

**Submission
No 2**

**INQUIRY INTO ENROLMENT CAPACITY IN INNER CITY
PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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Date received: 29 August 2016

INQUIRY INTO INNER CITY PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT CAPACITY AND REDEVELOPMENT OF ULTIMO PUBLIC SCHOOL

SUBMISSION TO THE GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No3

August 28, 2016

INTRODUCTION

I Jean-Pierre ALEXANDRE, wish to make the following submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No 3 Inquiry into Inner City Public Primary School Enrolment Capacity and Redevelopment of Ultimo Public School.

I am a senior citizen and do not have children or grand-children attending the Ultimo Public School (UPS) but believe its redevelopment has strong impact on my Community.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

- November 2013: NSW Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli, acknowledges the need for a larger Primary School in Ultimo/Pymont to cater for future needs induced by large real estate development in the area. He identifies the City of Sydney Wattle Street vacant depot site as his preferred option for a 1000 student "state of the art" primary school including "after school hours care". The new school will open in January 2017. A Project Reference Group including UPS students' parents and carers is formed and starts working on the Project while the NSW Department of Education Ministry and the City of Sydney negotiate the sale of the Wattle Street site to the NSW Government.

November 2014: just a year into the project development the Department of Education suddenly announces the collapse of their discussions with the City (**Backflip No1**). The Community calls a Public Meeting at which Public Schools NSW Executive Director, Murat Dizdar, confirms the negotiation collapse and that "they are now looking for (not identified yet) alternative sites". The meeting unanimously resolves that "the Department of Education and the City of Sydney must resume negotiations".

December 2014: a mere 3 months before state elections (28-03-2015), Education Minister Adrian Piccoli visits the UPS and announces the Department finally accepts the City new discounted offer and that the 1000 student school (together with a City of Sydney kindergarten) will definitely be built on the Wattle Street site (**Backflip No2**). The new school will open in Jan 2018 (1 year lost!).



NSW Education & Communities

New site chosen for Ultimo/Pymont school

Media release
15 December 2014

Agreement has been reached for a new public school serving the inner city to be built on a site to be purchased from the City of Sydney on the corner of Wattle, Jones and Fig Streets, Ultimo.

Minister for Education Adrian Piccoli visited Ultimo Public School today and announced that the Department of Education and Communities has agreed in principle to accept a recently revised offer of sale from the Council of \$74 million for the site.

"More families are choosing to live close to the city and the NSW Government is responding to the needs of this growing population. I am sure this agreement will be very welcome news," Mr Piccoli said.

"Ultimo Public School has been on its current site for 100 years and it needs space to grow as it proposes to deliver quality public education for another century."

The school currently has 335 students and will soon be reaching capacity. The new site will ultimately accommodate up to 1,000 students.

"The new site is a significant investment by the NSW Liberal and National Government to cater for local growth in student numbers well into the future, playing an important role in maintaining the area's desirability for inner-city residents," Mr Piccoli said.

"Childcare and after school hours care facilities will also be built to support the area's position as a vibrant and diverse residential hub."

Final details of the sale are to be agreed between the Department and the Council.

The Department accepted the Council's revised offer on the basis of recommendations by the Inner City Schools Working Party, established by the Minister to address the increase in school-aged children in the inner city.

Following community consultation about the area's future education needs, discussions with the Council over the site began in November last year. The project to build a new public school in Ultimo/Pymont was announced in the 2014 State Budget.

Some of the costs of the project will be offset by the sale of the existing Ultimo Public School site. The new school is expected to open on Day 1, Term 1, 2018.

- 12 June, 2016: less than 3 months after the elections, the Department of Education announces they just discovered the Wattle Street site is contaminated. Decontamination costs are such that they will not purchase the site but look for alternative solutions instead. (***Backflip No3***).
Discussions between the Ministry and the City over standards and costs of decontamination ensue.
The Department rapidly announces that its alternative solution is to construct a 500-600 student “vertical school” on the existing UPS site (instead of the 1000 student Wattle Street school) and that this will require the temporary relocation of the students during the demolition and construction stages of the new school.

- 16 June, 2015: Project Reference Group leader, Janine Barrett, calls an urgent public meeting at which it is unanimously resolved “(that) the Department of Education and City of Sydney reopen negotiations and for a proper independent survey of the Fig /Wattle Street site be undertaken...”
Executive Director, Murat Dizdar, confirms nonetheless that the demolition/reconstruction project will proceed.
The Department goes on to hire PR Consultant firm, McLachlan Lister, to quiet the Community and start developing the project. The new school will open in January 2020 (another 2 years gone, 3 in total!).

- March 2016: PR Consultant, McLachlan Lister, announces that Wentworth Park is chosen for temporary re-location of the UPS. Temporary school construction may include some landscaping (read lawn and pathways bulldozing, tree lopping, etc) works.

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

(a) the total of the project to date including consulting fees
and

(b) the estimated costs of the alternative sites for a new Ultimo Public School

Despite repeated Community requests, no figures have ever been made available to the taxpaying public. It is therefore impossible to have an informed point of view on the above terms of reference but, regardless, I doubt that the chosen project makes financial sense on a “**cost per student**” basis, taking into account:

- The Wattle Street project pre-development costs (works of the Project Reference Group for a year (Nov 2013-Nov 2014) including consulting fees.

- The Wentworth Park temporary school site decontamination costs **to the same standards as those priced for the Wattle Street site by the Ministry.**

- The lost opportunity of a badly needed Council kindergarten.

