

Wolli Creek Preservation Society Position Paper: Waterworth Park Development

Background

- Waterworth Park was apparently created by land-filling of former wetlands at the junction of the Cooks River and Wolli Creek.
- Despite the Velodrome and the playing fields on it, it has an abundance of birdlife (and no doubt reptiles as well) making use of the vegetation on the site. Neil Rankin's records reveal a total of over 40 species sighted in the last five years of last century, and numbers evident on any casual visit are surprisingly high.
- The existing vegetation is of several types (see attached maps for details):
 1. some 10s of clearly planted, and now mature, casuarinas and eucalypts scattered over the area of the open grassland and providing shade for those watching cricket etc (green dots each represent several trees)
 2. fringing the creek, small scattered remnants of salt marsh species, which constitute an Endangered Ecological Community, and more extensive areas of reeds and mangroves (Areas A1 and A2 in particular)
 3. a number of other vegetated areas (marked B to D), of varying sizes, of other plantings, typically wattles, with occasional gums, pittosporums etc. These areas have received little maintenance and have been invaded by numerous exotic weed species. They nonetheless provide birds with significant habitat, while no doubt supporting a different balance of bird species than a more diverse mix of local plant species would.
- Current management practice is not protecting the riparian zone, which has a wide mowed strip well within it.

Development Proposal

- The Touch Football Association has put forward a proposal to Canterbury City Council to expand by six its existing four playing fields on the Park and to install some additional lighting. Council's Works Committee has accepted the proposal in principle and the mayor has made a press release indicating reworking of the Park to expand playing fields and to establish picnic facilities alongside Wolli Creek. The Wolli Creek Preservation Society has not been consulted on the proposals at this time, but the mayor has given an assurance that we will be.
- The desire for additional sporting facilities is recognised, but the proposal as it stands conflicts strongly with the retention of natural values and bird (and reptile) habitat.
- Major earthworks would be required to adequately level the Park surface, although Council staff are optimistic that this could be done by cut and fill on-site, with little imported material.
- As proposed, the additional fields would require the removal of most of the type 1 vegetation and of substantial amounts of type 3, in order to provide separation between players and potential dangers from colliding with plants.
- Even more extensive damage to existing vegetation would be done in the process of creating the fields. Adding more fields is highly likely to lead to pressure to create more parking areas, further compromising the open and natural areas of the Park
- No detail is yet available about the proposed picnic facilities on Wolli Creek, but it seems likely these would affect the riparian zone and possibly the Endangered Ecological Community. The Council proposals also envisage a 'cycleway network' within the Park, involving further loss of vegetation.
- The costs to Council are high, somewhere of the order of \$150,000 has been estimated in Council's forward budget according to the Works Committee report.

Society Position

- The Society is opposed to the prospective loss of habitat from the development and seeks extensive revision of the proposals.
- We understand that the fields are only used one night a week and, at first sight, we feel that any need for additional facilities could best be met by extending the time of use, rather than the area. At the very least, three of the proposed new fields (1,2 and 3 on the attached map A) should not proceed, and the others should be reconfigured as in map B to retain more of the mature trees (type 1 vegetation). This also enables the proposed second cricket pitch area to be moved further from the vegetation.
- Part of the prospective Council budget (\$150,000) for the project could then be redirected to restoration and expansion work on the vegetation areas A-D, to improve and extend habitat and to reduce weeds. The proposed extensions to existing areas are shown on map B. The Society would be willing to provide some labour to support this, and will begin efforts to improve the area on National Clean-Up Day in March.
- Existing picnic facilities on the Cooks River frontage are in need of repair and upgrading to non-wood BBQs (to avoid timber being ripped from trees in the area). It is unclear that additional ones are required on the Wolli Creek frontage and the Society would oppose this unless well outside the riparian zone, beyond the existing vegetation and the extensions to them that we propose.
- There are extensive recreational cycling tracks in the Cooks River Valley, whose active facilities complement so well the passive activities typically suited to the Wolli Valley. There are also sport cycling facilities provided by the Velodrome. Extension of these by an essentially circular track around open playing fields is felt not to add sufficient value to warrant the financial and environmental costs involved. A more valuable addition to cycling provision would be a safer crossing of Cooks River alongside Unwin's bridge to link up with the Marrickville network. (A second crossing, back from Marrickville to Rockdale, along the eastern side of the East Hills Rail bridge would be a further valuable extension.)
- The Society favours the provision of natural paths through the extended vegetation areas adjacent to the creek to continue the bush/natural feel associated with the walk from Bexley North through the Regional Park, which will lead into Waterworth Park via either or both Unwin Street and the creek-side path under the SWOOS. It opposes the provision of hard formal tracks, as would be required for the proposed cycle path.
- The Society recognises the need to provide controlled access to the creek for fishing (to prevent damage to sensitive areas) and to allow for water views from various points inside Waterworth Park.
- More is needed to integrate Gough Whitlam and Waterworth Parks. They are currently divided by a road, with no traffic calming measures and no marked pedestrian crossing, which is now frequently used as a speedway. This would facilitate the area's use as a family visitation site. Calming measures could also create a parking lane, now that the road's role as major route has been reduced by the M5E. We note that Council has spent much money and done good work to restore a more natural environment in Whitlam Park, with a lagoon and plantings. A similar approach to Waterworth Park is now needed. It would be retrogressive to undermine the existing vegetated areas.