

KU-RING-GAI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO SPORTSGROUND MANAGEMENT

Foreword

Ku-ring-gai Council has recognised the need for an integrated approach to manage sportsgrounds and other formal recreation areas. This has included working at a local and regional level with our community and stakeholders. As an example Council has over the past five years developed a range of policies and strategies, developed formal and informal lines of communication between Council and users and implemented a range of funding strategies to enable significant capital upgrades, acquisitions to meet current and future need of our community. Later this month, Council will be hosting a Regional Sports Forum to discuss sporting and recreation issues that recognises the transboundary nature of sporting codes and provision across the Northern Sydney region.

Despite these initiatives current and future pressures will stretch the ability of Council alone to meet expectations. Direct pressures will come from the implementation of the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy and Residential Density Plan for Northern Sydney and from the increasing participation (hence demands by local clubs, schools and the wider community). Whilst some demand can be off set through changes to the existing facilities such as the installation of floodlighting to enable night play, reconfiguration of sporting rules to allow greater play areas and mid week competitions to lessen pressures on weekend demand, these actions will nevertheless impact on the quality of our playing surfaces. Additionally, increased use and demand of sporting facilities for organised sport, active and passive recreation will have a direct impact on the surrounding residential amenity at these locations.

Current funding of sportsfield maintenance and upgrade does not adequately cover the realistic cost to manage sustainable sportsfields and fails to consider the significant cost of improved technologies and materials which are required.

Whilst there are a multitude of pressing factors impacting on sportsground management of sportsfields throughout Ku-ring-gai and New South Wales, this Council recognises as essential the need for regional approaches to be developed in response to issues including insurance requirements, seasonal dates and wet weather conditions. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for the state Government, through the Department of Education, to commence working on guiding principles that allow for school sportsfields to be maintained and utilised for community sport out of school hours.

The issue of Sportsground Management is now of critical importance to Local Governments and Ku-ring-gai has encouraged all clubs and associations to submit comments to the NSW Standing Committee on Public Works regarding their inquiry into Sportsground Management in New South Wales. To keep the community updated on this important issue, Council's submission to be formally adopted on 22 August 2006, will be available on our website.

Finally, Ku-ring-gai Council would like to take this opportunity to formally thank the NSW Government for its attention to this area and express our interest to the Standing

Committee on Public Works to be part of any future working party or forum that is established as a result of this enquiry.

1. Adequacy of provision of quality sportsgrounds to meet community needs

Ku-ring-gai Council's Sport in Ku-ring-gai Strategy (2006, appendix 1) and Open Space Strategy (2005, appendix 2) has identified a number of pressures on Council's existing sportsfields. Not least is our ability to meet current and anticipated demands for playing fields. At certain times of the year many of Council's fields are being used to capacity. The size of individual sportsgrounds and the difference in the quality of the supporting infrastructure, such as floodlights and amenities results in disparate use and capacity for use across the local government area. Council recognises that the infrastructure across its network of sportsgrounds including playing surfaces and supporting facilities is ageing and in need of substantial upgrade to simply maintain the fields at a safe level for the current level of use.

Rapidly changing demographics and lifestyles will impact extensively on local sporting and recreational facilities and the importance of planning for future communities and their sporting and recreational needs is paramount.

1.1 Current Provision of Community Needs and Demands

The current population (2004) is estimated to be 108, 830 with the 2001 Census identifying that the demographics of Ku-ring-gai is orientated around family age groups, most notably children in school age groups (5-17 years) and their parents in their late thirties and forties. This characteristic is dissimilar to Sydney Statistical Division information. Given that young adults, including teenagers, are recognised as the highest users of sportsfields, Ku-ring-gai's above average representation of this age group is and will continue to further compound the need for additional sporting facilities in the foreseeable future.

Ku-ring-gai has developed a strong relationship with the majority of seasonal hirers of their sportsfields. This includes the traditional sporting codes of rugby, cricket, soccer, hockey and netball and the emerging or unique codes of baseball, softball, AFL, archery and equestrian to name a few. The importance of strong communication channels between Council and sportsfield hirers will continue to grow as greater demand and pressure is experienced by both groups to satisfy demands from members, clients and the local community.

At best, Ku-ring-gai is served adequately for sportsground provision, the current rates of provision is 0.8633 ha per 1,000 existing population. It should be noted that this figure includes land required to support sports infrastructure and not just the actual sportsground playing surface.

