



PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB

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SUBMISSION REGARDING THE DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT FOR BORONIA PARK

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SUMMARY

The Trust congratulates Council on the Draft Plan of Management, which we believe is an excellent document, well researched and clearly written and illustrated.

We fully support the general thrust of the Draft Plan of Management, particularly its emphasis on the protection, conservation and enhancement of this heritage-listed site, whilst also providing for the social, educational, and active and passive recreational needs of the community.

CONCERNS

Alienation of public access and use

The Trust's main concern is that the PoM's fine intentions are not diminished by vested interests successfully lobbying to change the plan so that parts of the Park are alienated from public use, opened up for vehicular access and covered in tarmac for parking, particularly when access and parking are only required occasionally and are demonstrably unnecessary.

Such changes to the Park would be against the main thrust of the PoM, which is to preserve and protect the existing character of the site.

Sporting clubs' wish list

The Trust is aware of the Facebook campaign sponsored by the *Boronia Park Sports Club Coalition*, which is pushing for the Municipality to fund an extensive upgrade of existing sporting facilities, to provide additional parking for sporting events and to reinstate the "Amenity Facility and Community Facility at Oval 3". Our response to some of these demands is as follows:

Amenity and Community Facility at Oval No 3

In 2007 the Rugby Club proposed the construction of a licensed clubhouse with a gymnasium, large storage areas, change rooms, male and female toilets and a parking area. They have subsequently reduced their demands and are now asking for 4 change rooms, storage areas, a canteen and disabled access for organised sport on Ovals 2 and 3. This still represents a major change to the use patterns of the park and is not supported by The Trust.

The Trust recognises the need for modest public amenities in this area and would support a toilet block along the lines of the recently constructed facility in Riverglade Reserve.

Vehicular access and parking facilities along the length of Princes Street

The *Coalition* wants this to be available during daylight hours, sporting sessions, game days and "as required".

The Trust supports Council's draft PoM, which leaves Council in control of the locked gate at Park St and only allows vehicles into the park at Council's discretion.

Access road and carpark for 40 cars at ovals 2 and 3

A carpark for 40 cars requires a space at least 53m long x 17m wide and would need to be designed to Australian Standards for surface, levels, kerbs and site drainage. Such a carpark represents a massive intrusion into the low-key bushland character of the site. This is totally unsupportable, particularly as it will only have occasional use.

A casual survey of the existing parking situation in the surrounding streets shows that there is plenty of parking capacity for any sporting event that generates a reasonably sized crowd.

It should be remembered that weekend football games at St Josephs college with its many ovals and dozens of teams playing both rugby and soccer generate crowds massively in excess of those attending any Hunters Hill Rugby Club game or cricket match. There is only miniscule off-street parking provided in the school's grounds so the surrounding streets accommodate the cars, and players, parents and supporters walk to the grounds.

The Trust supports the draft PoM in its general exclusion of private vehicles from the park. We understand the need for emergency vehicles to have access and the need for Council to be able to exercise its discretion in relation to particular circumstances. We would also support any minor work that would improve existing deteriorating road surfaces, ensure proper site drainage and prevent runoff into the bush and the river.

Lighting to No 3 Oval

The existing artificial lighting at ovals 1 and 2 already adversely impacts on neighbouring properties. Lighting at Oval No 3 seems unnecessary and will only cause additional problems for properties in the vicinity as well as adversely impacting on wildlife in the surrounding bushland.

The Trust is opposed to any artificial lighting for Oval No 3. We welcome and support moves to ameliorate the adverse impacts of the existing lighting to ovals 1 and 2.

General note regarding sporting clubs' use of the Park

The demands on the community purse contained in the sporting clubs' wish-list for additional facilities and car parking need to be considered in the light of a number of factors, including:

- How many days each year that the Rugby Club plays on Oval 1 in the second division of the NSW Suburban Rugby Union competition. According to the fixtures list on the NSW Rugby website this was only 8 in 2014.
- The small size of the crowds that rugby and cricket draw to Boronia Park, particularly compared to the crowds that attend rugby, cricket and soccer fixtures at St Josephs College.
- Public interest in and support for rugby, particularly at suburban club and junior levels, are on the wain.
- The majority of players and supporters of the Rugby Club have no particular on-going connection with the Municipality.

Community consultation and transparency

The Trust believes that the Plan of Management must include a firm commitment to continuing consultation with residents and users regarding the ongoing management of the park and any proposed variation of the Plan of Management.

