we have already talked about, in the town centre and rather than being at a separate location. At that stage there were a number of sites being considered, including the school sites but there were some concerns around the schools sites as they could potentially alienate a number of clients, whereas integration with the LINC offered clients a wider range of services and access to the broader community. The LEG group determined that they wanted to integrate with the LINC and be in the centre of town. A number of sites were considered and the Regent Square site was considered the best site, both to suit the physical characteristics required for a centre of this size as well as, importantly, the access to shops and other services. That occurred in 2009.

... from 2009 to 2013, people have started to think about other options - 'If our distinct preferred option does not become available through these other processes that are occurring, what might we do?'. I think we have seen this morning that some of the children's services people are trying to operate from at the moment are completely substandard. People have had a long road; they have obviously been frustrated about not having the centre so, it is only natural that people have thought, 'If this does not happen, what might we do so?'. Other options have obviously come into play because the primary, distinct, preferred option has been considered at threat for various reasons across the journey.

So, it is fair to say that at a point - I think it was probably around this time last year - when we consulted again with LEG group around a site that was offered for donation in Anne Street. We had feedback from the LEG group that that site was not considered suitable for a CFC, given its proximity to other services. That was the first important decision they made and then whilst they were considering that site issue, they then also discussed the option of what they might do if the distinct first preference was not available. They did agree that if that was the case, if the site was not going to be available, that they would obviously want a site and have a stand-alone CFC. My point is that we have had a long journey. People have started to become frustrated about the process and obviously want this important service for the community. Across that

*journey, other options have come into play and other fall-back considerations. But the point remains that there is a clear, distinct preference for a hub - a combined joined-up service provision for the community and that remains today.*

- 4.11 The Committee questioned Mr Finch as to whether a stakeholder group had resolved by a 27:0 vote, that a stand-alone Child and Family Centre was the preferred project. Mr Finch responded:-

*I have a report here from the parents and friends of the George Town Child and Family Centre which was done around the Anne Street site assessment. As I mentioned, it was about 12 months ago; it was actually 30 August 2012. This record I have indicates it was 22 votes for a stand-alone CFC at Regent Square at the time; so, not 27 but 22.*

- 4.12 The Committee further questioned Mr Finch as to what role the George Town Council had played in the State Infrastructure Planning Process (SIPS) consultative process. Mr Finch responded:-

*The SIPS process is a government process involving people in Infrastructure, Energy and Resources and DPAT. But consultation and discussion has always occurred with the George Town council. The George Town council in fact have had several motions over this journey as well about a site. At one of their meetings, which I will try and get the date of, they did discuss a number of sites and provide that information back to the department for further consideration. Some of those sites were included in what we looked at this morning - the Friend Street site was there. There was a site in Cimitiere Street and the Anne Street was amongst those sites. The council has been, I guess, square and centre to discussions about a site because of the importance of this for the community. The council have regularly been consulted about what sites might be available.*

### **Car park**

- 4.13 The Committee questioned the witnesses as to how many car parking spaces were required to be provided for the proposed development. Mr Clayton responded:-

*...I am looking at some information out of the planning report. It was saying that the proposed hub needed 90 spaces.*

*... The Memorial Hall needed 40, plus 80 during functions. That totalled to 127. I am quoting off the traffic impact report - they reduced it to 119 because it included the library relocating into the hub. It also said that there were 151 spaces nearby; so it totalled 323 in the area. The process that we did with this calculation wasn't necessarily about saying, 'This is what we need; this is how many car parks you need just for that one use'. We have looked at it as an integrated whole of the existing uses and came up through our traffic engineer with what was deemed to be an appropriate number of car parking spaces.*

*What we have done under this process is to use performance criteria where we have looked at the multiple uses and the demand and come up through our traffic impact assessment to ascertain the appropriate level of car parking. In this report, whilst it might have said 'originally needs to be 120', it is only 40 on a day-to-day basis and the need up to 120 is during functions. Now the functions obviously don't occur every day; they may not occur whilst the hub is in operation - it could be after hours. So our traffic impact assessment weighs up all these scenarios and looks at the uses. It might be that under this integrated approach that we are trying to do with this building, we are looking*

*at instead of actually multiple stops - you can park once and do multiple trips in this location which is one of the main reasons drivers use this location.*

