

Project Scope - James Watkinson Reserve, Pymont

File No: X038110

Summary

This report outlines the proposed improvements for James Watkinson Reserve in Pymont. James Watkinson Reserve Playground has been identified as part of the 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 access into the park and open grass areas, replace the barbeques, provide additional tables and seatings, upgrade park lighting, and associated landscape improvements.

The Draft Concept Plan was on public exhibition from 30 August 2021 to 27 September 2021. A letter was distributed in the local area and the proposal was exhibited on the City's website. 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 for improvement works to James Watkinson Reserve 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 parks and playgrounds improvement program. The staged program is for parks which need upgrade or enhancement works and to provide appropriate facilities for local residents.
2. James Watkinson Reserve is a local scale park located at 1A Mill Street, Pyrmont. Refer Attachment A - Location Plan. The reserve is located between Ways Terrace and Mill Street with pedestrian links to Point Street and Jones Bay Road. The land is owned by the City of Sydney.
3. The park is about 3140m² and is bound by heritage items which include a residential house to the north; Ways Terrace 4-storey public housing apartment buildings to the west and the Pyrmont escarpment and palisade fence, above Pirrama Road from the eastern edge. A contemporary apartment complex has been built south of the reserve.
4. The area that includes Pyrmont 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. Thomas Jones was granted 55 acres (22 ha) of land on the peninsula in 1795, however, development in Pyrmont was slow until the opening of the first Pyrmont Bridge in 1858. In 1923, Council resumed the houses on the western side of Ways Terrace to build the model block of flats. The building was designed by Leslie Wilkinson, professor of architecture at Sydney University, and completed in 1925.
6. James (Jim) Watkinson senior was a pillar of the Pyrmont community who lived in Bowman Street. He taught children to swim and helped establish Pyrmont as a dominant water polo and swimming club in NSW. He successfully fought against the demolition of the Pyrmont Baths in 1929, but they were eventually removed in 1946. In 1954, council named the reserve in his honour, however, the park was not formally gazetted.
7. A playground is described in the Preliminary Site Plan for Flats in James Watkinson Reserve by the City Building Surveyors Department in 1966. In 1992 with the formation of City West Development Corporation a significant portion of the original reserve was removed for the development of apartments. A refurbishment of the remaining reserve was done at this time.
8. James Watkinson Reserve is located on the north-eastern side of the Pyrmont peninsular. The hidden reserve sits on the sandstone escapement elevated about 12 metres above Pirrama Road. The elevated north-eastern facing reserve has extensive and beautiful views of Darling Harbour, Harbour Bridge, and city skyline.
9. The reserve has about 32 trees with a mix of mature native and exotic trees including eucalyptus, figs and plane trees, cabbage trees palms and Norfolk Island pines. Due to shallow soils and bedrock the turf grass condition is poor in drought periods.
10. The park is split over two levels, the upper area is adjacent Ways Terrace and a lower, larger reserve addresses Mill Street. A series of stair links and concrete terraces provide a connection between. The playground is in the lower Mill Street reserve area with a cliff and sandstone retaining wall behind.
11. James Watkinson Reserve is designated dog on-leash. Dogs are prohibited from the playgrounds, which is clearly defined.

12. An old timber stair and platform structure has reached the end of its life and the sandstone cliff and walls are in poor condition. Due to structural and safety concerns the stairs have been closed and there is an exclusion zone at the base cliff.
13. The park is well used and an important social space for the local community for informal gatherings and a quiet place to sit. The playground is about the right size for this park and is well used by younger families, parents, and carers with children.
14. The existing playground has a series of individual elements which focus on younger children (0-6 years). The playground, seats and barbeque facilities are in located grass areas which impedes equitable access and there are limited inclusive play experiences.
15. 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

16. A draft concept plan was developed for the works and community consultation was undertaken (refer Attachment B).
17. The draft concept plan sets the overall layout. The key principles are:
 - (a) Improve access and provide a welcoming, open and safe park for everyone.
 - (b) Protect the original parks elements and sensitively respond to the park and neighbourhood character.
 - (c) Retain the eclectic tree mix and mature trees and provide more shade trees to improve the amenity, provide native habitat and meet the Greening Sydney canopy targets.
 - (d) Increase the amount of usable grass and improve the turf grass for passive recreation.
 - (e) Provide inclusive local scale playground and increase play opportunities and diversity with a range of structured equipment, imaginative and nature play element.
 - (f) Improve park amenity and encourage social interaction with a range of seating opportunities, tables, barbeques and park furniture.
 - (g) Use simple, robust, high quality materials which reflect the local neighbourhood character.
18. The aim is to provide an inclusive park and provide a local sized playground with improved access for everyone. The proposal includes the following works:
 - (a) Remove the old timber stairs and platform structure.
 - (b) New sandstone or brick link path to provide better access.

