

09 August 2006



The Committee Manager
NSW Standing Committee on Public Works
Sportsground Management in NSW
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Our Ref: 7055650

Attn: Ms Kylie Rudd

Dear Ms Rudd

Re: Sportsground Management in New South Wales

Council in its meeting of 8 August 2006 considered a report which tabled a response to the call for submissions into the enquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW.

In summary, the submission makes the following points:

- The Shire has one of the fastest growing populations in Sydney. The mechanism to provide new sporting infrastructure at the same pace as population growth, mainly through the provisions of Section 94 contributions, does not keep pace with settlement. Alternative mechanisms to provide infrastructure at a faster rate would be welcomed by Council.
- State Government's targets to increase population densities has resulted in a different demographic mix than was anticipated when the original recreation planning was undertaken and provided. Funding assistance to cater for the new population should be considered by State Government.
- Sports grounds are at capacity and the opportunity to develop additional facilities in established suburbs is limited. As a result, Council is faced with the prospect of limiting use based on the capacity of the playing surface.
- Increased personal liability and financial reporting requirements (GST) have resulted in a decrease in volunteer numbers and increasing pressure on clubs to generate income. Council would support the establishment of mechanisms to limit liability similar to the New Zealand Accident Compensation Commission.
- Access by the community to quality playing fields within school grounds is limited. Additionally, pressure is placed upon Council to co-locate sports fields and schools in green fields areas. The Department of Education should take more responsibility for school recreation and not rely upon Council facilities.



- Recreational trends across the Shire are shifting away from the more traditional sports into low commitment/individual activities. This increase in use is reducing social cohesion as neighbours to sportsgrounds are experiencing a change in the traditional use patterns and sporting groups wanting to increase hours of use.

All these issues are placing pressures upon local government to provide additional facilities or add to the existing infrastructure. Council would welcome greater financial commitment from State Government toward recreation provision than that currently afforded through the existing grant schemes.

Attached please find Council's submission and a copy of its current policy.

Should you require any further information concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me on 9843-0235.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Ransom", enclosed within a circular scribble.

David Ransom
PARKS & RESERVES MANAGER

Submission to the Standing Committee Enquiry into Sportsground Management

Baulkham Hills Shire Council

Introduction

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Baulkham Hills Shire Council for consideration by the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW.

Baulkham Hills Shire Council is in the situation where, due to its rapidly expanding population as a result of the Kellyville/ Rouse Hill Release Area, is facing unique pressures upon its parks and reserves to meet a growing demand whilst, at the same time, responding to traditional users and the shifting recreational demands of the community being experienced across Sydney. Some issues identified here will be unique to a growing population and the lead time required to meet new demand.

Major Issues facing BHSC in Sportsground Management

The major issues facing Council in regard to sportsground management maybe summarised as:

Increasing population

As at the 2001 Census, the Shires population was 139,404 people with a 16.6% increase (19,859) between 1996 and 2001. The estimated current population is 160,000 and is predicted to reach 238,000 by 2025.

Whilst the new population moving into green fields housing release areas will have recreation provisions provided in the long term, interim pressures on existing infrastructure whilst new facilities are built, has resulted in a reduction of the capacity of existing infrastructure to cope beyond its designed limits.

Mechanisms to enhance or replace S94 contributions to provide new sporting infrastructure at the same pace as population growth would be welcomed by Council.

Higher density housing

The State Government's target to increase the density of housing has resulted in the introduction of a different demographic mix than was anticipated when the original recreation planning was undertaken and provided. Whilst housing stock is demolished for higher density housing the recreational activities of the new population are relying upon the existing open space resulting in an over use of all open space land (both passive and active).

The current provision under section 94 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act to provide infrastructure for the new populations in these areas is not sufficient to meet the demand generated by the new population as the improvements cost more than can be reasonably recouped from the developer contributions and the land to create new facilities is too expensive for Council to purchase. Additionally there is a reluctance from the community to have housing zoned for open space purposes as they believe it devalues their property.

The higher densities have resulted in more people wishing to participate in traditional sports and the desire for additional non-traditional activities based upon casual non-commitment type activities such as six-a-side soccer, touch football, indoor recreation activities and exercise gymnasiums.

Whilst the private sector take up some of these activities, the increased usage of the existing playing fields is decreasing the playability of those fields and increasing the affect upon neighbours.

Council would support increased funding support from both State and Federal Governments than what is currently available.

