

Ms Helen Minnican  
Committee Manager  
Committee on Children & Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

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Submission updated to include amendment

Dear Helen

## **Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Committee on the Inquiry - Children and Young People and the Built Environment**

Wollongong City Council has invested in children and young people for over two decades. The focus has included the provision of direct services, community development, policy and planning and information and referral. In recent years a number of initiatives relating to children, young people and the built environment have been undertaken. These initiatives have included a range of community engagement and consultation projects and the development of Council policies and plans. Outlined below are some of the details related to these initiatives which relate to the built environment and how it impacts on children and young people within the Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA).

Council has undertaken several community engagement projects throughout 2004 and 2005 which have culminated in final reports which inform planning processes related to the built environment across a range of Council divisions including Community & Cultural Services, Strategic Planning, Design, and Recreation and Natural Resources. These include the following projects:

### **Social Data Research Project 2004**

In 2004 the Community and Cultural Services Division of Council undertook a Social Data Research Project. The Project is an important planning tool used by Council's Social Planning Team in the development of the Council's Social Plan and by other Divisions of Council.

The Project included extensive consultation and engagement with over 3000 people living in the Local Government Area. A range of engagement strategies were undertaken including surveys, kiosks and focus groups. Children and young people were identified as two separate target groups and consultation was undertaken with children aged 4 years to 18 years.

The children's consultation included a workshop where children were asked to identify things that they would like or not like to see in their environments. This was done through verbal questions and pictorials. A total of 41 children under 5 years were consulted and 180 children

aged 5 to 12 years. The research considered children's use of parks, recreational activities, facilities and transport as well as issues related to safety and access.

Some of the issues raised by children included:

1. Wanting parks where there was equipment which is fun and challenging, access to open space and close to home. Children indicated that they felt unsafe in parks where there was graffiti and syringes present.
2. Children wanted access to more footpaths which were in good condition, wide and safe to ride bikes, skateboards and rollerblades.

Children were also provided with an opportunity to brainstorm their "Perfect Suburb". The primary school students indicated that their "perfect suburb" would include:

- More Police
- More playgrounds and parks
- Bike tracks and skate parks
- More public toilets
- Better public seating
- More bins
- Street lights
- A swimming pool
- Trees
- Car parking
- Street lighting
- More telephone boxes
- Water fountains
- Cheaper accommodation
- Footpaths
- Supermarkets
- Artwork by children (eg. murals)

The Early Childhood children indicated that their "perfect suburb" would include:

- Bike tracks
- More playgrounds and parks
- Swimming pool
- Sportsgrounds
- Trees
- Pedestrian crossing
- Police

As part of the Project a total of 509 surveys were returned by young people. The results of these surveys included:

1. More than 70% of young people responded that they were “very concerned” or “concerned” about safety. The other major issue of concern was the natural environment.
2. More than 50% of young people responded that they were “not concerned” about issues of art, entertainment, cultural activities and community welfare services and playgrounds and parks.

### **Social Data Research 2005**

The Community and Cultural Services Division undertook a further Social Data Research Project in 2005. Young people were identified as one of the target groups as well as families with children.

Some of the issues raised by young people at the consultations include:

- More walking trails needed
- Lighting of cycle ways
- Better facilities and maintenance of sporting fields
- Better maintenance of rock pool
- More facilities e.g. bins, parking, toilets at beaches
- More parking at shopping centres
- Upgrade and revitalise the mall and include better security

The findings of the Social Data Research 2004 and 2005 have been valuable in informing the development of the Social Plan, Cultural Plan, Safety Plan and the Multicultural Plan. These plans will drive much of the work of the Community and Cultural Services Division over the next 5 years.

### **Foreshore Master Plan**

In 2005 the Division undertook an engagement process with the Community to gather input into the development of the Master Plan for the Wollongong Foreshore. Families with Young Children, Children and Young People were identified as target groups for the purpose of the project. A range of focus groups were undertaken with these groups to gather their input into issues and desires for the Foreshore Master Plan. A group of over 50 children were asked to draw a design of their dream for the foreshore. The consultation considered the areas of:

- **Access:** pedestrian pathways & bicycle pathways.
- **Amenity:** building heights, building design, streetscape, commercial development, views, open space use, and natural environment.
- **Safety:**
- **Traffic:** volume, speed, parking, traffic signage.
- **Transport:** bus routes, location of bus stops, modes.
- **Culture:** facilitates.

