



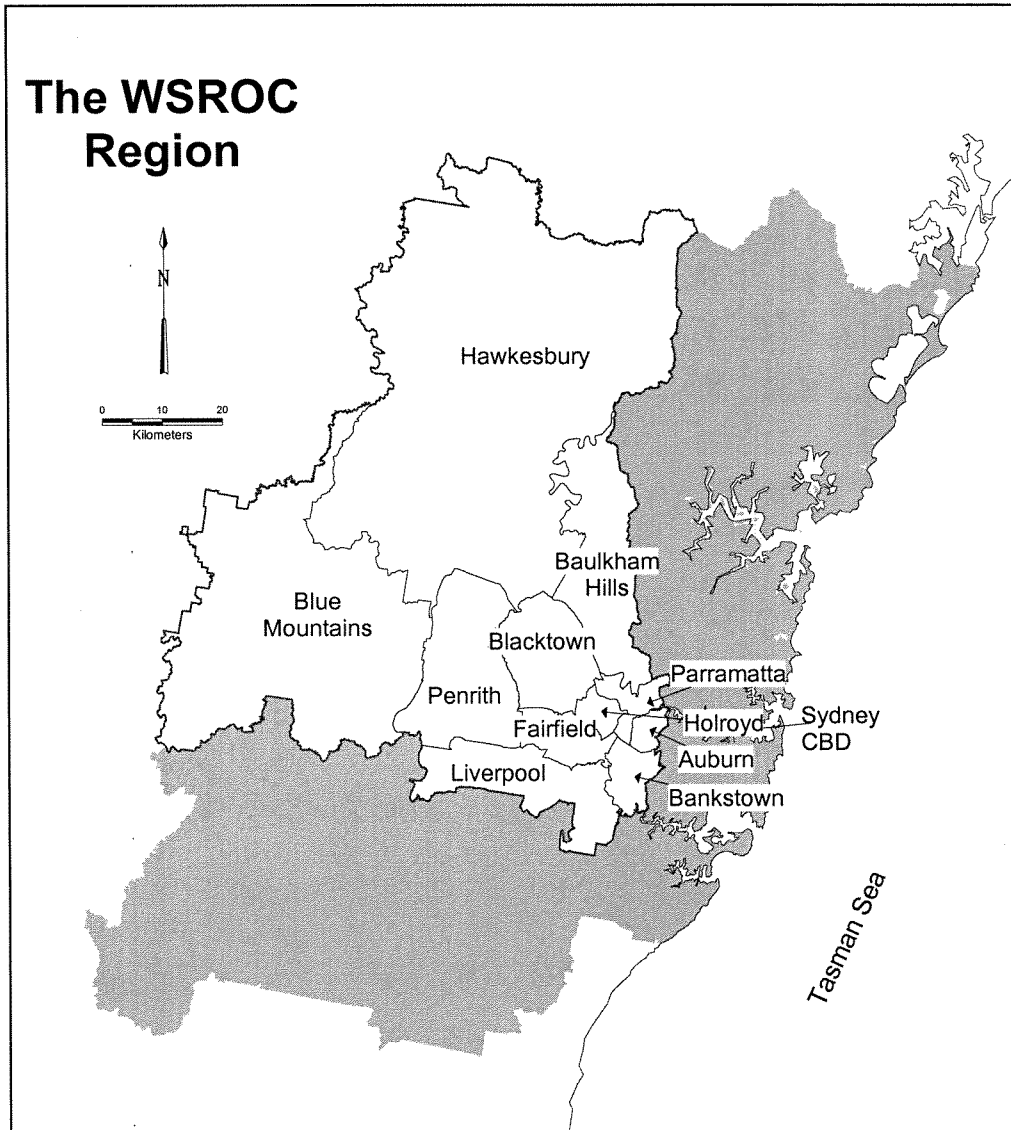
Response to the Legislative Assembly Standing
Committee on Public Works

Inquiry Into Sports Ground Management in NSW

August 2006

Prepared by the

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
1. Adequacy of provision of quality sports grounds to meet community needs across NSW	5
2. Environmental concerns associated with sports ground management.....	15
3. Effectiveness of current administration of sports grounds by various providers	15
4. Impact on health outcomes and social cohesion in disadvantaged communities	16
5. Traffic, noise and other direct impacts on residential amenity	17
6. Effect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability.....	17
7. Access to open space for active and passive recreational users	18
8. References	19

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS INQUIRY INTO SPORTS GROUND MANAGEMENT IN NSW

INTRODUCTION

Councils in Western Sydney have been reserving land in local planning instruments for decades to identify land proposed to be acquired, maintained and used for open space and recreation purposes. The provision of recreation facilities and open space should cover a very wide spectrum of human activity, ranging from simple activities like walking and cycling, whether for pleasure or as a serious means of mobility, to complex individual or collective sports requiring substantial areas of land or sophisticated equipment.

