

INQUIRY INTO ENROLMENT CAPACITY IN INNER CITY PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Organisation: Ultimo Pyrmont Education Campaign Committee
Date received: 17 September 2016

Partially
Confidential

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3**

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

Ultimo Pymont Education Campaign Committee (UPECC) Submission

Ultimo Pymont Education Campaign Committee (UPECC) was formed in June 2015 out of community concern for the failure of the government to provide adequately for the public education of children in the Ultimo/Pymont area, when the Minister for Education reneged on his 2014 promise to build a school fit for the future on the Wattle Street depot site.

It consists of parents, representatives of the major Pymont and Ultimo community groups, and specialists, including a demographer, a former government architect and a stone consultant.

(a) Total costs in \$\$ to date:

The Minister claims that the cost of decontaminating the depot site is prohibitive. However:

- The Department ignores the advice of their own consultant that it would cost \$31m and inflates the cost to \$55m;
- The Department is spending money to decontaminate the site of the temporary school on Wentworth Park, and will have to spend money to decontaminate the site of the current school once it is demolished;
- The Minister ignores offers from the City of Sydney to renegotiate the purchase price of the depot site;
- The Minister ignores proposals for a Public Private Partnership on the site, in which the cost of the school would be offset by other development of the site, while providing a school large enough for future enrolments, space for children to run and play, a promised childcare centre and community facilities.

The Department refuses to provide any costs.

However:

Consultancy costs incurred so far must include:

- Investigation of several alternative sites for the new permanent school, resulting in the choice of the Wattle Street depot site;
- Consultant work on the Wattle Street depot site – (18 months), including workshops for children, teachers and community members, meetings of the Project Reference Group and 2 tours of other schools; information sessions at Broadway Shopping Centre and other centres; development and updating of website; research into international examples; production and distribution of information leaflets;
- Investigation of alternative sites for the temporary school;
- Consultant work on the temporary school involving 2 designs, and including workshops for children, teachers and community members; meetings of the Project Reference Group; information sessions at Broadway Shopping Centre and other centres; updating of website; production and distribution of information leaflets; responding to parent concerns by phone and email;

- Consultant work on new school on the current site – development of design brief; involvement in selection of the design team; administering engagement of the design team;
- Preparation of legislative changes to enable use of Wentworth Park for the temporary school;
- Negotiations with agencies responsible for Wentworth Park – City of Sydney, Board of WP Sporting Complex Trust, Property NSW.

Department of Education costs incurred so far must include:

- Selection of consultants;
- Contract negotiations with City of Sydney, including legal fees, re purchase of the depot site;
- Involvement in development of design brief, advertising, answering inquiries, collating and evaluating responses; appointing the jury for selection of the design team, engaging the design team, including legal costs for contracts;
- Attendance at public meetings;
- Involvement in preparation of legislative changes to enable use of Wentworth Park for the temporary school;
- Involvement in negotiations with agencies responsible for Wentworth Park – City of Sydney, Board of Wentworth Park Sporting Complex Trust, Property NSW;
- Legal fees re lease of Wentworth Park.
- Contamination issues - costs incurred so far must include::
- Evaluation of contamination at the Wattle Street depot;
- Evaluation of contamination at Wentworth Park, including EPA, and drilling;
- Evaluation of contamination on the current school site;
- Employment of Environmental Investigation Services (Wentworth Park and current school site).

(b) Costs of alternative sites:

The Department refuses to provide any costs.

(c) Reasons for the dismissal of alternative sites:

The Department established the Inner City Schools Working Party (ICSWP), and charged it with recommending the best site for the new school.

The ICSWP made a unanimous recommendation of the Wattle Street depot because

- It was the best fit as part of a long-term solution to meet the needs of the growing region, comfortably accommodating the current target of 1000 students for Ultimo /Pyrmont;
- It was the only location with sufficient area for this number of students with flexible learning environments on the site including play spaces, as well as retaining the option of using Wentworth Park;
- It could also accommodate much-needed community amenities in the area;
- Construction could be undertaken without disrupting operations on the existing school site.

Most of the alternative sites were deemed to be too small. Only the depot site was considered large enough to meet future demand. The main reason cited for the government rejecting the depot site was the cost of decontamination to the extremely high standard (much higher than EPA), which was not recommended by its own

consultants. The Department has since decided only to remediate the site of the temporary school to the EPA standard.

(d) Costs of the temporary school on Wentworth Park

The Department refuses to provide any costs.

However:

Consultancy costs incurred so far must include:

- Investigation of alternative sites for the temporary school, resulting in the choice of the Wentworth Park site;
- Consultant work on the temporary school involving 2 designs, and including workshops for children, teachers and community members; meetings of the Project Reference Group; information sessions at Broadway Shopping Centre and other centres; updating of website; production and distribution of information leaflets; responding to parent concerns by phone and email;
- Preparation of legislative changes to enable use of Wentworth Park for the temporary school;
- Negotiations with agencies responsible for Wentworth Park – City of Sydney, Board of WP Sporting Complex Trust, Property NSW.

Department of Education costs incurred so far must include:

- Involvement in 2 designs for the temporary school;
- Attendance at public and school meetings;
- Involvement in preparation of legislative changes to enable use of Wentworth Park for the temporary school;
- Involvement in negotiations with agencies responsible for Wentworth Park – City of Sydney, Board of WP Sporting Complex Trust, Property NSW;
- Legal fees re lease of Wentworth Park.