- (c) New play equipment to focus on younger children, including slides, servery and lookout deck, double swings with bucket seat and nature play area.
 - (d) New path lights to improve night-time safety.
 - (e) Replace the barbeques with new accessible units and tables.
 - (f) Provide more seats, tables and a new water bubbler with a dog bowl.
 - (g) Improved turf grass area and irrigation.
 - (h) New shade tree, shrubs and groundcover plantings and landscape embellishments.
19. 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) The provision of bike rack and water taps near the barbeques.
 - (b) Investigate the inclusion of a children's sandpit area.
 - (c) Inclusion of a table and seats away for the barbeque and playground area.
20. The following tree management and planting is proposed as part of the park works:
- (a) Retain and protect 32 existing trees, palms and planting within the reserve.
 - (b) Installation of an additional shade canopy tree to improve the park amenity and contribute to the draft Greening Sydney Strategy tree canopy targets.
 - (c) Preparation of an Aboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plan to inform the detailed design and ensure appropriate construction methodology.
21. 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

22. 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.

23. The 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 pocket parks is 70 percent and the existing tree canopy coverage is about 46 percent. The proposal includes the installation of an additional shade tree to improve the park amenity contribute to meeting the Greening Sydney Strategy canopy targets.
- (c) Action 5 – Provide fair access to quality green space. This project will improve access in the park and provide an improved open space infrastructure to meet 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 where 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

24. 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

- 25. 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.
- 26. Risks of not implementing this scope of works include a failure to meet community expectations.

Social / Cultural / Community

27. James Watkinson Reserve is part of a significant network of well-loved parks around the Pyrmont Point peninsular. Improving access, 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.
28. An Indigenous Cultural Consultant will be engaged as part of this upgrade process, 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

29. The original vegetation on the Pyrmont Peninsular may have been Sydney Sandstone Ridgetop Woodland and Open scrub. The likely flora species have been well documented by John Broadbent Transformations: Ecology of Pyrmont peninsula 1788 - 2008.
30. The reserve joins Gibba Park on the Pyrmont Point peninsular which is identified as a Potential Headland Habitat Linkage and a Supporting Site in the Urban Ecology Strategy Action Plan. The proposed tree and plant mix will provide habitat and food source for fauna.

Financial Implications

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

Relevant Legislation

32. 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.
33. 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.
34. 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.
35. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

36. State Environmental Planning Policy Infrastructure 2007.
37. Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012.
38. Disability Discrimination Act 1992.
39. Companion Animals Act 1998.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

40. Current Program Dates
 - (a) Council Approval of Draft Concept Design November 2021
 - (b) Detailed Design December 2021 - June 2022
 - (c) Tender July 2022
 - (d) Construction Start October 2022
 - (e) Completion June 2023

Options

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

Public Consultation

43. 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.
44. A pre-consultation notification letter/email was issued to residents. Thirteen submissions and a joint petition by Pymont Community and Pymont Action Inc 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.

45. The petition with 92 signatures was lodged in December 2020. The petition notes that the undersigned do not support a proposed upgrade of James Watkinson Reserve. It identifies the following:
 - (a) The James Watkinson Reserve was saved from development by the Pymont community spear headed by the families in the nearby Way's Terrace.
 - (b) The children's playground has been refurbished and the park is in good order.
 - (c) We do not want "improvements" such as toilets which would make it more attractive for commercial letting purposes but less attractive for the community and particularly children.
 - (d) We are concerned that rate payer's money is being spent on possible "improvements" to the park without justification.
 - (e) We are happy with our little park where children can regularly visit and play unattended.
46. James Watkinson Reserve has been included in the parks and playgrounds improvement program as the play equipment has reached end-of-life and must be replaced.
47. No public toilets are proposed as part of the upgrade which is consistent with the City of Sydney Public Toilet Strategy. Public toilets are available nearby in Pymont Point Park (about 250 metres or less than 5 minutes' walk). These toilets will also be refurbished in early 2022.
48. Council staff met with the proponents of the Petition (Pymont Community and Pymont Action Inc) to discuss the scope of works and address concerns.
49. The pre-consultation feedback gave a clear message the park is an important social space for the local community, and the playground is well used and about the right size, but the equipment is old, tired and should be replaced. People would also like to see more seats for children, parents, and carers, more shade and better links between the playground, seats, and paths. The use of more natural materials and providing more nature play experiences was requested. The key community comments and ideas helped inform the Draft Concept Plan.
50. The public consultation/exhibition of the Draft Concept Plan involved the following:
 - (a) Letters advertising the online feedback portal were distributed to the Pymont area (within a 500metre radius around the site). Approximately 1,394 invitations were distributed.
 - (b) A webpage on SydneyYourSay showing the plans for the consultation from 19 July 2021 to 16 August 2021. Sixty-Six individual users viewed the page.
 - (c) An online Zoom consultation feedback session was held in the park from 5.00-6.00pm on Wednesday 15 September 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. Seven people attended the session.

51. There were 43 submissions received during the consultation feedback. This included submissions via an online feedback form, post and the Sydney Your Say email address.
52. The proposed works are broadly 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 consultation feedback received are outlined in Attachment C - Engagement Report

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