In 2005, Council developed a questionnaire for all seasonal hirers of the sportsgrounds that collects essential information and statistics relating to the current and future demand of sporting facilities by their club/association. The questionnaire results identified that, for many sporting codes, clubs have reached their maximum player capacity and are capping registrations because they simply do not have the ability to schedule any more games

The inability for Ku-ring-gai to develop new sporting facilities has a direct impact on the ability of emerging and minority sports to develop in the local area. This is also true for the growing demand for sportsfields to cater the increase in female sport participation (in particular soccer and softball). Whilst Council's Plan of Management and Allocation Licensing and Leasing Policy refers specifically to the need to provide sportsfields for the development of new sports and those that involve women, the effectiveness of this aim is restricted by the sportsfields already have their usage capacities exceeded.

In addition to the aforementioned survey, Council staff completed adhoc audits of floodlit fields during winter 2005, when demand for these facilities is at capacity. These audits have indicated that, whilst sportsfields are in use a minimum of 3 nights per week (Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday) at all locations, the majority are booked 4 or even 5 nights. In addition, the audits identified a disparity in the number of people utilising floodlit fields throughout Ku-ring-gai. This has implications for those clubs that have historically been allocated from Council one sportsfield one night for training opposed to the larger clubs/associations who have a number of locations booked across the week and who therefore have greater flexibility in allocating their training schedule.

1.2 Future Provision of Community Needs and Demands

The Sydney Metropolitan Strategy highlights the growth of Sydney's population to the year 2034 and, in this region is forecasted to increase by 26, 627 people. Across the Sydney basin up to two thirds of this population will be located within existing urban areas and, within Ku-ring-gai there are no green field sites to accommodate these dwellings. This will have a two fold effect, placing direct pressure on existing public open space areas for informal recreation in lieu of the traditional backyards and increasing the demand for formal recreation through additional membership of sporting clubs, such as football, cricket and netball.

The 2005 questionnaire survey of seasonal hirers indicated a relative lack of planning by many clubs in identifying the impact that Ku-ring-gai's residential planning strategy will have upon their membership numbers. In many cases, clubs projected a small increase each year, well below the expected population increase that will be experienced. There is the need for state sporting associations to clearly advise their local clubs of their forecasted increases in player membership. For example, of particular interest is the forecasted increase in player participation by state sporting associations. Cricket NSW has identified that a 20% increase occurred throughout the state for the 2005/06 season. Girls and women's' cricket experienced a massive 63% rise and schools a further 19% increase. There is an inability for Ku-ring-gai to provide facilities that will supply this exponential demand as all synthetic and turf wickets are booked for the upcoming Saturday summer season. However, cricket NSW has recently met with Council and discussed that their association is researching the various modifications that can be made to their sport to ensure that they can successfully manage and coordinate increased membership on the current facilities available.

Ku-ring-gai's Open Space Distribution and Needs Study (2000) was prepared as background material for the 2000-2003 Section 94 Development Contribution Plan for Ku-ring-gai. The study took a comprehensive look at both the quantity and quality

of all of the open space land owned and managed by Council. In addition, the study looked at open space provision on a suburb by suburb basis and considered the provision of sports facilities at both local and district levels. Using traditional planning measures, the study demonstrated that there is a need for additional sports facilities in Ku-ring-gai.

In terms of changes to our demographics, Ku-ring-gai has historically had an older population and currently as a local government area we have the oldest mean age of any council in Australia. The impact of the recent planning reforms by the State Government is that there will be an increase in the density and housing choice throughout Ku-ring-gai. Furthermore, future demographics will shift further towards nuclear families, and these are the most needing of formal recreation spaces. Therefore, not only will there be an increase in the population to serve, but the age groups emigrating to Ku-ring-gai will likely be those that utilise sportsfields at a higher rate than the decreasing older age bracket.

The growth of population coupled with the style of accommodation will result in increased demand for sportsground facilities, at least equivalent to current proportional rates and, given current trends, will most likely be higher. Based on population growth to 2009, the figure of sportsfield provision per hectare per 1000 population is expected to decrease to 0.8157. Traditional benchmarks are 1.21 hectares per 1000 population. What this will mean in terms of access and availability to fields is not fully known, though with the current trends in childhood obesity and increasing evidence that formal sport is replacing play, any reduction in the capacity to facilitate sport and recreation would also serve to perpetuate this unfortunate health trend. The effect of obesity on local communities is examined further in Issue 5.

Thus, when we consider that there will be increased demand for organised sporting facilities, coupled with a growing financial cost associated with the problems of obesity, the importance of supplying the required number of sportsfields can not be underestimated. Ku-ring-gai currently has 53 sportsfields at 42 locations and all of these sportsfields are fully booked each Saturday throughout the winter and summer seasons. Given that Ku-ring-gai's population is predicted to increase by a minimum of 10% in coming years, this would result in a shortage of 5.3 sportsfields for Ku-ring-gai. However, this figure is based on current levels of utilisation which, are in themselves, already utilised at unsustainable levels. Furthermore, this shortfall fails to consider the current capping of membership by local clubs, and the increasing participation of both youth and adults in organised sporting activities, so the actual demand can be predicted to be much greater.