- 4.14 When questioned by the Committee as to how many spaces were allocated for clients of the CFC component of the Hub, Mr Clayton responded:-

*We have never looked at it as an individual breakdown; we have looked at the hub as a whole unit. But in other child and family centres, we have generally allowed 12 car parking spaces.*

- 4.15 The Committee questioned the witnesses as to what impact, if any, the proposed facility would have on the business sector. Mr Clayton responded:-

*That's one of the reasons we went with the traffic impact assessment that looked at the whole site, not just this site as a stand-alone silo as such. Mr Eaton's report looked into the full traffic movements around that and took that into consideration. The whole concept of this hub is that when you're coming in to the CBD you're doing multiple activities, you're not just coming in, doing one thing, going and then coming back in at another time, so this is an integrated approach, and right down to the traffic impact assessment we had prepared as part of our planning submission, that was taken into account. I think 130 spaces are proposed which will include the existing carparking spaces and the newly formed ones at the northern end, plus there's a further 150 parking spaces in and around the shopping centre areas, and that was deemed to be appropriate to the nature of the development and the other aspects going on.*

- 4.16 The Committee questioned Mr Clayton as to whether further development of Regent Square would be required should the provision of carparking spaces for the proposed works prove to be insufficient. Mr Clayton responded:-

*We can't consider further development; that would be a council decision and they'd have to go through the whole planning process as well. All that we considered when our traffic engineer was engaged was to look at our site, the associated areas and what the impact would be. We submitted that report as part of our planning application. Mr Eaton gave extensive evidence at the planning commission. The planning commission derived that his methodology and evidence was sufficient and met the needs of this centre and the greater area.*

### **Child and Family Centre**

- 4.17 The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether there was a need for a Child and Family Centre in George Town. Ms Larcombe responded:-

*I suppose the opportunity was just right this morning (to take the Committee to the) fire station school ... and it happens in that little place every Tuesday and Thursday. I feel quite embarrassed that we have had to resort to that sort of facility for some of the children in this community who have, we might say, the highest need. Even just talking about it makes me feel really uncomfortable that we have this inequity here in George Town in that provision. When I see the other 11 communities where we have been able to develop child and family centres in the last three or four years, the difference in the provision of what is available for the child and the family is significant. Our child and family centres are purpose-built facilities focused on what we know as best early learning, and health and well-being provision for children. They are*

very much child-focused and account for the child having the opportunity to be in the centre with their parents. So, it is very much a family-centred approach to what might be available for children. I see it as very much available for all children in the community. The group we saw this morning were special children, if you like, with what we would call developmental or special needs, but really a child and family centre is available for all children and their families as a place to provide the best quality early learning environments as well as really easy access to health services such as the child health nurse.

In many of our child and family centres now we also have antenatal, midwifery and other services around other sorts of playgroups and therapeutic services. We are seeing high usage of those centres by families, increased use across the short time those centres have been open. The focus on working with the child is foremost in our thinking and what's best for the child within the family, and that idea of working really closely in partnership with families. We are moving away from what we've been traditionally seen as 'doing' to the family, if you like, as compared now to working with the family around what they see as their needs and how they can best be met within that integrated service delivery model.

### **Building design**

- 4.18 The Committee questioned Mr Clayton to describe the design process. Mr Clayton responded:-

Artas was originally engaged by the Department of Education to design the hub as a concept. When we started the process there was a detailed functional brief on a child and family centre and the hub concept was still new so there was a series of meetings with DPAC and other department heads around how this concept would evolve. The building itself is largely driven by the functional requirements of the briefs. The overarching intention of the hub is to provide an integrated service to the community by providing shared resources for staff to allow them, rather than working in isolation on various things, to come together in a shared area - as was alluded to by Jenny and Andrew - to pick up other things that might normally fall between the cracks. The design itself largely relates to the functional brief in the floor plan layout and the sizes and things like that. As I touched on in my opening statement, the building form and scale is largely derived from its location, its adjacency to the existing Memorial Hall and the extension, and also to Regent Square.

