

## A conversation with Clive Austin Chairman of ROYAL REHAB

### Why didn't you seriously go after State and Federal funding in the past?

The process to upgrade our buildings and services has been ongoing within ROYAL REHAB for more than 10 years.

We have comprehensively investigated a range of options in that period – from relocating to shutting our doors to staying put.

Our operational shortfall has been in the vicinity of \$2.5 million a year for the past eight years.

But our capital needs, to secure our future, are at least \$80 million.

It's not a case of us not seeking government funding. We have made numerous applications over the years, and continue to do so as part of our charter.

However, we know, and we were told, that funding of this magnitude was not possible through state and/or federal funding.

And, with the best will and contacts in the world, it was not available at such seriously high levels through charity drives.

The reality is, we had to find the funding ourselves, or seriously shut-up shop, because our facilities are old and outdated, and as a result our opportunities for expansion stymied.

Having said that, we certainly welcome the assistance of the community to generate increased financial assistance; we always have.

I am following up an earlier request for a meeting with the Prime Minister Mr Howard regarding funding opportunities.

### But why the need to sell the land?

Our land is our only asset. The only way we can secure our future is to sell a parcel of our land to pay our way.

That's a fact. It's a commercial reality. And we have sensibly pursued that path in a responsible and commercially acceptable manner.

We have been operating as a going concern for more than 100 years. There is a great tradition of care and service.

Not only at Ryde, but through our work out in the community; in people's homes and other residences. We are, in fact, a State-wide service.

An overdue and much needed state of the art disability and rehab centre is the best option for Sydney and NSW.

Not just the bricks and mortar, but funding that will allow us to maintain and build upon the breadth and standards of service and technologies for decades to come.

That requires tens of millions of dollars to achieve.

Every dollar we generate will make a difference to the level and scope of the services and facilities we provide - as an independent organisation - well into the future.

### ROYAL REHAB has selected a suitable company to undertake the residential sale of its land. Is this so?

We have selected a company that meets all the preliminary criteria preparatory to undertaking a sale process.

That company is not yet engaged on the project.

It can't be, and won't be until ROYAL REHAB has met a range of planning and legal conditions and obligations.

The company in question has the right expertise and experience; it has access to applicable funding; it has passed the relevant due diligence and probity standards; and has a suitable and responsible industry track record.

*Maximising Abilities  
- Optimising Lifeskills*

### **Who is the “suitable company?”**

That is commercial in confidence at this time.

### **Are we talking Australian or overseas?**

It is a highly regarded organisation. That is all I can say at this time.

### **When can development start?**

Right now ROYAL REHAB is well advanced in meeting all the conditions of the Concept Plan approval process, and putting in place and gaining approval for the various steps required under planning laws.

But only after we have satisfied all those demands and requirements can any development be activated.

We are not jumping the gun; but we are acting within a commercial framework that will, all being well, pave the way for a very important project to proceed - a project that will deliver a modern, state of the art and much needed new facility.

### **What is the financial arrangement that has been agreed to with the suitable company?**

We have, as part of a normal and responsible commercial process, selected a suitable company that may, subject to a range of conditions, be engaged in the project down the track.

It is not engaged now, so it is completely inappropriate to discuss financial details.

### **So what's in it for the Directors of ROYAL REHAB?**

No Director has a pecuniary interest in the development project. No Director has or will be remunerated in any way as a result of the development.

The Directors provide their services to ROYAL REHAB on a completely voluntary basis.

They do sincerely care about the level of services provided at the Centre and the people in the care of the Centre.

They certainly feel satisfaction at seeing the great work done by ROYAL REHAB, and certainly feel good about the opportunity to see the organisation guarantee even better facilities and services for the local and broader community.

### **Who are the Directors and how did they get on the Board?**

The combined experience and expertise of the Board is, in my view, second to none.

If you look at the careers of all the Directors, you will see we have an amazing range of skills and knowledge to draw upon, across medicine, science, research, legal, financial, commercial and social.

All are committed, highly regarded and highly principled Australians.