Of added concern is that there is currently limited data regarding the use of local sportsfields by the community for their passive and active recreation needs. If alternative options (eg playgrounds, bushland and park space) are not provided by Council, demand for sportsfields to be available for casual, social and ad hoc recreation will increase. The changes to traditional housing structures will result in many people not having access to the traditional backyard and look to alternative sources to satisfy their leisure needs and demands. Whilst Greenfield areas enable local government to plan for increased open space needs, Ku-ring-gai's development will derive from the reconstruction of existing dwellings. The cost of land in Ku-ring-gai is expensive and the average cost of property amongst the highest in the state.

Hence, acquisition of land large enough in size to provide the conservative figure of 5.3 new sportsfield locations is not a viable financial option for Council and there are serious concerns regarding Council's ability to maintain current provision levels.

1.3 Provision of sustainable sportsfields

The provision of sustainable and suitable sporting facilities is a key issue impacting Ku-ring-gai, and this pressure is expected to increase in the coming years. Whilst Section 94 is a funding source enabling the provision of additional sporting facilities, the limitations and restrictions associated with the funding warrant investigation. As funding can only be spent at specific locations and as developer contributions come in, there is real potential that money will be spent at locations that do not reflect where the true demand prevails for the provision of sporting facilities. Furthermore, provision is based on traditional playing surfaces that were historically based on much lower hours of usage per week than what is currently experienced. The growing need to redesign traditional construction methods and material to allow an increase in the hours of usage of each sportsfield will have a direct impact on the ability of Council to meet these financial implications in the short to medium term future.

Since 2004 the Council's sportsfield utilisation has been steadily increasing. This is being driven by two factors, an increase in participation and hence demands by more teams and an increase in fields that have lighting permitting evening training.

A key aspect influencing the ongoing condition of the playing surfaces is the hours in play. Nominally, Council has estimated that the sustainable carrying capacity or maximum use of sportsfields should be limited to 15.5 hours per week. This has been based on the historic response of turf and soil under wear and average climatic conditions. Demand of sportsfields currently exceeds this in many locations, as shown in appendix 3.

1.4 Impact of Floodlighting

While demand is addressed above, the impact of lighting as a mechanism to increase playing time has itself a number of consequences.

New and alternations to sportsground lighting requires development consent under Ku-ring-gai Council's planning scheme. This is primarily as lighting will increase utilisation and in turn affect neighbour amenity through traffic, noise, light spill and a reduction in the informal use of a sporting field as a neighbour asset.

In respect to lighting new fields and or upgrading lighting to a training standard, expectations to use sportsgrounds will necessarily follow. This has and continues to impact on the quality of surface, and is continually identified by players and associations. In effect, this leaves Council in a "catch 22" situation where a response to demand via more players requiring more training time through extending evening provision through lights directly leads to a deterioration in quality of surface that often prevents competition use on weekends. For many locations up to 38.5 hours per week is being allocated at most of our floodlit locations, exceeding the sustainable capacity more than twofold.

Since 2003, lighting has been installed at 4 new locations with another to come in the next six months. To date this has resulted in an additional 90 hours of training

available to seasonal hirers. In addition to new floodlights, upgrades have also been made to 7 locations with floodlights so that they meet the Australian standard for training. This brings a total of 11 fields compliant to training current standards lighting and 11 lit but not meeting the current standards.

In recognition of the need for more access to night time games, Council recently resolved that competition be permitted on one night per week at specific locations. Again, this allows an increased use of Council's sportsfields by seasonal hirers; however to off set impact, use is then reduced on Sunday bookings. The social impact of this policy decision enables the greater community an increased opportunity to utilise sports fields during recognised peak times (eg weekend days).

2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades

2.1 Appropriateness and fairness of council pricing principles for facilities.

Ku-ring-gai Council's Open Space Department operates on approximately 15% cost recovery for the money injected into sportsfield maintenance. Of this 15%, fees and charges are reviewed annually as part of the Council's Management Plan and all seasonal hirers are written to and provided a copy of the proposed charged during the 28 day exhibition period. Fees and charges are applicable to seasonal and casual hirers of sportsfields, parks and St Ives Showground.

There is currently no differentiation between the various fees and charges applicable to the hire of a sporting field for the same code (excluding the fee for turf opposed to synthetic cricket wickets). Therefore, irrespective of the quality of sporting field and surrounding infrastructure (eg amenities, car parking, training facilities etc) available for the local sporting club or association's use, invoices are based on the quantity of time the field is used (either half day or full day season and hourly training). Further investigation is required regarding the fairness of Council's pricing principles for sportsfields and there has been preliminary work completed on the concept of creating three different sportsfield 'levels' that will have a hierarchical pricing structure aligned with the service provided by Council (see section 3.3 for further detail).

