

Item 4.

Project Scope - Harry Noble Reserve Playground, Erskineville

File No: X038100

Summary

This report outlines the proposed improvements for Harry Noble Reserve Playground in Erskineville. Harry Noble Reserve 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 of a range of local users including individuals, informal and formal community groups, as well as wildlife.

The project brief is to refurbish the play area including; replace end of life equipment and soft fall as required, provide a range of play experiences, improve the entries and access into the park; increase the active recreation facilities, improve the open grass areas, provide additional barbeques, tables and seatings; and associated landscape improvements.

The Draft Concept Plan was on public exhibition from 18 May 2021 to 14 June 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 responses 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 for improvement works to Harry Noble Reserve 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, landowners consent, 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 staged program is for parks which need upgrade or enhancement works, the replacement of end-of-life equipment, and to provide appropriate facilities for local residents.
2. Harry Noble Reserve Playground is a neighbourhood park located at 1a Elliott Avenue, Erskineville. The park is bound by Swanson to the north and Fox and Elliott Avenues to the east and west. Refer Attachment A Location Plan. The Lady Gowrie Child Centre and Alexandria Erskineville Bowling Club are located on the southern boundary.
3. The 10,800sqm park is surrounded by low density residential terrace houses and medium density (3-4 storey) apartment buildings on Swanson and Copeland Streets and two-storey Department of Housing brick apartment buildings. Erskineville Oval and stadium is east of the park.
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. Erskineville Oval and Harry Noble Reserve form part of Crown reserve P.500429. The care, control and management of the reserve is delegated to the City of Sydney as the appointed Crown land manager. The southern portion of the existing playground within Harry Noble Reserve is located on part Lot 2 DP 52982, owned by the NSW Land and Housing Corporation. The City is negotiating access, management and maintenance of this portion of land and has received in principle approval for the small park renewal works. The land use agreement will be formalised to enable construction works. The activities identified within the renewal works are consistent with what is proposed within the Erskineville Oval Draft Plan of Management, currently under review by Crown Lands. This is anticipated for adoption in late 2021. The park is within the Heritage Conservation Area C22 – Erskineville Estate.
6. Harry Noble Reserve and Erskineville Oval were part of a land grant to Nicholas Divine in 1794. The park is located on the low-lying western edge of Sheas Creek Swamp. The park was proclaimed Macdonaldtown Park in 1885, then changed to Erskineville Park in 1892.
7. Since establishment the park area has been incrementally reduced. In 1938 the NSW Government's Erskineville Rehousing Scheme established Elliot Avenue and built seven apartment buildings. Another part was used for the Lady Gowrie Child Centre in 1943. An informal cricket pitch and loop track is evident in the reserve in 1943. The remaining park area was returned to Council in 1955 and the bowling club was built in 1956 on Ashmore Street.
8. The reserve was named in 1960 after Harry Noble, an Alexandria Alderman and State MP for Redfern. The low sandstone wall surrounding the park was built around this period. Swanson and Copeland Streets were widened in the late 1960s between Mitchell Road and Binning Street as part of the Department of Main Roads, Inner Suburban Radial Freeway Network. The full scheme was never realised, however Swanson and Copeland Streets are still classified State Roads.

