

Submission  
No 129

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE  
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 22/10/2014

---

Partially Confidential

21 October 2014

The Director

Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the

Broader Hunter Region

Parliament House

Macquarie Street

SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

SUBMISSION RE NEWCASTLE PLANNING COMMITTEE INQUIRY

I wish to lodge the following submission under paragraph (f) 'related issues' of the terms of reference, specifically in relation to Newcastle City Council (Council) and the sale of pocket parks following Council's Sustainability Review in 2012.

I am a resident of New Lambton Heights and an active member of the 'Lookout Road South Park' Adopt-A-Park group. We have recently become aware that Council is preparing a proposal to reclassify our local park from 'community' to 'operational' land to be sold for residential development. We have been advised by Council that this park was 'flagged' some time ago for review under Council's '**Asset Review and Implementation Plan' (ARIP)**, which arose out of Council's 2012

Sustainability Review. As far as we are aware this proposal has not yet received endorsement under the Department of Planning reclassification process.

In regard to parkland, ARIP is supposed to be reviewing under-sized pocket parks of less than 0.2 of a hectare. Lookout Road South Park is over four times that size, being 0.875 hectare. Council's '*Parkland and Recreation Strategy 2014*' states that the benchmark size for a local park is 0.5 hectare - Council currently has 240 local parks and 53% of them are under this benchmark size. Why then is Council targeting this larger park which is clearly out of scope for this review? **I and many other residents of New Lambton Heights are concerned that Council is inappropriately using this review to sell off valuable community land in order to pay off debt, whilst Council continues to hold many empty, decaying and non-income producing buildings on a speculative basis awaiting the outcome of planning decisions such as those under review in this inquiry.** Such building assets are easily replaceable, however community land is not, particularly land of this size within established suburbs such as ours.

Council's current Delivery Program and Operational Plan imply that asset sales should effectively be based on the assets ability to be sold at a profit and assets sold in a state of disrepair may not be inherently profitable. Doesn't this approach actually compound the City's infrastructure backlog? Is Council selling off assets acquired at little or no cost, such as Community land, in preference to the unused, deteriorating and redundant assets that it should be disposing of?

We would like you to include the proposed reclassification and sale of this land in your inquiry as it appears to be well outside the scope of Council's asset review and funds from the sale of land that has been used for open space are supposed to be held in a reserve fund (as per Council's '*Community Assets and Open Space Policy*' adopted in December 2012), not used to pay down Council debt as implied by Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

### History of the land

The land, known as Lot 40 in Deposited Plan 19631, is zoned 6a Open Space, dedicated public reserve and classified as Community land. **This land was specifically set aside for public use by Scottish Australian Mining in 1942** when they undertook the original subdivision of this area. The land has a long history of recreational use, having been the former New Lambton Heights Bowling Club for many years. In 1998 Council claimed ownership of the land and proposed to reclassify and sell the land under its 'Asset Conversion Strategy'. As a result of community uproar over the proposed reclassification and the community's dedication to maintaining the land, Council resolved to retain the land's status as Community land.

### Use and maintenance of park

Since Council claimed ownership of the land in 1998 the New Lambton Heights community formed a volunteer 'Adopt-A-Park' group to work in partnership with Council to maintain the park at minimal cost to Council. Community volunteers have continued to maintain the park for over 16 years now, with dwindling support from Council. The community volunteers give their time and effort, use their own mowers and tools, provide their own petrol etc. because they can see and believe in the social and recreational benefits that the park provides to our community. Our community has demonstrated our commitment to keeping this land for community use.

The park is consistently used by 80-90 users per week for a range of social and recreational activities. Being the only flat ground in the suburb, it is well-trodden by soccer and league players, scooters and bikes etc, yet the park is also home to a host of bird and wildlife due to its proximity to both Blackbutt Reserve and the Rankin Park/Jesmond bushland corridor. The park is also directly opposite the John Hunter and Newcastle Private Hospitals and adjacent medical suites, as well as Ronald McDonald House which houses the families of cancer patients from all over the state. With appropriate signage

and promotion this park will significantly enhance this ever-growing medical precinct which attracts doctors/students/researchers from all parts of the world. We consider it would be extremely short-sighted of Council to sell-off this asset now with the completion of the Newcastle Inner City Bypass so close. With significantly less traffic on Lookout Road this park will be more accessible than ever to the community.

#### Community objection to reclassification proposal

Following a community meeting of concerned residents we have formed a committee to represent the views of the community to Council in relation to this proposal. We have submitted to Council a petition from the local community with approx. 150 signatures opposing the reclassification of the park. A number of residents have also lodged applications for Public Voice seeking the opportunity to speak directly to the Councillors regarding this proposal. We are currently trying to organise an on-site meeting with the Councillors so that they are able to make an informed decision when asked to vote on this proposal.

Council recognises that this area has a greater than average proportion of 0-5 yr olds as well as elderly residents, both of which have a greater need for local recreation space for health and wellbeing. As a community we are deeply concerned that Council is again attempting to sell off this valuable community land in order to raise revenue. How can Council justify selling-off land that was donated for public use? Particularly when that land is maintained by volunteers at minimal cost. And how is this situation any different to current large residential subdivisions, where developers are required to set aside designated areas for public recreational use? These subdivisions are sold on the 'lifestyle benefits' they promise from their parklands, walking paths etc. Are Councils now going to step in and sell off these areas of land as well? These public open spaces are part of the trade-off for smaller lot sizes. Doesn't this type of reclassification activity somewhat circumvent the planning laws and rob the community of the very lifestyle they bought into? Where are people supposed to play and

exercise if these spaces no longer exist? If this park is sold it sets a very dangerous and sorry precedent for all subdivisions in Newcastle!

Please support our community by ensuring that this reclassification proposal, and others like it, are only ever raised for a proper purpose and proceed only where there is a legitimate and very significant benefit to the public.

I thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,