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The General Manager
Port Stephens Council

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Tomaree Sports Complex Master Plan - Submission

The Master Plan sets out an exciting vision which, if fully implemented over time, would result in a first class sporting complex to service residents and visitors and attract major competitions and tournaments. TRRA welcomes this in principle.

Funding implications

It makes sense to have an overall Master Plan to guide future development even if, as seems likely, funding will only be available progressively over many years and even decades. We fully understand that Council needs to have a suite of well developed capital works projects 'on the shelf' to take advantage of unpredictable grant funding opportunities, and that the total cost of all such projects will always exceed even the most optimistic estimates of available funding.

However, we note that the current Capital Works Plan for 2018-28 only contains a small number of projects in the Tomaree Sports/Aquatic precinct costed at a total of \$2.54 million. A further \$38.25 million for the precinct is identified in the unfunded Capital Works Plan Plus, mainly comprising three major projects – two new swimming pools and a new multi-purpose building. (see Attachment)

Full implementation of the proposed Master Plan has reportedly been costed at \$65 million (Port Stephens Examiner 3 May), although this figure is not mentioned either in the Master Plan document or in the Staff Report to Council meeting on 24 April 2018.

If accurate, a \$65 million price tag implies a more than 50% increase in the already substantial funding assigned to the Tomaree Complex, presumably to be allocated to either the Capital Works Plan or the Capital Works Plan Plus in future annual updates, and consequently competing with the other projects, throughout Port Stephens, already in these Plans. TRRA questions whether this



enhanced priority for only one major sports complex in East ward is either reasonable or equitable.

The Capital Works Plan and the Capital Works Plan Plus contain many worthy projects that have been developed by local communities throughout Port Stephens. Many communities, and local volunteer groups, have been patiently waiting for many years for their projects to advance in the list. There has been an unfortunate history of major new projects appearing and being funded in what is often perceived as unfair 'queue jumping'. While obviously welcome to those user groups which directly benefit, it must be questioned as to whether this is a fair or proper process.

Advancing the many individual projects and associated infrastructure work comprising the Tomaree Sports Complex Master Plan runs the risk of repeating the unfair and apparently arbitrary process surrounding capital works planning and implementation in Port Stephens.

Justification for specific facilities

No detailed evidence is presented for the demand for the various sports i.e. participation rates related to future population estimates, or of the supply in other parts of the Tomaree peninsula, e.g. the playing fields behind the Salamander waste recycling centre.

We would have expected a more detailed 'business case' to accompany the Master Plan. This is even more important if the proposed works are to displace other projects in the Capital Works Plans.

We submit that there should be a complete set of current and predicted participation rates and the capacity of the various sports to contribute \$ for the operation and maintenance. Another issue that deserves greater attention is the pattern of usage between different times, days and seasons. Much of the demand for active sports is necessarily concentrated at weekends.

Council has emphasised the potential to attract major regional competitions. But again there is limited analysis – what is predicted demand and where is the competition – potentially in other locations in the Hunter region with much better access and larger catchment area?

A business plan would provide an assessment of the economic benefits that the completed facilities, and their wider regional use, could inject into the local economy including through accommodation/restaurants and associated patronage of tourist facilities and businesses. We would expect Destination Port Stephens to have a valuable perspective on these issues, but there is no evidence that DSP has been consulted.

Need to consider other potential uses of the site

TRRA is concerned that the Master Plan assumes that the entire site, including the current Council depot planned to be relocated (most likely to the Salamander waste and recycling site) should be available exclusively for active sport and recreation, with a selected number of specific sports etc 'locked in' to the Plan through the provision for dedicated facilities – pitches, ovals, courts etc.

We submit that the strategic location of the overall site lends itself to a number of other potential uses, and call for a debate about whether some of these could or should be accommodated in a revised Master Plan. Other uses include:

- Youth facilities – we understand from former Councillor Sally Dover's public access presentation at the 22 May Council meeting that a number of community groups have well developed plans for a range of youth facilities and have already identified land within this precinct, close to the Tomaree Education Centre, as a suitable site for some of these facilities. We also note that no provision is made for a cycle road rules training facility to replace the now defunct one at Nelson Bay PCYC – the Tomaree Complex might be a suitable site?
- Park and ride facilities – with growing pressure on car parking at the Salamander Centre, Nelson Bay Town Centre and tourist destinations including Birubi Point and the Nelson Bay cruise boat harbour, there will be a potential need for a bus interchange and park and ride facilities, with associate shuttle bus system, and this precinct could be an obvious location. It may be that some of the parking could be 'dual use' servicing the sport and recreation demand at times while serving other functions at other times, although demand for all parking uses would often co-incide, particularly in peak tourist season.
- There have been suggestions that a major new tourist attraction could be a chairlift to the top of Gan Gan Hill (Lily Hill Lookout), from a base station in or near this precinct. This would obviously require significant parking but this could fit in with the previous suggestion.
- There may be other opportunities to co-locate sporting facilities with other infrastructure to support major outdoor events, such as the various rallies and festivals that have been held on the site in recent years – such co-location could improve the business case and justification for the major expenditure that is envisaged over time.
- We note that there is a significant privately owned tourist attraction (Toboggan Hill Park) to the north of the Masterplan area, but no indication as to what if any consultation there has been with the operators about the impact on their business.

There are also important questions about the environmental impact of the proposed works, particularly along the northern edge and if the works will encroach into the bushland, or will require clearing of other areas for Asset Protection Zones. We note the references in the Staff Report to environmental considerations, including this: 'A key factor was the appreciation and protection (as far as practicable) of the natural bushland setting that makes the Tomaree Sports Complex unique.' (p45, Council Agenda papers for 24 April meeting)

For due consideration of other uses and environmental impacts, a much wider range of stakeholders need to be consulted – the Master Plan appears to have been developed in discussions only with sport and recreation stakeholders (also on p45). We understand that the current consultation is an important step in wider consultation but submit that this needs to be followed through with direct contact with other interested parties.

Layout and design

We submit that there should be further consideration of provision for cyclists in the site layout. Shared paths, for use by both pedestrians and cyclists can work well in some areas but not where there is likely to be dense pedestrian activity. It appears that the central spine 'Sports Walk' is proposed to be pedestrian only, and that the existing shared path along Nelson Bay road will remain. If so, there needs to be some provision for cyclists to move into and around the sports facilities.

We observe that there appears to be no road access to Building 10. How will this be serviced by vehicles – perhaps via the 'Sports Walk' at controlled times?

We note that an access road is proposed to the north of the Dick Burwell oval. Currently spectators to the south of the oval enjoy the backdrop of natural bushland uninterrupted by any traffic or parked vehicles (we refer to the acknowledgement of 'the natural bushland setting' as a 'unique feature' in the Staff Report already noted above. It would be a shame to lose this feature, and it could perhaps be avoided by accessing all the western car parks from the south, where necessary crossing the 'Sports Walk' either at low speeds or, preferably, with grade separation (a road underpass and/or walkway overpass?).

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