

**INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS OF IMPROPRIETY
AGAINST AGENTS OF THE HILLS SHIRE COUNCIL AND
PROPERTY DEVELOPERS IN THE REGION**

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 21 January 2023

Partially
Confidential

Submission to the Upper House Inquiry into *'allegations of impropriety against agents of the Hills Shire Council and property developers in the region'*.

I do not have evidence of any impropriety by The Hills Shire Council and its dealings with developers, but some of Council's decisions raise questions..

Premier Rugby Precinct proposed for Fred Caterson Reserve

In August 2020, Hills Council invited Expressions of Interest (EOI) from potential partners to support the establishment, management and maintenance of a proposed premier rugby union precinct at Fred Caterson Reserve, Castle Hill. Only one EOI was received and that was from Eastwood District Rugby Union Football Club (EDRUFC). There was no interest from any rugby clubs in the Hills Shire Council area.

At a meeting of the Hills Shire Council on 24th November 2020, councillors agreed to adopt the masterplan for Fred Caterson Reserve, including the provision of a premier rugby union precinct. It was also agreed to accept the EOI submission by EDRUFC and the Mayor and General Manager were authorised to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on Council's behalf. (ref Minutes of Hills Shire meeting, 24/11/2020)

EDRUFC's current home is the T G Millner field in Marsfield which is owned by North Ryde RSL. There is a proposal to develop the field for residential housing which would benefit the RSL club. Some of the proceeds from the development proposal would be used to establish the new rugby union precinct at Fred Caterson Reserve. (ref City of Ryde media release 7/12/22 & Sydney Morning Herald 7/8/22)

The decisions by Hills Council give rise to several questions:

- Why does the Hills Shire Council want to have a premier rugby union precinct at Fred Caterson Reserve when there is no demand from any club in the Hills, and there is already a shortfall of playing fields for other sporting codes?
- Why would Hills Shire Council develop sporting facilities for a club based outside the Hills Shire? Is it reasonable to use ratepayers' funds in this way?
- During Council's consideration of the EOI, did any conflicts of interest arise in regard to EDRUFC, North Ryde RSL, or the proposed developer of the TG Millner site?

Decision by Hills Council to recommend use of synthetic grass

During the planning proposal stage for 55 Coonara Ave, West Pennant Hills, Hills Council asked the developer to provide a synthetic grass playing field on a cleared area of the site. This proposal was later refused by NSW Planning, but council is still considering using synthetic turf surfaces for other fields in our area.

According to a letter written by the Hills Mayor in 2019, Hills Council took advice from Smart Connection Consultancy. The website for this company claims *'.... we use independent research as a base to ensure that the most appropriate options are determined.'* However, the document provided to council, in order to assist with the decision making process, was *'The Smart Guide to Synthetic Sport Surfaces (Third Edition 2014')*. This document acknowledges the support of synthetic turf suppliers and manufacturers *'....who have allowed this book to be circulated to Local Government in Australia free of charge by sponsoring each section.'*

In our area, there is huge opposition to the use of synthetic grass playing surfaces and I believe that Council should have taken independent advice on this controversial issue. I am puzzled about why Council has only taken advice sponsored by synthetic turf manufacturers and suppliers, and has resisted talking to independent experts.

Thank you for your consideration.