



**ROCKDALE
CITY COUNCIL**
On Historic Botany Bay

6 September 2006

Our Ref P11/0015
Contact Michele Poepjes

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

Attention: Bjarne Nordin

Dear Mr Nordin

Submission - Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW

Thank you for granting the City of Rockdale an extension to lodge their submission into the abovementioned inquiry.

Please find attached Council's submission, which has been prepared in accordance with the key issues that the inquiry will be investigating, as stated by the Standing Committee on Public Works. Recommendations have been made under the relevant issue.

If you require any further information or clarification on the City's submission, please contact Council's Manager Community and Customer Services, Michele Poepjes, on 9562 1800.

Yours sincerely

Mr Greg Smith
Director - City Services

Submission

Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW

Introduction

The management of sportsgrounds poses many challenges for the City of Rockdale, particularly in relation to managing the increasing demand for recreational facilities in an environment characterised by limited sportsgrounds, aging facilities, water restrictions and the subsequent impact this has on ensuring the sustainability of reserves, recreational facilities, and amenity buildings. Proper control over the management of the use and redevelopment of its facilities is also a key issue confronting the City.

Council welcomes the NSW Standing Committee on Public Works' inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW. It is hoped that the outcome of this inquiry will result in the provision of real resources to local government to both develop and better maintain sportsgrounds, recreational facilities, and amenity buildings.

This submission is organised under the key issues that the inquiry will be investigating, as stated by the Standing Committee on Public Works. Recommendations have been made under the relevant issue.

Responses to Key Issues for the Inquiry

Issue 1 - Adequacy of provision of sportsgrounds in key demand areas

Rockdale City Council is a well established inner city municipality, which is highly urbanised and as such, has limited open space available to develop new sportsgrounds to meet the increasing demand for sports fields. This situation is further compounded by the fact that two thirds of the City is undulating and already developed, thereby restricting the opportunities available to physically expand the number of sports fields. The high cost of purchasing any of the limited, suitable, flat land would also make the expansion of sportsgrounds prohibitive for Council.

This problem is further exacerbated by the significant urban renewal that the City is undergoing and the pressure to approve high density housing developments, as a result of the State Government's Urban Consolidation initiatives and the Metropolitan Strategy Subregional housing targets. The increase in housing density, and the resultant rise in the population of the City of Rockdale and surrounding subregion, is placing greater pressure on our sporting fields, facilities and local sporting clubs'/groups' abilities to respond to the increasing demand for their services.

It is further acknowledged that, to date, the Department of Education and Training does not encourage community use of their sporting facilities outside of school hours. Locally, principals are reluctant to support community use due to a range of factors including, but limited to, access, security, costs and maintenance etc. Council is intending to forge stronger collaborative relationships with schools to facilitate better usage of these public resources.

It should also be noted that in order to facilitate the Cooks Cove development in accordance with Sydney Regional Environmental Plan No 33, it is being proposed that some of the City's sports fields will be relocated and rationalised in order to gain the greatest efficiency from the available land.

In light of these issues, Council has commissioned a review of its Open Space Plan in order to evaluate the total provision of open space in the City. The results of this review are not yet available.

Recommendation

That the Department of Education and Training consider adopting a policy position that results in the provision of resources and support for schools, to assist them to make available their sporting facilities, to local sporting groups outside of school hours.

Issue 2 – Current requirement for updating and refurbishment of sportsgrounds and supporting infrastructure

Council acknowledges the provision of capital funding through the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation and, has itself, accessed this funding source to start upgrading its aging sportsgrounds infrastructure. However, due to the age of a large percentage of the City's recreational facilities, Council is spending a disproportional amount of its resources on maintenance. The continued deterioration of the City's sportsgrounds, due to the lack of reserves to enable appropriate rehabilitation, is also contributing to this disproportional expenditure on maintenance. As a consequence, Council is faced with the issue of lack of sufficient funds to undertake any major infrastructure redevelopment outside of the projects funded by the limited grant monies received.