Particularly and deliberately the aim with the design is to keep a corporate end, which is the front end that faces the car park to the south. This is a little bit more corporate in its appearance, but as we work our way around Elizabeth Street the forms become much more playful, much softer, with a curved roof; even the materials are moving into more natural timber and plywood, use of colour and the like. We are looking to get as much natural light in through those child and family centres as we can. Then there is the extensive play area which we found to be fundamental in the child and family centres.

- 4.19 The Committee questioned Mr Clayton as to what discretion he had to design in such a way as to reduce construction cost. Mr Clayton responded:-

The responsible way in any design is to be sympathetic to where you are. My personal belief is that you don't add the frilly bits for the sake of the frilly bits. It's a matter of meeting demand. Once this thing is built and we walk away, there are a series of users who have to use this after I've gone away, so it needs to be a usable building. The systems and the materials and everything that we have put into this have been developed over many years of what we know

*works in schools and public buildings, and there can be a slightly elevated cost to some of those things, but across a lifecycle they are actually a most appropriate use. So you are not coming back in five or ten years and having to do maintenance and things like that. It's a balance between what the costs are upfront between ongoing costs, but I think the materials and the design that we have here is appropriate here for the specific nature of this building.*

*... it's appropriate that we create a building scale and a building mass that's appropriate for its need. I think it would be fairly inappropriate to put a 2.4-metre standard house ceiling flat across this and only have the whole building 3 metres high. It would look out of context in what we are doing.*

### **Opposition to the proposal**

4.20 In response to the public invitation for submissions, the Committee received a relatively high number of submissions from concerned members of the public for works of this nature. Of the 27 submission received and taken into evidence by the Committee, 22 opposed the proposal for a variety of reasons. The principal arguments proposed by such evidence fell into the following categories: the historic nature of Regent Square; the questionable co-location of services; the attractiveness of alternative sites; the loss of parking amenity; unutilised space; and the flawed nature of other planning processes.

4.21 Evidence on each of these areas of concern was communicated to the Committee both in the written submissions, other exhibits and documentation and in verbal evidence to the Committee at the hearings. As similar evidence on each area was repeated by many of the witnesses, the extracts reproduced hereunder provide a summary of the considerations received in respect of each point.

### **Historic nature of Regent Square**

4.22 A significant component of the evidence received by the Committee in relation to this reference focused upon the incursion upon the historic aspect of Regent Square the proposed works would have. Indeed it was described by Mr Nicholls as 'continuing the desecration' of Regent Square.

4.23 In his written submission, Mr Cox summarised the history of Regent Square as follows:-

*(Regent Square) is the oldest public park in Tasmania. Older than City Park and Princes Square, Launceston, older than St David's Park and Franklin Square, Hobart. It was established by Governor Macquarie for the use of the town, not of government.*

*It is a Crown reserve, reserved for recreation since 1891.*

*Since 1922 it has been leased to the Council and people of George Town exclusively for use as public recreation.*

*It is registered on the Tasmanian Heritage List for its association with Governor Macquarie as a rare example of early town planning and for its association with the people of George Town as a place of recreation and community events.*

4.24 Evidence was received that such history provided the basis upon which heritage tourism to George Town should be promoted as evidenced by the submission of Mr Watts:-

*... This is one of the most important aspects of the future development of our community here. To do anything to have a relatively serious impact on that is detrimental to George Town's future. I am involved with the Low Head Pilot Station Museum and over the last few years I would have spoken at length to several thousand tourists. The reason they visit that place out there is because it is a museum. We get approximately 7 000 visitors a year. They love the area when they get here. It has remarkable beauty but also has unspoiled historical aspects that you cannot see anywhere else due to development and these sorts of things.*

*Schools are now visiting George Town on a regular basis because early Tasmanian colonial history is now part of the curriculum. George Town probably has the best examples of this anywhere in the state. It is easy to access, visible and we can see all the aspects of the river, where ships used to enter the river, the reefs they used to hit, and the development of the different communication aspects from signal flags through to telegraphs. People come down here and go through the three museums. They can see all this early history of Tasmania. This was the third area of Australia to be settled and it is something we have to maintain and keep for the future. It is very much part of our future.*

