

Submission to Council for the Re-exhibited Master Plan for Berry District Park.

Introduction

The Berry Forum recently established a Berry District Park Sub-Committee as a direct result of the outcome of the Berry Community Strategic Plan, which issued its Exhibition Draft Report at the beginning of August 2016.

The Berry Community Strategic Plan process included a phase of engagement around ideas generation, with 540 surveys completed by residents, businesses and visitors. Outcomes were subsequently organised into seven themes, and a community forum attended by 200 people then identified the highest priorities.

Theme 3 of the Berry Community Strategic Plan relates to *Recreation, Community and Cultural Facilities*. Its objective is to build a strong and engaged community through the provision of quality sporting, leisure and cultural facilities and activities.

The Plan states, *“The design and implementation of the Adventure Playground proposal is one of the very high priorities in the Strategic Plan. The planning of this playground should be incorporated into the planning for the District / North Street Park along with a number of other priorities such as a dog off leash area.”*

The Berry District Park Sub-Committee was formed on 8th August with members from the Committee of the Berry Forum, representatives of the Rotary Club of Berry, the Berry Chamber of Commerce, Berry Landcare plus younger representatives of the community of Berry.

The Sub-Committee’s role is seen as being:

1. The principal coordinator of communications with Council regarding the Berry District Park.
2. To ensure the interests of Berry are represented in planning for the Park.
3. To canvass all stakeholders, and to assist in identifying required resources and explore funding options.

The Sub-Committee is yet to deliberate on many of the aspects that will require its consideration. The development of the Park will obviously be an extended project for all parties concerned with the outcome. Construction will be spread over several years and many concepts and suggestions will be floated before building actually starts, and even during the building phase ideas may change in ways that suggest something new or different be added to the vision.

The Sub-Committee is intent on seeing the project through to completion. The following comments are therefore intended as an initial response to Council’s current exhibition and should be taken in the context that they are preliminary to a more detailed assessment of what the residents of and visitors to Berry might want in the way of a district park.

Committee's Response to Amended Plan

We understand Council is currently seeking feedback on the following issues.

- A 950 metre Criterium cycling track.
- Removal of long vehicle parking area on North Street.
- Provision of more long vehicle parking in the off-street car parking area within the Park.
- Provision of a toilet block at the off street car parking area within the Park.
- Area for potential expansion of the proposed adventure playground north of the existing site.
- Spacing fitness equipment stations along the walking path within the Park.
- Proposed name change from Berry District Park

We therefore provide the following comments:

Criterium Cycling Track.

No supporting justification has been provided for the Criterium cycling facility, which was added to the Master Plan after the initial public exhibition period. Further, there appears to be little or no support for such a facility being located along North Street from within the Berry Community.

There appears to be very few of these tracks constructed in any State in Australia, which is probably due to the cost of construction and the significant requirements which have to be carefully considered and addressed.

For example, Hume City Council in Victoria recently completed a feasibility study, which estimated the construction cost at around \$2 million. Refer - https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/files/sharedassets/hume_website/sports_rec/sports_rec_re_design/final_criterium_cycling_facility_feasibility_study_web_version.pdf

A Criterium cycle track is intended to be used for high speed cycling and we believe that as such it is not suited to a park where users of the space will be a mix of all age groups from the very young to the very old.

It has also been suggested that the proposed cycling track at the Berry District Park would only be used on Sunday mornings and would be available for public use at other times. It would seem inconceivable that such a costly construction could be justified for minimal patronage and that the frequency of high-speed usage of the track would increase significantly. This would not be a desired outcome for other users of the Park (see City of Casey Criterium track usage – <https://www.casey.vic.gov.au/arts-leisure/sport-leisure/facilities/casey-fields/criteriumtrack>).

The proposed siting of the cycle track shown in the Master Plan would compress the area available for the adventure playground and disenfranchise other activities, and allow no room for future expansion. The track's immediate proximity to the playground, toilets and parking areas would also be a significant public safety concern.

Based on this analysis, the Berry Forum cannot support the proposed inclusion of the Criterium cycling facility within the Berry District Park.

Removal of long vehicle parking area on North Street

The Berry Forum supports the removal of long vehicle parking on North Street and instead providing for the maximum possible number of angled car parking spaces on the northern side of the street.

Provision of more long vehicle parking in the off-street car parking area within the Park

The Berry Forum supports the placement of at least 20 long vehicle parking bays in the proposed off-street car park (shown as F on the Master Plan). However, we question the practicality of the layout shown which should be of a design that will enable long vehicles to turn easily and safely, without the need to reverse. The car park requires a separate entry and exit to eliminate the need to turn or reverse a large vehicle.

Provision of a toilet block at the off-street car parking area within Berry District Park

Obviously the provision of a toilet block is a vital component of the Park, however it should be better positioned in order to make it more easily accessible to all. Whilst the proposed position may suit long vehicle parking, and in particular tourist buses, it has been identified that parents with young children playing at the playgrounds need to have it much closer. Also, as the majority of visitor car parking is placed along North Street, it makes better sense to also position it in a more accessible location, possibly by moving it eastward towards the Nature Park.

