



Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society Inc

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Greenwich Public School Upgrade

The Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society has been in existence since 1971, during which time we have been a strong advocate for everything in the environmental and conservation fields, working constructively with the community as well as the local Council. We started many initiatives now adopted and run by Council, and we have three representatives on Council's Bushland Management Advisory Committee.

It is with this background of experience and knowledge of the expectations of our community which prompts us to comment on these proposed upgrades to the two Greenwich schools.

Summary

We support in principle the need for the upgrade to the schools but disagree with some of the details and strongly oppose the removal of so many trees and understorey vegetation. Details will be further outlined below.

In particular we disagree with the size of the upgrade and suggest that it must cater for a greater number than that at present unrolled at the schools.

General

We understand that there have been a number of limited presentations over the last 6 months to selected groups, including the principals and adjoining neighbours, but this booth seems to be the first time that the general public have been notified of the upgrade. This notice was a small advertisement on the second last (the sports) page of the local paper, the North Shore Times. It stated that there would be an "information booth" at Woolstonecraft Station at 5 PM and 6.30 PM on Thursday 18th January, in the middle of the holiday period for many people with school children. The community should be given more consideration in circumstances such as this which affects so many residents.

The information booth was a complete shambles. The two staff member presenting the information said that they were there for one hour only. They would not have survived any longer due to the extreme noise level of the trains arriving every four minutes in both directions, making conversation impossible during the arrival and departure of the trains at a station built on a substantial curve in the line.

The information available, said to be for comment only, consisted of a set of fully developed architectural drawings for each campus (about 10 sheets each) as well as a FAQ sheet. The drawings were so detailed that it was hard to believe that they would be changed substantially. The staff did not know a great deal about the proposals or the schools as they existed and the display had to be on the bench seats of the waiting room.

The timing for a public consultation (during the major holiday period) and the time for the staff to inform the public (when most people were returning from work) the location (at the ingoing side of the station and not the outgoing) and the venue in general, left the impression that there was little, if any, concern for genuine public consultation.

The Proposals (We will discuss each campus individually)

Firstly a short History. In 1969 the Infants School (Greenwich Road) consisted of an asphalt playground with one or two trees. Norma Stuart, who had two children just starting at the school, approached the headmistress about having more trees planted in the school. The headmistress agreed and directed Norma to Jill Pain another parent. (These two women are still active in the local community). They gathered a group of parents and Norma approached the then lecturer at the Ryde Horticultural college for advice as to what and where to plant the school grounds to improve the amenity for the pupils. Council, provided soil and some trees and together with the group of parents the grounds were substantially planted up. Subsequent parent groups have continued this initiative and the school is now a lovely naturally vegetated area with substantial trees (a few of the original plantings still exist).

This involvement in the school grounds flowed on to the primary school, which though well treed, needed bush regeneration work to improve the understorey planting, reduce the weeds and improve the integrity of the trees. A substantial number of trees were planted along the River Road frontage after the oval was created in the early 1970's.

The school community is proud of their school grounds and will resist any undue destruction of that environment.

The overall concept

We cannot agree with the basic concept that the upgrade will only provide accommodation for the existing number of pupils at the schools. Lane Cove, and St Leonards in particular, is undergoing a massive redevelopment phase with some 1500 units already under construction in St Leonards and 3000 more possible in the next 5 – 8 years. Greenwich is the local school and will be required to accommodate the majority of children from these units. The time frame for this upgrade as proposed will mean that many of these children will be looking for the school before it is completed in 2021.

The upgrade **MUST** be planned and built to accommodate these children now and not have a situation by the time this proposal is completed that requires demountables to be reinstated when the inevitable increase in pupils occurs.

The Infants School

We accept that some trees will have to be removed either because they are too close to the new building or are a possible danger because of falling branches. This includes the two trees along Woodrop Street frontage.

We do however strongly oppose the removal of trees required to move the OOSH building and provide staff parking. The local back streets are close to the school and can easily provide the required parking facilities for the staff. The parking shown should be much better used to increase the playground area, which is already minimal for the number of children, let alone the increase that will occur in the future. The trees saved by not building the parking area will continue to enhance the playground area.

We raise the following questions for consideration.

1. Does the Department think staff parking should take priority over trees and the environment of the playground? We do not think that it should.
2. Is the present proposal of one fire isolated staircase being the only access to the upper floor level sufficient and is it capable of being correctly used by infant school children?
3. To increase the amount of accommodation can this building be three storeys in height?

The Primary School

We commend the location of the new building on the tennis court area and the facilities that it provides.

We acknowledge the need to remove two trees close to the building, but oppose many other tree removals.

We oppose the location of the start of the ramp and external stair at the south western side of the hall and the need to remove the "bunch of trees" here. These are all turpentine species and are endemic to the school grounds. We recommend that the ramp and stair start at the north western side of the hall, where the existing path to the tennis court now is, thus saving the trees on the south side. One tree may have to be removed to accommodate this new location but it is not a healthy looking tree at present.

We oppose the removal of the trees shown along the western boundary south of the new building and also further into the site here. No reason is given for this removal so we cannot see why they are so marked.

A number of questions arise from this proposal.

1. As above can the ramp be moved to the north western side of the hall thereby saving the clump of trees shown to be removed on the south side?
2. Can the building be expanded either to the south or by another storey to provide for increased pupil numbers?
3. What is the reason for the removal of the trees along the western boundary and further into the site in this general area?
4. What happens to the cricket nets - not shown on the drawings but appear to be clear of this building in its present form.
5. Will the basketball court be replaced?
6. What happens to the area on River Road frontage when the demountables are removed?
7. What happens to the area to the east of the entry road from Kingslingley Road?

Conclusion

These school upgrades are needed but the process of community consultation so far is flawed and must be seriously rectified if the Department wishes to gain community consensus to the upgrade. The future demographics in population growth must be incorporated into the planning so that the amount of accommodation to be built takes into account the Government's approach to urban densities in this area close to the city and public transport.

We would like to be kept informed of the progress of the upgrade and be invited to any future consultation sessions.

Doug Stuart, for the Committee,
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