

**Submission  
No 263**

## **INQUIRY INTO SYDNEY STADIUMS STRATEGY**

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## **SYDNEY FOOTBALL STADIUM REDEVELOPMENT**

Submission by Esther Hayter, architect, resident of Paddington for over 35 years.

**From the evidence so far presented to the people of NSW I am strongly opposed to the proposed demolition and rebuilding of the Sydney Football Stadium.**

**This opinion is shared by every person of my acquaintance, local resident or otherwise; all believe that the demolition and rebuilding proposals are an irresponsible and unnecessary waste of a massive amount of public funds.**

On 10 May I attended a presentation by Infrastructure NSW for some 'stakeholders', members of The Paddington Society and the Paddington-Darlinghurst Community Working Group. The presentation was an information session, based around a very lightweight document that was handed out and shown on a screen.

Our questions were answered to the best of their ability by the polite representatives of the delivery team, but it was apparent that the government's decision to proceed is based on only a very preliminary assessment of the sketchiest outline of the scheme, not to mention a very limited knowledge of the final design, its likely future costs and possible benefits to the surrounding community, to future users and to the citizens and tax payers of NSW.

It was therefore not appropriate for the attendees to question members of the delivery team re the issue of why a new stadium was **required**, as opposed to being **desired** by the government.

**I believe that the government has not presented valid or convincing arguments or sufficiently transparent cost estimates to enable the proposal to demolish and rebuild to proceed.**

Some of my many concerns are outlined as follows:

### **COMPARATIVE COST ESTIMATES:**

- **Upgrading the existing stadium** has been estimated at a cost of \$714 million;
- **Demolition and rebuilding a larger venue** is presently estimated at \$729 million.
- As an architect I can't believe that the figures reflect a true comparison of each option.

### **Upgrading the existing:**

- What does the estimated upgrade cost represent? Lack of any detail is very disturbing;
- Provision of fire safety measures, additional 'disabled' seating, increased and improved public amenities and modern refreshment facilities could not reasonably approach so closely the cost of demolishing the existing and re-building a new and larger facility;
- We are told that the upgrade estimate does not include roofing of the existing seating areas - is this correct?
- The present stadium seats 42,000; the average attendances for the majority of fixtures is between some 10,00 and 18,000; sometimes it is as low as 7,000;
- Surely a small reduction in existing seat numbers would allow for provision of more access seating and wider aisles within the existing building envelope, and without undue detriment to attendances at the majority of events;

- Has this option explored the possibility of providing some of the desired additional 'cultural' and commercial facilities in the zones surrounding the existing stadium?
- Alternatively could such additional facilities be provided inside or on the site of one or more of the surrounding buildings presently slated for demolition?
- Why has a 30 year-old award winning building been neglected to the extent that total demolition is considered to be a valid option, rather than upgrading it to required safety and acceptable amenity standards?
- Should some of the upgrade costs be borne by the SCG Trust, since some necessary items seem to be occasioned by their withholding of maintenance funds over 30 years?
- Could some of the proposed upgrade works be staged to reduce annual expenditure and allow extra time to explore more modest and affordable upgrade options?

#### **Demolition and rebuilding:**

- The promotional material notes that 'rebuilding the stadium will enhance a vibrant cultural and sporting hub and [provide] a venue that redefines the spectator experience'.
- Moving the new enlarged stadium footprint slightly to the west will necessitate demolition of several surrounding buildings to north and west;
- The existing well-used sporting facilities will therefore disappear from the site;
- The result appears to be a diminution rather than an enhancement of the already vibrant existing sporting hub;
- The displaced sporting facilities will not be re-located on the SFS site;
- Where will the gym, pool and displaced tennis courts be located? Temporarily? Permanently? At what (presently undisclosed) cost and who will pay?
- We are told that rebuilding and re-housing them will not be the responsibility of INSW;
- We must therefore assume that these costs are not included in the re-build option?
- Surely these costs should be included in total estimated cost of the rebuild option to ensure comparison with the upgrade option, where these facilities remain in situ?