Of particular note is the cost borne by Council is the preparation and execution of licence agreements between Council and sporting groups for amenity buildings and clubhouses. The time and money spent to develop these licences is exorbitant and a standard agreement needs to be developed at a regional or state level that can be implemented across all locations and sporting codes.

2.2 Section 94 Funding

Ku-ring-gai's Section 94 Contributions Plan for Residential Development 2004-2009 came into effect on 1 July 2004 and outlines Council's policy for the assessment, collection, spending and administration of development contributions. The plan details the facilities that are likely to be needed as a result of residential development. The plan included the estimated changes in population and demographic outlined in the "*What's New – projected population increases and changes in the demographic composition of the population*" section of this strategy.

2.3 Capital Works - Sportsfield Improvement Program.

In 2002, Council recognised that our existing sportsfield assets were incapable of sustaining the current level of use without significant upgrade. As a consequence it developed and is implementing a long term capital works program to improve asset condition and increase utilisation. Fundamentally this program seeks to reconstruct the playing surface, provide a better soil and turf environment, install irrigation sourced from harvested stormwater and, where possible, includes lighting to enable night use. Of the 46 sports grounds within the LGA of Ku-ring-gai a prioritisation program was adopted by Council and this has guided Council's capital works improvement program to date.

Now in its fourth year, Council's capital works program has refurbished three fields and planning is underway for another two facilities. Whilst the refurbishment program is a vital element in alleviating the issues of the sustainability of Ku-ring-gai's sportsfields, the recent impact of drought conditions, water restrictions and an increased demand for sportsfields by organised sporting codes, has resulted in many of Ku-ring-gai's sportsfields simply being unable to handle the level of use they experience. This has a flow on affect to the maintenance of these sportsfields and we are finding that budgets for maintenance require major review due to the increased necessity to undertake remediation works within a limited timeframe between seasons and without the previous availability of water due to water restrictions. As each field becomes stressed and level of use does not reduce, more money needs to be spent on basic maintenance to ensure a suitable surface.

A number of issues have arisen and conditions changed since the development and adoption of the original sportsgrounds prioritisation process including; the steady increase in the level of use of a number of fields, the ongoing water restrictions and the adoption of the Section 94 plan which identifies additional sources of funding for a number of locations. Subsequently Council staff in consultation with the Parks, Sport and Recreation Reference Group has revised the original process.

To ascertain what criteria was required in the prioritisation of sports fields the following assessment criteria was developed;

1. Playing Surface Standard;
 - A. Retains water above and/or below soil profile for a minimum of 7 consecutive days.
 - B. Less than 50% grass cover maintained throughout any one season.
 - C. Uneven surface levels.
2. Ability of recurrent maintenance programs to provide satisfactory playing surface.
3. Quality of supporting infrastructure.
 - A. Fences, back nets cricket/batting nets.
 - B. Seating & Shade.
 - C. Pathways & Lighting.
4. Current Negative Environment Impacts from Site;
 - A. Bushland Interface.
 - B. Water run off & storm water.
 - C. Impact on endangered species {flora & fauna}
5. Project can address identified environmental issues.

6. Project Caters for specific target groups at facility as identified in Sports field Strategic Plan.
7. Extent of multiple access to facility; i.e. 3 separate sporting bodies. E.g. soccer, cricket, rugby.
8. Facility usage; i.e. taken from sporting bookings
9. Identified as priority project in Sports field Strategic Plan and/or Plan of Management.
10. Asset management/maintenance plan for facility including audit and long term plan.
11. Ability of project to address issues of risk for Council and/or lower ongoing recurrent cost to Council.

The adoption of the Capital Works Program over the past five years has been an invaluable learning process for Council and the costs borne with substantial upgrade and remediation work have often exceeded preliminary planning. With the need for new technologies and methods to be implemented such as storm water harvesting and use of non potable water to irrigate sportsfields rapidly becoming the minimum work that has to be completed on each sportsfield, the cost of the annual program will continue to rise. However, despite these pressures and restrictions being enforced via water restrictions and environmental regulations, there is no identification of where the additional cost of these projects will be funded from.

2.4 Technology and innovation

As a means of addressing these issues, Council is researching a number of new technologies. This includes alternatives maintenance techniques, alternative supplies for irrigation including stormwater harvesting and sewer mining, the application of new varieties of turf and synthetic turf and the use of synthetic soil additives and chemical water collection soil additives. The dilemma is that new technologies are generally more expensive than traditional techniques, there are few case studies of their implementation across Australia and intern the long term impacts, costs and benefits are unknown. From a budgeting perspective this often leaves Council to pursue external grant funding to share the risk in the implementation and evaluation, though this funding rarely if ever allows for ongoing maintenance and if necessary the removal of the trail.