The Trust was dismayed by the lack of transparency in relation to the upgrading of Oval #3, the lack of professionalism in the construction of the work and the lack of proper Council oversight of the project. Council's decision to assess the project as *exempt development*, which meant that there was no formal documentation for its design and construction and no formal assessment of this, was clearly a major error.

The extent of the error is documented in Council's Draft PoM with an acknowledgement that the oval is often unusable after rain because of poor drainage and that \$275,000 has been budgeted to rectify

the shoddy work and to plant out the banks and retaining walls - an avoidable impost on Council's financial resources.

Quality of infrastructure and lack of planning

The Trust has previously been critical of the lack of proper planning in relation to the location of infrastructure in the park and the quality of the built forms. An example is the recently completed storage shed for the cricket club, which is so poorly located and lacking as a design that it is an eyesore.

It is vital that any new infrastructure is of the highest quality and is carefully sited in the landscape to ensure its impact is a positive contribution to the Park's character. The Trust is encouraged by the example of the new Riverglade Reserve toilet block, which is a tremendous improvement on Council's record in this regard.

CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE PLAN

There are critical parts of the plan that The Trust fully supports and believes must not be changed. These include the following:

The closure of Princes St East to private vehicles,

The construction of a playground designed for older children.

A comprehensive signage and interpretation strategy.

The completion of Oval #3, which includes:

- The stabilising and landscaping of the embankments
- The rectification of the faulty drainage,
- The remediation of bush

The Trust also believes this work should include the removal of the gravel steps and path and the construction of a proper access path between the two ovals.

Refurbishment of the grandstand

These facilities should also be made available for community use as well as by sporting clubs.

Public access to all facilities provided at the park.

No part of the park should be excluded from public access

Lighting of existing playing fields

The existing lighting must be configured to prevent spill into surrounding streets and houses.

A simple toilet block between ovals 1 and 2

On no account should this be anything more than a convenience for players and spectators using the two ovals.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS TO THE PLAN

The area below Tipperary Falls.

Replace the facilities and upgrade the existing facilities rather than removing them altogether. This is an attractive spot for picnics, is used by people walking the Great North Walk and by bush-care groups during their breaks. Council should also make an allowance to regularly maintain the area in the PoM.

Dogs off-leash

The survey of park visitors found that 41% of them walk dogs in the Park. The Draft PoM is unnecessarily restrictive in its dog policy and contradicts the 2002 PoM. The Trust supports Finlay's Paddock as an off-leash area as well as the playing fields when they are not being used for organised sport. This is the policy for dogs-owners at Riverglade Reserve, which is proving so successful.

Exercise equipment

It seems to the Trust that active exercise, jogging, working out etc. can sometimes be in conflict with more passive uses of the Park – for example joggers jostling with walkers on pathways. The proposed installation of exercise equipment stations along the loop path seems somewhat intrusive and represents an unnecessary expense.

Unused electrical shed near Oval #1

Rather than reusing this for storage (p.39 of PoM) it would be better to remove this eyesore altogether.

Unightly sheds etc. around the perimeter of the ovals

The ugly sheds, cricket store and water storage tank that already dot the perimeter of the ovals should be disguised by the installation of mass planting as well as by painting them a dark recessive colour.

Long jump pit

The long jump pit is a hazard for walkers and a repository for dog urine and is never properly maintained. It should be removed.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR INCLUSION

Access between ovals 2 and 3

Install a proper access pathway from the northwest corner of oval #3 up to oval #2. This is another steep bank that is the most used way between the ovals. It is dangerous to navigate and difficult to mow. It should be planted out in the same way as the other steep embankments.

Drinking fountains

At present there is a lack of drinking fountains. As a minimum it would be good to have additional fountains at the grandstand, between Ovals #2 and #3, and near children's playgrounds.

Proper funding for park maintenance and bush regeneration

It is essential for Council to plan for and adequately fund the proper maintenance of the Park. Council should prepare (and make available to the public) a schedule for periodic maintenance of all items. At present, for example, fallen trees often lie across walking tracks for months after a storm, which leads to unnecessary incursions into the bush as people skirt the obstacles.

The intrusion of weeds into the Park requires a much better funding commitment from the community to ensure invasive exotic species and weeds do not overtake the Park.

Existing park garden beds

The existing planting beds are poorly designed and not properly maintained. They would be better either removed altogether or planted with native, drought-resistant plants.

Signage and interpretation

It is important that Park users are made aware of the Park's history and its ecological and cultural importance so that the place may be better respected and the management of the area better understood.

Tony Coote
President
The Hunters Hill Trust