



PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB

P.O. BOX 85, HUNTERS HILL, N.S.W. 2110

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HHTrust sub draft PoM Boronia Park 2019 11 Dec 2019.doc

Hunters Hill Council,
Alexandra Street, Hunters Hill, 2110

Draft Plan of Management for Boronia Park

We submit the Hunters Hill Trust's suggestions, comments and objections in relation to the Draft Plan of Management (30 October 2019) (PoM) for Boronia Park.

We understand this process is occurring due to changes to Crown Land management legislation, to align with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993*, but there are clearly two major drivers for accelerating this review as it provides a platform for promoting and potentially implementing major projects within the Park that have evidently been supported by Council for some time.

The fact that Council is in receipt of three government grants - two totalling \$1.5m for 'upgrading sporting facilities' and another of \$200,000 towards an 'inclusive playground' via the Touched by Olivia Foundation (TBO) seems to have influenced and determined both the consultation process and the resulting draft Plan of Management.

We are disappointed that several of the intrusive proposals included in this Draft PoM were not revealed to the Community Advisory Group (CAG), or mentioned at on-site meetings. Requests by us for details on significant projects from the Club representatives and Council were refused and deliberately left vague.

In spite of the extension of the exhibition process, we remain concerned that this Plan might be adopted prematurely due to pressure to access the grant funds. This would prevent the proper analysis of submissions regarding controversial inclusions, several added belatedly. Further scrutiny and assessment by the community is justified and necessary to reach a fully considered and equitable outcome for the future management of Boronia Park.

The \$1.5m combined Commonwealth and State funding has been keenly promoted by Hunters Hill Council to provide a 'sport/community facility', primarily for use by the HH Rugby & Ryde-HH Cricket Clubs, within Boronia Park. Council has also decided to position the new TBO playground here despite the funding application having been successful for a location in Riverglade reserve.

A misleading colour brochure has been printed (presumably at ratepayers' expense) implying that the only decisions to be made are about *where* these over-sized projects will be placed within the Park. Is it really the role of Council to be favouring particular interests in this way? How can Council's pre-determination of outcomes in the Plan give any confidence or expectation that other voices will be heard?

The Trust's objections and concerns about the suitability and impact of these proposals within this important heritage-listed parkland are listed below.

A. We object to:

1. The scope of the sport/community facility:

We note the allowance for 'a building footprint of up to **525 square metres** (15 x 35 metres), excluding surrounding paved areas, rainwater tanks, and other ancillary elements) and double storey to a maximum height of 8 metres above surrounding ground levels'. **This is approximately 25% bigger than the Hunters Hill Sailing Clubhouse at Clarke's Point!**

In addition, a new amenities and storage building is proposed near Oval 3, shown on the Landscape Concept Plan as a low-profile single storey building with a footprint of up to **80 square metres** (excluding surrounding paved areas and other ancillary elements). There is no functional need for either of these structures to be so large and no justification provided for such extravagant use of space.

We also object to the inclusion of seating, for either indoor or outdoor viewing, as part of this facility. To associate such seating with the building would strongly influence the building's design and location.

Of the four siting options, the only site that would not encroach on valuable open parkland would be alongside the grandstand backing onto Ryde Road ('Site 1' in the draft Plan). This, along with the proposal to upgrade the grandstand pavilion, which has long been neglected by Council and the sporting clubs, would allow for a smaller footprint and make good use of the pavilion. This site was identified in the 2015 Plan as being the most appropriate.

A building of the dimensions proposed at any other site within Boronia Park will drastically impose on its character and its cultural and ecological values and potentially on other users' experience and enjoyment of the Park.

In our view, this proposal is being driven by the demands of the Clubs rather than by proven and genuine community needs. Site 1 is the only supportable option, allowing a modified and reduced footprint as it enables use of facilities in an upgraded and/or enlarged grandstand pavilion in close proximity.

2. The proposal for a 20 year lease:

A lease to any organisation of longer than a year is inappropriate, and at the CAG meetings was expressly not requested by the representative of the Rugby Club. Considering that demographics and 'fashions' in sport are changing rapidly (such as the rise of women's sport, and drift from rugby to soccer and AFL), a long lease may lock out organisations that later have greater community support. The NSW government's grant to help fund sporting precinct upgrades avoids specifying that they should be limited to rugby or cricket. Consequently, a lease or license should be primarily concerned with appropriate use of storage spaces, with other uses of a Community Facility dealt with by a booking system operated and controlled by Council.

We believe a long term lease is unacceptable and has no place in a 'community' facility. It also locks in unjustifiable exclusive rights to two specific sporting interests.

Further, the manner of presentation in the draft Plan of items 1 & 2 above indicates a disturbing handing over of control by Hunters Hill Council to the Clubs to the disadvantage of broader and longer term community interests.

3. The 'inclusive playground' proposal:

The proposed large (2000 square metre) playground should not be built within Boronia Park at any of the four site options in the draft Plan but placed in Riverglade Reserve which was the location specified and approved in the funding application by TBO, and where it is needed. Boronia Park has two existing playgrounds that could be incrementally upgraded to suit a range of age groups.

4. The late addition of a BMX track:

There was no proposal for a BMX track raised at the Community Advisory Group meetings, or even prior to the completion of the first draft of the Plan. This was poor ad hoc procedure and dismissive of the process that community members engaged with in good faith.

In our view neither of the sites - of 3,500 to 4,500 square metres - is appropriate within Boronia Park as both impinge on natural areas and are in, or abutting, the 'passive use' zone. We agree there is a need for such a facility, and suggest it be made elsewhere in the HH Local Government Area to satisfy this age group and where there would also be less potential for conflict between user groups.

