

Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (SREP) No 26: Proposed amendment to permit a temporary school in Wentworth Park

As an Ultimo resident living close to the existing Ultimo Public School, I'd like to make the following comments about the proposed amendment to SREP 26 .

(1) Temporary relocation could have been completely avoided

The NSW Government promised before the 2015 elections to build a new primary school on the City of Sydney's disused Wattle St depot to cater for 1000 students (plus childcare facilities), but later reneged on this commitment.

-This (Wattle St) solution: would have made it unnecessary to accommodate students in a temporary school and hence to rezone Wentworth Park: They could have stayed in the existing school until the new premises were ready.

(2) "A Project Reference Group was set up to obtain stakeholder input " - made up of ...representatives from the school, the community and the NSW Dept of Education...

-I am not aware that any Ultimo residents from the broader community were represented in the PRG and none, apart from parents of students at the existing school, were consulted by other means.

(3) Amendment ..." without consent by or on behalf of a public authority"

- Since "*current zoning and objectives for Wentworth Park prohibit the proposed educational use*," the Government's decision to amend the SREP to " permit a temporary school on part of Wentworth Park" is clearly questionable and self-serving. Local communities and regular individual and group users of the park were not consulted about the rezoning proposal which should be closely examined by an independent authority rather than rushed through by the Government-an interested party. Adopting the "Wattle St solution" would have avoided this issue completely (as stated above).

(4) Pre-emption of Upper House Inquiry findings

An Upper House Inquiry into "*inner city public primary school enrolment capacity and redevelopment of Ultimo Public School*." is in progress, with hearings in November, and the Committee's report expected some weeks later.

It is unacceptable that the Government placed this proposed Amendment on exhibition on the day after submissions to the Inquiry closed, and chose not to wait for the Inquiry's findings before applying for the Wentworth Park rezoning in order to permit the temporary school to be erected.

(5)... "need to carefully consider environmental impacts"...

(a) Tree removal

It is stated that three allegedly sickly trees would be removed and two recently planted would be relocated. But all were originally planted for the permanent pleasure and convenience of all park users.

Why should they be moved to accommodate a temporary (3-year) structure? It would be far better to adapt the location of the temporary accommodation to the existing natural environment by placing it entirely within the Wentworth Park Sporting Complex area.

(b) Toxins -

An initial site investigation found high levels of soil pollutants (lead, PAHs) in the proposed school area, which are extremely toxic if ingested. It is proposed to protect the students from contact with the soil with decking.

It is unrealistic to suppose that the same pollutants are not present in the open park, where the students would play freely, and hence would be at equal risk.

(6) Impact on the City of Sydney's Priority Connection Ultimo –Glebe- Forest Lodge

The proposed rezoning encroaches on the City of Sydney's *Priority Connection* - Ultimo-Glebe-Forest Lodge (see Draft Walking Strategy and Action Plan,11, Appendix A, Key Walking Routes p 40 http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/233320/Walking_Strategy_FINAL_for_web.pdf).

Only a year ago, public funds were spent on installing a brick-paved walk/cycle way, new trees, benches and a water fountain. This wasted investment cannot be justified.

(7) Violation of public space

The area nominated for the temporary school falls partly within the existing public space. Since greyhound racing will cease in mid-2017, the school could and should be located entirely within the Wentworth Park Sporting Complex area to avoid stealing precious public space,(see (5)

8) “ Impact on the stakeholders in the temporary location” ?

These stakeholders include local community members who regularly visit or cross Wentworth Park, including sports teams, other schools, keep-fit enthusiasts, children using play equipment, dog walkers, joggers and leisure walkers. Those groups do not appear to have been consulted about the impacts of the proposed rezoning on their activities..

(9) What happens after removal of the school?

“The Department of Education is committed to making “good works” on the Park once the temporary school has been removed”

What guarantees does the community have that the temporarily unavailable land will be restored in good condition for public use?

In view of the above concerns about the *proposed amendment of SREP 26 to permit a temporary school in Wentworth Park*, I ask the NSW Department of Education to

- suspend all decisions until the Committee of Inquiry reports its findings
- reopen negotiations with the City of Sydney, with the aim of purchasing the Wattle Street site for the development of a new school of adequate size, as initially promised.

Patricia Johnson

Ultimo, 2007