9. The large and level reserve has a relaxed open grass and treed character that reflects the neighbourhood. The reserve is surrounded by a low sandstone wall and large trees around the park edge. The park has a simple and robust materials palette which includes sandstone, asphalt and concrete paths with brick edges.
10. The three entries on Swanson Street have timber arbor or pergola structures with climbers and a series of timber shelter structures. A primary pedestrian path dissects the reserve and provides a north-west and south-eastern though link between Swanson Street and Fox Avenue. A secondary path connects Elliot and Fox Avenues along the south edge of the park.
11. The reserve has 60 trees with a mix of mature native and exotic trees including, eucalyptus, figs, jacaranda, cook pines, popular and plane trees along the street frontages. The predominant tree species are Tallowood (*Eucalyptus microcorys*). The trees have been planted around the park edge around an open central grass area. As a result of the dense planting and over-shadowing there is a wide (15-20m) bare mulch under-storey area along the northern and western side of the park. Low shrub and groundcover plantings have recently been installed to improve the visual amenity of the area. Due to the poor sun (solar) access, high uses, poor drainage and shallow soils, the turf grass quality is poor.
12. Harry Noble Reserve is a designated dog off leash area and is well used. Dogs are prohibited from the playgrounds. The existing playground is fenced and provides a clearly defined space.
13. Harry Noble Reserve Playground was identified for an upgrade due to the overall condition of the reserve including the condition of the existing playground. The playground is isolated and disconnected from the main reserve space and other facilities such as barbeques, tables and open grass areas.
14. The existing playground has a series of small individual elements which focus on younger children (0-6 years) and has limited play opportunity and diversity (experience and ability range) given the size and neighbourhood scale. The gates restrict equitable access and there are limited inclusive play experiences.
15. The reserve includes some basic active recreation opportunities, with netball hoops in the turf grass area and a basketball hoop near the Fox Avenue entry and road, which is a safety and potential conflict hazard.
16. 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 cater for a broad range of park users.

Draft Concept Plan

17. A concept plan was developed for the works and community consultation was undertaken (refer Attachment B).
18. 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) protect the original parks elements and sensitively respond to the informal park and neighbourhood character;

- (c) retain the eclectic tree mix and mature trees, and maintain the enclosed central open lawn space;
 - (d) increase the large shade tree plantings to improve the park amenity, provide native habitat and meet the Greening Sydney canopy targets;
 - (e) increase the recreation opportunities and improve usability for all park users by better arranging the park facilities;
 - (f) maintain the open and flexible park uses with separation and clearly defined spaces for dog off-leash and other park uses;
 - (g) provide inclusive playground, increase the range of active recreation and play opportunities and diversity with a range of structured equipment, imaginative and nature play elements;
 - (h) improve park amenity and encourage social interaction with a range of seating opportunities, tables and park furniture; and
 - (i) use simple, robust, high quality materials which reflect the local neighbourhood character.
19. The proposal includes the following works:
- (a) a new active recreation court with two new basketball half courts, a netball half court and goal circle practice area;
 - (b) a fenced toddler and play equipment structure with decks and bridge, platforms, climbing, firepole, slide and servery;
 - (c) a covered sandpit, boulders, stepping-stones and a spinning carousel;
 - (d) nature play area with sandstone boulders and block, balance beams, pole course, imaginative cubby house, undulating dune mounds, tunnel and sensory precision play elements;
 - (e) climbing challenge and large tower with slides for older children or more advanced abilities;
 - (f) double swing with toddler cradle and seats, and a large basket swing and inground trampolines;
 - (g) a large shade structure over the play space to provide sun protection in summer;
 - (h) additional tables, seats, water bubblers with dog bowls, barbecue, and sheltered picnic facilities; and
 - (i) improve turf grass for passive area and more landscape shrub plantings.
20. In response to the public consultation, the following will be investigated and incorporated where possible in the detailed design as noted in Attachment C:
- (a) A review of additional barbecues and picnic facilities will be investigated.
 - (b) A review to provide another dog off-leash space to share and reduce volumes in Harry Noble Reserve will be investigated.