Sportsgrounds are at capacity and the opportunity for developing additional facilities in established suburbs is limited

The nature of sport participation is changing with traditional sports on the decline and the introduction of high intensity - no commitment sports, impacting on field capacity. Sporting seasons are extending, with traditional dates merging or overlapping creating a situation where grounds receive no rest between seasons for renovation or recovery. The summer sports being most affected by poor quality turf cover left after a winter season of overuse. A number of factors are decreasing the playability of the existing playing surfaces leading to increased risk potential as grass cover is unable to be maintained.

The main reasons for playing fields reaching capacity are:

- Traditional planning standards approach that perpetuated an under supply of active playing fields (2.83 Ha/1000 population) which is still accepted by the Land and Environment Court
- Standard of development of playing fields in the past over creeks or rubbish tips without adequate soil profile, drainage or irrigation
- Increase in the length of winter seasons reducing renovation times available to Council for annual maintenance
- Sunday use has increased as a result of the introduction of sports such as women's soccer (who can't fit on Saturday)
- Introduction of "all year" sports with a number of traditional winter sports now competing for summer allocation of facilities resulting in grounds having no recovery time from intense use
- Week night competition to meet the demand for more flexible, social, low commitment sport attracting new participants increasing use
- Lead time to construct new facilities in release areas places pressure on existing infrastructure until the new facilities are in place
- Drought conditions and Sydney Water restrictions on irrigation reducing the turf cover to a point where field closure is being seriously considered
- Increased population densities have resulted in overcrowding of the playing surface
- Participation advertisement campaigns from Federal and State Government to become more active has increased usage numbers
- Over 35's returning to the sport of their youth due to health considerations and people wanting a healthier lifestyle

- Cash rich but time poor population wanting activities on a “pay as you play” basis extending the traditional times of use into the dark hours

The results of sportsgrounds reaching capacity are:

- A decrease in the turf cover and an increase in the compaction of topsoil profile
- As turf cover deteriorates the risk of injury to participants increases
- Increased participation has resulted in car parks becoming inadequate to hold the number of participants any one given time with cars now spilling onto local roads and creating frustration in the community
- Demand to improve sporting infrastructure – irrigation, lighting, drainage, car parking, change rooms, kiosks, meeting rooms etc..
- Increased requests to extend usage hours which would result in greater impact on neighbourhood amenity
- Reduction in neighbourhood cohesion as residents band together against sports clubs

Council is considering limiting the use of its infrastructure to allow recuperation of the playing surface and a reduction in neighbourly disputes that result from overuse.

Council is also considering allocating use on the basis of the capacity of the playing surface. The mechanism for achieving the playability of the ground surface must be equitable and defensible.

Council would support the development of a test model for capacity based allocation of sporting fields as opposed to the existing demand based system.

Increased personal liability and financial reporting requirements (GST) have resulted in a decrease in volunteer numbers and increasing pressure on Clubs to generate income

The cost of participating in sport is increasing as clubs seek to cover costs of insurance, Council fees and payments to attract quality players. Many Clubs are reporting it is difficult to get coaches and officials without offering financial incentives as volunteer numbers are generally decreasing across the community due to personal liability and a time poor society.

This has resulted in:

- An increase in liability premiums leading to increased cost to the player
- As clubs start paying traditionally volunteer positions, these costs are passed onto the players and sport is becoming more expensive
- Canteens are a good revenue source to clubs. As Council seeks to introduce sharing between clubs of the playing surface, the sharing of the canteen becomes an obstacle to any shared arrangements
- Pressure on canteens to provide a greater range of modern foods that require preparation in kitchens/kiosks that do not meet health standards for food preparation resulting in additional costs to Council to upgrade kiosk facilities
- Clubs are seeking to outsource canteen activities introducing commercial gain from community land requiring amendments to plans of management and licensing requirements. A lot of administrative work for a small community gain

- Pressure on Council to permit income generating revenue to the Club through advertisements in open space reducing the natural amenity and aesthetics of the space

Council would support the establishment of mechanisms to limit liability similar to the New Zealand Accident Compensation Commission.

Council would support an amendment to the core objectives of the Local Government Act for community land categorised as sportsground to support activities associated with the provision of income to community groups without major changes to plans of management or onerous licensing arrangements.