The City is also intending to explore options to partner with community groups such as PCYC and the private sector via sponsorship, developer agreements or partnership agreements etc. to fund the redevelopment of sportsgrounds and supporting infrastructure.

Recommendation

That consideration be given to establishing a special grants program, through the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation, to assist inner city Councils to update and refurbish their aging sportsgrounds, recreational facilities and supporting infrastructure.

Issue 3 – Appropriateness and fairness of Council pricing principles for facilities

Rockdale Council has recently adopted a Rental Assessment and Subsidy Policy, which will ensure a greater level of transparency and fairness in the fees applicable for the hire of facilities by various categories of users. This policy establishes a set of criteria that is used to assess the level of subsidy, which each lessee or licensee can receive.

The 'extent of accessibility of facilities to the wider community' has been purposely adopted as a key criterion for the allocation of subsidies to encourage optimal / shared use of facilities. (A copy of the policy will be submitted as a separated attachment)

Despite the adoption of this policy, Council must still manage local clubs' and the community's expectation that the facilities should be provided free of charge. It would appear that this expectation is based on local clubs' limited ability to charge fees and raise income, due to the financial difficulties parents face in meeting the registration fees or lack of willness to pay the fees. Parents also appear to have limited time available to be involved in fundraising initiatives.

Recommendation

1. That consideration be given to reviewing the registration fee structure used by various sporting clubs / associations in NSW with a view to establishing a code of conduct to guide the setting of registration fees, and to define user obligations to pay fees.
2. That consideration be given to developing a set of financial models for various levels of sporting clubs together with implementation guides, to assist clubs to better manage their financial viability. Particular focus could be given to methods available to generate income to enable clubs to meet operational costs including licensing and leasing fee obligations.
3. That consideration be given to establishing a government funded club/association operating grant funding program to assist new clubs / sporting organisations to off set some of their start up costs, and to facility them to achieve a level of financial sustainability at agreed target dates or milestones.

Issue 4 – Environmental issues, including water conservation and grounds maintenance

As mentioned previously at Issue 1 and 2, the high demand for the City's limited sportsgrounds is impacting on Council's ability to implement an appropriate rehabilitation program. This problem could be addressed in part by setting up school ovals as relief grounds, which would in turn allow Council to undertake rehabilitation work on its grounds on a regular basis. Ideally, Council would like to be able to contain the usage of its grounds to 80% capacity to allow sufficient time for grounds maintenance.

Council has also adopted a strategy to top dress its sportsgrounds with sand that contains organic matter to facilitate better water conservation and drainage. In addition, aeration of sportsgrounds is undertaken on a regular basis to improve drainage. Consideration is also being given to increasing the number of water bores.

Recommendation

That consideration be given to establishing school and other community organisations' ovals as relief grounds to assist Councils to develop a sustainable rehabilitation program for their sportsgrounds.

Issue 5 – Residential amenity, public liability and security issues

Council attempts to balance community concerns regarding noise arising from the use of sportsgrounds by restricting the time period loudspeakers can be used and by prohibiting the consumption of liquor at reserves or adjoining areas. Provisions are also included in licensing/permits that require Clubs to observe the Noise Control Act 1975.

Rockdale Council has also formalised the requirement for regular users of sportsgrounds to arrange their own public risk insurance to assist Council to manage the increasing risk associated with the provision of sporting facilities. Clubs are also required to undertake an audit of the sportsground to identify any hazards before commencing their activities.

It has also been observed that many Club organisers, participants and parents do not acknowledge the importance of ensuring player safety. This point is highlighted by the objections and complaints Council receives when it makes the decision to close sportsgrounds in extreme weather, or when it is deemed the grounds are not safe.

Recommendation

That consideration be given to establishing a state wide sports safety education program to increase sporting clubs and the wide community's awareness of the need to manage player safety, particularly in relation to the condition of sportsgrounds.