

ITEM NO: 11

SUBJECT: FORMER LAWSON GOLF COURSE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

FILE NO: F00731

Recommendations:

That the Council:

1. *Accept and note the content of submissions made on the public exhibition of the former Lawson Golf Course Site Redevelopment: Vision and Concept Plan.*
 2. *Make the consultant report on the exhibition of preliminary options available for public viewing on the Council website and through the Council libraries.*
 3. *Extend the project area of investigation to include the adjacent Crown Reserve No 52559 for Public Recreation located at 42A Wilson Street, Lawson and containing Lawson Oval and BMX track; and the adjacent Cemetery Reserve located at 80-90 Wilson Street, Lawson .*
 4. *Develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Lands to jointly fund a study to determine the future development options for the reserve known as Lawson Golf Course and the adjoining reserves outlined in Recommendation 3 of this report by April 2008.*
 5. *Commence a review, in April 2008, of recreation needs and opportunities in the Mid Mountains to inform this and other projects within the Mid Mountains.*
 6. *Ensure that studies for the Lawson Golf Course precinct are coordinated with those of other projects within the Mid Mountains, and especially within the South Lawson area over the period 2007-2010 or until the project is finalised.*
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Report by Group Manager, Community and Corporate:

Report summary

The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the results of community consultation on the proposed vision and concept plan for the redevelopment of the former Lawson Golf Course and to seek approval to progress to the next phase of the project.

This report describes:

- The community consultation activities undertaken prior to and during the exhibition period;
- Issues raised by the community and other stakeholders for consideration in the selection of the preferred concept plan option for redevelopment of the site;
- The consultation results which showed a lack of definitive support for any of the concept plan options as exhibited;

- The need to continue to further investigate the viability of the four conceptual precincts proposed being: development, environmental protection, informal recreation and organised sports;
- The need to undertake a review of recreation needs and opportunities in the Mid Mountains;
- The offer from the Department of Lands to jointly fund preparation of an “Options paper for the future use and management of the reserved Crown land known as the Lawson Golf Course” and adjoining reserves to inform viable and sustainable development of the site; and
- The need for the project work to be coordinated with that of other projects being undertaken within the Mid Mountains.

Background to report

In 2004 the Lawson Golf Club became insolvent and handed back management of the Lawson Golf Course to the Council. A decision was made by the Council to review the use of the site in response to changing needs of the local and regional community, and the costs for the Council to maintain the site as a public golf course.

Reports and Council resolutions on these matters are found in the business papers and Minutes of Council meetings of 20/7/2004 Item 10 (Minute No. 309); 12/10/2004 Item 20 (Minute No. 440); 2/11/2004 Item 24 (Minute No. 475); and 13/09/2005 Item 5 (Minute No.304) and 21/02/2006 Item 14 (Minute 486).

On 13 September 2005 the Council considered the *Report and Appendices on the former Lawson Golf Course Site Redevelopment: Recommended Vision and Concept* and resolved:

1. *That the report be placed on public exhibition for a period of two months for comment and forwarded to external government agencies.*
2. *That submissions received from the exhibition be assessed and reported back to the Council for consideration and final adoption.*
3. *That the report to the Council following exhibition address how the development of the site can meet the objective of being self funded.”*
(Minute No. 304, 13/9/05.)

Subsequently on 21 February 2006, the Council resolved:

“That the Council grant an extension of time, to 1 May 2006, for submissions with regard to the Lawson Golf Course proposals.”
(Minute No 486, 21/2/06)

The Council’s Management Plan 2007-8 contains a milestone for this project which states:
“Progress planning for Lawson Golf Course Redevelopment”.

The Project

The objectives of the Project were to develop a concept plan and define uses for the redevelopment of the golf course that will:

- Be acceptable to the community;
- Be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable;
- Meet the recreation needs of the community;
- Be self funding; and

- Assist in and enhance the integration of the redevelopment of the Lawson Town Centre and its recreation areas.

The concept plans envisaged by the Council involved the inclusion of appropriate mixed use development to fund provision of recreation facilities to serve residents from across the city, as well as the local area.

Progress to date

Work undertaken to date has involved:

- Integration of community and stakeholder ideas and concerns into the development of “Former Lawson Golf Course Site Redevelopment: Recommended Vision and Concept Report, July 2005” (the Report).
- Confirmation of the vision, and the development of concepts based on feedback received from the community and other stakeholders.

