

**SUBMISSION**

**BANKSTOWN CITY COUNCIL**

**INQUIRY INTO THE JOINT USE AND CO-LOCATION OF  
PUBLIC BUILDINGS**

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Bankstown City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide the following submission to the NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee Inquiry into the Joint Use and Co-Location of Public Buildings.

**Purpose of Submission**

This submission provides information on Bankstown City Council's experiences with joint use or co-location of public buildings and includes views and commentary on issues, advantages and disadvantages relating to such arrangements.

Council has conducted an analysis of the Inquiry's terms of reference. The comments included in this submission relate to matters raised in paragraph no.s 1 - 3, namely:

1. *Options for retrofitting and adaptive reuse of existing state and local government public buildings;*
2. *Options for the design and construction of new public buildings with joint uses, having regard to environmental and community life cycle issues;*
3. *Issues arising from co-location of state and local government public buildings with private buildings.*

Consideration has also been given to the content of the "Inquiry Overview", which discusses matters such as *cost savings, economies of scale, the significance of proper planing, responsiveness to changing communities and the balance between public and private interest.*

## **Experience with Joint Use, Co-Location or Adaptive Reuse**

There are a limited number of examples Council can cite regarding joint use or co-location of public buildings by State and Local Government in Bankstown City.

Most recently, Council has undertaken the planning and design phases for construction of the **Chester Hill Multipurpose Community Centre**. Construction of the Centre has been made possible through a joint agreement between Council and the Department of Education. Essentially, the centre (to be constructed during the current financial year) will be built across Council owned land, an adjoining Crown reserve and land owned by the Department of Education (Chester Hill Public School). The centre will be multifunctional, with a portion of the facility specifically designed to provide a) school hall facilities for Chester Hill Public School during school hours and b) An Out of School Hours Care Centre for local children before and after school.

The remainder of the facility will be used for Early Childhood Health Services, a Senior Citizens Centre, Neighbourhood Centre Activities, leisure learning, playgroups and assorted community meetings and activities. Council is fully funding construction of the Centre, with the Department agreeing to a long-term lease of school land in return for its new 'school hall'. The school will receive other, less tangible benefits including increased casual surveillance of school grounds after hours and further integration between the school community and the wider community of Chester Hill. The multipurpose centre will also provide the school with easy access to an OOSH service which was previously located some distance from the school, requiring transportation of students.

The **Bankstown Civic Tower** is a local example of co-location of state and local government, albeit that Bankstown City Council as owner and landlord leases space to several State government departments. The Civic Tower is an eleven-storey development located on the north-eastern perimeter of the Bankstown CBD civic precinct. At present all tenants are government bodies, although private tenancy of the building is not necessarily precluded. The government mix certainly remains Council's preferred option for the building, in terms of both management efficiency and maintaining a strong government/services presence in Bankstown. Council's

administrative offices occupy three and a half storeys of the building (following a fire which destroyed the adjoining Council Administration Building in July 1997), with tenants including, for example, the Department of Community Services, Premiers Department, Legal Aid and others. Council's Customer Service Centre is located on the building's ground floor. The building effectively provides a "hub" of civic/community services in the centre of the CBD.

The CBD Civic Precinct has been developed with the objective of providing a 'core' location of civic services. The precinct houses the Bankstown Town Hall, the Bankstown Civic Tower (refer above), Bankstown Council Chambers, the Bankstown Library, Bankstown Courthouse and, until recently, the Bankstown Local Area Command. The Bankstown Courthouse will soon undergo a major redevelopment, reaffirming its place in the Civic Precinct. Although efforts were made to accommodate new Police headquarters within the civic precinct, this could not be achieved. All public buildings in the civic precinct surround a central park.

A number of Council's corporate and commercial services are also housed in a separate commercial building, the **Capital Centre**, in the Bankstown CBD - partially a legacy of the fire of 1997. These local government services are co-located with other State government departments including Corrective Services, together with a variety of private commercial uses within the same complex.

In Bankstown City, **Early Childhood Health Centres** (formerly Baby Health Centres) are located in numerous premises constructed and maintained by Council. The services run from the centres are operated by the Area Health Service. Whilst this is not so much an example of "joint use" or "co-location", it does provide a further example of cooperative arrangements entered into between local and state governments. This particular arrangement has origins dating back some 50 years and is indicative of the significant level of support provided at the local level over many years to State government programs and activities. The nature and level of such support is currently under review.

A further example of such cooperative arrangements, although not strictly related to 'public buildings' is the free usage of all general sporting facilities in the City by local

**schools.** This is mentioned in the context that, given the tremendous and growing burden on available **sporting and community facilities**, this Council is anxious to develop a reciprocal level of support for out-of-hours school use for community and sporting activities. These types of arrangements are evident in other parts of Sydney.

Council sporting and community facilities are also utilised by State instrumentalities such as TAFE for the conduct of offsite or practical components of various educational programs.

It is certainly considered that there is a widespread expectation by State government departments and agencies that, where their services or funded programs are to be delivered at a local level, the relevant local Council will contribute in some shape or form to the delivery of the service. Bankstown's experience in this respect has included Council construction of facilities, maintenance of facilities, provision of land, subsidised rental and/or free use of facilities. In 2003 Council was required to respond quickly to a State government call for land on which to construct a child care centre at Padstow. As a result, a potential child care crisis was averted, although the location of the new centre on a council park also raised some local community concern regarding the most appropriate use of Council's finite land resources.