The issues raised by children, young people and their families were included within “The Community Engagement Interim Report for the Wollongong City Foreshore Master Plan”. This report is being considered by the design team and will inform the development of the City Foreshore Master Plan and the Linkages LEP.

### **Community Engagement Framework**

In 2005 Wollongong City Council adopted a Community Engagement Framework which identifies the principles of community engagement at Wollongong City Council. This framework proposes an Engagement Unit. The role of this Unit will be to undertake community consultation on behalf of a Council Division and to advise Council Divisions on appropriate methods and strategies of engagement and provides training to those needing to engage. As this framework has been formally adopted by Council there is an expectation that results of all engagement processes are considered by the relevant Council Divisions in their planning, design and development.

Wollongong City Council is committed to ongoing community engagement through the Engagement Framework and part of this will be to ensure there are strategies and mechanisms existing within Council to consider the impact of the built environment on children and young people.

Council has developed a number of policies and plans which relate to children, young people and the built environment. These include:

### **Wollongong City Councils’ Child Care Centre Development Control Plan**

Council has recently adopted the “Wollongong City Child Care Centre Development Control Plan 2005”. The Development Control Plan provides information and provisions for the establishment of, and additions to child care centres. The DCP is based on the provisions of the children’s services regulations 2004 where relevant and the principles of best practice child care centres. The DCP replaces the “Policy for the Development of Child Care Facilities”. The new DCP is a more detailed and comprehensive document and provides a superior structure to ensure the needs of children are paramount in planning, designing and the approval of Child Care Centres in the Wollongong LGA.

The DCP seeks to encourage the provision of high quality child care and Child Care Centres based on best practice principles within the City of Wollongong. It aims to ensure that child care developments within the LGA provide environments where children’s development is positively fostered. The DCP provides a policy framework to ensure that all those involved in the design, development and approval of child care centres both within and external to Council are informed by and comply with a set of standards which ensure that the physical child care centre environment is a positive one for children, their families and the community. The DCP considers a range of process, planning and design criteria to achieve this aim.

The development of the DCP has involved cross government consultations as well as an internal working party with representatives from Strategic Planning, Planning, Traffic, Children and Family Services, Design, Sustainability and Landscaping. The draft DCP was advertised to the community to seek their comments. This has ensured that the appropriate expertise across all relevant portfolios has been utilised to inform the policy whilst ensuring the needs of children was paramount in all decisions.

## **Berkeley Strategic Plan**

The Berkeley Plan was developed to address a number of social, economic and environmental issues at Berkeley. Young people provided valuable input into this plan throughout the community engagement process. Some of the main issues raised by young people included concerns with issues related to safety, graffiti, vandalism as well as access to sporting clubs. Implementation of the Berkeley Plan has now commenced.

## **Draft Towradgi Park Master Plan**

The draft Towradgi Park Master Plan aims to prepare a 25 year plan for Towradgi Park. Community and Cultural Services undertook the community consultation component of this Plan.

As part of the community engagement process for the development of the Draft Towradgi Master Plan young women were identified as a target group. A focus group was undertaken to look at how the park is used, how the park can be improved, aspects of the park which are important to the group, ideas for the park, improvement of cultural aspects and areas of the park which are unsafe. The group also considered and made comment on the concept plan.

A report was submitted to Division for consideration when developing the draft Master Plan.

## **Development of the Social Plan 2006 to 2009**

The Wollongong City Council Social Plan currently under development and due for finalisation in December 2006 identifies both Children and Families and Young People as target groups. It is anticipated that within the plan an identified strategy for these target groups will include ensuring that children, young people and families are considered in all aspects that relate to the built environment. A range of mechanisms and processes will be developed and projects undertaken to ensure this happens within this LGA.

In conclusion Wollongong City Council acknowledges the importance of the built environment and its impact on children and young people. Children and young people are well placed to comment on the issues that most impact on them and propose solutions. To support this Council will continue to develop strategies which ensure this occurs across the Wollongong LGA.

For further information to support the inquiry please do not hesitate to contact the Children and Family Services Coordinator, Tracy Venaglia on 4227 7158.

Yours faithfully



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