



CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL

City of Cultural Diversity

S-165-1

Our Reference:

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Subject: Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry. As requested, we have enclosed a copy of our generic Plan of Management for Sports Fields as well as our fees and charges.

Background

The City of Canterbury has a population of 131,000 and administers a local government area of 33.4 square kilometres covering 16 Sydney suburbs. Our City has 42 parks and gardens of which 26 contain 60 sporting fields.

Response to Inquiry

Our response to each of the factors listed in your letter calling for submissions is detailed below.

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

There are 38 clubs and associations who currently use Council's 60 sporting fields on a seasonal basis. Sporting clubs use our sporting fields for 22,000 hours per annum, and train under floodlights for approximately 4200 of these hours. Our summer sporting season runs from 1 September to 31 March, while our winter season runs from 1 April to 31 August.

Our sporting fields are used for the following sports:

- Australian football
- Athletics
- Baseball
- Cricket
- Hockey
- Netball
- Rugby League
- Rugby Union
- Soccer
- Touch football

In 2001 we commissioned a report which investigated open space and recreation provisions in our City. The report found that the amount of open space that can cater for sport is less than two-thirds of that recommended by open space standards. Infill development pressure on older established inner city areas such as Canterbury increases pressure on the deficiency in sportsground provision for our community. The only effective ways of countering this trend is for councils to buy more land (at high prices in the inner city areas) or to make more intensive use of what we already have. Both of these initiatives would be aided by a loosening of the current restrictions on councils' use of "old" Section 94 funds and by the State Government legislating to protect the "replacement value" of councils' community land taken by State and Federal Government agencies by compulsory process.

Community Feedback

Community perceptions of the adequacy of sporting fields can be gleaned from feedback from community consultations that we held as part of the development of the Canterbury City Social Profile document. The issues raised during the consultations are listed below:

- More facilities and services are needed for all age groups at reasonable cost.
- Growth in some sports (e.g. touch football, netball, soccer, cricket) has not been matched by growth in facilities.
- Amenities and toilet facilities in and around parks need to be improved.
- Lack of quality meeting places for sporting groups.
- Planning perceived to be inadequate to meet competing needs for access to facilities.
- Transport to recreational facilities and services needs to be improved. Planning for new facilities should take account of availability of transport.

During our 2006 Youth Summit, young people raised the following issues relating to sports fields:

- Perceived high cost of recreation services and facilities
- Need for more recreation activities/facilities for youth that are affordable e.g. basketball.
- Need for more public indoor sports facilities. Private indoor facilities are considered to be too expensive.
- Personal safety is a concern for youth at recreation venues and on public transport.
- Additional basketball and tennis courts required.
- Transport to sporting facilities needs to be improved.

2. Cost and revenue arrangements including capital upgrades

Sports fields costs Council approximately \$1.3m per annum to operate. This amounts to an average of \$22,000 per field with major costs being ground maintenance, electricity, water and refurbishments. Income received for bookings of our sports fields is approximately \$250,000.

As the figure quoted above show, our charges to clubs and sporting associations do not recover our full costs of maintaining sporting fields. Our charges do however attempt to recover a more sizable proportion of "special" expenses" Council bears in making grounds available to suit the particular requirements of individual sports (eg floodlighting for winter football codes for their training, turf wicket preparation for higher level cricket etc) as well as imposing some measure of and incentive for "rationing" of hirers' demand for grounds.

In our view, the use of our sporting fields by sporting clubs and associations provide a significant community benefit. Team sports provide the opportunity for the development of friendship and community spirit, and the improvement of health and fitness. With this in mind we consider that it is not unreasonable for the community, through Council, to promote and support sport through subsidising use of our sports fields.

We recently reviewed our charges for sports fields and found they are at the lower end of the range compared to neighbouring councils. Nevertheless, Council resolved to provide further assistance to the sporting clubs by reducing our floodlighting charges from \$17 per hour to \$12 per hour, a saving of \$21,000 per annum for the winter-users of our sports fields. In addition, we do not charge schools for use of our sporting fields.

As the cost of using our sports fields are relatively inexpensive compared to surrounding councils, they are relatively attractive to regional sporting clubs and associations looking for grounds on which to play and train. This is evidenced by the high utilisation of our sporting fields at Beaman, Croydon Park, Ewen, Hughes, Parry, Rudd and Tasker Parks. In order to ensure that sporting clubs are making full use of the fields they hire, particularly for training purposes, we have just completed an audit of all clubs use of our fields and will be reporting our findings to Council in the near future.

