



**PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE**  
PO BOX 85, HUNTERS HILL, NSW 2110

16-9-2021

HHT BP Facility submission F

## **Boronia Park: Development Application for Sports and Community Facility** *Submission from Hunters Hill Trust*

### **Summary**

The proposed building is in the wrong place, too large, too costly and does not align with the Council's own environmental commitments. The community rejected the proposed location, and the Business Case is not adequate to justify the future burden on ratepayers. Alternative options should be explored that better align with the original grant intentions. We seek a smaller building with greater consideration of environmental impacts, materials and energy costs, as well as lower ongoing costs.

### **Introduction**

The Hunters Hill Trust rejects the proposed structure and its proposed location.

We also criticise Council for not following the proper DA process in adding documents (on 23 and 30 August) during the exhibition period (18 August to 17 September), and also for failing to display a site notification sign until the final week of exhibition.

### **Funding:**

**The design and construction is being funded from four sources:**

1. A grant of \$1,000,000 from the NSW government. Besides announcing that the grant was 'to fix up the grandstand', it was also intended to replace 'facilities that are not suitable for women, children or the disabled'.
2. A grant of \$500,000 from the Federal government, clearly identified by federal member Trent Zimmerman (both in parliament and also on Facebook) as being intended to build new facilities to benefit women as well as men.
3. To enable a grander structure, HHRUFC committed to contributing a further \$1.5 million, raised by its supporters.
4. Hunters Hill Council is contributing the time of its officers in coordinating the design and construction, estimated at \$100,000, and has publicly committed to making no cash contribution to the project.
5. We note that in response to concerns expressed by non-sport stakeholders that Council would 'bail out' the Rugby club if it failed in its fund raising (or if the cost exceeded that budgeted for). On 23 December 2020, Council issued the document titled 'Council's response to questions raised at meetings facilitated by Lucy Cole-Edelsten on 9 and 10 December 2020', which contains the following assurance:

*'The construction of the proposed Sports and Community Facility will be managed by Council and funded entirely through grants secured by the Rugby club, committed funds from the Club's savings and contributions from Club members and other members of the community that want to see modern facilities in Hunters Hill'. 'Contractual commitments to construction will not be made until all funds are in place.'*

This is embedded in the Business Case (Item 2.8, Key Risks and mitigation strategies), which states that:

*'The Agreement for Licence includes conditions precedence which prevents construction of the building commencing prior to fundraising targets being met'.*

6. No estimate of the cost of work is provided on the ePlanning site for this project, in spite of the requirement for a *'Detailed Cost Report' 'prepared by a quantity surveyor,'* on the Development Application form. Since this project is being run to a fixed budget, it is essential that the whole Scope of Works can be completed for the stated cost (\$2,475,000).

## Location

The Addendum Report to the Plan of Management for Boronia Park (dated 21 April 2020, issued just prior to the final Plan), shows that 97 of 103 responses to the question of location of a Sport and Community Facility, agreed that it should be *'south-east of Grandstand'*. Only 2 of 26 responses agreed with a location *'between Ovals 1 & 2'*. In spite of this, the Plan of Management, dated 4 May, gives no justification for the Facility to be located between Ovals 1 & 2.

## Inadequacy of the Business Case

The proposed building serves two separate functions:

- The lower storey (toilets, changing rooms, storage spaces) serves the functional needs of organised sport, and provides public toilets. The lower storey could probably be funded entirely from the governments' grants.
- The upper storey does not appear to contribute directly to the use of Boronia Park for sport, but provides a Club House for use mainly by the HHRUFC and an indoor meeting/recreational space, nominally for community use.

But the Business Case fails to establish any community demand for an additional Community Space, and does not take into consideration the impact this may have on the local community, and on the wildlife living nearby. It doesn't identify any unmet demand for space from *'play groups,' 'chess and bridge clubs, etc,' 'indoor sport activities,' 'probus clubs and the like,' 'educational talks,' or 'school speech nights'*, and simply assumes *'a 15% occupancy rate net of HHRUFC use'*. No basis (such as the current occupancy rate of Council's other halls) is given for this assumption, which, therefore, could be seriously over-estimating the income to Council, and consequently the maintenance cost of the facility.

Moreover, while listing five existing halls under direct Council control, the Business Case does not mention the many other halls available for public use, including the Town Hall, two scout halls, and several church halls. Neither does it examine the current usage of each of these halls. Without showing an unmet demand there is no justification for an additional hall or community meeting space.

