

Item 4.

Project Scope - Ethel Street Playground, Erskineville

File No: X038090

Summary

This report outlines the proposed improvements for Ethel Street Playground, Erskineville. The playground has been identified as part of the small parks and playgrounds improvement program.

The objective of the proposal is to provide an improved park and playground which supports the needs for the range of local users including individuals, informal and formal community groups.

The project brief is to refurbish the play area including: replace end of life equipment and soft fall as required, increase the range of play experiences, improve safety and access into the park, additional seating, provide a space for social gathering and associated landscape improvements.

The Draft Concept Plan was on public exhibition from 29 March 2021 to 26 April 2021. A letter was distributed in the local area and the proposal was exhibited on the City's website. The proposed works are supported by the community and the response highlighted that an upgrade of this park would increase the current use of the park.

Community feedback was broadly in support of the proposal. Community suggestions will be incorporated as part of the detailed design phase where possible and additional information has been provided as requested.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the scope of improvement works to Ethel Street Playground as described in the subject report and shown in the Draft Concept Plan at Attachment B to the subject report for progression to relevant approvals, preparation of construction documentation, tender and construction; and
- (B) note the estimated project forecast as outlined in Confidential Attachment D to the subject report.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Location Plan
- Attachment B.** Draft Concept Plan
- Attachment C.** Engagement Report
- Attachment D.** Financial Implications (Confidential)

Background

1. The City has an ongoing small parks and playgrounds improvement program. The program is for parks which need upgrade or enhancement works, the replacement of end-of-life equipment, and to provide appropriate facilities for local-resident.
2. Ethel Street is a small local sized playground located in a central median in Ethel Street, Erskineville. The playground is surrounded by a 10kmph Shared Zone road and on-street parking. Refer to Attachment A - Location Plan.
3. The park has a very small area of land (125m²) and is surrounded by low density 1-3 storey residential terrace houses and apartment buildings. The area is a Heritage Conservation Area C23 – Kingsclear. The land is owned by City of Sydney and is within the road reserve.
4. The area that includes Erskineville is within the traditional homelands of the Gadigal and Wangal people, two of the 29 clan groups of the Sydney metropolitan area that are collectively referred to as the Eora Nation.
5. Ethel Street (unnamed) is shown on the MacDonalddtown Parish of Petersham Map 1886-1888 and the median is evident in the City of Sydney Aerial Photographic Survey 1949_Image 99. A playground is identified on the City of Sydney Building Surveyors Plans 1949-1972 Section 19 Erskineville. A 1977 photograph of a treeless Ethel Street shows a fenced playground with swing and slide. The playground had a minor refurbishment in 2010 and the Shared Zone was established around the park.
6. Ethel Street Playground is a small local scale play space located in a narrow central median and therefore is very constrained in the type of play opportunity as well as safety considerations. A shared zone around the park prioritises pedestrians and helps improve safety. The park and playground consist of a swing and see-saw and small turf grass and includes a low timber barrier fence, park signage, timber bench seats and concrete stools and low shrub plantings.
7. The small park has a relaxed and informal character that reflects the neighbourhood. The median reserve has a mix of deciduous trees and is in a beautiful treelined street.
8. The original vegetation would have likely been Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub. The park has four trees with a mix of exotic trees including Jacarandas, Honey Locust and Plane tree. The surrounding street trees are predominantly small native trees including melaleuca and water gums. Due to overshadowing and compaction the turf grass quality is poor.
9. Ethel Street Playground was identified for an upgrade due to the overall condition of the reserve including the condition of the existing playground. The existing park layout remains generally the same.
10. Consideration has been given to the provision of play equipment in surrounding parks within a 500 metre radius, to ensure a coordinated network of facilities that caters for a broad range of park users.