Some are longstanding members of the Board; most others have been there for only a few years, so renewal is certainly not an issue.

They all serve ROYAL REHAB on a strictly pro bono basis.

Board members are elected by the Directors and members of the community.

Details of the career experience of all 11 Directors can be found on the ROYAL REHAB website:

[www.royalrehab.com.au](http://www.royalrehab.com.au).

### **It is claimed traffic congestion will be generated by this development and that is a concern for sections of the community.**

A range of expert, independent traffic studies have all stated that the affect of increased traffic will not have any material impact on local roads and amenity.

Certainly we are spending many tens of thousands of dollars on a network of traffic calming devices, and road improvements generally, in the areas surrounding the ROYAL REHAB site.

### **A great number of residents want traffic lights on Victoria Road. Why won't ROYAL REHAB back the community on this and tell the RTA to do it?**

We are already on the record as saying we would prefer that traffic lights be installed as asked by some sections of the local community. We made this point in a previous submission.

We recently wrote to the RTA – with a copy to the Department of Planning - seeking a review of the RTA's decision not to install the lights for traffic flow and safety reasons.

As the legal custodians of the roads, they make the final decision not us.

It's not our call. They have stated that lights at that particular juncture are not practical because they would be too close to an existing set of lights. This would materially affect traffic flows and create an accident black spot.

The RTA has written to ROYAL REHAB confirming that it is standing by its previous decision, informed by professional modelling, that new traffic lights are not possible.

Nevertheless, we will continue to push as much as possible on this matter.

### **What is the local community getting out of your development?**

The material benefits flowing back to the local community as a result of this project are worth some \$20 million.

This figure, which ROYAL REHAB will meet from the development process, covers parklands, passive and active recreational facilities, wetlands, cycleways, picnic grounds, ancillary medical services, childcare centre, public meeting room and roadways.

The community will have access to such facilities for the first time.

### **The perception is that the land you are selling is going to be crammed with high-rise towers?**

Not true. The development is not overly dense.

Apartment buildings can be built on around 10 per cent of the total site.

Indeed, we have accepted a density limitation of no more than 50 dwellings per hectare.

The total number of dwellings has been capped at 791... these will be built in stages over a four to 10 year cycle.

At least 100 of the dwellings will be detached houses and town houses. The balance will be apartments in a range of buildings, none of them higher than six storeys and most of them three to four storeys. The buildings will be designed to sit in balance with the local topography.

The projected total population increase will be in the order of 1,500 people. Not all at once, but on a staggered basis.

### **So how will the site be developed?**

The development will see 4.48 hectares being safe, landscaped open space and lakelands for public use (currently nil).

The new medical campus will be on 2 hectares.

It is worth noting that the project will provide 3.46 hectares of open space per 1,000 new residents versus 3.38 hectares per thousand for the whole of the City of Ryde.

### **ROYAL REHAB was under attack for not consulting closely enough with the residents of Weemala Hospital, and their family members, re future accommodation options. What has been done to resolve this situation?**

There certainly was a misunderstanding on the accommodation we were planning to provide to existing Weemala residents within the new campus, and we take responsibility for that.

A firm commitment has been provided to the families of residents that on-site accommodation will be provided to all residents who choose that option.

The choice of on-site and off-site accommodation is on the table, and whatever decision is taken by the families will be honoured.

The families have been asked to provide feedback on the features they would like to see provided within the new accommodation units.

### **The Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) needs to relocate as a result of the development. How is ROYAL REHAB assisting on this matter?**

RDA has operated on a cooperative basis on our Ryde site for 20 odd years. It is an organisation whose activities and members we fully support.

For some 18 months, we have collaborated with the Association and Ryde Council on facilitating a relocation to a new permanent home that offers better and safer conditions.

There is a long history of negotiation and study to find a suitable site, which we have supported financially and through external expertise.

To this end, we are working with government agencies to facilitate one of the two sites deemed by RDA as being satisfactory for its needs.

ROYAL REHAB will also be providing financial assistance to help RDA complete the move from Ryde to the new home by March 2008.