Simply being mentioned in the revised Plan of Management is not sufficient justification to commit Council and its ratepayers to the continuing maintenance expense estimated as \$38,000, but possibly as much as \$64,000 p.a. over at least a 20 year period (the life of the HHRUFC Licence Agreement) while their annual rental contribution is \$100 with some consideration of ongoing costs.

The *'Rationale for Investment'* (part 1.2 of the Business Case) lists only three items:

- *'adequate accessible change rooms'*;
- *'compliant accessibility toilet facilities', and*
- *'adequate storage for users'*

But none of these requires the Facility to be located between Ovals 1 & 2, or to include an elevated Community Space.

Finally, the Cost Benefit Analysis (Section 2.5 of the Business Case) mentions again that the community will gain disability amenities, but reminds us that Council will have an indefinite obligation to cover the recurring maintenance costs. It stretches the truth in stating that the project will provide *'separate male and female change rooms'*, when the same document (Section 2.1.2, *Scope of Works*) explains that *'two sets of change rooms ... were considered, but use will be made of the existing change rooms in the Boronia Park Grandstand should two sets be required'*. This is not satisfactory when the State grant was given specifically to replace facilities *'not suitable for women, children or the disabled.'*

Moreover, Both grants referenced the need to cater for people of both genders, for children and for people with disabilities. The toilets on the lower level have external entry doors, making them directly accessible to the general public. But the only Accessible toilet is on the upper level, and so generally will be inaccessible!

The proposal should include options for a facility meeting the stated needs, and located south-east of the Grandstand, the location shown to be preferred overwhelmingly by consultation with the community.

## **Comment on the proposed design**

### **Uncertainty of funding**

Because of being designed and constructed within a fixed budget, it would have been useful for pared-down designs to be outlined for reference should the Club contribute less than the anticipated \$1,500,000.

### **Environmental performance/Sustainability**

As stated in its Sustainability Action Plan, at its 24 February 2020 meeting Council declared a climate emergency; and resolved:

*'That Council continues to build on its strategic commitment to sustainability by consideration and implementation of sustainable principles in all future aspects of our operations and service delivery.'*

Yet the proposed design of the facility falls far short of this stated intention in that:

- The proposed location of the building necessitates the removal of four mature trees (estimated to be 40 - 50 years old). These healthy trees are estimated to be capable of providing shade, amenity and ecological benefits at the core of the sporting fields for a further 15 - 40 years. The locations of replacement trees are not specified, and it would be decades before they could approximate the existing canopy benefit and climate change mitigation.
- Being two storeys in height, the building requires a lift to provide disabled access to the upper level, adding to both the cost of construction, and of ongoing maintenance.
- The Acoustic Assessment report requires that all openings (such as doors and louvre

windows) in the upper floor be kept closed while the building is occupied, meaning reliance on the air-conditioning system during hot, cold and even mild weather.

- The upper storey is single-glazed on all sides with little shading from the east, north or west, making it reliant on air-conditioning for control of the indoor climate in summer and in winter. This is illustrated by the Section Elevations, and Shadow Diagram, which show little protection of the large glazed areas from solar penetration.
- With such extensive glazing the consequent light-spill at night will impact on both nocturnal wildlife and local residents.
- With such extensive glazing, the Community Space would also require extensive curtaining if it is to be darkened in the day time to allow the use of projected images.
- The colour of the metal roof is specified to be Colourbond Basalt, a dark grey which would absorb rather than reflect solar heat. Considering that there has been recent condemnation of dark roofs in the popular press, surely the roof should have a finish that reduces the summer heat load.
- The roof design seems not to accommodate collectors of solar energy to generate either electricity or hot water.
- Neither is there any indication of which spaces will be air-conditioned, or allowance for the machinery and ducting required for air-conditioning.
- Although included in the Business Case (Expected outcomes, part 1.4), no documents included in the DA support the stated aims of achieving:
  - water and energy efficiency,
  - efficient electrical facilities and lighting, or
  - energy efficient heating, ventilation and air handling.

## Details of the design

### The footprint of the proposal exceeds the area set by the Plan of Management

The footprint of the building is stated (see the External Works Plan) to be 450 sqm, composed of the lower level (420.5 sqm) plus upper overhang (29.5 sqm), which meets the requirement of the Plan of Management (*'no larger than 450 square metres'*).

However, adding together the dimensions marked on the Lower Level Plan shows the overall length to be 43.69 m, and the overall width to be 10.0 m at the western end, and wider at the eastern end. This gives a lower level footprint in excess of 436.9 sqm. Added to this is the width of the shaded areas at the eastern end, marked as CLEAR, ELEC and STORE. Scaling their width as 1.2m gives a total lower level footprint of approximately 460 sqm, and a total footprint for the building of approximately 490 sqm.