The consultants, GHD, prepared the Report for the Council and were subsequently commissioned to coordinate community engagement in the development of a preferred concept plan. This involved:

- Public exhibition of the Report with three alternative concepts;
- Analysis of submissions on the exhibited concepts, with a view to identifying a preferred concept, which had general community support and met the objectives for the project; and
- Reporting on results of the public exhibition and providing recommendations for future development of the site.

A draft Lawson Traffic Study has since been developed for the Council (July 2006). This study provides advice to ameliorate potential traffic issues which may result from redevelopment of the site.

External consultation on the project to date

Community and other stakeholder consultation activities undertaken to date have included newsletters; advertisements in the Blue Mountains Gazette; public exhibition of the Report in venues across the city, including Council offices and libraries; and, provision of information on the Council website. Consultation activities have focussed on:

Informing the community about the project;

- Reporting on results of the public exhibition and providing recommendations for future development of the site;
- Involving the community in the development of the vision and concept plan for the site through workshops and other means; and
- Ensuring community input and concerns are considered in adoption of a concept for the ‘best’ use of the site.

The consultation program appeared to generate considerable goodwill from the community and other stakeholders. Whilst there was some scepticism at the start of the project based on previous consultation processes that people had experienced, the feedback received at the end of the various activities undertaken in Phase 1 and 2 suggested that some barriers and cynicism had been turned around.

GHD recommend that a similar level of consultation be undertaken in the next phase of the project, and that where possible the relationships with the individuals and representatives from this project be maintained or built on, given the knowledge, commitment and passion that they brought to the project. Unfortunately due to staffing resources, and the need to engage and reach agreement with the Department of Lands, there has been a delay in reporting the results of the consultation to the Council. Further delays will be necessary before resources are available to continue this planning work. This is outlined below in this report.

Discussion of Concept Plan Options

The Council placed three concept options on exhibition seeking public comment. These were Option 10, Option 11 (which includes the adjoining public reserve) and Option 6 (an option proposed by the Bushcare Network). These options are available on the Council website for viewing under <http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/citydevelopment/lawsonprojects/golfcourse/> and a summary has been provided as an enclosure to this report (Enclosure 1).

All three options sought to:

- Lift Lawson’s profile and provide a “showcase” which meets the “25 year Vision for the City”.
- Provide park like areas for informal recreation.
- Provide for protection of environmentally sensitive areas.
- Provide for active sports fields and/or courts. Option 6 provides for croquet lawns in the central part of the site. Options 10 and 11 provide for organised sports at the southern and flattest part of the site. The sporting area indicated is sufficient to accommodate 4 playing fields, or 2 cricket ovals, or 3 playing fields and 16 basketball/netball courts. The location minimises the need for earthworks and the potential impact of noise and light spill on adjoining residents.
- Present a development precinct around the clubhouse on Wilson Street. Option 10 and 11 propose consolidated development precincts on the northern portion of the site, while Option 6 provides a small and dispersed development footprint with specific uses nominated.

The report prepared by GHD suggested that future development of the site should be subject to a number of controls that could include:

- Controls to ensure that views from Wilson Street are maintained;
- Adequate parking is provided;
- Parking areas are not large areas of hardstand; and
- Controls to protect South Lawson Creek and all existing vegetation (trees/shrubs) on the site.

Summary of submissions on the Options

In total 181 submissions (written correspondence) were received as follows:

- 29 Written submissions from individuals, organisations and businesses;
- 149 Feedback forms from individuals and organisations; and
- 3 Emails.

Submissions commented on the proposed options and identified issues of concern which included: development; environment; feasibility; history and heritage; lack of information on sporting needs; noise and traffic; parking; quality of life of local residents; the need to

consider alternative sites for sporting provision; showcasing Lawson; tourism opportunities; taking a whole of Lawson approach; the capacity of the Council to fund the proposals; and suggestions for alternative site uses. The submissions and these issues and themes are summarised in Attachment 1.

A number of comments made in submissions indicate distrust or misunderstanding of information provided to date. This included:

- The type of development proposed (given that the nature/type of developments is still to be determined, and could comprise a range of land uses).
- The nature of the Blue Mountains LEP 2005 requirements and the range of permissible uses under the current zoning.
- Permissible land uses for a Recreation Reserve under the Crown Lands Act and the potential to raise income from development and lease or sale of land.
- Lack of confidence in the ability of the Council to protect the environmentally sensitive areas of the site through management and planning controls.

Additional information and attention was requested on matters such as:

- The proposed precincts
- The need for sporting facilities, and
- What it would cost to develop and manage the various precincts

Levels of support for options

Submissions supported elements of each option but no option was supported by a majority of respondents. The highest support was for the Bushcare option where 32% of submissions agreed that it met the needs of the community.