- (c) Additional investigations will be undertaken to provide more barrier walls, to increase separation between dogs and the playground
 - (d) Investigate if additional swings can be provided in the playground
 - (e) Investigate whether additional paths for trikes and scooters circuits outside the playground can be linked or implemented sooner to increase the recreation opportunities
 - (f) The City will contact local schools to see if there is interest and opportunity to undertake targeted consultation with school children to help develop the playground design
 - (g) An acoustic assessment will be undertaken to ensure the percussion play elements will not be disruptive to surrounding residents. No increase in noise is anticipated because of the playground renewal
 - (h) Investigate the inclusion of table tennis tables
 - (i) Investigate the number and location of the water bubblers
 - (j) Review path alignment to ensure suitable access and convenience to all park facilities
 - (k) Investigate staging options to enable portions of the playground to be operational during the works. Noting temporary signage will also be provided to direct people to the Renwick Street Playground which is about 200 metres or five minutes' walk away
 - (l) Investigate the installation of an additional mid-block pedestrian crossing or kerb extensions on Fox Avenue to link Harry Noble Reserve and Erskineville Oval
21. The following tree management and planting is proposed as part of the park works:
- (a) retain and protect 57 existing trees and planting within the reserve;
 - (b) the removal of three small Jacaranda trees with poor habit to allow the installation of the active recreation court;
 - (c) the installation of 14 new mixed deciduous shade canopy and native trees to improve the park amenity and contribute to the draft Greening Sydney Strategy tree canopy targets; and
 - (d) preparation of an Aboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan to inform the detailed design and ensure appropriate construction methodology.
22. 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

23. 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.
24. 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 target percentage cover for neighbourhood parks is 55 percent and the existing tree canopy coverage is about 40 percent. The proposal includes the installation of eleven (11) additional shade canopy trees to contribute to meeting the draft Greening Sydney Strategy canopy targets.
- (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

25. 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.

Risks

26. 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.
27. Risks of not implementing this scope of works could result in failure to meet community expectations.

Social / Cultural / Community

28. Harry Noble Reserve is the primary passive park in Erskineville and is a large and flexible open and community space. The reserve is well used by families, parents and carers with young children and people with dogs. More people are moving into the area with the Ashmore Estate development nearby which increases the need for good quality open spaces, playgrounds, and facilities.
29. 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.
30. Indigenous cultural consultation will be undertaken to ensure that the project contributes to recognising the City's Indigenous heritage, celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the public domain, and enriching local knowledge about the cultural landscape.

Environmental

31. The original vegetation would have likely been Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub and with Estuarine and Freshwater Wetlands to the east near Mitchell Road. The park is between two potential habitat linkages and is identified as a Supporting Site in the Urban Ecology Strategy Action Plan. The proposed tree and plant mix will provide habitat and feed trees for fauna.

Financial Implications

32. There are sufficient funds in the current year capital works budget and future years forward estimates. Current cost estimates and financial implications are detailed in Confidential Attachment D.

Relevant Legislation

33. 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.

34. 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.
35. 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.
36. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.
37. State Environmental Planning Policy Infrastructure 2007.
38. Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012.
39. Disability Discrimination Act 1992.
40. Companion Animals Act 1998.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

41. Current Program Dates
 - (a) Detailed Design August 2021- February 2022
 - (b) Tender March 2022
 - (c) Construction Start July 2022
 - (d) Completion April 2023

Options

42. Proceed with progression of improvement works as outlined in this report including relevant approvals, preparation of construction documentation, tender and construction.
43. 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

44. 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.

45. A pre-consultation notification letter/email was issued to residents. Fifty-one (51) 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. The key community comments and ideas which helped inform the draft Concept Plan are:
- (a) The existing playground has limited play value for its size. Increase the variety of play experiences for children of all ages, particularly for older (mid-advanced) abilities.
 - (b) Provide a greater mix of play opportunities with natural materials, nature play (manipulative and balance), imaginative play and climbing challenges. The key requested items are:
 - (i) improved play element or equipment provision (active, balance, force movement, manipulative, social and imaginative play) for children of all ability and age ranges;
 - (ii) a significant tower large climbing net/ play structure with slide;
 - (iii) more nature play and natural material (timber, rocks, dirt, green, ropes – tactile/ manipulative play) to explore;
 - (iv) a sand play area (manipulative play);
 - (v) more swings with basket, strap and bucket seats;
 - (vi) accessible carousel;
 - (vii) a mixture of rubber, synthetic grass and organic mulch soft-fall and natural turf grass areas; and
 - (viii) inground trampoline (jumping and active play).
 - (ix) a trike, bike or scooter loop for children.
 - (c) Increase the basketball facilities and relocate away from the entry, pathway, road and playground and co-locate the netball hoops.
 - (d) Provide more seats for children, parents and carers and increase the range of seating opportunities in shaded and sunny locations.
 - (e) Maintain a fenced enclosed play area and provide or increase the shade over the play space and seatings areas. These comments respond to managing the conflicts between the dog off leash areas and children and other park users.
 - (f) Improve the connection between the playground with the broader park areas and other park facilities (open grass, table and bench seat and barbeque facilities etc) with barrier separation of off leash dogs and other park users.
 - (g) Increase and improve complementary parks facilities including:
 - (i) improve access to public toilets;
 - (ii) barbeque and shelters picnic facilities, including tables and bench seats;

