

11 February 2020

Ms Jessica Currie

Coordinator

Recreation Planning, Parks & Recreation

Northern Beaches Council

Dear Ms Currie

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION STRATEGY CONSULTATION

We appreciate the opportunity to put forward our views on a proposed Open Space and Recreation Strategy. We have chosen to do so in writing rather than on the interactive website as there are a number of points we would like to address and space does not permit on the website.

The format adopted for the initial consultation did not lend itself ideally to discussion of the principles and major issues which should underlie the strategy on this important topic. Therefore, we have put together this discussion of the major issues as we see them. We note that the initial consultation did not contain any current proposals for the open spaces and recreation areas within the Palm Beach/Whale Beach area.

Issues

Amongst the major issues we see (in no particular order) to be dealt with in a strategy are the following: -

1. Natural recreation spaces

The principal area of natural recreation space in our area is McKay Reserve, which is natural undeveloped coastal bushland, with a number of unstructured tracks. We believe that the principal issues which the proposed strategy should address are: -

* The preservation of such areas in their natural state – these areas are irreplaceable. This will require policies on the minimum level of infrastructure to ensure the safety of those using the area plus some measure of safe access for people with disabilities. Thus there needs to be a discussion about the trade-off of structured pathways, accessible to people with disabilities vs greater intrusion on the natural state of the area.
* Procedures for a measure of reduction of fire hazard to protect lives and the surrounding houses. In particular, there should be accessible fire hydrants at all these sites.
* Improved measures for the removal of rubbish.
* Firm policies on which activities are permitted within the area and those which are not and to ensure that group activities such as weddings are properly licensed and policed. In particular, the Council’s non-smoking policy for all group activities in these areas needs to enforced; all naked flames, such as open fires, candles, tiki torches, sparklers, etc should also be banned during the fire season. Bonds should not be released without an inspection of the site by Council rangers.
* Areas which are part open space and part recreation area, such as Dark Gully Park should be preserved and maintained as they are.
* Appropriate acknowledgements of indigenous history or sites within these spaces would be appreciated by indigenous people and visitors alike. Consultation with Budawa might result in assistance in the preparation of such acknowledgements.
1. Man-made open spaces and recreation areas

These areas include golf courses and public parks, such as Winnererremy Bay Reserve and Governor Phillip Park. These areas need to be preserved from development which is a constant threat. Where a usage, such as a golf course, is diminishing in use, to the point where its viability is in question, alternative opportunities for public use must be found. An example is Avalon Golf Course – an alternative use for part of the site might be as an amphitheatre used for public performances or perhaps an aquatic centre.

A number of public spaces contain picnic tables – many of these are placed in the unshaded open, without a roof or other cover. These are rarely used as people are more and more conscious of the risks of sunburn and skin cancer. Over time, additional picnic tables should be installed in the shade of trees or with roofs and the older exposed ones phased out. Some parks currently without picnic tables, such as Hordern and Wiltshire Parks could be considered for the installation of one or two (at most) carefully-sited picnic tables to increase public enjoyment of such spaces. Shaded seating is also important in all these spaces to encourage socialisation, rest and quiet contemplation of the environment. There needs to be a transparent public policy for charges for the exclusive use of any part of these spaces for events.

Consultation on the new Plan of Management for Governor Phillip Park is due to commence in April this year and we welcome this. Among a number of issues of concern, its use by the producers of Home and Away is increasing, both in terms of space occupied and in terms of hours of use. The result is that the public is being crowded out of this Crown land, and local businesses within the Park, at times, have difficulty operating. This needs to be addressed.

Pittwater Council had a policy of removing equipment from smaller parks and consolidating such equipment in larger parks. We trust that this policy will not appear in the new strategy and that any small parks from which equipment has been removed are preserved and not slated for development

1. Fees and Charges

There needs to be a transparent public policy for charges for the use of both natural and man-made open spaces and recreation areas, where a permit or licence is required.

1. Access to waterways

Whilst the Council is not responsible for the waterways, it is responsible for all the means of access. Greater use of the waterways is inevitable which puts demands on parking and tinnie, kayak and canoe storage. Parking throughout the Palm Beach/Whale Beach area is already under intolerable pressure during the summer months and holiday weekends so additional parking will need to be constructed. Trailers are another problem but despite previous representations, Woorak Reserve remains an under-utilised trailer parking area. Additional tinnie, kayak and canoe storage is also required but existing places such as Dark Gully Park are not suitable for reasons of no vehicular access and lack of parking. Greater availability and promotion of public shuttle transport is required.

Council must ensure that all public pathways, steps and rights of way leading to the waterways are signed and maintained for public use and not encroached on or appropriated by adjoining properties.

1. Beaches

The principal issues in relation to beaches are management issues, of rubbish removal, adequate clean toilet facilities, parking and the prevention of pollution of the kind which caused problems and illness at the southern end of Palm Beach last year. These beaches and their events receive world-wide exposure – for example the Palm Beach to Whale Beach Swim is rated World No.1 most beautiful coastal swim on the Red Bull website.

1. Tree Cover

There are many opportunities for increased tree planting in open spaces without impinging on existing public use and enjoyment. Examples are South Pittwater Park (shade trees near the ferry wharf where people wait) and Winnererremy Bay Reserve where there is space for at least another row of trees along the Mona Street and Edgar Green Drive frontages. This should be part of the strategy, namely to increase tree canopy. Pittwater tree coverage is below the Sydney average and restoration is all the more important as temperatures rise. Hopefully the Council’s policy of replacing any dead or dying tree with a native equivalent would apply and be specifically included in the strategy.

1. Fire Risks

The level of fire risk should be assessed for all open spaces and recreation areas for which the Council is responsible and the result of that assessment made available to residents in each area. The rating should also be made available to people making a booking for events in open spaces and recreation areas.

1. Youth Facilities

Additional exercise equipment in open spaces will be attractive for young people and could be used to provide additional meeting places for them, encouraging fitness and involvement at the same time. There should be consultation with young people to get their views on their needs.

1. Signage/Direction Finding

There are many opportunities for improved signage in our area and, we believe, other areas with the LGA, both for direction-finding and for information. For example, there are some thirty-three or thirty-four pathways in public ownership in Palm Beach and Whale Beach, most of which have no signs and have not been maintained. The “Walking Pittwater” app should be updated and re-released.

1. Rubbish Collection

Increased use of open spaces and recreation areas will generate additional rubbish. There will need to be additional bins provided and/or more frequent collections.

1. Lighting

Some recreation areas, for example Governor Phillip Park, are used by people for walking or relaxation at night. Consideration should be given to adding subdued lighting on principal paths or tracks in the interests of safety in man-made open spaces and recreation areas (but not in natural areas where lighting would disturb the native fauna)..

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We trust that this discussion of underlying strategic issues is useful in the formulation of a draft strategy for open spaces and recreation across the LGA. We note that there will be further public consultation once a draft strategy is formulated, which we would strongly support and we look forward to seeing the draft strategy in due course.

Yours faithfully

A/Prof Richard West

President

Palm Beach & Whale Beach Association