- The fees of the PR Consultant hired to quiet the Community.

- The loss of access of a large part of their park by the Ultimo/Pymont/Glebe community for 3 to 4 years.

- The cost of remedial works of Wentworth Park after the temporary school is removed.

- The inferior education opportunities offered to the Ultimo/Pymont children which will be housed for up to 3 years in prefab classrooms.

(c) the reasons the alternative sites were dismissed

If the Inquiry into above terms (a) and (b) proved that cost effectiveness was not the genuine reason for abandoning the Wattle Street project, then the “ordinary” citizen I am could only speculate and political rivalry between the NSW Government and the City would come to mind. To be noted that regardless of the ownership of the different sites (Quarry Street current UPS site, Wattle Street Depot and Wentworth Park) it does not make **“General Public Interest” sense** to leave a large, well located site vacant while, just across the road, a large part of a public park is bulldozed.

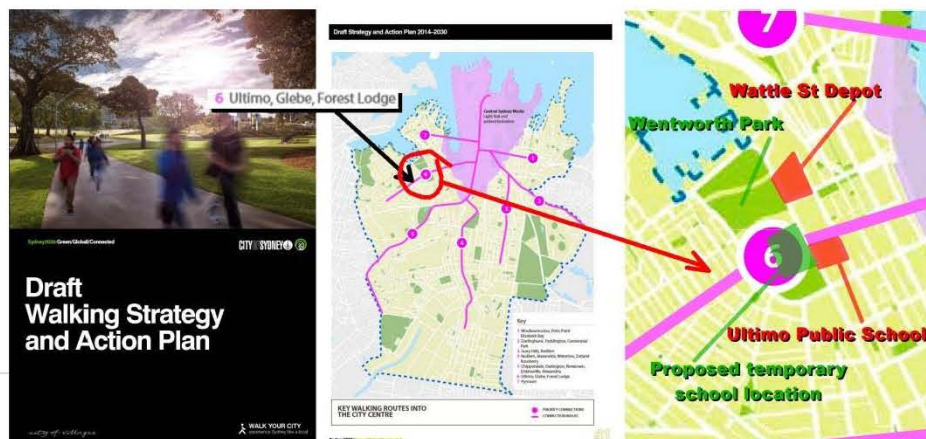
This is whether the site is contaminated or not since:

- The Wattle Street site will not remain vacant forever and someone at some stage will need to decontaminate it (*ie, it is just kicking the can down the road*).
- All sites in Ultimo/Pymont are contaminated. This is the result of the Peninsula industrial past.
- Cost mitigation measures proposed by the Community, such as using the decontamination excavation to accommodate a basement car park which would serve the Wentworth Park Light Rail Station and the proposed Fish Markets redevelopment complex, were ignored.

(d) the costs of rehousing Ultimo Public School in Wentworth Park while the school is rebuilt

This point was commented with above terms (a) and (b) but I would like to stress again that the following items must be priced up when comparing the chosen solution with the Wattle Street one:

- The loss of a large part of their park by the Ultimo/Pymont/Glebe residents. Ultimo/Pymont is Australia’s densest suburb and notably lacks public space.
- The temporary school will sever the City of Sydney key walking route No6: Ultimo-Glebe-Forrest Lodge (refer to City of Sydney - Draft Walking Strategy and Action Plan – Dec 2014). Substantial amounts of public money have just been spent on this part of the route (new walkway, new trees and lawn, fountains, benches, etc...). This investment will have to be written off.



- The inferior education environment offered to the Ultimo/Pymont children for at least 3 years while housed in prefab classrooms.

(e) *The impact of the Bay Precinct development on future enrolment capacity in the Inner City*

Although, again, no enrolment projection figures are available, a number of real estate developments in the area will have an obvious impact on the number of children of primary school age in Ultimo and Pymont. They are in particular:

- The Bay Precinct project and in particular the Fish Market redevelopment.
- The Central Park (Old Brewery) project, in particular its remaining stages.
- The Tabcorp redevelopment.
- The Powerhouse Museum sale
- The Greyhound racing course re-development (?)

The impact of these developments on Primary Public School enrolment may however be mitigated by the fact that these projects target mostly overseas speculators (99% of new apartment purchases in Ultimo!)...but this is a matter for another debate.

(f) *Any other related matters*

Finally I would like to stress here the total lack of public consultation (and indeed of human consideration) by the NSW Government which:

- Backflipped many times over on promises made during public meetings and/or announced via press releases.
- Projects to alienate a large part of Wentworth Park without any consultation with its users (sport clubs, schools, parents and kids, dog walkers, etc...) and the community at large which enjoys the park and commutes through it.
- Hired a PR Consultant rather than face the Community.

CONCLUSION

The choice of constructing the new Ultimo Public School on the school existing site rather than on the City of Sydney Wattle Street vacant depot seems to be the result of a series of backflips by the NSW Government rather than of any economic rationale. It will result in:

- A school having half the capacity initially announced (500-600 students instead of the 1000 promised) and being delivered 3 years after the promised date.
- Housing Ultimo/Pymont children in inferior prefab classrooms installed on contaminated soils for at least 3 years while they watch their beloved school torn down just across the road.
- Depriving the Ultimo-Pymont-Glebe Community of a large part of their much needed park for 3 to 4 years and interrupting their "key walking route" recently constructed at their expenses.
- Leave the Wattle Street vacant depot eyesore in the middle of Australia's densest suburb.

Jean-Pierre ALEXANDRE