As more urban consolidation and urban expansion takes place in Western Sydney the distribution of parks and playing fields will become more crucial to serve the needs of all age groups and young people in particular, since they have less and less outdoor space associated with their homes in which to gain exercise.

Considerable changes have been taking place in recreation activity. For this reason assumptions about the way in which time and money will be spent on recreation in the future can only be tentative. Whether these changes will incur increased expenditure of both time and personal income, or both, is uncertain. In addition, the distinction between services that have normally been supplied for profit by private enterprise and less profitable activities such as amateur team sports that have been subsidised by the community is constantly changing. A substantial proportion of the increased leisure time which has become available over the last few years has been spent in the home. **All these factors point to the need for a flexible and multi-use approach to the supply of public recreation facilities.**

1. ADEQUACY OF PROVISION OF QUALITY SPORTS GROUNDS TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS ACROSS NSW

In assessing the open space needs of a future community, consideration should be given to widening the definition of the 'need' for open space as involving more than simply the space to exercise or play organised sports. The social and environmental contributions made by properly designed and located open space, provides benefits beyond easily defined and quantifiable active uses. Accordingly open space should be planned to accommodate needs which complement and reinforce diverse recreation provision.

Three major areas should be considered in the formulation of any open space plan – recreational, social and environmental requirements.

(1) Recreational needs

Community profiles, organisational surveys and the application of recreation standards can all be used to establish the basis of recreation demand. Raw population forecasts can identify open space components directly linked to population levels. These are essentially active sports facilities, where attempts can be made to match provision levels in new areas with those in more established areas. However of much greater relevance are the age group profiles of the communities in question.

Different age groups have different social and recreational requirements. Recognition of this variation in need and its resultant impact on provision requires the development of a community profile as an important component of any open space plan. For example, many new release areas contain a high proportion of children and particularly youth, which can result in a high demand for play and sporting facilities. **An understanding of the impact of age group profiles and how these groups use open space is therefore essential to meeting equity goals for provision. In this respect any open space system has to be variable and robust enough to absorb the peaks and troughs anticipated in the future.**

(2) Standards of provision

It is now generally accepted that the application of rigid standards to the provision of open space and recreation facilities is not always appropriate. Since the needs of different areas vary according to the socio-economic character of their populations, a wide range of factors, influences and constraints have to be considered.

Important components in the assessment of existing open space and recreation in the urban areas of Western Sydney should include:

- *The character of the community, particularly in terms of age distribution;*
- *Expectations in the supply of open space and recreation opportunities;*
- *The distribution of open space relative to the population served; and*
- *Opportunities for bringing any undesirable situations (such as poor distribution of facilities) into balance.*

(3) Social goals

Open space planning should contain a number of social goals beyond just provision of recreation opportunity. These include:

- *Access*
- *Community focus*
- *History*
- *Identity*
- *Education*

Access: The goal of high accessibility should be incorporated into both planning and design of open space areas. Hence the distribution and equity issues in the location of parks within an open space system should provide a range of recreation opportunities accessible for the whole community. This should be one of the fundamental elements of any plan.

Each category of open space will be dependent upon the catchment's guidelines and linkages and different age groups will have varied recreation preferences and travel capabilities.

Community focus: Parks and sports grounds provide an important community focus, particularly at the early stages of development. They provide an important meeting place, particularly for young children and their parents in situations where there is currently a limited population or limited funding to enable construction of community facilities.

History: Open space can perform a role in preserving elements of an area's heritage. Incorporation of archaeological and heritage sites within open space, the connection of these with open space links and the location of open space to provide curtilage to important heritage elements can help to address this issue.

Identity: Protecting, reinforcing or creating a 'sense of place' is also a main element of an open space plan. Western Sydney contains a wide range of landscape types and vegetation communities. The site selection of parks can provide the means to protect areas of landscape interest - both the rare and the commonplace. Where there are no natural features present the embellishment should seek to create a sense of place and a clear local identity.

Education: An open space system plays an educational role allowing young children to have some interaction with nature, while being supervised. Conservation areas can also provide a more complete experience for older age groups without the need for much supervision.

(4) Environmental goals

There can be conflicting objectives in the provision of recreation opportunities while protecting environmental values. **Attempts need to be made to match the recreation focus with the reservation of sufficient open space within all categories of open space to meet some environmental goals.** For example, local parks and sports complexes have a greater emphasis on recreation use, while conservation open space has a high emphasis on habitat protection.

Open space has a role to play in dealing with water quality and quantity. Smaller lots and higher densities reduce infiltration rates and the quantity and frequency of urban runoff. Open space also has a significant role to play in the reuse of water, provision of infiltration areas, energy dissipation of urban flows, stabilisation of creek banks and retention of existing aquatic habitats.

(5) District parks

Local government provides district parks that generally include a variety of play experiences in a range of settings including sports fields, bush land reserves, adventure playgrounds, BBQ and picnic areas.