*...We have all heard about there being a Macquarie town and there were several early Macquarie towns in New South Wales. Then here is New Norfolk and George Town in Tasmania. What we should be doing is forming a coalition of early Macquarie towns so we have conferences between New South Wales and Tasmania and develop this whole tourism potential that is available to us. Macquarie was the first person in George Town to do town planning. Anyone studying town planning at university anywhere in Australia should be coming to George Town to see what a Macquarie town looked like because it is still more intact than any other Macquarie town in Australia.*

4.25 Dr Zimmerman submitted:-

*... due to the historical nature of Regent Square, I thought it should not be destroyed, more from a tourism point of view. In George Town we are losing our manufacturing base as time goes on because it is ageing and not going to be viable for much longer. I think we should be focusing on tourism and the history is an important part of that tourism. We have a beautiful town but if we destroy the centre of it with a huge building people are not going to want to spend time in George Town.*

*.... The design of the building is totally not in keeping with the rest of the neighbourhood around it. We have heritage-listed houses, a heritage hotel, we have tourism things, and it just does not fit in.*

*... It will block off the view from the main street if people are driving down to see if there's a park in behind there. It butts almost right up onto Elizabeth Street and is just too big for the part of the square it's on*

## Co-location of services

4.26 The Committee received a body of evidence that opposed the works on the basis that that the co-location of services was inadvisable. There were essentially two threads to this argument, first, that the existing 'LINC', Online Access Centre and Service Tasmania outlet were adequate and second, that the proposed Child and Family Centre should properly be a stand-alone facility located in proximity to one or other of state schools. The following extracts summarise these points:-

4.27 In his written submission, Mr Cox submitted:-

*George Town's existing library and Online Access Centre ("Digital Hub") are working satisfactorily. The existing OLAC is well run and well supported by the community. Threatened with a loss of government funds, the Digital Hub is now funded by the Commonwealth Government. The Hub proposals are an unnecessary duplication of services. There is no need to move the library 50 metres into a new building, especially (as) there is no expansion of room for the library in the new centre and the potential for close liaison between the library and the Digital Hub already exists. Moreover, such a change will take services out of an already very much underutilised Council building, which has the ability to provide seven rooms for training. It has been suggested that the training rooms in the Hub would be available for community use. So are the rooms in the Memorial Hall and its extensions. There is NO community demand for extra meeting rooms.*

4.28 Appearing before the Committee at its first hearing in George Town, Mr Nicholls submitted:-

*It is my view that the co-location of the proposed services in this development in George Town is not the most fiscally prudent or efficient way to achieve the desired outcomes. Nor is the proposed development site the most suitable location to achieve the desired outcomes in terms of the first principles.*

*The intent is to improve the lives of the George Town residents by providing economic, social and cultural stimulation into the region. The proposal is for the community to repair a fragmented and demographically divided community that provides support to disadvantaged parents and their vulnerable children for years to come.*

*It is my view that the government has used the emotive issue of parents and children to promote their own agenda. The government's active encouragement and polarisation of this issue in George Town has been disgusting. They have used and manipulated vulnerable parents. The reality is the CFC component comprises only approximately 30 per cent of the proposed hub.*

*We have not seen any of the providers of the other services demonstrate their support for the hub, or even being encouraged to do so by the government. Far from trying to find a solution that addresses the first principle needs and the desires of the wider community, it has actively sought to stifle mediation, public contributions and any effort by all interested parties to explore and develop an alternative to the proposal which would garner the community's full support.*

*It is my opinion that the community has been held to ransom by the Minister for Children, who on more than one occasion stated that the development is to go on the square or not at all in George Town; it would go to Sorell. Employees within the existing services have received loosely veiled threats that their jobs*

or services are at risk if they speak out or indeed communicate what the government have been planning behind the scenes.

You will hear lots of justification from the supporters and proponents of the development - jobs, services, delivery models. Much of this is supported by the wider community. They are also 100 per cent in favour of a child and family centre in George Town.