Those supporting the Bushcare option believed that this met the needs of residents living around the site, as well as lifting Lawson's profile and bringing tourists to Lawson. Those against the Bushcare option felt that the activities in this option were well catered for in the mountains, and that the Lawson site provided a key opportunity to develop active and passive recreation precincts, with some form of a sporting complex.

Most respondents agreed that there was a need for an informal recreation precinct, and that this could include picnic areas, children's playgrounds, walking tracks etc.

Those against an organised sports precinct did generally recognise the need for sporting provision but felt alternate sites could be found without damaging existing grassland and bushland, and impacting adjoining residents. A number of submissions suggested that active sports could be accommodated on the Ridge Street former land fill site rather than the former golf course.

Continuing consultation

It is considered important to continue a high level of community involvement in this project. This process should be consistent with the overall Integrated Planning & Implementation Mid Mountains Pilot and the Collaborative Community- Government Framework currently being developed by the Council.

The site is potentially an important regional recreation resource and consultation should have city wide community focus and involve residents and groups from across the city as well from the local area. Ongoing liaison with the Department of Lands and other government agencies will be essential throughout the project.

Extension of the Project Area:

During the development of the concepts for public exhibition it became apparent that there would be advantages achieved if the 2 adjoining Crown reserves were included into the overall project area. Consequently this Council report recommends that the project area is extended to include the adjacent Crown Reserve No 52559 for Public Recreation located at 42A Wilson Street, Lawson and containing Lawson Oval and BMX track; and the adjacent Cemetery Reserve located at 80-90 Wilson Street, Lawson.

This would allow location of the different precincts to achieve efficiencies of scale; to reduce duplication of facilities; and locate a development precinct in closer to the town centre and reduce impacts on adjoining residential properties.

The recent development by the Council of a sustainable asset management (SAM) plan for the Lawson Cemetery has identified potential opportunities to reduce duplication of facilities on adjoining reserves. Inclusion of the Cemetery would offer opportunities to combine parking areas, access roads and amenities for the Cemetery with those provided for a community or sporting precinct. The peak periods of use of the sporting and Cemetery precincts would rarely coincide. There is however a need to retain the overall Cemetery asset for future cemetery purposes.

Next stage of the project

The report by GHD suggested that further studies should be undertaken to ensure certain constraints are met and triple bottom line frameworks are specifically considered. The report suggested that the next stages of the planning process undertake the following studies:

A feasibility study to determine:

- Capital costs for construction;
- Ongoing costs;
- Means of raising revenue - private or government (Council may need to raise 30-40% on project costs to attract Federal and State government grants)
- Potential for staging works;
- Uses for development precincts;
- Densities for development precincts; and
- Commitment from private interests for development scenarios.

An environmental study to ensure:

- Environmental constraints are clearly understood;
- Environmental costs are minimised;
- Bushfire setbacks are achieved and are given due consideration as part of feasibility study; and
- Buffers are appropriately installed.

An overall study for the site could subsequently establish:

- Types of facilities that need to be provided;
- Detail strategies and principles for development;

- Development character for the site; and
- Costs and implementation of the plan.

The other issues that arose that need to be addressed were:

- The balance of regional and local needs in the site development; and
- The relationship of the development on this site to development on other sites, in meeting stated local and city needs.

The GHD report suggests that to progress this project the Council needs to:

- Consider recreational priorities versus other priorities e.g. residential priorities, educational priorities, financial priorities;
- Establish whether the priorities need to be weighted dependent on whether they are local versus regional in focus;
- Consider how the varying priorities can or will be met through other current or future projects; and
- Communicate back to the community and other stakeholders how the list of ideas and concerns that cannot be met through the redevelopment of Lawson Golf Course site will be addressed.

As the major part of the land involved is Crown land it was necessary to consult with the Department of Lands, as the land owner, regarding development of a sustainable and self funding project.

Discussions with Department of Lands regarding progression of the project:

The General Manager of BMCC and relevant staff have met with the Director General, Mr Warwick Watkins, and staff of the NSW Department of Lands (Lands) to discuss the project. These discussions suggested that Lands and the Council jointly fund a study to determine options for the reserves. This paper would investigate potential commercial uses for the land, the development precincts and a funding model to allow for the development of community and recreation facilities on the land. The discussions were conducted on the basis of ensuring that the project can be sustainable and self funding, and to maximise benefits for the people of the Blue Mountains and the state of NSW.

