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The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: SUBMISSION-INQUIRY INTO SPORTSGROUND
MANAGEMENT IN NSW**

Council Ref:

Thank you for the opportunity for input into the submission process relating to sportsground and green space management within NSW. Leichhardt Council recognises that the planning, management and provision of public facilities for sporting use is an important community issue. It is also recognised that at the community level there are complex and difficult issues affecting the provision and management of open space facilities within NSW.

Open Space and the Leichhardt Local Government Area

The Leichhardt Municipal Council is an inner west municipality located approximately 6km from the Sydney Central Business District. It comprises of the suburbs of Annandale, Balmain, Balmain East, Birchgrove, Leichhardt and Rozelle. The estimated population in 2001 of the Local Government Area (LGA) was 48,705 people. The population is expected to grow by 2011 to in excess of 55,000 people. In terms of land area the LGA is approximately 11.km² with some 84 parks, gardens and reserves set aside for active and informal recreation. A total of ten specific sporting reserves are set aside for active recreation.

In terms of population demographics, the Leichhardt LGA is undergoing a transactional change. The location of the LGA and its proximity to the Sydney CBD, combined with a well established residential area are key attractors

particularly to young couples and families. Just under half of all residents within the LGA are aged under 35 years, a range which is indicative of most active members within the population.

Open Space Deficiencies

Leichhardt Council currently has a benchmark figure of 2.83 hectares per 1,000 people. The average figure across the LGA is however below this benchmark at a ratio of 1.65 ha per 1,000 people. While Council is endeavouring to address this inadequacy it is unrealistic to expect that this ratio will increase within the short to medium term particularly given population demographics and predicted population increases.

The pressure that is placing on existing recreational facilities both within and outside of the LGA is of critical importance. Currently competition for open space facilities for active sport far outceeds current facility provision. Difficult and unpopular decisions are having to be made on issues associated with the allocation and use of sporting facilities. Carrying capacity is currently at an all time high and this is having detrimental impacts on playing surface conditions across the LGA. The lack of adequate provision, particularly in relation to training facilities coupled with excess demand for facilities is also having a negative impact on the enjoyment of sport and the overall presentation of facilities.

Planning and Partnership Opportunities

Leichhardt Council is endeavouring to address this issue in a proactive manner and through a number of initiatives. This includes advocating strongly for the community use of existing open space facilities not currently managed by Council. This has involved exploring partnership arrangements with local schools and State Government for the use of playing fields and other school recreational facilities including basketball and netball courts. Leichhardt Council is also lobbying State Government for possible managed use of identified playing fields within Callan Park (Rozelle Hospital site). The freeing up of these facilities would assist greatly in alleviating a number of pressures which the LGA is currently facing particularly in relation to training facilities for active sports. Discussions have been held with the Department of Health in relation to this matter and Council is currently awaiting feedback on a number of options proposed. The process is however frustratingly slow.

Areas of land which lie out of the realm of responsibility and control of the local authority also need to be examined closely particularly with regards to existing and future recreational needs. Current deficiencies can not be addressed adequately without the setting aside of additional open space to meet recreational demands. In this respect State Government also has a critical role to play particularly in relation to land under its governance. The Rozelle Railway/goods yards and the long term future of this site needs to be explored particularly in relation to possible community use and the development of open space facilities. Opportunities for open space facilities at White Bay also need to be considered. On the local government front S94

plans need to be reviewed in line with recreational demand. This is necessary to ensure that adequate planning is being undertaken to meet current demands and needs.

Current Provision-Neighbourhood and Community Parks

Neighbourhood and community parks also need to be reviewed with consideration given to developing multi purpose facilities which cater for a range of recreational uses, both on the informal and active recreational fronts. This will imply a cultural change within the community particularly where such areas are boarded by residential housing. Education and strict management control in relation to active sports will be needed in this respect.

With regards to the above this may also necessitate the need for rationalisation to be undertaken with existing facilities. A greater emphasis needs to be placed on the provision of quality recreational facilities rather than the quantitative approach. Urban green spaces need to be viewed and managed as the "green lungs" of a city which provide the needed relief from the built environment and a pathway for city workers and the inner city resident providing both leisure and recreational opportunities for a wide and diverse spectrum of users. Multi purpose development which focuses on providing a range of leisure and recreational experiences must be fostered as a method of best practise and as a promotion of the concept of sustainable green spaces.