Ideally these parks should be evenly distributed across the urban area and located within 800 metres of all residences. The parks should include recreation facilities for organised sport and other more leisurely pursuits.

Organised sporting facilities should be planned to respond to the needs of the future population, with park layouts allowing for flexible use, including seasonal and yearly changes in demand. When allocating playing fields councils usually consider the participation rates in sports codes within their LGAs. They also consider recreation planning standards adopted elsewhere in the State.

Increasing urban development and changing demographics shift the demand for community-based sporting facilities in different regions. Re-evaluation and re-adjustment on a regular basis is an equally important part of ensuring that community needs are met. Significant changes in the population profile will require revision of both the type and quantity of open space provision, particularly for organised sports activities.

The Western Sydney region continues to experience major population growth that has to be catered for. Typically in new release areas in the past the proportion of children aged 0-4 and 5-9 years was found to be high when compared to Sydney averages. Now, with the increasing cost of land, new release areas on the urban fringe are not attracting as many first home buyers and families with young children, so the proportion of young children is not as high as it was in the past.

In more recent trends the initial proportion of youth aged 10-14 and 15-19 years is tending to be higher than observed in past new release areas. An increasing proportion of young adults aged 20-24 are choosing (or are forced by circumstance) to live at home longer. Household heads are found to be in their late 30's, reflecting the dominance of 'changeover buyers' and the general ageing of the population. This changing socio-economic character of the population of release areas over time in turn reflects the requirements for open space.

Local government in the region is committed to providing open space with variety, size, distribution, accessibility, visibility and quality design and construction. Minimal standards of provision leave no room for shifts in recreation focus, or the opportunity to cater for as yet unforeseen needs.

Embellishment standards must be of a sufficiently high standard to ensure that use is maximised, the environment protected and the recreation potential of the site realised as soon as possible after development commences.

(6) Age groups

Recognition should be given to the fact that all release areas have a 'lifecycle' and that the open space provided must cater for different groups at some stage. This cycle means that there will, in the long term, be times when some facilities will be under-used and subsequently over-used. Flexibility and variety of provision is the only long-term solution to this problem.

The following information sets out the major recreation focus of different age groups that should be considered.

Age 0-4 years: The best place for small children to play is usually considered to be the backyard where they can be supervised without anxiety. Pre-schools, playgroups and kindergartens and small parks often provide children with their first form of structured recreation by offering the chance to mix and communicate with their peers outside the family setting.

Age 5-9 years: Children of this age group enjoy 'discovering' their local area and therefore a supply of passive open space is important as well as areas set aside for junior organised team sports.

Age 10-14 years: As children become more assertive they start to seek out recreation opportunities beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Recreation often takes the form of group activities and club outlets start to become more important. Activities including swimming, water sports, skateboards, BMX, scouts and guides are all enjoyed by this age group and therefore playing fields for organised sport, areas for both informal and specialised activities, plus passive open space, would all be required.

Age-15-19 years: As adolescents become more independent, family-oriented activities become less important and recreation tends to occur in spaces and facilities away from home, although transport difficulties can limit preferred choices. This age group has a high rate of participation in both informal and organised active sports. The provision of a diversity of recreation opportunities, including specialist facility areas such as water sports and water slides, is essential as well as core elements such as formal playing fields, indoor sport and recreation centres and passive recreation areas.

Age 20-29: Involvement in informal and organised sports starts to become less important to this age group, although indoor sports activities, often requiring the purchase or hire of equipment or facilities, become more popular. As this age group commence having their own children, family orientated activities such as picnics and barbeques and bushwalking emerge in importance again. The implications of the supply

of facilities therefore include the provision of indoor sports centres, areas for informal activities and passive open space. Participation in active sports still continues to be important to this age group.

Age 30-39 years: This age group will include many of the parents of newly formed families. Participation in active team sports becomes less important by this age, with the exception of golf, tennis, bowls and swimming which tend to be popular activities. Family-orientated activities and informal sports are still participated in and there is an increased demand for adult education activities in this age group.

Age 40+ years: Watching sport becomes equally or more important than participation (except golf, tennis and bowls) and there is greater emphasis on passive pursuits such as swimming, walking, picnicking and gardening. There is a general decline in active recreation with age and women in particular increase the proportion of time spent in home-centred recreation. The supply of specialist facilities, particularly bowls and small parks with sheltered seating, developed gardens and lookouts in the vicinity of users, together with access to large natural areas and parkland, is important to this group of the population.

(7) Quantity of open space provision

Assessments of the quantity of open space in the older established areas of Western Sydney often point to a shortfall in active open space provision, inadequate distribution of open space relative to the population and the need for a minimum optimal size of parks for maintenance purposes.