2.5 Supporting Infrastructure

There is no specific program for their improvement other than a reactive maintenance approach. While Council is developing a proactive approach to the collaboration of asset data for sportsfield infrastructure we are finding that funds are seldom available to fund even basic maintenance infrastructure.

2.6 Funding opportunities

The NSW Department of Sport & Recreation's Capital Assistance Funding Program is currently the only significant funding opportunity available to Local Government for capital works projects. However, the amount of money available in the 'pool' must be spread across all of NSW electorates and results in the \$ provided per electorate being minimal. In addition, funding must be supported with Council or club contributions, and this has implications on sporting clubs who do not have surplus funds available for capital projects. This has a direct impact on the ability of some sporting codes to improve and increase their sporting infrastructure and facilities,

especially developing sports that have lower membership numbers. As a result, the facilities provided for the different sporting codes throughout Ku-ring-gai is disproportionate and, with capital funding providing money for the upgrade of one sportsfield each financial year, some locations will not have any projects completed in the foreseeable future.

There is the need for state and federal government to provide a greater range of funding opportunities to local government and community sporting clubs that allow for the provision of new facilities and the embellishment of old. Whilst Ku-ring-gai's population will significantly increase over the coming years, there is no provision of additional sport & recreational facilities, funding or services by the higher tiers of Government to lessen this burden on the local community. Rather, this cost will have to be borne by residents, clubs or Council.

3. Environmental concerns associated with sportsground management

Over recent years the importance of maintaining an active lifestyle has been promoted to all levels of the community, an example of which is the "Active after schools" program. Whilst this is a great initiative in a growing obese society, there has been no consideration given to how local Councils will absorb this new demand for their sportsfields, both in regards to the quantity required and the environmental concerns associated with increased use.

3.1 Impact of Drought Conditions and Water Restrictions

Parks and Gardens consume the majority (60 to 80 %) of Ku-ring-gai Council's potable water consumption over the last 15 years. Sports fields account for a large proportion of this, but the exact amount is not possible to determine.

The average level of potable water used in Ku-ring-gai Council's parks and gardens is approximately 90 000 KL per year, and has been as high as 122 000 KL in 1991/2 and as low as 61 000 KL in 2003/4.

The last 15 years indicates that drought conditions are becoming 'normal', with two severe drought periods from 1994-1996 and from 2001 onwards. Both drought periods had water restrictions placed on water usage, for the first time in the Greater Sydney area since Warragamba Dam was completed in 1960. This suggests that further periods of water restrictions are very likely, with major implications for sportsground management and maintenance.

The current level 3 water restrictions may become more severe if the drought continues. It is possible that the use of potable water for sportsgrounds may be prohibited in future, as has happened in Goulburn in the NSW Southern Highlands. The severe drought conditions and lack of irrigation has recently made some playing fields unsafe for usage in both Goulburn and Toowoomba.

Ku-ring-gai's total and parks and garden water consumption was lower during periods of water restriction, with levels about 30 % below average. This demonstrates that Ku-ring-gai Council is doing its best to contribute to water savings (See attached appendix 4 Council water consumption chart for the years that were subject to water restrictions: 1995/6 and 2003/04).

3.2 Irrigation of Sportsfields

Balanced against the figures provided in section 3.1 is the fact that Council currently provides automated irrigation systems at 10 out of 53 sportsfields at 8 sites. To provide sustainable sporting surfaces, irrigation systems are required at all locations, and the installation of an appropriate system is included as part of Council's annual capital works program for sportsfields.

Given the importance of irrigation to achieve sustainable playing surfaces coupled with the increasing restrictions that potable water can be used for, it is critical that Council identifies alternative water sources for the purpose of watering sportsfields.

However, how Council can achieve the above is problematic. Whilst some funding opportunities are available, to adequately research, plan and implement irrigation systems and subsequent turf and soil works at all of Ku-ring-gai's sportsfields would be an exorbitant cost. Therefore, unless additional funding opportunities are provided, the installation of irrigation systems at the majority of sportsfields is unlikely to be achieved in the foreseeable future.

3.3 Stormwater harvesting schemes

Sportsgrounds (and other parks and gardens) offer pervious surfaces within the Ku-ring-gai area. This is much needed and helps absorb heavy rainfall rather than contributing to sudden increases in flow through the stormwater system which are quickly generated by runoff from impervious surfaces in the local government area (areas of tiles, paving, concrete and asphalt). Local waterways in Ku-ring-gai suffer from sudden peak flows after heavy rainfall with associated erosion, local flooding and waterway degradation.