- (iii) water bubblers with dog bowls; and
 - (iv) garbage bins.
 - (h) Improve the visual amenity with additional shade tree plantings, landscape shrub and groundcover plantings.
 - (i) Improve access and circulation with more park paths.
46. The public consultation/exhibition involved the following;
- (a) Letters advertising the online feedback portal were distributed to the Erskineville area (within a 500 metre radius around the site). 1133 invitations were distributed.
 - (b) A webpage on SydneyYourSay showed the plans for consultation from 18 May 2021 to 14 June 2021. 1142 individual users viewed the page.
 - (c) A pop-up consultation feedback session was held in the park from 10.00-11.30am on Saturday 29 May 2021. Council staff were available to answer questions and obtain feedback about the proposed concept plan. Respondents were also encouraged to view the plans and provide feedback on the Have You Say website. About 50 people attended the session.
47. There were 92 submissions received during the consultation period. This included 73 written comments via email and the online feedback form.
48. The proposed works were well supported by the community and the responses highlighted that an upgrade to this park would increase the current use of this park.
49. A summary of and responses to the key comments and suggestions are provided below.

Dog Management

- (a) *Nineteen (19) responses requested the park be fenced or a fenced dog area be provided.* The reserve currently has a boundary wall around the park which provides a barrier to the street. The installation of a high fence and gates around the park will restrict equitable access and views (passive surveillance) into the park. Dogs must be under effective control while off leash in the park.
- (b) *Two responses expressed concern the proposal takes space from dog off leash areas.* There are enough play facilities in the area. The design realigns the main path to increase the open grass area. As a result, the size of the open dog off-leash areas remains about the same.
- (c) *Ensure owners pick up their dog faeces.* The City encourages people to use our parks responsibly and pick up after their dogs. The proposal will include additional garbage bins with dog waste bag dispensers and park signage.

Playground

- (d) *Nine written responses like the proposal*, particularly the trampoline and play structure and climbing challenge, which cater for older children and offer active sport. The upgrade is desperately needed, the sooner the better. Consultation feedback indicates the proposal is generally well supported by the community. The proposed upgrade works will be undertaken early next year.
- (e) *Six responses expressed concerns about the inclusions of a sandpit*. The inclusion of a sand pit was identified in the pre-consultation process. Manipulative play with sand, organic mulch and sticks are important play and learning experiences for young children. The City has sandpits in several of our playgrounds which are well-loved by the community. The playgrounds are inspected and cleaned daily and covers help provide protection from cats and leaf litter. No syringe needles have been found in sandpits. Dogs are not permitted within playgrounds.
- (f) *Three responses requested plenty of shade be provided in the playground and seating areas*. The proposal includes a large marquee style shade structure over the playground and seats. A range of seating opportunities will be provided near shade trees and in sunny locations.
- (g) *Two respondents requested more challenging play equipment with climbing and a large slide be provided for all ages and abilities*. The proposed playground will increase the variety of play experiences for children of all ages, particularly for older (mid-advanced) abilities. It also includes a greater mix of play opportunities with natural materials, nature play (manipulative and balance), imaginative play and climbing challenges. The inclusive playground area is level and has an even rubber surface to provide good access and encourage engagement, social interaction, and participation on the inclusive carousel, cubby and servery and basket swing. The area also includes percussion elements and is fenced.
- (h) *Consider the inclusion of a flying fox*. Flying fox rides have a large footprint and can only be used by one child at a time. Due to space constraints the inclusion of a flying fox is not possible in this park.
- (i) *Concerns about the use of organic mulch playground soft-fall due to dog faeces and litter*. The proposal includes areas of both rubber and organic soft-fall surfaces. Manipulative play with organic mulch is important play and provides learning experiences for young children. It is also much cooler than rubber and synthetic surfaces in hot weather. All playgrounds are inspected and cleaned daily. Dogs are not permitted within playgrounds.
- (j) *Request water play areas be included instead of a sand pit*. The installation of a water play area is not supported in a neighbourhood scale park. Water play areas are appropriate in large regional facilities such as Gunyama Park Aquatic Centre and Pirrama Park, Pyrmont.