Surveys undertaken through the development of community and social plans point to a number of findings as follows:

- *There is a strong demand for sports facilities on weekends and after working hours*
- *The community is relatively mobile and willing to travel to use suitable sporting facilities. Residents use facilities both within and outside their particular Local Government Area.*
- *There are insufficient facilities/sports grounds to meet the current strong demand.*

Sports and recreation needs identified by residents encompass a wide range of sports and active recreation activities. Some are more appropriately provided by the private sector, such as roller skating venues situated in industrial/commercial complexes.

Councils also recognise that the needs of the incoming community may differ from those of their established residents. Also possible ethnic, cultural, gender and economic differences can affect demand.

There is also the need to consider regional recreational demands and the added pressure that development will place on existing facilities. Such facilities that are regional or have State-wide catchments should be located in major centres. The funding and construction of such facilities is generally outside the role of local government, but maintaining the opportunity for such developments is an inherent part of any flexible and comprehensive open space plan proposed for an area.

Recent changes to S.94 legislation which for the first time will mean that Councils will be able to levy for sub-regional facilities across local government boundaries should encourage regional planning of sports fields etc.

Finally, the planning for open space must recognise that future changes for needs as yet unforeseen should be catered for. Because any plan relies on speculative

assumptions concerning a future community, systematic monitoring and ongoing fine tuning will be essential.

(8) Quality of open space

In addition to the quantity of open space consideration should also be given to its quality. While being somewhat subjective a number of factors that could be taken as indicators of the adequacy of the type of provision could include:

- *The range of facilities provided – changing rooms, toilets, undercover shelter, BBQs etc*
- *Proximity to public transport*
- *Provision of car parking*
- *Proximity to residential development; varied terrain*
- *Tree cover and landscape quality; and the provision of children's play areas, picnic areas etc*

Other factors to be taken into account are:

- *The degree of use; and*
- *The potential for further open space and recreation development.*

Often open space deficiencies lie, not just in the total quantity of open space relative to the population, but more in the lack of a range of recreation opportunities. These issues should be alleviated in the region by the provision of extensive facilities provided by the Western Sydney Regional Park, further development of Rouse Hill Regional Park and proposals for acquisition of land at Shanes Park for conservation purposes.

(9) Social, demographic and economic factors which influence recreation provision

There are a number of factors which influence the type of recreation provision required in addition to population age groups.

- *Gender:* Males are more likely to use open space and participate in active sports. Females tend to participate more in unstructured and informal recreation. Both tend to participate equally in visiting parks, picnics and some ball oriented sports. Current provision can tend to favour male sports.
- *Length of residence in a LGA:* Long term residents tend to use open space more than new arrivals. This may in part be related to awareness which can be addressed by education and promotion.
- *Ethnicity:* People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly women, participate less in sporting activities.
- *Educational qualifications:* Higher levels of education can often equate with higher levels of open space use.
- *Hours worked:* High numbers of hours worked means less recreational time which may result in demand at a greater range of times.
- *Income:* Higher income people tend to use more expensive facilities.
- *Dwelling structure/density:* Smaller lots and higher densities place greater pressures on open space.
- *Vehicle ownership:* Vehicle owners have greater mobility and opportunities to use a wide range of open space types. Those without vehicles tend to use local parks or those with public transport access more frequently.

(10) Recreation preferences

A report titled *Who Cares About Western Sydney* commissioned by WSROC in 2001 highlighted a range of positive factors relating to the environment and the community, including the region's open space, trees and parks. By contrast people were found to dislike the distances they had to travel to work and recreation, poor public transport and accessibility problems and noise and air pollution.

The survey findings also pointed to the resident's desire for more sporting, entertainment, education facilities/venues for youth and a desire for more trees, parks, recreational bicycle routes and open spaces in their local areas.

(11) Organised sporting facility provision

An analysis of sports field use in Baulkham Hills Shire in 1995 indicated that the dominant sporting activities in winter are Soccer, Baseball, Rugby League and Union, Australian Rules, Netball and Hockey. In summer Cricket and Baseball dominated. Netball and Athletics are also popular in the summer season. The survey also found increasing demand for each of these sporting codes which would need to be catered for in the future. **Of particular concern was found to be the lengthening periods of participation in sports that in the past were only conducted in either the winter or summer seasons. This overlapping demand was tending to cause undue wear on sports fields.**

(12) Access issues

In many parts of Western Sydney the majority of the open space is located along the main creek lines. The presence of physical barriers such as creeks and major highways, coupled with poor public transport services and high costs all contribute to poor accessibility to open space and recreation facilities. There is a need to improve both public transport services to open space areas and car parking facilities. Councils are attempting to overcome these barriers to access by continuing to extend their networks of cycleway and walking trails. Safety and security issues are also being addressed.

Major barriers to participation in recreation include time, facilities, access, parking and transport. In Western Sydney time and availability are identified as major issues and quality, maintenance, information and adapting facilities for particular groups are identified as factors that would encourage the increased use of open space. Lack of transport and poor access have been identified as two of the major barriers to open space use by high school children. To address these issues planning the location and distribution of parks as a system together with footpaths, cycleway and public transport provision is essential.

