

PLan: the Planning Action Network, Inc

6.11.2015

The Secretary,
Public Accounts Committee
Email: pac@nt.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

1. Introduction

We are pleased to see the Northern Territory Parliament refer the \$20 million dollar investment now being proposed for rehabilitating the Richardson Park Stadium at Ludmilla, to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). The expenditure of \$20 million dollars is a serious matter, whatever the supposed source of the money, and a matter for care, due diligence, and open public accountability.

2. The Treasurer and Member for Fong Lim, David Tollner, has publicly stated to local residents that the stadium needs be completed by August, 2016, as the venue for a rugby league match by an interstate team- the Parramatta Eels. We reject this as a responsible decision making, either as a reason for this expenditure, or as reason for fast tracking the project. There are already alternatives at Marrara.

3. Rugby Leagues Costings for the move to Marrara, 2012

In 2012, the full official body of the Northern Territory Rugby League Incorporated, completed a report entitled 'A Proposal to relocate the Northern Territory Rugby League from Richardson Park to the Marrara Sports Complex'

The completed construction costs at Marrara, to be completed in 2016, were estimated at \$16 million dollars, four years later. These 2012 estimates are consistent with the present Government Budget figure of \$20 million dollars.

However for the transfer period, the 2012 Report's projections say that to continue using Richardson Park, \$225,000 was needed for a 'surface upgrade' of the field of play, and a total of \$250,000 for five upgrades during 2012-2016. The field also needed fencing at a cost of \$30,000.

Rugby League moved to Warren Park, Marrara, without waiting for the completion of the new venue. The abandoned Richardson Park site, is now overgrown and derelict. When publicly interviewed just after the NT Government's 's new announcement, General Manager - John Mitchell stated that Rugby League was happy at Warren Park.

4. Disadvantages of Richardson Park for play.

In their decisive 2012 report, Rugby League listed as their first reason for moving the fact that:

‘The playing surface is in poor condition’

A good playing surface is clearly crucial to the ‘rough and tumble’ of Rugby League, and the welfare of the players.

The continuing poor condition of the ground was due to its location in the Ludmilla Creek Catchment. The club was unable to meet the repetitive cost of working to rectify this problem.

Other serious disadvantages quoted by Rugby League were a serious and hazardous lack of parking, utility costs were high, the venue was not central with the population of the suburbs moving north, and the public were unfamiliar with the venue. They could have added that road access is poor.

5. Advantages of location at Marrara

For many years it has been NT Government sports policy to provide for peak sporting venues to be concentrated at Marrara, This has been a gradual process. Rugby League's move to Marrara was part of this policy and process.

A shared Marrara location provides obvious advantages. It is the home of peak sport in Darwin. Sport is central, with opportunities for sharing professional expertise in areas like oval maintenance, training, games management and sport health as well as facilities as such need occurs. Infrastructure, including transport, communication, media facilities, and emergency services, including policing can be more rationalized.

These should add to the NT Government's efficiency in fostering sport in general.

6. Present Richardson Park Proposal for Ludmilla.

The present proposal to redevelopment Richardson Park, costed roughly at \$20 million dollars, bears little or no relation to the Rugby League's aforementioned costing to move to the sports hub now at Marrara. In addition, we can

give no credence to accommodating 'rectangular sports' at Ludmilla. It makes no sense, and is not in the public interest. Most rectangular sports are already settled at Marrara, and being joined by other sports.

The present proposal is centred around a very much larger facility, to be used occasionally for special events, the management and running cost to be met by the NT Government. A much bigger stadium is proposed than is needed and could be maintained by Rugby League.

Redeveloping the Richardson Park site for events would require playing fields to Rugby standard, on land that is salt affected, a multiplication of stadium seating, clearing and leveling a huge areas of natural vegetation for carparks, bulldozing new road accesses from one or two points through Ludmilla, installing expensive media night lights and building a buffer wall, to keep the noise away from residents. This would mean almost endless costs, including ongoing maintenance, Many matters could not be successfully dealt with at Ludmilla.

The site is part of the Ludmilla Catchment, on land with major ongoing drainage problems, and is best rezoned CONSERVATION, and returned to the catchment.

7. Local Stakeholders – Residents and Ludmilla School.

Local stakeholders were not informed until earth moving equipment were working in the area. The residents are strongly against the development. As the broad concept plans include part of a shaded school playing field, NTCOGSO has distributed a media release on behalf of Ludmilla School, which is unable to speak up freely. With densification bringing more families to the area, the school needs room for future expansion.

8. The public has been in the dark about this sudden proposal of redeveloping a broken down Richardson Park field and stadium for events. Handled as a Major Project, using the more secret EOI secret process, rather than public exhibiting in the Planning Notices for submissions, to be considered by the Development Consent Authority (DCA) this proposal could almost have passed unnoticed, by the general public. This not in the public interest.

It looks like an election sweetener, rather than a properly considered proposal, and is un-costed. The end result would be a much greater cost than \$20million dollars when all aspects are considered. Public stakeholders would be distressed and angry with the government's action.

9. It should be noted that there is inclusion of the redevelopment of Richardson Park in either of the first and second Area Plans. Neither has there been an EIS for such a development on the edge of the Ludmilla catchment. The premature proposal for a refurbished stadium at Richardson Park should be abandoned, and any EOI's or tenders, cancelled.

10. It is PPlan's view that the final movement of Rugby League from Richardson Park to Marrara should be expedited, based on the expenditure limit of \$20 million dollars, or less, if effective economies can be achieved. Some effective sharing may be possible.

This would be money better spent.

We would be pleased to share formal verbal information should the PAC require it.

Please acknowledge this submission.

M A CLINCH (Miss)

Convener

PPlan: the Planning Action Network, Inc.