Ku-ring-gai Council is implementing several stormwater harvesting schemes, and a landmark sewer mining scheme for the purpose of sportsfield irrigation. This will contribute further to reducing Council's reliance on potable water supply for the maintenance of sportsfield and other parks and gardens. This will also provide an addition supply of water in case further water restrictions prohibit the use of potable water for parks and gardens.

Stormwater harvesting and water recycling for sportsground irrigation will need to be carefully managed as new management problems issues are possible. For example, recycled water often has a higher level dissolved salt, which may cause problems for salt accumulation in the soil and for salt sensitive turf species.

Community acceptance of water recycling and reuse is essential and their involvement is also required as the hirers and users of the sportsgrounds.

3.4 Service and Maintenance Plans

Council is developing service and maintenance plans that guide the daily activities of operational teams to ensure existing assets are managed and maintained to maximise the useful life of the asset. Service levels for particular fields will vary according to their place in the sportsfield hierarchy. Three distinct service plan levels are currently being developed: level 1 represent premier venues for sport, level 2 represent standard

venues for sport and level 3 represent smaller venues suitable for junior/beginner sports and training.

It is also important to ensure that the biological components of each sportsfield are managed in accordance with their individual features and assets. Service and maintenance of sportsfields in Ku-ring-gai are managed in a way that considers biodiversity issues as they are often located in environmentally sensitive locations. For example, many of the sportsfields are located on the urban / bushland interface and adjoin highly valued and sensitive environments that are habitat for flora and fauna species, some of which are listed under the Threatened Species Conservation Act. Sportsfields needs to be managed in a way that minimises sources of disturbance such as water pollution, erosion, weed escapes etc.

The safety of stakeholder / users is a prime focus and the recent drought conditions and subsequent water restrictions have resulted in many surfaces becoming overly compacted. Council and clubs have the difficult task of balancing the safety of players with the expectation that grounds should always be available to play. This is also the same after periods of inclement weather when fields are muddy and wet. Council requires all seasonal hirers of sportsfields to sign a wet weather policy, insurance inspection form and seasonal conditions of hire to ensure that the club checks that the field is safe and suitable for play and training on each occasion. However, in an ever growing litigious community, some clubs are finding they are unable to meet these conditions and also those imposed by their governing regional, state and insurance bodies. There is a need to develop a regional, state or even national approach to the issue of ground maintenance and community sport, to ensure that all stakeholders' interests are satisfied.

3.5 Asset Management Plans

Asset management plans determine the current value of assets, through an audit process. The condition of physical and natural assets is rated and needs and priorities for asset maintenance and/or improvements are determined. The outcomes of this process inform the development of service plans and prioritisation of capitol works programs.

3.6 Importance of 'changeover' process between seasons

There is a growing pressure on the bookings function of Council to allow seasonal hirer's access to pre and post season dates, and this has impacted significantly on the maintenance works that can be completed by operational staff during the 'change over' period. However, the inability of sportsfields to recover between seasons and the growing deterioration of sportsfields towards the end of each season has resulted in Council at the end of summer 2005/06 for the first time effectively 'closing' all fields for a minimum of 1 week during the changeover period. Council is strongly considering the need to increase the time that fields are closed to all formal hirers and imposing greater restrictions on the number of nights that pre season training can occur.

Opportunity exists for a regional approach to be developed that examines seasonal dates and changeover procedures currently existing at the various Councils in each "ROC" (Region of Council). This would reduce the difficult of some codes whose competitions spans a number of Council and who need to accommodate their draw

accordingly. However, the issue of season dates also needs to be discussed with state sporting associations who are increasingly extending their pre-season and final dates without consulting Councils and, as a result, encroaching into the allocated dates for the next winter/summer season.

4. Effectiveness of current administration of sportsgrounds by various providers including councils, state government (including schools) and private operators

4.1 Council administration procedures

Council is proud of the bookings administration procedures it has developed for open space hire and strong communication channels exist between staff and seasonal hirers. The seasonal use of grounds is allocated twice a year, with each hirer required to submit the following documents to Council:

- Signed wet weather policy
- Signed conditions of hire
- Signed insurance inspection form
- PLI certificate (minimum \$10 million)
- Club contact details

A procedure is in place to deal with any clashes requests that occur and an invoice is raised after the first few weeks of each season to reflect the confirmed bookings allocated.

In 2005, the Council developed a questionnaire for all seasonal hirers of the sportsgrounds that collects essential information and statistics relating to the current and future demand of sporting facilities by their club/association. The importance of this data is reflected by the completion of the questionnaire becoming a seasonal condition of hire by all clubs and, failure to submit information will result in club's not receiving an allocation pack the following season.