Part of the success of bicycle transport as a common and viable transport option in European and Asian countries relates to the provision of a coherent hierarchical network of bicycle facilities, extensive system marketing and the active role played by local government in facility provision.

Cycling and walking could be increased in the Australian context by integration into the design of urban form and transport systems.

Cycleways should be planned to be highly visible and providing direct links between destinations such as schools, sports grounds and other activity centres and other open space reserves.

(13) Growth areas

Councils experiencing rapid growth in population find their current maintenance assets insufficient to meet the future demands of major release areas. Equipment, personnel and a new depot may be required and need to be realistically assessed to enable a process of gradual and efficient enlargement of a Council's resources.

(14) Management plans for community land

In accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993*, management plans are required to be prepared for all community land. Initially generic plans are produced which set guidelines for planning, resource management and maintenance of all open space. Later stages include more detailed, specific plans for most reserves.

(15) Maintenance issues

Items regarding maintenance include the following:

Size of open space: The actual size of reserves is one of the major issues to be considered in terms of maintenance costs. Councils in Western Sydney have tended to acquire a large number of small lots that have resulted in increased maintenance costs due to the necessity to use manual labour. Small sites (less than 1.5 hectares in area) can only be developed as a single playing field. Therefore the option of grouping playing fields and court games, such as netball and tennis, into multiple unit reserves to reduce management and maintenance costs is restricted by the size of the sites available.

In some instances land linked to drainage systems can have limited functional use and can be difficult and costly to maintain. Small pockets of open space, often oddly shaped and leftover from subdivision, with no particular purpose but requiring maintenance, should be avoided. Where such awkward spaces do exist however they can be used to provide areas of informal seating and play areas, with the maintenance burden reduced when residents agree to voluntarily manage the land. Such an arrangement assists in community building and can help to promote the importance of exercise for keeping fit.

Areas of hard surfacing: The high capital costs of most hard surfaces, in contrast to vegetated alternatives such as turf and groundcover, can be offset in the longer term by lower maintenance costs. These areas generally have higher carrying capacities than soft surfaces and reduce the need for water consumption.

Councils tend to reduce or increase hard surfaces depending on population densities in order to match embellishment to use patterns and needs.

The role that opens space performs in absorption of run-off and environmental modification should not be discounted. The environmental aspects and capital costs therefore set some limits to the proportion of hard paving that should be proposed.

Interfaces between landscape treatments: Major vegetation maintenance costs are incurred at the edges or interfaces between different treatments, particularly planting. Limiting the linear metres of edges and controlling these edges are major design tools for reducing maintenance in these areas.

Mowing strips and paths can be used for these purposes, preferably in geometric forms, since informal ground plans are more difficult to maintain with machinery.

Physical form and location: The physical form and location of parks such as distance from maintenance depots, topography and spacing of obstacles are all relevant.

High maintenance items (such as turf) located a considerable distance from the maintenance depot, turf on steep slopes or higher numbers of obstacles spread out produce higher costs through travel times and the requirements for hand mowers.

Desirable design strategies to address these issues may include reducing slopes through the use of retaining walls, planting groups, grouping facilities and planting and the provision of an additional depot. Where areas of native grass or vegetation occur within parks these should be retained as low use, low maintenance areas.

Plant selection: The plant selection for public landscapes should be driven by very different values than that of the home garden. Life cycles and life costs are extremely important maintenance considerations involving vegetation establishment - maturation – over-maturity and decline. **In the design and embellishment of parks it is extremely important that the real costs of establishment be recognised and the process effectively undertaken.** Failure to provide high resource inputs into this phase often results in unnecessary costs later in the life cycle. Maturation generally has the lowest maintenance requirements of the lifecycle and the length of that phase is therefore important when assessing vegetation types and total maintenance costs.

When plants are selected Councils should promote planting using local seeds in accordance with biodiversity plans. Reinstating natural vegetation can help to reduce maintenance costs and can add to a child's experience of nature.

Decline of vegetation involves difficult decisions which require balancing aesthetic, heritage issues and costs. As a result replacement programs are best undertaken over time. The lifespan of vegetation therefore becomes an important consideration in respect of the ongoing costs of open space.

Turf, shrubs and groundcovers, perennials, annuals and trees all differ significantly in their short-term establishment and long-term maintenance costs. Even within a single year maintenance requirements and costs can vary significantly. An attempt can be made to minimise these costs by selecting species that are both suited to the particular area and have a long maturation phase, in order to reduce the net maintenance costs of the open space system.

(16) Sports complexes

Sports complexes require large tracts of relatively flat land, preferably located close to schools to allow for joint use. Access will be primarily by car, public transport and cycleway. Also, due to reciprocal use (i.e. home and away matches) these complexes will be used by people other than local residents and conversely residents will travel to other LGAs to use facilities.