4.29 Mrs Rabbett in her evidence at the hearing submitted :-

*Why would you move a library from there to there just for the sake of moving a library? We have the LINC there in a nice new building, so why would you move it from there to there? You are moving the hospital services to there, leaving that empty. The ladies at Service Tasmania here are in a building with a safe environment, they are collecting money and it is all safe here. You are going to move them down there to an integrated service you are going to be offering people. I am not quite sure what they really mean by integrated service. Does that mean that the librarian is also going to be issuing my licence, because I do not want the librarian to know that I have been there to see someone about a medical issue or that I am a little bit depressed or I have other money problems? I don't want everyone at every counter to know that or have access to that. That is just really an invasion of privacy. I think if you go and see a doctor, you go and see a doctor. If you go and get a library book, you go and get a library book. You park your car once in George Town and within five minutes you are wherever you want to be.*

4.30 Mrs Wootton, in her written submission to the Committee, related the proposed works to the redevelopment of the George Town District Hospital and cited evidence to the Committee in its inquiry on that reference that the hospital redevelopment would “provide a new and integrated one-stop facility which combines hospital services along with community health and welfare services ... (where) health and community health and community welfare services are all on the one spot so everyone knows where to go. The opportunity for those services to work together for the good of the community is well enhanced”. Mrs Wootton submitted that:-

*... if the GTH&CC is fulfilling the promises in the excerpts ... it is already doing what the proponents of the Hub propose to do. It appears the Hub will be duplicating at least part of the role of this multi-purpose Health facility and it will result in services moving from the GTH&CC to the Hub.*

*Many residents express concern about the waste of money in duplicating what we already have.*

4.31 Ms Gunst summarised the sentiment of opponents of the works with regard to the co-location of some services with a ‘Hub’ when she appeared before the Committee:-

*... I do not believe it is a good idea to include a Centrelink facility with a hub or a child and family centre. Regarding people going to Centrelink, I believe it is their policy that if people are not working then they pressure them to get a job - any job. It may not suit them, but they need to work so they need to go there. Some of these people have their own ideas and concepts and therefore they get angry. There is a potential for violence. I do not see why small children should be exposed to this. There is the potential to do something here with the*



Centrelink. Service Tasmania also is in this area. Why have that included with a child and family centre? It is working well here.

### **Attractiveness of alternative sites**

- 4.32 As stated above, the Committee inspected two other sites, one in Friend Street (the 'YMCA site') and the other in Anne Street. Mr Nicholls made the following submission in relation to the siting of the proposed works:-

*We looked this morning at three sites here which I have done a very brief study on, in terms of how they stack up in relation to each other. ... we have, not in any particular order, the YMCA site, which is the first site we looked at after Regent Square; that's where the judo was. The second one on that list is the Anne Street site, which is the third site we looked at, where there is a concept design for a stand-alone centre. Then at the bottom is the Regent Square site. Those rings on those plans indicate 400 and 800-metre marks respectively. Mr Finch mentioned this morning that we were 1 000 metres from Regent Square at the YMCA site this morning. You could clearly see that from Regent Square, the YMCA site is approximately 400 metres from the existing Memorial Hall. Within the 400 metres of the YMCA site, the entire CBD of George Town is covered.*

*There are some dot points to highlight some of the things in relation to those locales. For me, it was interesting doing that exercise. I had thought that the Anne Street site was geographically the best located of those sites. After making that assessment, which I don't believe the government has done, I now think that the YMCA site is the best in terms of geographical location. However, if the Anne Street site were to have a stand-alone child and family centre on it, it would be directly opposite the existing community health and services provision, which is there in the square, and within 400 metres of the existing LINC building and services within the building we are in at the moment.*

*The other conclusion I was able to draw from doing this study, is that the Regent Square site is, of these three, the most remote site of any existing child service provisions within the town. It is the one that is furthest away, and has the least amount of residential amenity.*

*In the absence of any other site to be considered, and in conversation with Mr Nielson who has generously offered to make a donation to government about the Anne Street site, there has been very little conversation or even consideration of that site by the government. The community decided that we would try to fill that void and test that site to see if it would be possible to take a building off the site that we understood from the existing plans that have been provided through the hearings, to take a stand-alone child and family centre.*

- 4.33 Mr Cox suggested another alternative:-

*I think the most appropriate location of the lot, all other things being equal, would be on the south-eastern corner of the school grounds at the Port Dalrymple School. I see some real problems with it, especially in relation to the relocation of the LINC. Maybe the LINC would be better in the centre of George Town, especially because of the relationship with the digital hub which is our online access centre, which is thriving in the centre it's found in at the moment. But the placement of a stand-alone child and family centre on that corner would be reasonably close to some of the other facilities available for helping the disadvantaged people in town such as Wattle and Neighbourhood House. It would be fairly close to the houses which are in the far northern and north-western parts of the town, furthest away from the CBD, and yet it is no further*

away for the people who live in South George Town. That corner is in fact 200 metres closer to the service station which most people from South George Town pass on their way to town than is Regent Square.