A further example of joint-use of public buildings is the Council site which houses the Bankstown Arts & Crafts Centre and the **Bankstown Ethnic Day Care Centre**. The buildings, although ostensibly separate in terms of purpose and clientele, are built around a central common area. The Ethnic Day Care Centre was built by Council using funds provided by the State government and is independently run as a government HACC service. HACC services also make significant use of other Council facilities - 2 local community centres operated by Council are used at least 2 full days a week for HACC activities. This level of usage constantly needs to be reassessed against other local demand for Council facilities.

The Dunc Gray **Olympic Velodrome** represents a special purpose cooperative arrangement between State and local Government which has certainly benefited the Bankstown community. The facility was constructed on Council land by the State government and was formally transferred to Council following the 2000 Olympics.

The facility is now managed via an agreement with a third party - the Bankstown Sports Club. Effectively, the facility served the Olympic objectives of the State government and has remained as a legacy for the nation and for Bankstown. Costs associated with the ongoing upkeep of the velodrome are underwritten by the Sports Club.

Another cooperative arrangement between State and local government in relation to public buildings is the provision of multistorey carparking. In the Bankstown CBD, for instance, the **Marion Street carpark** provides both commuter parking and general public parking for the Bankstown city centre. Ongoing maintenance costs of the carpark are met by Council.

The adaptive reuse of public buildings is one issue which Council has been increasingly faced with in recent times, as community needs change. For example, in recent years a number of **Scout and Guide Halls** within the City have been identified as surplus to the needs of the scouting and guiding movements and have been successfully adapted to address other demand for specific-purpose or general community use. In Chester Hill, for instance, a former guides hall is now used by the "Woodpeckers", a mens woodworking group. Similarly, other assets owned by Council are under review given their age and the needs of the City's current population. These include the Town Hall, a multi-level carpark in the Bankstown CBD and a large site currently housing residential dwellings which is used to accommodate various community organisations.

### **Other Issues Relevant to Joint Use and Co-location of Buildings**

The following general matters are raised in terms of issues, advantages and disadvantages identified by Council in relation to joint use and/or co-location of public buildings:

The issue of equity is considered paramount in situations where partnership arrangements are entered into for public buildings. For example, local government should not be required to carry an unreasonable burden to provide land, facilities or ongoing maintenance of public buildings which may be in full or in part occupied by

State government services. It is reasonable that relative contributions are negotiated fairly and equitably having regard to the objectives and resources of both parties.

Where a public building is proposed to provide for joint use or co-location of state and local government functions, it is essential that clear parameters be established prior to project commencement. Relative responsibilities and risks must be clearly defined and proportionately shared. Difficulties can and will result where the responsibilities and obligations of partners are not appropriately understood or recorded.

A further issue relevant to the joint use or co-location of public buildings, particularly in more recent times, is that of security. Different government (and private) tenants tend to have specific requirements regarding security arrangements, some of which may change from time-to-time depending on perceived threat levels. The appropriate management of security needs is essential.

The broader issue relating to use of Council facilities by organisations for community purposes has been identified as a matter requiring further direction and Council is currently developing policy on this issue. The policy is expected to address, among other things, how Council will proactively plan and respond to changing community needs in terms of community facility provision. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings is clearly one option.

Other difficulties which may be encountered through joint use or co-location include possible confusion by users/customers/clientele regarding the respective responsibilities or scope of operations of co-locating organisations. There is also the potential for uses or clientele of different services to conflict - this needs to be a primary consideration in initial decisions regarding joint use or co-location. Further, although some co-located services operated by different levels of government and/or private organisations may in fact be complementary, there remains the potential for dissatisfaction or difficulties with one particular service to impact negatively on other services or tenants.

The benefits of joint use or co-location are evidenced by the number of such arrangements already operating within the State. Co-located libraries are a case in point. Libraries are typically a well-regarded and valued local government service which benefit from integration with other local services, from retail centres to schools or police stations. The co-location or joint use of public buildings by state and local government can help in the development of defined 'civic precincts' and promote community awareness and identification of a range of government services. These arrangements can also serve as positive local examples of government cooperation. In many instances joint use and/or co-location provides economies of scale in terms of resource use and more efficient usage of public lands. These arrangements can also assist in the provision of public facilities at the local level, which might otherwise have been foregone (i.e. because of resourcing issues) for many years. Joint usage or co-location, properly planned, can provide concurrent benefits to service providers and service users, and can promote positive communication and greater understanding between state and local authorities. This is expected to be the case with the soon-to-be-constructed Chester Hill Multipurpose Community Centre.

### **Conclusion**

The above information is provided to the Inquiry to illustrate the types of public building arrangements currently in place in Bankstown City. Council's submission recognises that there are some quite definitive benefits to be achieved through joint-use or co-location, although such arrangements need to be carefully managed and potential pitfalls anticipated. Importantly, Council considers that, where joint use or co-location arrangements are being considered by State and local government, negotiations must be entered into fairly and equitably - without undue burden being borne by local government in the short, medium or longer term.