Structured or active open space providing the formal recreation needs of the community caters particularly for the 5-29 year age groups. It may contain areas with other settings and uses, such as children's playgrounds and areas of natural bush land.

The design of sports complexes should be guided by the following principles:

- *It should be capable of accommodating future changes in sporting activities which reflect community need;*
- *Where possible sporting complexities should group together activities to maximise land efficiency and reduce embellishment costs through economies of scale. This maximises the use of amenities buildings and allows for the shared use of facilities, car parks etc.*

- *Where possible sports grounds should utilise flood prone land, retention basins and former waste disposal sites.*

The nature of sporting facilities means they have the highest maintenance requirements of all the open space categories. Regular and high use patterns (causing wear), watering and mowing requirements are the major maintenance elements of these reserves.

Embellishment and site selection can play a major role in reducing maintenance requirements. Effective sub-surface drainage, adequate topsoil and careful construction can all increase usage and reduce maintenance costs. Properly designed and installed automatic and semi-automatic irrigation systems simplify care and maintenance of playing fields.

Aggregation of sporting fields into complexes also helps to simplify the process of maintenance by providing centralised storage of equipment for each complex. Each reserve will also require a management plan which will identify specific site issues such as the dual use of drainage sites within retention basins.

Some community involvement in the maintenance area may come from sporting groups and other users. However, the scale of the management issues for sports complexes means this can only be a supplement to a Council's management programs.

Wherever possible, water resources (i.e. farm dams) should be retained and the facility made as self-sufficient as possible in regard to irrigation and water quality.

(17) Multiple use

Recreation use of drainage land for open space is an important element of any open space plan. Reduction in land take of residential land, reduced land purchase costs, protection of ecologically sensitive land and variation in recreation opportunity are all positive elements of dual use of open space. (See WSROC Dual Use of Drainage Open Space in Western Sydney C (6) Circular F1 and its subsequent revision (3 April 1992).

Maximising the benefits requires an integrated approach, without which many of the benefits can be diminished. Many of the problems encountered in the past in dual use projects result from:

- *The provision of open space lacking variety;*
- *A poor distribution of open space throughout new release areas;*
- *Limited usability of the resulting reserves for recreation purposes;*
- *The destruction of riparian vegetation and bush land habitats;*
- *Drainage and hydraulic design parameters inappropriate to the particular site and intended recreation use;*
- *A lack of consistency in the application of planning and design principles; and*
- *Uncertainty as to the costs and benefits of provision and maintenance (Department of Planning 1993).*

2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS ASSOCIATED WITH SPORTS GROUND MANAGEMENT

Nowadays Councils are adopting a catchments-based approach to open space and recreation planning. Greater emphasis is being given to the establishment of structure plans and management frameworks for the catchments, with an emphasis on establishing links.

Consideration is given to the full development of the recreation opportunities inherent in the catchments' landscape within environmental constraints. This includes the promotion and conservation of the natural systems in all development and management and the enhancement of catchments images through management of their visual, cultural and aesthetic qualities.

More recently local government has also had to plan more strategically to cater for issues arising from droughts and the issue of overlapping codes referred to above. Governments could assist Councils by providing funds through the NSW Environmental Trust's City and Country Environment Restoration Program for further research into the effects of global warming that will have to be managed in the future (e.g. maintenance of turf and watering regimes).

3. EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT ADMINISTRATION OF SPORTS GROUNDS BY VARIOUS PROVIDERS

Sporting and recreational facilities in Western Sydney are provided by the private sector, State Government and local Councils. The majority of facilities are owned and managed by the Councils. Many recreational facilities are of a substantial size and perform a sub-regional function. **Often playing fields and other sporting facilities are concentrated to provide catchments that are wider than the immediate locality.** They need not necessarily be within walking distance of all users. Another factor that needs to be considered in planning for sports grounds is the availability of school facilities and the possibility of these being used by the community.

Councils do not necessarily provide the full amount of open space described in a standard but different breakdowns in composition of open space are provided at various stages of development of an area. For example, a concentration of playing fields could eventually be converted for passive purposes as a population ages, or in large areas where natural bush land may be a constraint, for dual use purposes.

