



PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB

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20-8-2018 BP Playground concept plan comments.docx

Comments on Concept Plan for Inclusive Playground at Boronia Park North

Council is proposing to build an 'Inclusive Playspace' on the site of the playground in High Street, and has invited comment, closing 22 August (see 'Concept Plan Inclusive Playground Boronia Park North' on Council's website)

Brief Summary

While we acknowledge there are obligations under the Disability Access Inclusion Plan, we see no case for this proposed 'inclusive' playground to be located in close proximity to sensitive bushland within heritage-listed Boronia Park. The concept plan is poorly visualised and out of scale for the selected site, and there is no information provided in the documents on the actual footprint to fully gauge its impact, but it is distinctly a project of major proportions. It is also outside the scope of the current Plan of Management (PoM) and we question the choice of Boronia Park as the preferred location for this particular project.

Introduction

On 12 March, Hunters Hill Council signed a MOU with the registered charity 'Touched by Olivia' (TBO, ABN18123509008) to develop an 'Inclusive playground' somewhere in the Hunters Hill LGA.

The playground would be called 'Livvi's Place', a condition imposed by TBO. Judged by nearby Livvi's Place playgrounds (in Yamble Reserve, Quarry Rd, Ryde and Timbrell Park, Five Dock), they are intended for the very young (pre-school) and those who find it difficult to engage with many existing playgrounds.

An 'Audit of playground sites' (presented to Council 14 May) recommends using the site of the small existing playground in High Street (near the Montefiore Home). The project's Audit document eliminates all other sites, including the Park Road playground site selected in the current Boronia Park Plan of Management, on the basis that it has no toilet and would need a new parking area in Park Road.

The TBO project is estimated to cost \$500,000, plus \$200,000 to reconfigure parking in High Street. No estimate is given for annual maintenance costs, but they would most likely far exceed those for our current playgrounds.

Our Council voted (CM 4443, 12 June, **carried 4:3**) 'to pledge 10% of the project cost up to \$50,000' towards the project, but has made no provision for parking or maintenance costs.

The project seems to be based on the assumption that if Council puts up \$50,000, the NSW Government will top that up to \$500,000. But the Planning Minister's press release of 9 April promises '\$20 million to build more than 200 new or upgraded playgrounds that are more

inclusive and engaging'. \$20 million divided by 200 equals \$100,000 each, not \$500,000. Would the Minister really favour his own electorate to this extent?

From what we can judge of the proposal, we make the following comments:

- The existing Junior playground in High Street is low-key and set close to bushland amongst trees while having no detrimental impact on the adjoining natural areas, and providing very adequately for a variety of visitors' needs.
- The development of a concept plan in the apparent absence of a site environmental assessment is poor practice for a development of this apparent scale.
- Such a redevelopment is not identified in the PoM, which proposes only an upgrade of existing facilities (already done) in this location and new facilities for older children along Park Road.
- The reasons given for using the site of the current High Street playground do not stand scrutiny: the new toilet block is too small for the anticipated playground, the existing playground serves a useful purpose, and is not 'in need of an upgrade' - a bit of standard maintenance would do.
- The replacement playground in its proposed form is intrusive and unacceptable, as it will impinge on the E2 zone and the nearby expanding Bushcare site.
- Its location may also necessitate a Fire Plan, possibly identifying an Asset Protection Zone, impacting on the E2 zoning and surrounds.
- The proponent will presumably require earthworks in order to implement the scale of the structures and playground surfaces proposed (size suggested to be 100m x 40m); this is opposed due to the inevitable impact on high conservation value communities.
- There are alternative sites such as at the corner of Park & High Streets for a small 'inclusive' playground (another toilet could be positioned there if considered necessary).
- Parking is at a premium already along this stretch of High St due to Montefiore Aged Care and it will never be adequate for the numbers of visitors that would be attracted to a playground of such extravagant dimensions (no doubt it will receive extensive promotion); a Traffic study would be required.
- Council has committed ratepayers to contributing 10% of the proposed cost, up to \$50,000, at a time when the budget is stretched and there are higher priorities in the PoM, e.g. Council provides only \$5,000 annually from core funding for much needed bush regeneration in Boronia Park.
- Ongoing maintenance costs will be considerable with an investment of this magnitude; and security lighting would be required to prevent vandalism.
- The new playground will be fenced to meet the requirements of 'inclusivity'.
- The dog management policy, long overdue for Boronia Park, will need to be developed prior to any further public pressure on this area and the need to protect children of all ages and capacities (in addition to its recent designation as a Wildlife Protection Area). It is clearly a popular access point for dog walkers, with dogs largely roaming off the leash.

Conclusion

Overall, the Trust is opposed to a facility of such dimensions and form in this location adjoining important bushland. It is structurally out of character with this natural setting and will impose unreasonable costs and responsibilities on Council and the local community in terms of upkeep and management.

It cannot be considered to be 'inclusive' as it will largely cater for younger children when the revised PoM has identified that it is older children and young adults that require facilities.

A preferable alternative would be to supplement the existing playground over time with additional equipment, as costs allow, which is complementary to the Park's natural environment and will foster greater inclusion for children of all ages. And later, when funding becomes available, to build an additional playground for older children nearby, as envisioned in the Plan of Management for Boronia Park (adopted December 2015).

Bushland and natural areas are under increasing pressure on many fronts and need protection from further encroachment and development. Places such as Boronia Park should be valued and retained as far as possible for their environmental heritage, habitat corridors and passive recreation assets.

We reiterate that this major project is outside the scope of the current Plan of Management, is not suitable for this location and will place severe strain on Council's resources. Boronia Park is also the subject of further development proposals at this time, imposing cumulative impacts and costs. These proposals must be considered in detail and in conjunction with each other.

A further Audit across the LGA is required to find a suitable location for a small inclusive playground where it can have less impact on its surroundings and Council's budget constraints while providing for its target audience.

Alister Sharp
President
20 August 2018