Pocket parks have little value to the community and the value of such facilities needs to be weighed up in terms of the net benefit to the wider community. The traditional approach of the planned and organised civic squares and the manicured lawns, which adjoin many a town hall, as places of civic pomp and ceremony are no longer acceptable as the sole permitted use of such sites.

The value of these sites from a recreational, social and economic perspective has been transformed over the last decade. Such spaces are now used by a wide range of users for a range of cultural, leisure and recreational pursuits. Likewise such users come from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultural affinities. They therefore have different needs, values and viewpoints on how open space should be utilised.

It is clearly evident that many parks and open spaces across NSW are suffering from a lack of sustained investment. Run down facilities and poor standards of maintenance combined with a lack of age related facilities within open space areas and a lack of presence by a local authority are highly visible to the public. This in itself communicates directly a lack of care, ownership and authority and what can be termed as "a culture of neglect".

Benefits of Quality Open Space

The benefits of quality open space to the wider community needs to be advocated on a national basis. While the recreational benefits are often publicised and promoted the economic, educational and social benefits are

often neglected. There needs to be a wider emphasis by Federal, State and Local government on promoting the wider benefits of open space. This needs to include the following:

BENEFITS OF GOOD QUALITY GREEN SPACE

BENEFIT	GOOD QUALITY GREENSPACE CAN....
ECONOMIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds value to surrounding property, both commercial and residential. Consequently increasing tax yield to maintain public services • Contribute to attracting tourists • Encourage employment and inward investment to an area • Assists in establishing a favourable image of a place
SOCIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Places for quiet contemplation and reflection, for relaxation, informal recreation, peace, space and beauty • Provide opportunities to improve health and personnel fitness and take part in a wide range of outdoor sport and activity • Provide safe areas to meet, talk and play for free association of friends and strangers, for families and between the generations • Provide Cultural links with an areas past, giving a sense of place and identity • Provide opportunities for community events, voluntary activity and charitable fund raising • Provide an educational resource-an outdoor classroom stimulating ideas on art, design, the environment and natural sciences.
ENVIRONMENTAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide habitats for wildlife, aiding biodiversity • Help to stabilise urban temperatures and humidity • Absorb pollutants in the air and ground water • Provide opportunities for the recycling of organic materials • Slows storm water run off and reduce drainage infrastructure • Provides a sense of the seasons and the links between the natural world and the urban environment.

The benefits that open space offer to the community not only in meeting recreational needs but also in addressing social, economic and environmental issues needs to be promoted and advocated. In terms of addressing community problems associated with antisocial behaviour open space can play a leading role in providing opportunities for community cohesion and community safety. Capital Funding opportunity in this area along with funding which promotes open space development to address antisocial behaviour is needed at the community level particularly in addressing deficiencies in teenage recreation provision and creating legitimate areas for teenagers to recreate and socialise.

Wider funding schemes are also required in the area of access and disability funding. The aged nature of parks infrastructure is testimony to this with many parks failing to meet basic DDA requirements. Accessibility is a key assessment of open space provision. Without public access the provision of good quality open space sites are of little benefit to the community.

Funding Streams

Currently local government relies on Section 94 funding, rate collection and external grants to support open space management, development and planning.

The current capital funding opportunities which State Government provides and encourages local authorities to apply for is supported and valued by local Council's. Without such support and assistance it is recognised that many of the recreational improvements undertaken on recreational sporting grounds could not proceed. Competition for capital funding within Council's is a difficult process particularly for recreation programmes which often compete against recognised core services including, refuse, roading and engineering schemes.

Council officers recognise however that there is a high risk of services particularly capital development becoming dependent upon external funds that cannot be guaranteed in the future. Although this increased dependence helps to increase opportunities, there are serious concerns in the event of funding applications being unsuccessful. This would mean a reduction in opportunities for local people, having raised community expectations.

Planning Overview

There is a genuine need to develop nationally agreed standards and a planning framework which addresses the fundamental basic steps for undertaking open space, sport and recreation assessments and audits. This would need to include the following criteria:

1. existing provision to be protected (Subject to criteria 5);
2. existing provision to be enhanced;

3. areas in which new provision is required
4. opportunities for new, enhanced or relocated provision and
5. Land or facilities that are surplus to requirements and therefore no longer needed.