Furthermore, the visual impact of the proposal is greater than this as a result of enclosing the telco building with screen walls to match the lower storey of the building (see Lower Level Plan) and the upper drawing of Elevations) creating an opaque storage yard of 64sqm. This increases the visual footprint to approximately 550sqm and presents as a massive wall across the core parkland. This increase could be avoided by use of a transparent fence, or omitting the fence altogether (it is not fenced at present, implying it doesn't need fencing).

### Aesthetics of the proposed building

The masonry walls, fences and window framing, screen fencing (and even the roof), all are specified to be dark grey (Basalt). Such a dark colour would add to the intrusive/ominous presence of the facility, as illustrated in the image at the top of this document. The location, size and scale of the building, as proposed, would also deny the local community the characteristic open space and vista of tall trees with bushland beyond that is such an inherent component of people's enjoyment of their Park. Appreciation of the Park as representing late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century public recreation grounds would also be lost.

The entire Park is included in Schedule 5 of the HH LEP 2012 as a local heritage item due to its Aesthetic Significance. This is one of the Four Values of the Burra Charter.

It appears that while the Heritage Consultant considers the aesthetic characteristics of the Park could also be worthy of State listing, for their report they have mainly focussed on the sporting aspects of the Park and not on the majority parkland of Boronia Park containing natural heritage including bushland, wetland, extensive native flora and fauna species, Endangered Ecological Communities and other environmental values. While there is ample description of Environmental and Aboriginal values it is concluded that these are of lesser importance in relation to the new facility.

Thus the aesthetic, cultural and natural values are passed over as being of less significance than the historic elements of the three sports fields and the association with the Rugby Club. A more complete appraisal of the Park's extensive heritage context is required.

The Hunters Hill DCP 2013 2.4.2(e) Objectives for Heritage Conservation states: *'Ensure that new development is undertaken in a manner that is sympathetic to, and does not detract from, the heritage significance and heritage items and their settings, as well as streetscapes and landscapes and the distinctive character that they impart to the Municipality'*.

The Trust believes the proposed building does not meet it this Objective on account of the proposed location, design and scale.

### **Meeting the needs of all potential users**

The change rooms are shown as two large rooms, each being a mirror image, with entries to both north and south. A dashed line across the middle of each, suggests that each could be subdivided into two, so as to accommodate four teams at a time (e.g. two male teams and two female teams). However no detail is given as to how such partitioning is intended, how it would operate, and whether it would be soundproof.

### **Suitability of the Community space for general use**

The Business Case estimates that the Community Space will be let for 15% of the time it is not required by the HHRUFC, and that this will generate 40% of the cost of maintenance. But the income could be less than this because the proposed structure will not appeal to some potential users:

- all walls are glazed, so unless heavily curtained the room could not be darkened to show projected images during the day;
- The floor-to-ceiling glazed walls will be highly reflective of sound, making it unsuitable for musical performances;
- there is no associated stage, back-stage area, or changing rooms;
- No space is shown to store seating
- the open staircase shown at one end of the room would create a fall-hazard for young children and inebriated adults.

### **Traffic & Parking**

The Traffic and Parking Impact Assessment concludes that adequate parking exists in the carpark off Park Road and the surrounding streets, implying that no additional parking is required within the park itself.

### Acoustic Assessment

The Acoustic Assessment Report considers only the impact of noise coming from the second level of the facility (and mentions noise generated by 'mechanical plant and equipment' but this wasn't assessed because of the absence of information about such plant). The Report does not the acoustics of the interior spaces, which the Sydney Opera House found was an important omission!

It is unfortunate that no assessment is provided as to the acoustics of the Community Space, because its design will impact on its suitability for the proposed uses as '*an additional community space for hire to undertake indoor sporting, recreational and cultural activities*', which are integral to the Business Case. Unless the entirely glazed walls could be dampened with curtains, these surfaces will be highly reflective, creating high and 'muddy' levels of sound due to multiple echos from the glass surfaces.

### Heritage Impact Assessment

The proposed building pays little heed to the historical significance detailed in the Heritage Impact Assessment, or of the residual bushland described as '*a viable remnant of natural bushland, containing endangered ecological communities and vulnerable flora and fauna species*'. It is described as forming '*part of a regionally significant wildlife corridor linking Sydney Harbour to Lane Cove National Park*' and beyond. Indeed, the location will obscure the view of the bushland from Oval 1 and the grandstand.

We disagree with the opinion in this report that the overall form '*is sympathetic to the natural character and scenic qualities of the park*'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alister Sharp'.

Alister Sharp, President  
16 September 2021