3. Environmental Concerns associated with sportsground management

Our environmental concerns relate to the following matters:

- The amount of water used to maintain fields.
- The costs associated with implementing alternate low water usage practices.
- Water run-off from hard paved areas such as associated carparking areas.
- Vandalism and maintenance of amenities.
- High usage of sports fields means fields are not given adequate time to recover.

4. Effectiveness of current administration of sportsgrounds by various providers including councils, state government (including schools) and private operators

Following a review of how we allocate our sports fields to sporting clubs and associations on an annual basis, Council on 26 February 2006 adopted the following policy for allocation of its sports fields:

4.1 Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible clubs must satisfy all three of the following criteria:

- 4.1.1 The club is local (within Canterbury local government area);
- 4.1.2 The club is affiliated with a local association;
- 4.1.3 The club has teams participating in local competitions.

4.2 Preference for Annual Seasonal Field Allocation

Preference is given to clubs and associations in the following order:

- 4.2.1 Long term seasonal hirers – clubs and associations that satisfy the eligibility criteria, and have hired fields in the previous year;
- 4.2.2 New eligible hirers – clubs and associations that satisfy the eligibility criteria, have requested use of Council's sports fields, and are on a waiting list;
- 4.2.3 Other hirers.

4.3 Allocation to Long Term Seasonal Hirers

Allocation to long term seasonal hirers is undertaken in the following way:

- 4.3.1 Prior to the commencement of each season information is sought, via Council-initiated invitation, from all long term seasonal hirers about their training and playing requirements for the forthcoming season;
- 4.3.2 These hirers are then given first priority to retain fields booked for the previous season;
- 4.3.3 If these requirements involve the need for additional fields to be booked from the previous season, these are accommodated where possible before allocation to new eligible hirers or other hirers.

4.4 Allocation to New Eligible Hirers

Once the requirements of long term seasonal hirers have been met, any excess sporting fields are released to new eligible hirers on the waiting list in order of their listing.

4.5 Allocation to Other Hirers

Once the requirements of new eligible hirers have been met, any excess sporting fields are released to other hirers that have requested a seasonal booking. This is done with a clear understanding that the booking is on a season-to-season basis only and subject to cancellation (at the end of the season) in the event that the fields are required for either a permanent hirer or a new eligible club.

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

Senior sport provides a substantial opportunity for the development of friendships and community spirit, and the improvement of health and fitness. Junior sport provides the opportunity for younger members of the community to learn the value of teamwork, collective responsibility, reward for effort, the value of rules and boundaries, service and citizenship, self discipline, dignity and respect, exercise, health and nutrition and sportsmanship. These are some of the reasons we encourage participation in sport through cost subsidisation of our sporting fields.

International studies have shown there is a link between participation in sport and improved health. Therefore, increasing sport participation as a strategy for improving our citizen's health could significantly reduce health care costs. There could be a high potential economic value for all levels of government in Australia in increasing active sport participation as part of a broader strategy of increasing physical activity in order to improve the health of our citizens. Improvements in average health levels of individuals through increased physical activity could significantly cut health care delivery costs, with high potential savings annually. Such a strategy we believe would be best

developed by a collaborative effort of the three tiers of Government – Federal, State and Local.

The Canterbury City Social Profile document identifies a number of indicators of need with respect to the provision of sports fields. The City of Canterbury contains one of the most culturally diverse communities in Australia, which accompanied by high population density, means there is significant pressure on sporting fields to cater for a diverse range of sports and interests. Our research has shown that a large number of our residents that are on low individual and family income experience difficulties in being able to pay fees and participate in some programs. In addition, there is a limitation on services to recover costs through full fees without impacting on the utilisation of the service, and high demand for services offered for free or with a relatively small charge.

Canterbury's large and growing number of residents from Non-English speaking countries impact on the type of recreation services sought by the community and contribute to increased community pressure for changes to the use of existing facilities. This also has implications for the demand to cater to separate groups within communities.