4.2 State and Private schools' sporting facilities in Ku-ring-gai

The Sport in Ku-ring-gai Strategy identifies the need to work with school principals to maximise the mutual benefits of community use of school facilities and school use of Council facilities as a high and ongoing priority of Council. Currently Council obtains limited data on the use of local clubs and associations' use of school grounds for afternoon training and weekend games or of the school's own use of their grounds for weekday and afternoon activities. The impact that primary and high school use has on Council's sportsgrounds is considerable and there is the need for school grounds to bear a greater percentage of local community sport and recreation needs. However, with complications stemming from insurance, ownership and maintenance issues to name a few, schools seem to be reluctant to investigate this opportunity and there is the need for state government through the Department of Education to provide fundamental principles that enable greater use of school facilities to occur.

The LGA of Ku-ring-gai contains a number of private school grounds, much higher than the state average. Currently Council does not have the option to use any of these schools' sporting facilities (including sporting grounds, pools and indoor sporting facilities) for local community use. There is the need to investigate and determine at what point do private schools have a responsibility to provide a public service and for these facilities to be used by local Council. In particular, Ku-ring-gai does not have

any Council owned or managed indoor sporting complex, however preliminary investigation indicated that currently this is an example of where provision within Ku-ring-gai is being catered by the private schools. However, further investigation is required that examines the accessibility of these facilities to the local community and the restrictions of their use.

5. Impact on health outcomes and social cohesion, particularly in disadvantaged communities

Government campaigns have become increasingly prevalent in recent years which encourage communities to implement healthy lifestyles and be active for physical, social and mental benefits.

Council's Open Space Strategy identifies the importance of open space areas as assets for recreation, conservation and as a conduit for communities to come together which is an important component of urban liveability. Council's Community Plan, Sport in Ku-ring-gai Strategy and Open Space Strategy all include key action plans that increase the opportunity for residents to participate in sport and recreational activities.

5.1 "Active Ku-ring-gai" Program

Council employed a Recreations Program Officer in May 2005 and the "Active Ku-ring-gai" program has been developed and implemented over the past 18 months to increase the range of activities provided within the local community. The program provides affordable activities that have been designed specifically with particular target groups in mind. For example, women and older adults for Pilates in the Park. General feedback to date from participants is that they are pleased to see their local Council running and promoting activities that are accessible in regards to cost and availability.

In addition to the physical benefits of the activities, the program is designed to build a pathway for community members to adopt an active lifestyle and to increase social cohesion between individuals. Planning is now underway to increase the number and range of activities offered through the program.

5.2 Impact of childhood obesity

Whilst Ku-ring-gai Council is not identified as a disadvantaged community, the issue of childhood obesity is one that is nevertheless prevalent throughout all of NSW.

At one of the presentations provided at the regional sports forum hosted by Ku-ring-gai Council, the monetary and social impacts derived from childhood obesity was discussed. It identified that the minimum total monetary cost of obesity to Australia is \$13.84 billion and that the percentage of NSW boys and girls who are obese doubled between 1985 and 1997. With mental disorders, injury and depression being a major issue for youth in today's society, and depression linked to other risk behaviours (eg smoking, drug and alcohol use and eating disorders) the benefits of sport participation can not be discounted. Life skills, mental and physical well being and the creation and maintenance of social networks are direct benefits of organised sport. The speaker offered that 62.3% of all children (5-14 years) in NSW participated in organised sport and physical activity out of school hours and that this figure had increased by 3% over recent years. Additionally, a 2.9% increase in the adult age group had occurred, with a total of 42.7% of adults having participated in organised sport.

6. Traffic, noise and other direct impacts on residential amenity

6.1 Sportsground Plan of Management

Ku-ring-gai is currently reviewing the Generic Plan of Management of Sportsgrounds. POM is structured to reduce the impact on the residential density. The Plan of Management has been developed specifically with consideration to the impact that use of sportsfields and adjoining facilities has on the surrounding residents. The Plan of Management review identifies that early morning activities can only occur at those sites where there will not be an impact on residential amenity. Eg boot camp style activities are not allowed.

6.2 Development of Action Plans

Council has worked closely with local sporting clubs and association's development in recent years to develop partnerships. An example of this is the provision of action plans with local residents and sporting groups for each location where night games are played. Identifying that an increase in noise and traffic will occur at these locations, surrounding residents are provided with the contact details of a person that can be called to resolve minor issues on-site. This has provided a valuable tool for local community residents and acts as a positive example of where the local community, sporting clubs and Council work together to generate a result which has the various stakeholder's interests in mind.

6.3 Night Game Policy

The need to accommodate local sporting codes growing membership demands has resulted in initiatives such as the adoption of a night game policy. This has allowed Council to spread the usage patterns from weekend games only to include one night a week at specific locations. Restrictions are placed upon the club regarding the maximum number of Sunday dates that can be used in conjunction with the playing of night games to ensure that the local community is provided with increased opportunity to use the sportsfield for their own leisure.