#### **PROPOSED NEW FACILITY:**

- Will be a 'colosseum' style structure, equal in height all round, the height equal to the maximum height of the existing elegant saddle shaped structure which dips down towards Moore Park Road;
- It will therefore be much more intrusive in the streetscape of Moore Park Road; its height will be overbearing relative to the Victorian terrace houses in the Heritage Conservation Area of South Paddington;
- Seating capacity will be between 40,000 and 45,000; the likely figure of 42,000 was mentioned at the information session. i.e. the capacity will be equal to or (perhaps) a little greater than the existing;

- Seating 'closer to the action' is also promised, providing an 'enhanced game day experience'; regular users note that it is difficult to believe that the proposed seating could be closer to the sidelines than the distances provided in the present stadium;
- Weather protection: the promotional material asserts that it will provide 'complete weather protection' and that 'all seats will be protected from the elements';
- However without a substantial overhang of the roof beyond that presently indicated or complete roof enclosure this cannot be achieved if the proposed maximum height is not to be exceeded and if adequate sightlines are to be maintained;
- Substantial roof overhangs and complete roof enclosure are not proposed, because both would be detrimental to the turfed playing surface;
- Sun, wind and rain will therefore penetrate various areas of seating in differing weather conditions;
- A ventilation slot between the roof and the top of the grandstand seating is proposed to ensure airflow - presumably for the benefit of patrons and the wellbeing of the turf;
- This slot will further expose attendees to wind and rain penetration;
- As well it will allow stadium noise to escape in the direction of Paddington's residential areas to the north; this counteracts the claim of acoustic benefit to northern residential areas from the increased height of the 'colosseum' style new structure.

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS & ACCELERATED TIMETABLE**

### **Stage 1:**

- A Reference Design concept is due to be completed by the end of May; this will establish the building envelope but will not include detail of the design or appearance of the building;
- Reference documents and the EIS will be placed on public exhibition for 42 days; there will be opportunities for further stakeholder consultations and public feedback;
- If the proposed timetable is followed, it appears that demolition, removal of the existing stadium seating and site preparation for the new building will commence shortly after the last football fixtures are over for the season i.e. before the completion of the assessment period by the Department of Planning, i.e. before approval can be granted;
- Demolition of the existing stadium therefore appears to be premature; it appears that a new stadium is a done deal! if this is correct it would be outrageous and a serious departure from accepted planning / approval procedures!
- Approval of the Stage 1 envelope is anticipated in late November - an unusually brief assessment period is therefore anticipated, particularly if public and expert submissions are to be properly considered and responded to during assessment;
- The minister for Sport will be the consent authority - another disturbing feature of the process: surely this represents a conflict of interest?
- Further demolition and site preparation is planned to commence in mid January 2019.

**Stage 2:**

- Detailed planning and design are only due to commence in 'early to mid 2019', after a Design Competition in accordance with conditions set by the Department of Planning;
- It is only during this stage that the layouts, seating numbers, building structure, and overall appearance will emerge, at a design stage, for presentation to the public;
- Only during this extensive period can more accurate cost estimates be prepared;
- Realistically, costings can only approach finalization at the conclusion of the design process.

**CONCLUSION**

- The Design Principles in the promotional material to date are obscure abstractions, simple slogan-style catchwords; without further detail they have little real import;
- The design brief, feasibility study outlines, detailed design principles, parameters, strategy and more realistic costings for both options should be revealed for public assessment and feedback, prior making the decision to proceed.
- It seems clear that adoption and commencement of the Demolition and Rebuild option is premature and should not be contemplated before far more is known about the Upgrade option and the comparative impacts and likely costs of the alternative.

**Previous infrastructure contracts entered into and commenced in haste have recently proved to have major negative consequences in terms of delivery and cost blowouts.**

**In this case also, the benefits to the community, the stadium users and the citizens of New South Wales have not been adequately revealed in sufficient detail to justify the proposal to demolish and rebuild the Stadium.**

**I hope that the overwhelming community feedback urging caution and requesting further transparency will be heeded before the final decision is made to demolish the existing Sydney Football Stadium.**