Sustainability Assessment

The site has major social, economic and environmental value for the city wide community as well as local residents of Lawson and has potential to meet critical recreation and sporting needs of the city wide and Mid Mountains community. These values and opportunities need to be identified and evaluated through the recreational review and investigations of options available for development of the site.

It is proposed that this work is coordinated with planning for other projects within the Mid Mountains and especially within the South Lawson catchment. This will provide an integrated approach to land use and community facility provision in the Mid Mountains. This is expected to enhance decision making and expand opportunities for the best use of land; provide savings in costs; and enhance opportunities for recreation provision, business and tourism development, storm water management and reuse, traffic management, environmental protection and enhancement, and bushfire protection.

Financial implications

The Council does not have the resources to redevelop the site and needs this project to be self funding in the longer term. The Department of Lands have been consulted in the progression of the project to date and are willing to join with Council in the next stages of planning. This would include jointly funding the next stage of planning with the Council.

The overall approach adopted by the Council is to seek opportunities to fund improvement and maintenance of recreation and cemetery facilities through development of a portion of the land. Any funds raised this way could be then increased through application for grants and other government and entrepreneurial funding opportunities.

The Council has provided funding of \$28,000 in 2007-8 to commence the recreation review and options study. It is expected that additional funds for the planning work will need to be sought in the 2008-2009 budget to supplement the funds currently available.

The assessment of different options will need to evaluate full life cycle costs for any proposed development including capital and recurrent operational and maintenance costs. In the interim funding for ongoing maintenance of the site is available in 2007-8 and, pending redevelopment of the site, needs to be considered in budget preparation for future years. These maintenance costs are partially offset by income from the lease of the club house.

Legal and risk management issues

The preferred concept will need to align with the legal requirements for the land or processes will be needed for reconsideration of the status of the land. The legal status of the land parcels are outlined below.

The major land parcel of the Former Golf Course site and the adjoining public reserve are owned by the Crown and reserved for recreation of the people of NSW. The Crown Lands Act outlines permissible uses for these sites and requirements for any leasing, licensing or sale of the land. The Council is appointed Trustee for these reserves. A small contiguous land parcel of 0.58ha is owned and managed by the Council under the Local Government Act as Community Land under the categories of natural area: watercourse and wetland, and general community use.

The site is zoned Recreation - Open Space and Environmental Protection - Open Space under Blue Mountains LEP 2005. Recreation and certain other land uses may be permitted within this zoning subject to development approval and construction certification. Should land uses not currently permitted within this zoning be demonstrated to provide the best use of the land for continuing returns, there would be a need for the Council to consider rezoning of the area proposed for development.

During the planning and implementation of redevelopment plans, the land and clubhouse will need management to reduce risk, including maintenance and attendance to matters such as safe access for the public, bushfire protection and weed management.

Development of a Memorandum of Understanding with the NSW Department of Lands

As the Department of Lands is prepared to join with the Council in this project it is recommended that the Council proceed to develop a formal agreement regarding their participation. Further negotiations with the Department are required to develop a final document for signing by both parties.

Council approval is sought for the General Manager to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the NSW Department of Lands in order to jointly fund project investigations. The MoU would define the project area, but also allow parcels of land to be added to or removed from the project area at any time with agreement of both parties. The objectives of the MoU would be developed along the lines outlined below:

1. Adopt an integrated planning and management framework for the Lawson Golf Course and Cemetery precinct;
2. Prepare and implement an overall study for the precinct;
3. Establish a joint business model that will achieve financial sustainability of all Crown lands forming the Lawson Golf Course and Cemetery precinct including, but not limited to, securing an economic return which may then be applied to funding of development of Crown and community land within the Lawson Golf Course and Cemetery precinct;
4. Promote transparency, prevent duplication of effort and resources and minimise red tape for commercial and community access, development and use of the lands forming Lawson Golf Course precinct;
5. Maintain strict probity with respect to all negotiations between the parties and any third parties;
6. Work cooperatively to meet all objectives.

The MoU would list the principles for working together, the responsibilities of each party; methods and requirements for communication and information sharing; the methods for liaison; representation, processes for development of any subsequent agreements; and would allow progressive development of funding agreements for each stage of the project. The MoU would also describe legal obligations and processes for variation and termination. It is proposed that the Memorandum of Understanding would be developed between the parties before the commencement of a mid mountains recreation review in April 2008.

Conclusion

The Lawson Golf Course Redevelopment project has great potential to provide for the ongoing recreation needs of the communities of the Blue Mountains and beyond. Consultation undertaken to date indicates some support for certain land uses, and a requirement for further investigation of the viability and acceptability of other forms of development.