5. Floodlighting of Oval 3:

Another matter of major concern is the proposal for floodlighting on Oval 3 which is not mentioned in the 2015 Plan. It is critical that this is not now permitted as it will inevitably affect diurnal and particularly nocturnal wildlife including microbats and vulnerable Powerful Owls, and would also impact on local residents due to increased usage, noise and light disturbance.

This item was also added belatedly and the draft Plan fails to assess the impacts or to justify the need for lights on this Oval when Ovals 1 & 2 are already well lit and adequate for evening use.

6. Parking provisions:

We would prefer the upper part of Princes St within the Park not be used for parking at all.

If cars are to be allowed to park here, the procedures described in PDFL7 are appropriate, and repeat the recommendations of the 2015 PoM which have never been implemented. Only after these measures are implemented should any private vehicles be admitted to Princes St:

- parking here should be restricted to designated major game days
- the gate should be opened and closed by a Council employee (not just managed by Council: in the past the gate has been opened on other days and sometimes not re-locked after a designated opening)
- Besides 'robust' barriers to prevent parking on the north side of Park Rd, when open to parking the site should be patrolled by Council's ranger(s) to ensure orderly behaviour
- There must be a safe, off-road pedestrian path to protect walkers from reversing cars.

No other user group is extended this privilege within the parkland, and it should be so regarded, not as a right.

The additional gate to close off the informal carpark next to Oval 3 and prevent parking across this area is welcomed and overdue. We note that the adjoining area is clearly indicated as a connecting native vegetation and wildlife corridor in the draft Plan.

7. Transparency in costs incurred by HH ratepayers:

It appears that no figures have been made available by Council on the extent to which costs associated with managing sporting activities in Boronia Park exceed income. This is unacceptable and it must be made transparent whether a 'user-pays' system is in place and functional and if it is sufficient to protect ratepayers from increasing costs.

This is particularly important in light of the likelihood that submissions from outside the LGA will influence the outcomes of this Plan leading to even greater future costs to ratepayers, including long term maintenance, from the proposed developments.

B. We support these proposals of the Draft PoM

8. Off-leash dog walking area:

We support off-leash dog exercise on Oval #3 '*when not being used for approved sporting activities (including training) or other approved activities*'. This is the practice at Riverglade Reserve, and has been shown to work well, both for the dogs and by allowing their owners to socialise. Oval #3 is already fenced along its eastern edge, which will keep dogs out of the bushland. We trust Council will provide dog-poo bags and waste bins, as it does in other locations, and also a dual-use drinking fountain.

We also support the policy of all dog walking to be on-leash and under owner's control on all tracks within the Park and strictly managed near bushland. Greater Ranger presence would be welcomed.

9. Other items mentioned in the Draft PoM:

- We support the provision of temporary parking spaces along the south side of Park Street and along Boronia Avenue 'if safe and practical' as well as the upgrade of this entry point to the Park, long overdue.
- We support the upgrading of the mulched path that runs from Princes St between Ovals #2 and #3 to comply with the relevant Australian Standards so that it is navigable by prams and wheelchairs. To aid those reliant on wheels for transport we suggest this path be extended between Ovals #1 and #2 to join the carpark.
- We welcome additional indigenous plantings between Ovals 2 & 3 as well as on steep slopes to prevent erosion, extend habitat corridors and reduce the area requiring mowing.
- In addition, we welcome the special management measures and actions outlined for greater protection of native fauna and flora, particularly EECs and the now 'Critically' endangered Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest.
- We support education and enforcement in relation to the Wildlife Protection Area with more extensive explanatory signage located within the Park.
- We support an increased emphasis on water usage, as mentioned in Section 6.2.4 and PDFL20 & 21. In addition we suggest regular reporting of the quantity of town water drawn for use in irrigating the playing fields with the aim of reducing this by better use of other sources.

10. Provision for other types of physical exercise:

We urge Council to support physical exercise for those in the population who do not wish to play competitive team sport. For example:

- We support the provision of a small pontoon at the bottom of Princes St to allow the '*launching/retrieving/boarding small (non-motorised) craft*'. A small rack here could be used to secure the trolleys used to walk the craft down Princes St from Park Rd.
- We propose Council install outdoor table tennis tables (as Lane Cove Council has at Blackman Park). These provide good exercise to people both young and old, and also promote social interaction. Made of steel or concrete, they require little maintenance, and players bring their own bats and balls.
- We support the installation of 'rebound walls', as mentioned in the Draft Plan.

C. Final comments:

Public confidence in Council's stated commitment to maintaining the balance between general public access and intensity of sporting use, as well as fully protecting the Park's natural areas, is undermined by the clear intent of the draft Plan to accommodate the demands of the sporting clubs and the past history of infrastructure built on Boronia Park. The mismanaged re-construction of Oval 3 some years ago by the Rugby Club has left an environmental legacy of dead trees, polluting sediment run-off into the wetlands and ongoing impact on the E2 conservation zone and the overall integrity of the Park. The failure of that project to install drainage, rendering Oval 3 often too wet for use, has transferred those costs to the ratepayers.

While the formation of a Community Advisory Group for revising the Boronia Park Plan of Management was welcomed, it was poorly managed by Council with a lack of meeting preparation and follow up, insufficient willingness to listen and failure to disclose vital information on which to make judgements on development proposals or assess the results of the online survey.

As a result, despite the efforts of the consultant, the process became tokenistic at best and dysfunctional at worst. No final meeting was held prior to public exhibition of the draft Plan, and no further meeting has been proposed.

Overall, community consultation has been inadequate in terms of the major projects that are being determined for the Park within this draft Plan of Management. It is certainly not acceptable that, as happened with the 2015 Plan, Councillors make changes after the consultation period, which have not been discussed publicly to allow participation by the broader community.



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