Draft Concept Plan

11. A concept plan was developed for the works and community consultation was undertaken (refer Attachment B).
12. The concept plan sets the overall layout. The key principles are:
 - (a) provide an accessible, welcoming, and safe park for the community and visitors.
 - (b) provide a local scale play space which improves the play opportunities for local children with a range structured equipment, imaginative and nature play elements.
 - (c) provide a range of seating opportunities which encourage social interaction and local community gatherings; and
 - (d) use simple, robust, high quality materials which reflect the local neighbourhood character.
13. The proposal includes the following works:
 - (a) refurbish the existing park benches and provide a new communal bench;
 - (b) replace existing swing and provide new nature play elements including sandstone boulders, steppingstones, balance beams and timber platform;
 - (c) increase and improve open turf grass area for passive recreation;
 - (d) improve the barrier edge and bollard protection around the park and provide a low fence;
 - (e) a new kerb ramp to provide inclusive access to park facility and playground;
 - (f) additional traffic calming measures including a speed hump and planting island to reduce vehicle speeds near the playground and improve safety;
 - (g) new groundcover and low shrub plantings; and
 - (h) the provision of a plinth for an ongoing program of small public artwork sculptures curated in collaboration with the Tom Bass Studios nearby.
14. In response to the public consultation, the following will be investigated and incorporated where possible in the detailed design as noted on Attachment C
 - (a) a review of the timber barrier rail alignment and infill fence panels alignment, height and design;
 - (b) investigations will be undertaken to identify additional signage and line-marking which can improve safety in the area;
 - (c) adjustments to the speed hump and planted island median to allow pedestrian to cross the road and maximise permissible parking spaces; and
 - (d) reviewing the organic mulch surfaces and edge treatments to minimise material spilling onto the road.

15. The following tree management and planting is proposed as part of the park works:
 - (a) retain and protect all existing trees; and
 - (b) preparation of an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan to inform the detailed design and ensure appropriate construction methodology.
16. A Review of Environmental Factors (REF) will be lodged for the works in accordance with the Environmental Planning Assessment Act 1979 and the State Environmental Planning Policy Infrastructure 2007.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

17. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies - this project will provide an improved open space infrastructure which meets the needs of a wide variety of user groups and provides opportunities for social interaction.
 - (b) Direction 9 - Sustainable Development, Renewal and Design - this project is part of wider program of ongoing renewal of small parks across the local government area; it will provide improved quality of open space infrastructure.
18. The draft Green Sydney Strategy establishes targets to increase greening and tree canopy in the City. It includes strategic directions to ensure we distribute quality greening fairly across the city so that everyone shares the benefits provided by greening. This project aligns with the following directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 3 – Cool and calm spaces. Two key issues facing most of the city's residents relate to high urban heat and impacts on physical and mental health.

Greening for All

- (b) Action 4 – Distribute greening equitably. The strategy target is to establish 30 per cent canopy cover, within an area of around 1.6 kilometres to provide key heat and health benefits. The existing tree canopy cover in the park is about 70% which exceeds this target.
- (c) Action 5 – Provide fair access to quality green space. This project will improve access in the park and provides an improved open space infrastructure to meets the needs of a wide variety of users.
- (d) Action 6 – Adapt for climate. This project will provide additional landscape planting and reduces the hard surface areas to reduce heat and increase water infiltration. Furniture and materials will be refurbished or recycled were possible.

Cool Calm Spaces

- (e) Action 8 – Cool the hot spots. Cool streets improve the walkability and liveability of our city. The project will enhance and improve the amenity and usability of an important and well used small park. The tree canopy and planting has been maintained or increased.
- (f) Action 9 – Calm green spaces. The proposed refurbishment provides a range of spaces including an open turf grass area for passive recreation, bench seats and social gatherings.

Organisational Impact

- 19. This upgrade will provide an improved park amenity and play experience for children, their carers and other community members visiting the park. The replacement of non-compliant assets represents a removal/mitigation of risk to the City. The assets will require ongoing maintenance.
- 20. The proposal includes a plinth for the potential installation of small public art sculptures in collaboration with the Tom Bass Studios nearby. To enable the installation of sculptures by Tom Bass students as part of their public artwork curriculum, an arrangement that complies with the Roads Act 1993 (NSW) will be considered..

Risks

- 21. Risks of not implementing the scope of these works include potential failure of play infrastructure and risk to the community. Daily inspections are carried out by the City as per standard parks and playground maintenance operations
- 22. Risks of not implementing this scope of works include a failure to meet community expectations.

Social / Cultural / Community

- 23. Ethel Street playground is unique, well used, and an important social space for the local community. Improving the amenity and play offering within the park represents an investment in this community, providing opportunities for people of different ages and abilities to use the park alongside each other.
- 24. The proposal includes the installation of a plinth for the installation of public artwork sculptures by Tom Bass Studio students, subject to a suitable arrangement being established. This will help foster a connection with the surrounding neighbourhood and will be new cultural focal point for the local community.