Consideration on a national basis should also be given to providing policy direction specifically relating to:

- S94 Contributions - If financial contributions are insufficient to provide new recreation space beyond the ability of individual developments, special area based open space funds should be considered to contribute towards district wide projects. These funds should be used to enhance existing provision or provide new provision in areas of need as and when required. A list of projects and estimated costs contained within local plans, which can be regularly updated, should be considered.
- Local standards should be set for different open space typologies

Emphasis should be placed on planning policies which:

- prescriptive and flexible
- Ensure open space is a priority within new developments and not as an after thought. The concept of 'design housing around the open space' as opposed to design the open space around the housing' should be adopted.
- support the improvement of the quality of existing open spaces as a priority
- support the potential development of a new 'open space development fund' that could be built up to improve the quality of existing open spaces from developer contributions
- account for the likelihood of smaller developments to ensure the Council continues to acquire funds to provide new or enhance existing open spaces

With regards to developer contributions (Section 94 Funding) and new housing developments there is a potential need for bigger and better located open spaces – size and location are key to long-term sustainability and achieving the significant benefits open spaces can provide. Integrating quality facilities which are multi purpose and promote wide community benefits e.g. sports, play and informal open space should be advocated where possible.

Leadership

There is a genuine need for greater networking between local authorities across NSW in the administration, management and development of greenspace sites.

Lessons on management, development issues, partnership formations and the creative use and implementation of practical solutions to green space problems can be learnt from sharing common experiences across the local government areas.

A number of local authorities are currently working in isolation despite the fact that the majority of issues and problems affecting green space management across the metropolitan area mirror each other. Given the close political boundaries which exist, the opportunities for information sharing and the pooling of industry knowledge to address park management issues should be harnessed. The setting up of a "NSW Greens Space Taskforce" which is representative of local authority officers would be a good move forward in addressing this issue. However this should be done with caution and with recognition that that individual approaches appropriate to each Local Authority will need to be adopted as each area has different structures and characteristics.

On a nation wide basis it is advocated that considered thought is given to the creation of a national body which promotes excellence in green space management across Australia. Consideration to creating a similar body to that of CABA Space within the United Kingdom is advocated. CABA Space is part of the Commission for the Architecture and the Built Environment (CABA) and is publicly funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). CABA Space aims *"to bring excellence to the design, management and maintenance of parks and public space in towns and cities"*.

Through their work, they encourage people to think holistically about green space, and what it means for the health and well being of communities, routes to school and work, and recreation through play and sport. Their ultimate goal is to ensure that people in England have easy access to well designed and well looked after public space.

Lessons learnt for some of CABA Space's case studies include:

- strategic vision is essential
- political commitment is essential
- think long-term
- start by making the case for high quality green spaces in-house (persuading other departments is key – high priority)
- a need to market parks and green spaces
- a need to manage resources more efficiently
- work with others - projects are partnerships
- keep good records: monitor investments and outcomes
- consult widely and get public support for your work

Summary

The demand for access to quality green space within the metropolitan areas of NSW is at an all time high. The dense and urbanised nature of our cities coupled with competing demands of an active population pose a number of challenges for green space practitioners. Planners and developers need to be practical and forward thinking in their approach to the provision of green spaces and facilities that provide for recreation. This is more important particularly in the inner city areas where housing and commercial development continues at an unrelenting pace.

Planners need to be more than regulators and policymakers they need to be urban visionaries planning for the present but mindful of future use and changing population needs. In this sense there is a need for a greater emphasis on developing quality recreational facilities which meet a diverse range of recreational needs. The creation of pocket parks is no longer an option or an affordable luxury as such parks are failing to provide for community demands. The need for reviewing standards and the provision of green space is an important and ongoing issue as is the development of local government partnerships for addressing common problems within the metropolitan areas.

Leadership from state and federal government as well as continued grant funding to support green space development and the community use of parks needs to continue. Without such leadership and support the ability to provide quality facilities and meet a range of identified community needs would be reduced significantly.

The promotion of networking, partnerships and information sharing needs to be further promoted particularly at the local and state level. The management issues facing green space managers are not isolated nor are they unique. Such problems can be addressed through networking and best practise and in this sense national direction is also required.

I trust that this is viewed as a positive submission. I am available to discuss the contents of this submission with the Committee should the need arise.

Yours sincerely,

Aaron G Callaghan
SENIOR RECREATION PLANNER