Access of community to playing fields within school grounds

The Government policy to limit after hours access to school grounds due to vandalism concerns also means that any sporting facilities the schools have are not available to the community. Additionally, new schools are being provided that do not include sporting facilities that are of a standard to support out of school activities. Council is being pressured to locate schools in new release areas adjacent to proposed schools to facilitate sporting requirements.

Issues associated with this are:

- Traditional school sports ovals do not meet risk standards for usability, car parking capacities or provide public amenities for players
- Reduction in capacity of Council grounds as usage increases when schools utilise Council facilities
- Access to school ovals depend upon the decision of the principal. A change in principal can alter long term use arrangements with some clubs who loose access needing to be accommodated on Council fields already at capacity

Council would support the requirement for the Department of Education to take more responsibility for the financial support of infrastructure used for school recreation activities and making school ovals more accessible outside of school hours.

In relation to the Standing Committee's specific terms of reference Council would like to make the following comments.

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

The traditional standards approach for the provision of sporting facilities has resulted in an under supply of playing surfaces that have not kept pace with changing community use patterns or demographic shifts.

In the development of the Balmoral Road Release Area, Council has based its recreation planning upon projected community demand based upon current participation rates published by the Bureau of Statistics Exercise, Recreation and Sports Survey (ERASS). These figures have then been modified by the projected population demographic mix of the proposed housing density, the employment and transport opportunities, and, an estimate of the age and cultural make-up of the proposed release area population.

It also increased the size of the playing field dimensions to allow a more multi purpose use to meet future changing recreation trends. This has resulted in an increase land uptake for open space within the new release area that will not be supported by the 2.83 ha/1000 rule of thumb.

How should the viability of sportsgrounds be evaluated in terms of health outcomes, open space and community cohesion?

One option could be cross comparisons between information from other health and community service providers (ie. Dept of Health, Education, Police and ABS) obtained under the provisions of an MOU for incidences of:

- obesity, heart disease,
- truancy, suspension, expulsion rates
- property vandalism and other crime statistics
- volunteer rates/trends, and

compare these findings to usage and facility provision data for sportsgrounds over a the same time periods.

2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades

Council has 36 Reserves that contain sports fields. Expenditure on its sportsgrounds in the period 2004 to 2006 has been tabulated and in summary is:

	2004/2005	2005/2006
Capital expenditure on sports field improvements:	\$ 94,761	\$ 92,233
Capital expenditure (release area – Kellyville / Rouse Hill):	\$ 3,000,790	\$ 2,817,451
Recurrent expenditure(on Reserves that contain sportsgrounds):	\$ 1,631,937	\$ 2,079,160
Income from fees (all sportsgrounds and courts):	\$ 85,000	\$ 90,000
Income from Sport and Rec Grants – Capital Assistance (direct to Council):	\$ 0	\$ 13,000
Income from Sport and Rec Grants – Regional Facilities:	\$ 0	\$ 45,000

The majority of capital expenditure on the older more established playing fields have been in the form of irrigation upgrades, lighting improvements, sub-soil drainage, power upgrades and installation of stormwater harvesting.

Fees are charged in accordance with Council's adopted policy. In the 2006/07 seasons the following fees will apply:

Field type	Seasonal hire fee (per field per season)
Class 1 – Large fields including turf wickets and complete range of support amenities, flood lighting and car parking	\$ 1,725.50
Class 2 – Fields of varying size, medium range of facilities including parking	\$ 1,039.50
Class 3 – Sports fields of varying size, synthetic wickets, toilets only	\$ 780.50
Class 4 – Other sports field not included above	\$ 520.50
Class 5 – Special classification for non-traditional sports such as pony clubs, BMX tracks and radio car control tracks	\$ 208.50
Netball Courts	\$ 57.50
Mid-week training only	50% of hire fee

Council is considering the introduction of a per session charge to reduce the tendency for clubs to block book fields and also to permit greater control over mid week sessions and multiple use of playing surfaces for a range of activities.

3. Environmental concerns

Increasing populations, higher density housing, government campaigns aimed at increasing physical activity, the introduction of new sports, changing participation numbers, drought and increased sports registrations are all impacting on the sustainability of sporting grounds. This coupled with Council's inability to water fields or rest fields from overuse, will determine if sport is played at all in the near future.