Environmental

- 25. Enhancement of planting is consistent with the Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan and Urban Tree Canopy objectives.

Financial Implications

- 26. There are sufficient funds in the current year capital works budget and future year forward estimates to deliver this project. Current cost estimates and financial implications are detailed in Confidential Attachment D.

Relevant Legislation

27. Local Government Act 1993 - Section 10A provides that a Council may close to the public so much of its meeting as comprises information that would, if disclosed, confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the Council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business.
28. Attachment D to the subject report contains confidential commercial information which if disclosed, would confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom Council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business.
29. Discussion of the matter in an open meeting would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest because it would compromise Council's ability to negotiate fairly and commercially to achieve the best outcome for its rate payers.
30. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.
31. State Environmental Planning Policy Infrastructure 2007.
32. Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012.
33. Disability Discrimination Act 1992.
34. Companion Animals Act 1998
35. Roads Act 1993.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

36. Current Program Dates
 - (a) Detailed Design July - December 2021
 - (b) Tender February 2022
 - (c) Construction Start May 2022
 - (d) Construction Completion January 2023

Options

37. Proceed with progression of improvement works as outlined in the subject report including relevant approvals, preparation of construction documentation, tender and construction.
38. Project does not proceed - this option is not recommended as the current condition of the playground has a number of associated risks and compliance issues.

Public Consultation

39. Community Consultation was undertaken as a two-part process: pre-consultation/early engagement and public consultation/exhibition. For a detailed description of the consultation process and findings refer to Attachment C
40. A pre-consultation notification letter/email was issued to residents. Eighty-nine submissions were received during the pre-consultation period. The purpose of the early community consultation was to seek input from the community about how they use the playground and how the park could be improved
41. The public consultation/exhibition involved the following:
 - (a) Letters advertising the online feedback portal were distributed to the Erskineville area (within a 500metre radius around the site). Approximately 1133 invitations were distributed.
 - (b) A webpage on SydneyYourSay showing the plans for the consultation from 29 March 2021 to 26 April 2021. 235 individual users viewed the page.
 - (c) An online Zoom consultation feedback session was held in the park from 5.00-6.00pm Wednesday on 21 April 2021. Council staff were available to answer questions and obtain feedback about the proposed concept plan. Respondents were also encouraged view the plans and provide feedback on the Have You Say website. One person attended the session.
42. There were 15 submissions received during the consultation feedback. This included submissions via an online feedback form, post and the Sydney Your Say email address.
43. The proposed works are supported by the community and the responses highlighted that an upgrade to this park would increase the current use of this park. A summary and response to the key comments is outlined below:
 - (a) Two submissions referred to issues of vehicles hitting the existing fence due to its close location to the road and concerns about feeling caged in by the new fence. The existing playground includes a timber rail which provides a safe barrier between the park users and cars. The provision of additional infill fence panels was identified in the pre-consultation to improve safety for young children. The alignment of the timber barrier rail will be moved away from the kerb to eliminate the likelihood of vehicles hitting the fence. Also the height of the infill fence panels will be reduced to 600mm to minimise the caged feeling and improve the visual amenity.
 - (b) Two submissions related to providing additional traffic directional signage to help people particularly delivery drivers navigate around the narrow streets and reduce volumes around the park. Significant changes to traffic flows in the precinct will need a broader traffic study and modelling which is beyond project brief. Investigations will be undertaken to identify additional signage and line-marking which can improve safety in the area.

- (c) Two submissions suggested the new speed hump and traffic calming measures are not needed due to narrow street widths. The new traffic claiming is proposed in response to community feedback about safety around the playground. The speed hump will help reduce vehicles speeds in the 10km Shared Zone. A review of the speed hump and planted island median design will be undertaken to allow pedestrian to cross the road and maximise permissible parking spaces.
- (d) One submission raised concerns about dogs being allowed in the park as they urinate on the synthetic grass softfall and concrete stools. Community feedback in pre-consultation/early engagement indicates the small grass area is important to residents for dog exercise and toileting. The existing concrete stools will be cleaned and moved out of the turf areas to improve use of the space. The playground is inspected daily and regularly cleaned including softfall. Dogs are not permitted in the playground area.
- (e) One submission suggested additional motor scooter parking be provided on Clara Street. This would change parking configuration in the area is beyond the project requirements. These suggestions have been directed to the City Traffic Area Manager for consideration.

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