Active recreation

- (k) *Request the active recreation areas be changed to a full basketball/ netball court to allow structured games to occur.* In response to community need, the project provides improved netball and basketball hoops for active recreation rather than formal sport facilities. A full court can be monopolised by a single group and unfortunately netball and basketball court sizes are not compatible. The aim is to provide multiple half courts and goal circles to maximise the number of people and different groups able to play at any one time.
- (l) *Include a fence near the basketball court to ensure balls don't enter the bowling club or childcare.* The proposal will include a high net fence to stop balls going into the adjacent properties.
- (m) *Concerns about anti-social behaviour associated with the basketball courts.* The provision of improved recreation and community facilities typically help reduce anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour at basketball courts in other locations, such as Victoria Park, has not been an issue.
- (n) *The proposed sports courts are completely unnecessary.* The proposed active recreation facilities were identified in the pre-consultation process. The proposed location maximises the distance from residential dwellings and the protected corner location helps minimise disturbance to other park users.
- (o) *Increase the number of active sports facilities in the park including cricket nets, soccer goal, tennis, and full-size ball courts.* Harry Noble Reserve is passive open space with playground and informal active recreation facilities. The purpose of the project is to retain the relaxed neighbourhood character and increase play opportunities. Formal sport facilities are provided at Erskineville Oval, Prince Alfred, Perry and Sydney Parks nearby.

Park facility and amenity

- (p) *Eleven responses requested the inclusion of public toilets in the park or refurbishment of the toilet facilities in Erskineville Oval.* Public toilets are available nearby at Erskineville Oval (about 100m or 2 minutes' walk). Therefore, the provision of additional toilets in Harry Noble Reserve is not needed. Investigations into the refurbishments of the public toilets at Erskineville Oval is currently being undertaken and will be a separate project in the future.
- (q) *Six submissions requested more barbeques, tables, seats and shelters be provided.* The existing park has an old barbeque and two shelters with tables. The proposal includes a new accessible barbeque and four more picnic table sets for small and large groups, platforms, bench seats and seating walls.
- (r) *Four responses suggested the upgrade include lighting to improve safety and hours of use.* New pedestrian lights will be provided on the paths around the playground and in active recreation areas to improve safety and enable use of the courts in the evening.
- (s) *Request additional bike parking.* Existing bike racks are located near the Fox Avenue entry. More bike racks will be provided near the active recreation courts and playground.

Traffic management

- (t) *Include a high wall around the park to reduce noise impacts from traffic* The installation of a noise attenuation wall around the park is not supported. A high wall will restrict sightlines (passive surveillance) into the park which will reduce safety and will impact visual amenity. The traffic volumes and noise on Swanson Street do not warrant a wall.
- (u) *Request additional traffic measure to reduce vehicle speeds around the park, and near the school/ childcare. Rat running is becoming an issue with increased traffic volumes.* As part of the Ashmore and Harley Street cycleway project new footpath continuation treatments (raised crossings) are proposed at both ends of Fox Avenue at the Swanson and Ashmore street intersections. A raised pedestrian crossing is also proposed on Ashmore Street. This will slow traffic and discourage rat-running through the area.

AMIT CHANAN

Director City Projects and Property

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