In order to coordinate facility provision and make best use of public lands it is recommended that the project study area is extended to include the adjoining Crown Reserve No. 52559 to the north with the BMX track and Lawson Oval, and the adjoining Cemetery site at 80-90 Wilson St, Lawson.

It is also recommended that results of the public exhibition are communicated to the community, and that the Council undertake a review of the recreation needs and opportunities within the Mid Mountains commencing April 2008. This would then inform a study to determine the future development options for the reserves.

Prior to progressing to the next stage of planning it is proposed that an agreement is developed with the Department of Lands to jointly fund this planning work with the Council.

In order to achieve integrated outcomes for the Mid Mountains this project is proposed to be coordinated with the Lawson Town Centre Redevelopment and planning for other major projects in the Mid Mountains, including the rehabilitation of the former land fill site on Ridge Street. This is proposed to commence with a review of the recreation needs and opportunities within the Mid Mountains. Resources are unavailable to commence this work until April 2008.

It is again confirmed that the project will need to be self funding, given the financial position of the Council.

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Attachment

A SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES RAISED IN THE SUBMISSIONS

Table 1: Issues and Themes in raised by Community in Submissions
Development
Concern was raised over recreational land being taken for development and private use. Many respondents felt Option 11 had too much development. Concern was expressed around potential impacts on the environment caused by the development.
A number of respondents acknowledged the need for the development, but were concerned about over-development and inappropriate development.
There was often the assumption made that development would involve selling the earmarked development precinct to a developer for residential housing, rather than considering a range of other possibilities such as commercial recreation, education, or community use.
There was particular concern that the development precinct in Option 11, would be insensitive to the need for a buffer to the creek and hanging swamp.
There was the view that Council LEPs and other planning requirements would not support development precincts.
Environment
A number of respondents expressed concern about the environmental impact of the development and sporting precinct on native vegetation and the nearby creek. The intensity of traffic, as well as fertilisers used on sporting fields among other impacts, were seen as being detrimental to surrounding national park / bushland areas.
Feasibility
The ability of Council to obtain the money to develop the site, and the ability of the site to be self-funding were raised as key concerns for each of the options.
Many respondents recognised that Council would not be able to adopt any of the options without funding from non-Council sources.
Many respondents felt that they could not or were not willing to make a call on their preferred option without the information that would be generated from a feasibility study.
History and Heritage
Respecting and enhancing the site’s history and heritage and current social, cultural and natural characteristics were raised as a priority in a number of submissions. Some respondents also felt the history of the site (as a golf course) should be considered in the final design.
Concerns were raised about the options ignoring indigenous heritage of the site

Lack of information on Community Sporting Needs
Many stakeholders felt they needed more detailed information on the current sporting needs of the local community to assist in making a preferred options choice. E.g. how many sporting fields are required
Noise and traffic
Concern raised over the increase in noise levels from the proposed sporting development.
An increase in traffic flow caused by stakeholders accessing the sporting facilities and the development was raised as a particular concern, especially regarding traffic safety along the narrow roads such as Henry, Cleveland and Wilson St south and difficult intersections.
Parking
Respondents raised concern over current lack of parking facilities and suggested that insufficient parking facilities were proposed, particularly with Options 10 and 11.
Quality of life
Concern was raised regarding the impact the development would have on the quality of life of local residents, particularly in relation to noise, traffic, and visual impact.
Need to consider alternate sites – Ridge Street Site
Respondents highlighted the potential to relocate the proposed sporting grounds and facilities to the former tip site in Ridge Street.
Respondents suggested that cycle facilities may be able to be accommodated on the former land fill sites in Ridge St, Lawson or Blackheath.
Showcasing Lawson
Creating a development that would showcase Lawson and the Blue Mountains, such as a Botanic Gardens or Arboretum, was supported.
Tourism
Whether respondents were in support of Option 10, 11 or 6, there was a general consensus that attracting tourists to Lawson was a good thing. This was seen as having a positive effect on local businesses and the Lawson community as a whole.
Whole of Lawson approach
Several submissions expressed support for a proposal that would address needs of the whole community, and provide an opportunity for everyone in the Blue Mountains to be involved.
Respondents wanted the site to be developed taking into consideration other future development plans for Lawson.
Alternate usage
Alternative suggestions for the site were also submitted. These included a recommendation to providing an education resource for the community; maintaining the club house as an arts and crafts centre; and developing the 19 hectare site into a multiple residential development providing resort style living for the over 55's.