Deficiencies in management practices in respect of open space provision which have been identified over the years include:

- *An ad hoc approach by Councils to the acquisition of land and the implementation of open space developments leads to considerable problems in keeping councils' reserve registers and maps;*
- *Problems associated with the lack of upfront funding with S.94 funds in order to acquire land, infrastructure works and embellishment.*

Section 94 of the EP&A Act allows Councils to require persons developing land to pay monetary contributions and/or dedicate land in order to assist funding the increased demand for public amenities and public services generated by the carrying out of their development. Specific problems encountered are:

- *Contributions lag behind development;*
- *Local government cannot control timing of development and consequently receipt of income; Section 94 does not cover recurrent funding expenses. This can often form a much larger financial burden than the initial capital costs of human services provision such as sports grounds and recreation facilities;*

- *Large upfront costs of open space land acquisitions;*
- *Due to the absence of (or at best limited) control over the timing of development it is generally not possible to prioritise the expenditure of S.94 funds; and*
- *Local government experiences significant difficulties in levying contributions for Crown development and the loss of contribution can only be made up from non- S.94 sources.*

While this is a general problem with funding for a range of human services it has been acknowledged that a particular need exists for some base level provision to be made in new release areas due to their physical and social isolation.

There is generally a much wider range of open space provision in terms of size in the newer residential areas of Western Sydney (as the result of the S.94 contributions) than is found in the older established areas of the region. **The issue of retrofitting open space in older areas undergoing urban renewal is proving difficult for local government in the region to resolve acting in isolation.**

4. IMPACT ON HEALTH OUTCOMES AND SOCIAL COHESION IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Metropolitan planning policies and programs can either help and promote or discourage physical activity and active lifestyles. Healthy frequent exercise helps to combat heart disease, strokes and other diseases that are associated with both sedentary occupations and stressful lifestyles. Healthy lifestyles can also improve mental wellbeing and therefore influence physical health.

Patterns of urban development that lead to increased car use/dependency, such as low density housing, few facilities located within walking distance from homes, and long commuter trips all tend to limit an individual's available time for physical exercise.

Planning can create attractive, safe and convenient locations that encourage people to walk and cycle (to work, schools and local facilities). Developments can ensure accessible and appropriate recreational facilities and resources in the local community.

There is a large body of public health and medical evidence to support these assertions. The research points to the complexities of any individual's likelihood to engage in physical exercise. Effects of topography and weather conditions can conspire against walking and cycling but there are also other psycho-social issues that influence the propensity to engage in physical activity (such as increased internet use and watching television by children).

In Western Sydney the urban form of the region contributes to a range of health issues for its residents. These include the increasing proportion of the population who are overweight or obese, an issue gaining increased public attention.

The lack of social/physical opportunities relates to issues of isolation and access to and involvement in community life. There is now increasing awareness of the importance of developing and maintaining social networks, local groups and activities to avoid social isolation, depression and mental health issues. The increasing urban consolidation and the move from a suburban lifestyle to a more urban one also bring fundamentally different ways of living with a greater emphasis on the importance of provision of public space.

There has been considerable debate on the issue of social capital and social cohesion in recent years. Social capital is seen to be a major factor in the development of stronger and more viable communities. Overall, the responses to the *Who Cares About Western Sydney ?* study pointed to a strong connection to neighbourhoods and neighbours, which indicated a degree of neighbourhood cohesion. Nevertheless, the findings also pointed to a small, but potentially

significant minority of people who, for whatever reason, were clearly much less connected with their neighbourhoods than the majority.

When asked what were the most important services to themselves personally sports facilities, public parks, and other human services were rated as important for a significant minority.

5. TRAFFIC, NOISE AND OTHER DIRECT IMPACTS ON RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

Safety and accessibility are important factors influencing patronage of open space by a local community. Therefore Councils have to consider the risks posed by heavy traffic, open drains, aggressive dogs as well as closeness to residential areas and parking provisions.

In order to encourage use while ensuring safety, areas of open space should always be highly visible and not be located at the rear of properties. Dumping of garden waste and other anti-social behaviour can occur if parks lack visual surveillance.

6. EFFECT OF LITIGATION AND INSURANCE COSTS ON FINANCIAL VIABILITY

In March 2001 WSROC made a submission to the *NSW Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Salinity*. The submission highlighted the work that WSROC had undertaken to reflect the importance of the management of salinity in the region including:

- *Recognition that salinity was a major environmental issue affecting a large area of Western Sydney (see NSW Salinity Strategy and State of the Environment Reporting in 2000); and*
- *Noting that the causes of salinity in the region differed from basic dry land and urban salinity models and required greater understanding.*

Issues that were identified included:

- *Liability, process and information dissemination;*
- *A lack of guidance to councils on how to alert residents of the problem and potential damages;*
- *A lack of information mapped at an appropriate scale;*
- *A lack of Council resources to deal with the growing community concerns as residents became aware of the impacts of salinity problems;*
- *The need for clear and consistent council action based on clear guidelines.*
- *The need for further research with mapping at an appropriate scale and the development of new building materials and techniques;*
- *Ramification of actions taken:*
 - *Effects on land values;*
 - *Anger at lack of detailed information;*
 - *Further deterioration in surface water quality as subdivision proceeds and inappropriate water management techniques are used in new developments*
- *Western Sydney Issues*
 - *Lack of acknowledgement at the Federal level of urban salinity issues for the region (no financial support);*
 - *Lack of public awareness of the impact on residences and urban infrastructure;*
and

- o *Lack of financial support to repair damage to economically disadvantaged areas.*

Salinity is an issue for the development of sports grounds in urban areas such as Western Sydney. It has significant implications for asset management, risk, liability and costs to the community.