4.34 When questioned by the Committee as to why, in his opinion, the Regent Square site was chosen, Mr Cox submitted:-

*It's a compromise, based on the fact, I believe, that the people of South George Town did not want the child and family centre located near Port Dalrymple School and I think that's what the compromise is.*

4.35 Mr Watts submitted that:-

*The location to me really is a problem. I believe that it has the potential to disenfranchise a lot of the more socially and financially disadvantaged people within the George Town area. George Town has a lot of public housing and this is a throw back to when we had large industries here, employing many more people than what there are now ...*

*So, because of these sorts of things, a lot of housing has become available. Of course, the government rightly moves people into public housing. A lot of the people who have moved to public housing in George Town are moved from other sites. So you have people who are struggling financially and socially. They have been moved away from the people that they went to school with, from their families and all of the social structures that they have had through their life. They come into a town like George Town and there is very little support. There is very little recreational activity here for people in evenings and things like that. There is very little opportunity for single people to meet other people and that sort of thing.*

*These people are based mainly in the north and north-east of George Town which is usually referred to as north George Town. If you wanted to put a site for a child and family centre which gives them easy access, you could not pick a much worse area than Regent Square, unless you put it around at Pipe Clay Bay or Low Head or somewhere like that. Most of these people, do not have their own transport or, if one member of the family is working, there is probably only one car in the family and that is used to get the person to work. So, it is certainly outside the 800 metre - which is the proponents' words - 800 metre area where walking is considered a viable proposition. ... The point I am trying to make here is that, there could be a lot of people disenfranchised by the siting of the CFC in that area.*

**Loss of parking amenity**

4.36 Opponents' arguments in respect of parking amenity were neatly summarised by Mr Nielson who submitted:-

*I have a summary about George Town car parking availability. Between 1953 and 2007, on the east and west car parks that you saw today, we had a 130 car parks that were built by the community. The Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, the Apex Club and all built it, plus 30 sites behind the old hall. That was 160 car parks up until 2007.*

*In 2007 when the hall development extension took place we lost 50 places - about 30 around the back and some other spaces in the front. The council conditioned a requirement for an additional 120 car parks, which you have heard, and they have spent about \$87 000 on that gravel patch that we are told today isn't a car park. I have it on record where the lead minister, the Premier, calls it a car park.*

Between 2011 and 2013, the proposed hub LINC, as determined by the proponent's traffic expert, was to require 90 spaces, but not a requirement of approval. The development was to be built on the site of a 60-space semi-developed car park. Here is the calculation before you. Sealed spaces currently available - 105 along Macquarie Street, plus 15 at the back of the new hall; that is 120. To be built or required to be built - nil, less the 90 that will be required for the hub LINC. This is the first time I have ever seen the council approve a project without asking for parking. We had a little coffee shop open a couple of years ago and they said, 'grab five or you can pay \$2 500'. If you take off that 90, it leaves only 30 in reality for our CBD.

... I'm contending there that this will reduce from something like 160 or 170 parking spaces available in the east and west car park and behind the original hall that were available up to 2007 down to only 30 car-parking spaces where anyone can park for more than one hour. There is restricted parking in the whole of the main street. That wouldn't even cover the people who work in the commercial premises. This is absolutely devastating. There has been no commitment to parking for this new development. It's taking away what was established for our CBD.

### **Unutilised space**

4.37 The Committee received evidence from a number of witnesses who submitted that the proposed works should not proceed on the basis that the space created particularly by the 'LINC' and Service Tasmania operations moving to the Hub would not subsequently be filled and would add to the already considerable unutilised public space in George Town. Indeed, it was argued that the Hub itself provided for public space in the form of meeting rooms for which there was no demand.

