

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Friday, 20 May 2022 2:22:44 PM  
**Attachments:** [Lismore CBD Proposal .. Ridley Bell.pdf](#)

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## Your details

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as** A business owner

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**Submission type** I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public** I give my consent for this submission to be made public

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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## Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

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## Supporting documents or images

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**Attach files**

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- [Lismore CBD Proposal ... Ridley Bell.pdf](#)

## Thinking out of the Square ... BUT UP !

### Introduction

The February 28<sup>th</sup> Flood and the flood that occurred 4 weeks later were 2 of the highest 6 floods on record, and occurred just as Lismore was beginning to recover from the 2017 flood, which at that stage was the third highest flood in recorded history,.

Whilst I have concerns regarding the future of residents in North, South, Central and parts of East Lismore, at this stage, this proposal is not offering a solution to that issue. As I work with householders in those areas, I hear the opinions of those, who, perhaps were only impacted in their actual homes by the 'Monster' flood, with the water from all other floods rising up the steps but not into the house. These folk are resolved strongly to stay where they are and restore their homes, making them much flood safer, using villaboards and waterproof polystyrene insulation, held in with tech screws that can be unbolted, so that panels can be washed down dried and then screwed back on. There are other flood wise developments that people are investigating as well. There are other people who just want to get out, put their homes up for sale and move on ... to who knows where?

My thoughts in this submission pertain to the CBD and surrounds, the public places, and the suitable usage of land. There are some strong advocates of relocating the Central Business District to higher ground, which initially, was my own response as I surveyed the catastrophic damage, talked with business people and tried to ascertain the future. As I thought about the future, my view transitioned to a different tack. It became not so much the idea of relocation, which many people agree on, but the long term future and security and where we see the CBD and associated businesses being relocated to. Whilst there are a number of businesses that will not come back, there are also many who are very passionate and sentimental about the CBD and it remaining "Downtown" and who will not countenance any 'moving to higher ground'. The emotions of sentimentality, passionate love for 'Downtown Lismore, and the need to provide long term security for businesses that are contemplating starting again and continuing, are emotions that need to be weighed up and held in balance.

This proposal is not a short term band aid fix, as such measures will do nothing for the long term security in people's minds, if they are going to stay and further invest in their businesses in this town. (As a matter of fact, my own business, Mountain Blue Farms, was impacted seriously with our packing shed in Habib Drive South Lismore, incurring millions of dollars of damage to fruit packing lines, and other equipment. The Winsome and Mazzer House, which I have been associated with for decades, were also severely damaged, and are subsequently going through the process of restoration, and making them flood ready for the future).

## THE PROPOSAL

### 1. A Town Square

The development of a 'Town Square' is the fundamental idea underlying this proposal.

Many Cities and towns in Europe and South America have a town 'Square' or Plaza, and I have seen many great examples of this phenomena. Often, particularly in towns with a Spanish influence, the Square has the Cathedral located on the highest side, and is a strong focus, facilitating colourful processions and religious festivals.

Whilst not advocating the moving of the Cathedral, the concept of a 'Town Square' would provide a "community people's place", where folk could gather.

There could be street level (flood ready cafes), the Pie cart, pop ups, farmer's markets, concerts, buskers, signature events (lantern parade etc) and it could be a wonderful attraction that gives Lismore a heart that really pumps again.

It must be said from the outset, that the land on which the town square sits would no longer be privately owned, but would be owned by the community, after existing building owners in that precinct, were suitably recompensed.

### **2. Providing a Secure space for Business, Entertainment, Cafes and Restaurants, Cinemas, Office Space, Hotel Bars and many more, that will attract investment back into "THE HEART"**

It is the opinion of this author that the various flood mitigation discussions that are being had, do not show a realistic appraisal of just how bad this situation was, and how, whilst some measures may have a minor affect, the risk of another "Monster Flood" if climate is changing, may make such solutions to be just throwing good money after bad, and will only cause a greater exodus of business and household folks to other, more secure areas. Lismore could die a slow and painful death.

It is my opinion, as a stakeholder in this exercise, that the only solution is "To go up" !!

I have talked to a number of business owners, some of whom have already walked away and said 'NO MORE', however, there are a number of business people that say that they want to stay, because they love Lismore and want to keep the HEART pumping. Some that I have spoken to are hesitating, waiting to see if there will be a critical mass of people on the footpath that will make their business viable and worthwhile. These views in a sense may bring about a problem of inertia in themselves, however, this highlights the need for a radical, long term approach to the town, that gives security from any further catastrophic events, not just "A hope that we have it right with our next band aid".

### **3. Building Up !!**

So now that we have put forward a basic premise for the future of Lismore, is it a feasible option within, say a 10 year period. In my opinion the following plan is feasible, and by harnessing the involvement of commercial developers as well as government incentives, it would in fact be economical and a great way forward. The plan that I am putting forward allows the development to proceed, whilst having a minimal affect on the operation of most businesses.

I envisage that the final picture would look as follows :

A **Woodlark Street Mall** located on the north side of Woodlark Street, stretching over the Brown's Carpark towards the back of the Court house and the Harvey Norman Shop. It would be situated on top of two or three levels of carparking, at a level high enough to be above an 18 or 20 metre flood. The mall could contain shops, office space, restaurants, a cinema, gymnasium, supermarkets and bars and bottle shops to allow current hotels to relocate. It could contain places of worship, to relocate some of the churches that have been decimated as well. Priority for the shops and other facilities would necessarily go to current CBD businesses.