Some environmental issues facing Council:

- Availability of reuse water in new release areas suggests Council has greater access to irrigation opportunities, however the reuse water supply from Sydney Water is so high in salt it will degrade the ability of the soil profile to sustain growth in the long term without the inclusion of chemical additives. In a wet year these salts will leach from the soil profile into the stormwater systems and eventually the creeks.
- Access to water supply is capped by Sydney Water to a trickle feed requiring large water tanks for storage, increasing the costs of upgrading irrigation systems
- Increase in floodlighting intensity to meet risk standards has resulted in night sky illumination some interest groups are petitioning Council to reduce its night sky emissions
- Upgrading of lighting standards to meet light spill requirements has resulted in focused beam type lighting which requires taller poles. The lights can now be viewed from greater distances against the night sky
- Poor rabbit management across the State and on private property has increased Council's costs for pest species management as rabbits are a major threat to the grass cover on sportsgrounds

4. Effectiveness of current administration

Under the terms of the Local Government Act, Council is required to enter into a licence agreement for use of playing fields, amenities blocks and car parks. BHSC administers this requirement through the seasonal allocation of playing fields and a licence agreement with individual clubs and associations.

The main document that identifies the terms of this agreement is the "Use of Playing Fields – Policy, Practices and Service Levels". A copy of this document is attached to this submission.

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

There is an increasing recognition amongst the Shires population of the benefits of leisure and recreation in improving the quality of life, health and wellbeing. This has led to higher expectations regarding the standard and range of facilities, programmes and services that are required from Council.

The Shires population is ageing and this has created a shift in expectations as the older age group more frequently recreate "at home" or close to home. Many older people are moving out of the family home into locally provided higher density housing but remaining in the Shire. It will become increasingly important to offer social contact opportunities in a safe and accessible environment close to the higher density housing stock. Walking for pleasure and exercise remain one of the largest use of recreation time and the older population remain active in this area. In response Council has increased its spending on pedestrian pathways and reserve walking tracks to accommodate these folk.

Likewise there is an increasing preference for individual / informal activities rather than team based or group activities. The demand for greater flexibility in infrastructure, use and access places impacts upon the traditional users of facilities to "make room" for the new comers. This has also resulted in people seeking activities during times that have not traditionally been catered for, and around which sport has not been structured historically. Use patterns have extended into the dark hours requiring an increase in infrastructure for floodlighting and car park lighting. It has also increased the exposure of activities to more neighbours for longer periods of time decreasing social cohesion.

The introduction of the Companion Animals Act requires Council to allocate areas for off leash activities for dogs. The community responded to this requirement by demanding greater access to areas traditionally used for other activities including sports grounds. To improve its services to these users Council has instigated a series of upgrades to parks that are dog friendly and at considerable cost. The difficulty arises when this new activity is to be introduced in close proximity to neighbours who object to barking dogs and an increase in the use of open space as people drive to these facilities. Additionally, there has been disputes between sports clubs and off leash dogs when these activities come into conflict despite clear signage outlining hours of use. Both groups demand their right to utilise public facilities at the exclusion of all others.

Council is experiencing a definite shift in social tolerance as more people wish to undertake a greater range of activities on the open space developed for a more traditional demographic mix. These intolerances result in Council being more involved in dispute resolution between neighbours and users.

6. Traffic, noise and direct impacts on neighbours

Increased usage of playing fields longer into the night, on more occasions than normal and for new non-traditional sports (six-a-side soccer and touch football) has seen a decrease in the social cohesion of the community and a requirement for Council to become involved in dispute resolution between users and neighbours.

7. Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability

Council is not aware of any groups facing financial ruin over insurance costs alone. Sport generally is becoming more expensive for average families due to a number of factors including, Council fees, insurance, cost of paying for coaches and players, safety equipment, kiosk white goods, uniforms, goal posts, training aids and so on.

The majority (up to 50%) of a clubs registration fee is paid direct to associations for insurance and administration charges.

A potential solution to reduce insurance costs to the community would be a State run sports injury scheme which is not for profit and has no excess fees if clubs can prove due diligence in risk management practices.

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

Council is currently updating its recreation strategy that will define future policy / framework direction in terms of access for both active and passive recreation.

In broad terms, sustainability and compatibility principles are to be incorporated, to maximise access whilst minimising impacts between user types and the resource.

Increasing demands are placed on open space planning for both new developments and the older established areas, to provide a range of active and passive opportunities at the one 'site' and within reasonable distances to the population.

Practical elements include effective signage and other supporting information to users, combined with the appropriate placement of open space, trails, picnic areas, vehicle and pedestrian access.