4.38 Mr Austin submitted:-

*If the development was to go ahead as planned on the site in Regent Square, it would double up on facilities we already have: the library, the call centre and Service Tasmania, which operates from this building, which is underutilised. If that were to happen, it would mean more empty spaces and these empty spaces at the present are a source of income to our council and the ratepayers of this community.*

4.39 Mrs Wootton added:-

*I believe the hub idea has been to put government services all under one roof, whether it is a LINC or a proper hub, to put them in a government building rather than council-owned buildings. In the past, councils and communities have had to provide facilities for things like libraries, courtrooms, Service Tasmania and that sort of thing, so communities have provided those facilities for government services and been paid lease money. Now the idea is to take those out of that so it is in government money and what happens to these vacant facilities when they are moved of the hall and council chambers? Service Tasmania is aware of this building. There is a large area bigger than this just next door that has not been used since 2002 which was the courtroom that we no longer need here. That building has not been used for council purposes since 2002 and this is going to mean more empty council buildings. It is going to take a long time for the government to recoup nearly \$7 million in the saving from leasing government council buildings, and communities are going to suffer because of this.*

### ***Flawed planning and other assessment processes***

- 4.40 The Committee received a considerable body of evidence concerning the other assessment processes the proposed works had been subjected to by other bodies. These included processes conducted by the George Town Council; the Resource Management and Planning Appeals Tribunal; the Tasmanian Planning Commission; and the Tasmanian Heritage Council.
- 4.41 Much of this evidence appeared to be given on the basis that the Committee was an appellate body able to review the proceedings and decisions of such other bodies. It was submitted that the Committee ought reject the proposed works on the basis that there were deficiencies in these processes.
- 4.42 The Committee was content to hear such evidence concerning the perceived inadequacy of other planning and assessment processes the proposed works had been subjected to by other bodies on the basis that it informed the Committee of some of the background to the development.
- 4.43 Such evidence did not however, contribute to the matters the Committee is obliged by the Act to have regard to in its deliberations.

## **5. DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE**

- 5.1 The following submissions were taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:
- Department of Education – George Town Hub – Regent Square, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, October 2013;
  - John Watts, Submission dated 9 October 2013;
  - Mary Bent, Chairperson, Tasmanian Library Advisory Board, Submission dated 8 October 2013;
  - Greg Johannes, Chair, Community Services Hubs Board, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Submission dated 1 October 2013;
  - Patricia Webb, Submission dated 30 September 2013;
  - Karen & Garry Rabbett, Submission dated 10 October 2013;
  - Peter Cox, Friends of Regent Square, Submission dated 14 October 2013;
  - Dr Jane Zimmerman, Copy of correspondence dated 13 December 2012 to Stephen Brown, General Manager, George Town Council;
  - Dr Sennin Charles, Submission undated;
  - Debbie Rainbow, Submission dated 15 October 2013;
  - Richard Nicholls, Submission dated 15 October 2013;
  - Lorraine Wootton, Submission dated 15 October 2013;
  - Gerald O’Doherty, Submission dated 15 October 2013;
  - Hon Ivan Dean MLC, Correspondence dated 9 October 2013;
  - Desmond Wootton, Submission dated 15 October 2013;
  - Graeme & Sue Neilson, Submission dated 14 October 2013;

- Brenda McMahon, Submission dated 15 October 2013;
- Helen Flanagan, Submission undated;
- Richard Nicholls, Supplementary submissions;
- Sennin Charles, Supplementary submission;
- Karen Rabbett, Supplementary submission;
- Jane Hudson, Submission
- Debbie Rainbow, Supplementary submission
- Parents and Friends of the George Town Child and Family Centre,
- Daryl Camino, Submission
- Richard Nicholls, Supplementary submissions
- Lorraine Wootton, Supplementary submission

## **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 The Committee gave very careful consideration to the propositions given by both proponents of the works and by those who opposed it. Arguments were well made and the Committee resorted to considering its statutory obligations. The Public Works Committee Act prescribes that when considering a proposed public work, the Committee must have regard to: the stated purpose of the works; the necessity or advisability of carrying the works out; and the present and prospective public value of the work.

### ***Stated purpose***

6.2 The Committee is satisfied that the proposed works will undoubtedly provide a facility that addresses the stated purpose, that is, to provide an integrated service centre where the three principal partners: Learning and Information Network Centre ('LINC'); Service Tasmania (including Centrelink) and a Child and Family Centre (CFC) will work in collaboration to deliver a range of services for the George Town community.