A **Magellan Street Mall**, which might stretch back to Conway street, and again would accommodate an array of businesses and shops. Again, businesses would be encouraged to move up to become secure, and very accessible, with lots of parking available on several levels.

A **Keen Street Mall**. This might be a little more complex, due to the presence of the beautiful Conservatorium Building, however, I am sure that this is a problem that can be overcome, as with any buildings that are deemed important to save. This mall would extend out from Keen Street eastwards.

Each of these malls could be joined to the others via aerial footbridges.

It maybe, that Lismore. as part of our reset, could develop a level or two that contains new high tech entrepreneurs in an environment that encourages such thought. There are no doubt many options that I have missed, and that would be worth investigating. I am very aware that I am just putting forward a concept, which would require the skills of economists, engineers, architects, developers, town planners and interested members of the community to bring into existence.

**Finally, What do we recommend should be done with Molesworth Street ??** There are obviously buildings that are very sturdy and flood ready, and we are referring to The Summerland Credit Union and Westlawn buildings that are well built, have strong foundations and we would not countenance removal. Molesworth Street, however, does have some buildings that could go, to make way for a lively precinct of 'flood ready' venues

that could be developed somewhat along the lines of the South Bank on the Brisbane River. This might require a hard look at the Levee and buildings such as the Sportspower building.

### **A Town Square**

Having now relocated everyone out of the area bounded by Magellan, Keen, Woodlark and Molesworth Streets, it is time to have a hard look at what we have left. Many of the shops were still vacant after the 2017 flood, and many have reached their "Use by Date" in terms of appearance and structure, not to mention flood readiness.

In the opinion of this author, once all businesses are relocated to the safety of the "Malls over Carparks", we commence the 'Heart Transplant' of Lismore, and create a wonderful town plaza or city square, with many of the attractions of such plazas that can be seen in so many places around the world. (It is a very enlightening exercise to Google City Squares in many cities and towns around the world, and get a glimpse of what the heart of Lismore might one day be).

### **4.HOUSING !!**

Above the shopping and all purpose malls that surround the City Plaza on three sides there could be a plan developed for some safe housing in inner city apartments. This could extend to the number of levels that is deemed appropriate by the planning authorities on the City Council, and State Planning bodies. These apartments could become very trendy as Lismore becomes alive and people want to live safely in downtown Lismore. The inner city population would bring life to the city centre, and would encourage many new entertainment venues and ideas, given that popular past times for youth in Lismore have been wiped out in some cases (Ten pin bowling for example).

The residents would be safe above any flood danger and could remain at home, rather than in evacuation centres in the event of a flood. The electrical plan for the buildings could see the lower car park areas quarantined and switched off, with a back up generator (or a solar powered battery system, keeping residents in power). The handling of sewerage during a flood has been the primary reason for not allowing residents to remain at the Winsome Hotel in North Lismore on the upper levels where otherwise they would be safe. A temporary diversion holding tank that empties into the town sewerage system again after the flood might overcome that problem. There are obviously many engineering issues that would need to be addressed, however, there maybe a number of residents in low lying areas that would willingly move into something like an apartment on top of the Woodlark Street Mall. Lift access from the ground level may need to be investigated, with options to ensure that safety is front and centre.

With careful imagination, the rooftops of these malls may be developed into community facilities as well, with things like a community garden, rooftop bars, and even gymnasiums and swimming pools.

A possible objection to this proposal is that a high rise type development, particularly the Woodlark Street Mall on the northern boundary, would cause shaded areas on the Lismore Town Plaza. In fact, on a hot summer's day, that shade maybe much sought after.

To ensure that the walls of the malls do not be concrete eyesores, cafes and restaurants with outdoor eating areas on balconies and balconies on apartments may help break up the concrete facades.

The area is known for soil issues for buildings, however, there are already great examples of successful buildings such as the Westlawn and Summerland Credit buildings that prove that it can be managed. Then there are some older buildings such as the Winsome Hotel, and the Conservatorium, that have stood for many decades and withstood many floods.

## **5. FUNDING IT ALL**

Obviously, the question will be asked ... "And how will we pay for all of this?" I am a local businessman and not an accountant, and do not therefore have lots of detailed costings of all this. However, I am of the opinion that if this is designed as an attractive project, it will attract private enterprise funding as well as whatever government grants are available. In discussions with people about this vision, the response has been very positive, with suggestions that an apartment in one of these malls would be a great investment, or home to live in.

## **CONCLUSION :**

With a project like the one proposed here, the development costs are likely to be high, but in my opinion, the attitude that "We are Lismore and we band together and we overcome" is wearing thin, and after 12 weeks as I write, the city centre is still looking desolate, apart from the odd Oasis, and many businesses are still in Limbo.

Lismore has been my home town for 41 years and of my 4 children, and 4 grandchildren still live here, and have chosen to do so, because this is their town. I believe that the time is now for the Leaders of this City to make courageous decisions to ensure that Lismore moves from being a town in limbo with many people worried about their future, to being a town that has a wonderful and vibrant beating heart, with security for all.

Ridley Bell

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