Studies have also shown that sport improves social cohesion. Sport participants experience a high degree of interaction with other individuals, improve interpersonal relationships, establish a basis for trust and build teamwork skills that foster cohesion. Sport also significantly enhances the quality of urban life. Numerous studies of social cohesion have found that sport and community recreation play a key role in the life of a city, and that recreation and sport facilities contribute to a city's social fabric. With this in mind, we have initiated a number of programs that promote the involvement of non-English speaking (NESB) communities in sport to encourage social cohesion and promote participation in mainstream sports programs such as cricket and Australian Rules football.

Consultations with migrant communities have shown community appreciation of the role sport plays in assisting young people to mix socially in the community and develop self esteem, reduce obesity and promote healthy lifestyles. We also use local sporting facilities to promote "Healthy Lifestyles" and "Community Harmony" programs. These programs are often targetted at 'at risk' youth which include low socio-economic and newly arrived communities and young females. Many of our community groups are also committed to providing sporting and recreation programs and do so at little or no cost to participants.

6. Traffic, noise and other direct impacts on residential amenity

In general, the users of our sports fields respect the amenity of adjoining residents and we receive few complaints from these residents. There are however two sports fields situated in densely populated residential areas in our City that we have received complaints about from adjoining residents. These fields are used extensively for soccer training and fixtures and have limited carparking available. The complaints about these fields relate to traffic and parking issues.

Council is committed to maintaining the amenity of residents that adjoin sporting fields and at its meeting on 27 July 2006 resolved to prepare specific plans of management for those sports fields whose use is having a negative impact on the amenity of residents. In

preparing the plans we will undertake consultation with all users including representatives of sporting clubs, schools, community groups and local residents. The plans will address issues such as:

- Frequency of use
- Noise and environmental impacts
- Location of facilities
- Lighting
- Parking and traffic issues
- Requirements of section 36 of the Local Government Act 1993.

7. Affect of litigation and insurance costs on financial viability

There have been no successful insurance claims made against Council for sporting injuries since the commencement of the Civil Liability Act in 2002. Council requires users of our sporting fields to carry their own insurance. I am not aware of the effects of litigation and insurance costs for individual sporting clubs and associations that use our fields.

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

The City of Canterbury contains 2.1 hectares of open space per 1000 residents. This is significantly lower than the recognized standard for community open space which is 2.83 hectares per 1000 residents.

The provision of public open space is one of the factors that contribute to quality of life, particularly in dense urban environments such as Canterbury. With this in mind, we commissioned Spackman and Mossop in 2001 to prepare a strategic plan for open space and recreation. The Plan provides strategic direction for the future provision, development, use and management of open space and recreation facilities within the City of Canterbury. The major issues raised in the plan in relation to open space and sports fields are discussed below.

One of the issues facing Canterbury is that open space provision throughout the city is uneven in its distribution. The majority of open space is located in the southern and eastern areas and there is a shortage of open space in the central and northern areas, particularly in Lakemba, Punchbowl, Wiley Park and Campsie.

Our strategy to address this issue is to identify opportunities for land acquisition in the central and northern areas, to balance open space distribution by:

1. Enlarging existing areas of open space
2. Establishing additional areas of open space where possible, and
3. Improving amenity and/or facilities within existing open space areas.

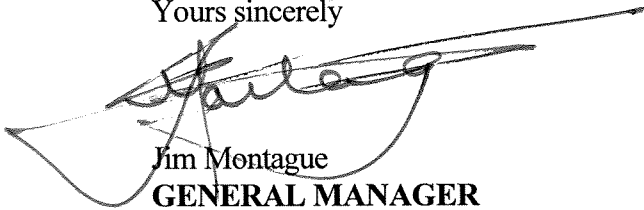
We have established a program of providing small areas of open space within 400m of all residents and open space acquisitions have been planned for the future to fulfil this strategy. However, there is a real need for useable sized open space areas (min. 1,000square metres) within the city. The cost of purchasing such parcels of land is significant and is difficult to achieve within the tight constraints of our budget.

The Spackman/Mossop report found that the amount of open space that can cater for sport across the city is relatively low for the population size. The current provision of open space for sport is less than two-thirds of that recommended by open space standards. Council has adopted the following strategies to address the shortfall:

- Consideration of the longer term provision of sports fields and facilities through the flexible development of Salt Pan Creek and other open space
- Further encourage multi-use of fields to increase usability and efficiency of existing sports fields
- Maintain higher levels of maintenance of sports fields to support a greater frequency of use.

If you would like more information, please contact my office on 9789 9447.

Yours sincerely



Jim Montague
GENERAL MANAGER

11 August 2006