### ***Necessity etc.***

6.3 The Committee is satisfied that on the balance of the evidence received, the need for the Hub exists. The Committee accepts the evidence that the Hub model offers disadvantaged communities a facility where the centralization and integration of services will enable the delivery of a wide range of services to the benefit of the community and in a more cost effective manner by the removal of duplication of resources and equipment, reduction of administrative overheads and recurrent costs.

6.4 The Committee is of the clear view that the accommodation currently occupied by the 'LINC' is inadequate. The existing library operates from a room within the Memorial Hall which provides little scope for offering additional services such as an adult learning program given space constraints and the configuration of the building. The Committee noted that an Adult Literacy Co-ordinator has been accommodated within the

George Town Library but has no rooms for confidential discussion and no spaces in which clients and tutors can meet with any degree of privacy. The Committee accepts the submission that such a situation limits the effectiveness of the service and its value to the community.

- 6.5 The Committee is of the view that the current accommodation of the Service Tasmania outlet and On-line Access Centre respectively located in the Council Chambers and Memorial Hall is inadequate and inhibits any opportunity for resource sharing and collaboration.
- 6.6 The Committee notes that despite the opposition to the Hub on other points, the need for the establishment of a Child and Family Centre in George Town was unanimously supported. The Committee concurs with that view. A Child and Family Centre will provide a considerable range of long term benefits by meeting the health and wellbeing, education and care needs of local children from before birth to age 5 as well as supporting and empowering families in their parenting role, strengthening the local community and offering pathways to employment.

***Present and prospective public value of the work***

- 6.7 The focus of the Committee must necessarily be upon the future and the construction of a Hub will provide a state of the art facility for the George Town community for decades to come.
- 6.8 The Committee is of the view that the benefits resulting from the construction of the Hub will be of significant value to the wider community of George Town and outweigh the matters raised in opposition.

***Recommendation***

- 6.9 The Committee recommends the project in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted.

**Parliament House  
Hobart  
23 December 2013**

**Hon. A. P. Harriss M.L.C.  
Chairman**

## 7. DIVISIONS

7.1 In accordance with section 8(2) of the Act, the following Divisions were recorded:-

7.2 On the Question proposed – That the Committee recommends the project in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted;

The Committee divided.

AYES - 4

Mr Brooks

Mr Hall

Mr Harriss

Ms White

NOES - 1

Mr Booth

7.3 On the Question proposed – That section entitled “Conclusion and Recommendation” as read stand part of the Report;

The Committee divided.

AYES - 4

Mr Brooks

Mr Hall

Mr Harriss

Ms White

NOES - 1

Mr Booth

## 8. DISSENTING STATEMENT

8.1 The Honourable Member for Bass, Mr Booth, voted against the inclusion of the “Conclusion and Recommendation”.

8.2 Mr Booth provided the following Dissenting Statement:-

“The project should be rejected as being:-

1. Not fit for purpose.

The overwhelming weight of public evidence received was that the community wanted neither a “hub” nor any more buildings on Regent Square. Inadequate parking, causing commercial damage to surrounding shops with significant loss of Heritage value of Regent Square are matters that call for rejection of the project in that location.

Furthermore the location was not the preferred choice due to distance from schools and the availability of other land and buildings in closer proximity for either a green field development, or a retro fit.

2. The project is not an appropriate or prudent use of public money.

The evidence was very clear that a Child and Family Centre was justified but not the hub concept. The hub duplicates already existing services and will create further redundant real estate in an already over supplied and depressed market.

It is neither prudent, nor an appropriate use of public money to impose on a community a divisive and unwelcome project of this scale and nature when the evidence clearly showed that a more appropriate location and project scale could deliver, arguably better services, save considerable public money (in the order of some millions of dollars) and provide an opportunity to utilise existing land and or buildings already available for sale on the private market.

The project is an extravagant waste of public money and an example of political hubris, rather than careful, rational and responsible expenditure of scarce public funds and should be rejected in the expectation that a standalone CFC in a more appropriate location, with attendant savings of public money be proposed.

**Parliament House  
Hobart  
23 December 2013**

**K. D. Booth M.P.**