6.4 Development Application Conditions

Ku-ring-gai's Sport in Ku-ring-gai Strategy identifies the need to spread the wear and tear that this activity generates. The installation of floodlighting at new sportsfields is an essential requirement and Council is constantly evaluating locations where floodlights can be installed. The impact on surrounding residents where new lighting will be installed will be considerate, and to accommodate the changes, development conditions of lighting generally prevent use after 9.30pm. Inclusions of conditions such as no weekend hours and staggered training time slots are also often included. These restrictions are communicated to the sporting clubs during the development application process so that they are aware of their responsibilities to ensure that the surrounding resident's amenity is considered whenever possible.

7. Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability

7.1 Public Liability Insurance

Public Liability Insurance is perhaps the most controversial issue that has impacted on local sporting clubs over recent years. The growing professionalism of grass roots sports, coupled with an increase in litigation has resulted in many state associations developing their own policies and regulations in regards to their players and

insurance. As a result, there has become a stalemate in some issues where Councils and hirers are unable to agree on the terms of PLI limits and conditions.

7.2 Security and Vandalism

Ku-ring-gai has experienced a general increase in vandalism to sportsgrounds over recent years. Incidents have included arson, break and enter vehicle damage to the surface itself, goal post removal or damage and other incidents of minor damage associated with anti-social behaviour. This damage cannot be budgeted for and is often very expensive to repair. The increase in vandalism has resulted in the need to increase costly security patrols of sportsgrounds and the limiting of vehicular access to certain areas by the installation of gates and/or bollards in some locations.

8. Access to open space for active and passive recreational users

Ku-ring-gai Council owns and/or manages over 1,400 hectares of open space land. Approximately 1,100 hectares are natural areas or bushland. The remaining 300 hectares includes 42 sportsgrounds, 71 tennis courts, St Ives Showground, an outdoor swimming pool complex, over 250 parks, two golf courses and an estimated 300,000 street trees.

Past Council studies and surveys of residents regarding their use of open space for passive and active recreational use identify walking as the most popular activity, with golf, tennis and swimming all rating highly. The surveys identified that many residents use local sportsgrounds for informal sport and social/picnic use in addition to organised sporting activities. The location of the sportsground in relation to their home and the ambience or 'feel' of the location was the primary factors in determining which sportsground they visited. Therefore, when we consider the growing demand by the organised sporting community for sportsfield use, it follows that sportsfields are becoming increasingly inaccessible to the non-formal sporting community. Council has addressed this issue somewhat by restricting seasonal hirers to a maximum of 15 out of 22 Sunday dates that sportsfields can be used. At locations where Friday night games are played, Sunday usage is restricted to 8 dates.

Council is therefore working to ensure that alternative recreational facilities including parks, bushland, tennis courts and St Ives Showground are appealing and made available to the local community. Council's capital works program includes an annual allocation for the upgrade and embellishment of playgrounds, tennis courts, West Pymble pool, parks and bushland. Council's District Park Landscape Masterplans has identified 15 locations which, over the coming years offer the staged preparation to plan, prioritise, and carry out improvements effectively and within a reasonable timeframe. Planning is underway for the development of walking tracks incorporating fire trails and linking existing tracks together.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

There are a number of challenges confronting Council in managing, maintaining and expanding sportsground facilities in Ku-ring-gai. These include changing community needs and demands, increased capital expenditure requirements, deterioration of fields associated with drought and water restrictions and age, a lack of assistance from some local schools. Ku-ring-gai Council is seeking to address these challenges through

detailed planning, working closely with appropriate stakeholders such as sporting clubs and associations, by committing funds through prioritised forward capital works programs and encouraging other Councils and the State Government to adopt a more regional and co ordinated approach.

Ku-ring-gai Council, on behalf of its community is committed to the provision of high quality and accessible sportsgrounds facilities as we are firmly of the view that their provision has a tremendous public benefit, both in the context of improving public health and social cohesion. The former of these benefits actually results in significant financial benefits for the NSW Government by reducing health and hospitalisation costs in the longer-term. In addition, many of the costs pressures described above have arisen as a result of state government policies and practices.

The provision of greater support from the NSW Government through partnerships, targeted funding and policy and will assist in ensuring the ongoing provision of high quality sportsground facilities in Ku-ring-gai and across the state. It would also guarantee that both the costs and cost benefits of promoting active sport participation through the provision of such facilities is shared fairly between both the local and state levels of government.

It will however take more than direct financial assistance. Policy development, particularly in respect of access to and retention of existing sporting facilities on state owned land and ongoing research and study to ensure that we all access relevant and useful information in a timely manner will be of critical importance.