As the result of increasing levels of litigation Councils in recent years have been subjected to extensive insurance claims and, while the number of claims is now reducing, local government is put in a very difficult position in relation to the provision of playgrounds and sports grounds, maintenance of equipment etc.

Local government is currently attempting to balance increasing community expectations, amounts of open space, a range of facilities and consequent implications for maintenance.

7. ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE FOR ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATIONAL USERS

Open space is used for a wide spectrum of human activities, including passive and active recreational pursuits as well as providing areas of intrinsic ecological value. It can also reduce the impact of urban development on the natural environment by maximising rain retention, reducing soil erosion, providing shade and enhancing visual amenity.

Given high population densities and the high stresses of modern life, along with increased leisure time, the value of metropolitan open space cannot be overstated. Public open space, accessible to the whole community, is a key environmental and social resource. As the principal custodians of this resource local government is seeking to establish and manage areas of open space to enhance local diversity, improve public amenity and provide a diversity of recreational opportunities.

Councils are wrestling with the need to balance demands for residential development with conservation and recreational objectives.

Passive recreation areas in the region include natural bush land, children's playgrounds, landscaped parks and gardens, scenic lookouts, areas of heritage of cultural significance and green links.

Some of the largest LGAs in Western Sydney contain bush land that has significant conservation values. However, with the extent of new urban development this bush land is at risk, particularly where it is privately owned. A balance must be struck between providing for public access and comfort and allowing bush land to retain its largely natural and undisturbed character. Leisure activities in the bush, if not appropriately controlled, can cause considerable damage to a fragile ecosystem.

Care of bush lands and playgrounds like ovals and sports fields requires financial and human resources for their maintenance. While community volunteers assist in maintenance programs they still need the support of Council infrastructure and direction.

A report prepared by WSROC titled *Western Sydney State of the Environment Report 2000* highlighted that workshop participants were concerned that there be future provision of space for a wide diversity of recreational needs: skate boarding, bird watching, family picnics, all forms of sport, quiet places, outdoor dining, children's playgrounds and areas for running and walking at lunch time. They all confirmed the contribution recreational open space makes to health, to neighbourliness and to family well-being.

Currently the available space in Western Sydney includes Council recreational space, farming land, national parks, State reserves and Commonwealth land. However, open space is disappearing under urban development. **The issues for all Councils are the maintenance of**

the quality of the open space and the conflicting priorities between maintenance for safety and for bush land conservation.

Councils try to distinguish between enduring and transient interests in active recreational opportunities when deciding priorities for new recreational facilities. Some Council's priorities are directed to developing joint facilities for the enjoyment of both local schools and the community in general.

In rural areas isolation underlines the importance of facilities and activities that encourage community contact. However, some common rural recreational pursuits such as horse and trail bike riding may degrade natural habitats and need careful management.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean River is a major focus for recreational pursuits in Western Sydney. Demands on the river as a recreation resource will continue to grow as Sydney's population moves further from the coast. It will be important that the river's ecological and landscape values are protected while still providing a range of recreational opportunities.

8. REFERENCES

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WSROC Ltd, *Who Cares About Western Sydney? Report 2001*

WSROC Ltd various submissions and reports

Various Western Sydney Council websites

WSROC 2006

PUBWORKS - WSROC Submission to Inquiry into Sports Ground Management

From: "Sharon" <sharon@wsroc.com.au>
To: <pubworks@parliament.nsw.gov.au>
Date: 11/08/2006 10:20 AM
Subject: WSROC Submission to Inquiry into Sports Ground Management
CC: "Alex Gooding" <alex@wsroc.com.au>, <esme@wsroc.com.au>, "Sharon"
<sharon@wsroc.com.au>

Sharon Doc: \C:\Templatenorm\Normal.dot Project: File: Date: 11/08/2006 To the Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Public Works

Please find attached a submission from the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) Ltd to the Legislative Assembly Standing committee on Public Works Inquiry into Sports Ground Management in NSW.

Given high population densities and the high stresses of modern life, along with increased leisure time, the value of metropolitan open space cannot be overstated. Public open space, accessible to the whole community, is a key environmental and social resource. As the principal custodians of this resource local government is seeking to establish and manage areas of open space to enhance local diversity, improve public amenity and provide a diversity of recreational opportunities. WSROC is therefore grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

If you require any further information in respect of this submission please do not hesitate to contact the Assistant Director, Mrs Sharon Fingland on (02) 9671 5271 or 0417 239 539. It would be appreciated if you could acknowledge receipt of this submission.

Sharon Fingland

Sharon Doc: \C:\Templatenorm\Normal.dot Project: File: Date: 11/08/2006