Contamination issues - costs incurred so far must include:

- Evaluation of contamination at Wentworth Park, including EPA, and drilling;
- Employment of Environmental Investigation Services.

(e) Impact of the Bays Precinct development

The Bays Precinct Urban Renewal project includes provision for thousands of families (Treasury forecast 16000 new residences in the area). Many more families than previously expected are choosing to stay in the inner city rather than move to the suburbs.

So far no provision has been made for building or enlarging schools.

The Minister claims that the promised school on the Wattle Street depot site would cost much more than the average primary school in New South Wales. This is a reality of inner city living – land is more expensive and therefore infrastructure costs more to provide. But this must be balanced against the benefits the government derives – higher stamp duty on housing purchases, less demand for public transport. We estimate that in the four and a half years January 2012 to June 2016, the government has received up to \$150 million stamp duty from real estate sales of \$2,821,798,420 in Pyrmont and Ultimo alone. As more land is developed for housing in the Bays Precinct, more stamp duty will be paid. This must be spent on infrastructure, including public schools, required by these new residents.

The knowledge industry companies being drawn to a redeveloped Bays Precinct will include young families from Australia and overseas, with the expectation of quality public schools for their children. One result of the overcrowding of inner city schools, including Ultimo Public School, is the contraction of the catchment, and a ban on international students. As part of government policy to attract younger knowledge workers to the Bays Precinct, it is a concomitant responsibility to meet its legislative requirement to provide quality public education for all the children who need it, whether temporary or permanent residents.

(f) Other related matters

Current Enrolment in Childcare Centres

Four childcare centres surveyed in Ultimo and Pyrmont show strong demand for primary school places in the next few years.

- KU Maybanke Pyrmont: 45 children (full capacity) enrolled 2012 - 2015; a waiting list of 90 families in 2016.
- KU Maybanke Ultimo: 60 children (full capacity) enrolled 2012 - 2015; a waiting list of 300 families in 2016.
- City West: 65 children (full capacity) enrolled 2012 - 2015; a waiting list of 120 - 150 children in 2016.
- SDN Pyrmont: 65 children (full capacity) enrolled 2012 - 2015; a waiting list of 380 families in 2016.

Some families are doubtless on the waiting lists of more than one centre. Nonetheless, the numbers show growing demand for school enrolment.

Health of the children

Physical health – Most children in the inner city live in apartments and have limited opportunities for exercise at home. This is a growing trend. There is great community concern about diminution of physical activity and a consequent increase in obesity in our children.

Ultimo Public School, with 300 children, is already stretched for playing space. Groups of children spend 40 minutes two to three times a week playing on Wentworth Park, as the school grounds are too small. The proposal to more than double the number of children on the existing .54h site (designs to accommodate up to 800 children were invited) will make it even less possible for our children to have the necessary physical exercise to keep them healthy.

Exercise and academic achievement – Research demonstrates a direct correlation between physical exercise and academic achievement. Not to provide adequate playing space denies children the chance to develop their full potential, compared with children in more spacious suburbs and regional areas.

Psychological damage – There is much anecdotal evidence that children whose valued school is demolished experience a sense of loss. This will be exacerbated by the proximity of the temporary school, across the road from the demolition, while they attend a school of demountables. The Minister for Education correctly states "Every parent, teacher and student knows that learning in a demountable classroom is no alternative to learning in a

real classroom. Our kids should not be languishing in second-rate facilities like demountable classrooms.”

Loss of trust – We raise our children to respect authority, and hope that our leaders deal with us honestly and with concern for the wellbeing of our community.

Many children - and certainly their parents and other members of the community – are aware of the series of broken promises made in relation to Ultimo Public School over many years.

Less than 15 years ago, the Department rebuilt Ultimo Public School to accommodate increased enrolments. The community believed that this was on the basis on quality demographic projections. As in Northern Sydney, where the Department’s forecasts were woefully inadequate, so they proved in Ultimo/Pyrmont: the new school was full in little more than a decade.

Attempts by the Department of Education to “sell” the idea of a high-rise school have been comprehensively rejected by the community. The government and the Department assured the community that they would not proceed with any redevelopment plans without community approval. Older children (and their parents) see this as dishonest dealing.

The Department’s decisions about the future public education of children in Ultimo and Pyrmont have not been made on educational grounds or concern for children’s health and wellbeing. They have been made solely by the Assets Section, whose only concern is dollars and cents. Decisions of such magnitude, affecting our children’s physical and mental health, as well as their capacity to achieve their best educational development, must be made by taking these issues into account, and by treating their needs with the respect they deserve.

Conclusion

The Department’s case for moving the school to temporary accommodation at Wentworth Park for several years, demolishing the existing modern school and building a high-rise school on the same small block, rests on faulty demographic projections, overstated costs for building on the Wattle Street depot site, understated costs for their current plan, and utter disregard for the health and education needs of our children.

We congratulate the committee for holding this enquiry, and trust that it can address the concerns of present and future inner city residents and their children.

I will be available to attend a hearing to answer questions if required.

Mary Mortimer OAM
Convenor