However, the design and the positioning of the carpark and the toilet block is going to be contentious and we believe it is something worth discussing more extensively and taking opinions from the residents in North Street as this will impact them as direct neighbours.

There are suggestions for an information kiosk in the Park given that many travellers will stop at the park for a rest. These visitors will sometimes need shelter while using the Park so perhaps a covered area would provide such a benefit.

Rotary's Proposed Adventure/Nature Playground

Initial discussions within the Sub-Committee with representatives from Rotary make it clear that there has been a significant misunderstanding between what Council believes an adventure playground is and what Rotary is proposing and what the community supports and desires.

Rotary are proposing a nature based adventure playground and parkland along with covered BBQ and picnic areas. The aim is to provide kids with a lot more free play with nature's elements providing them with an opportunity to explore and learn a lot more than they would if the game and play was set out for them.



This concept will complement what are the preferred tourist coach stops around the country, those that combine easy accessible parking, with modern, clean toilet facilities together with covered picnic areas.

Area for potential expansion of the adventure playground north of the existing site

The Sub-Committee has clarified with the RMS, matters in relation to the granting of land along North Street for community use, in that there is no restriction on what community facilities Council may construct on this land. It had been stated by Council that since the full extent of the Park is not coming into Council ownership, this formed part of the basis for the decision regarding the location of the future extension for the adventure playground, being located to the north (on Council land) as opposed to the west on RMS land.

The Rotary Club has been allocated an area on the eastern end of the Park to develop this children's playground. Rotary will contribute a considerable amount in funding this particular project and will expect to oversee its final design and construction. Current thinking suggests the proposed area is too small and Rotary is looking to expand its allocation. Expanding west into H1 achieves two objectives. It gives Rotary more space and the sports grounds less. We know such a move traverses Council-owned land and RMS-owned land but we think these title-related issues can be overcome as RMS will relinquish all responsibilities over ownership and maintenance. In the amended plan any expansion by Rotary north of their allocated area is blocked by the skateboard park.

Dog Off-Leash area

Not mentioned within the re-exhibited plan and an item that was clearly identified within Council's intention for the Berry District Park is that of providing a suitably sized fully fenced dog off-leash area. This was also identified within the Berry Community Strategic Plan as a priority.

Two types of off-leash area are required:

- A controlled fenced area. Visitors and those with caravans often bring a dog and they would greatly appreciate a space to run the dog off-leash. The triangle area designated H2 on the plan would work well for this purpose. This is the only area that would need fencing by council.
- An off-leash area, which allows dog owners to walk a section of land on which their dogs can socialize, similar to a beach area for dogs. Berry residents would also love an off-leash area to exercise their pets, a facility they lost to the new road works, but it could be reinstated alongside the creek in the Camp Quality area.

Sports Grounds

We believe that the sports grounds proposed in area H1 are excessive given that the existing sports grounds on council land on the eastern side already serve Berry quite well. On the amended plan these grounds constitute more than half the Park and we think they should be halved in size.

The Shared Pathway

As part of their obligation, Fulton Hogan will construct a shared walk/cycleway stretching from Kangaroo Valley Rd, along the northern edge of North St and meeting the existing path that winds through the sports grounds and Camp Quality. This will provide an extensive cycling track for everyone, particularly the under-12's.

We would prefer a path that meanders a bit rather than one that is perfectly straight, perhaps a gentle winding around trees. Council could maybe bring some influence to bear on such an outcome. We would also like to see the path loop around the car park to avoid crossing a vehicle entry point. Perhaps council could also rule on this outcome.

That there is no fence planned to run along the southern edge of the Park is to be applauded. Fences tend to collect litter and become overgrown with grass. We note that there will be a high fence between the northern perimeter of the Park and the new highway to prevent access to the highway

We approve of the planned tree planting along North St. but caution the use of any tall trees likely to block the view of the escarpment for North St residents.

Spacing fitness equipment stations along the walking path within the Park

Rotary's proposal has always been one of having a play facility suitable for all ages and abilities. The siting of the senior's fitness stations should also be a component along the pathways adjoining or within the playground rather than the proposed position far away from everything else.

The Berry Forum therefore requests that the design and positioning of the complete playground, parkland and picnic facilities be further discussed between all parties to ensure the most desirable outcome for all concerned.

Proposed name change from Berry District Park

The Sub-Committee has not had time to further engage with or research the community's feelings on the naming of the Park. However, we note that Council are open to other suggestions than those that are currently proposed, and we would like to support for consideration the name '*Broughton Park*' which links with the heritage of Berry. It also complements other names of heritage recognition within the area including that of Broughton Creek and Broughton Mall. The Berry Community Strategic Plan identified the importance of preserving the town's heritage character.

Planning

Fulton Hogan aim to vacate this area by December 2016 and will complete their end of the deal in regard to landscaping and the shared pathway. It is essential that planning start now to get the site "shovel-ready". The initial plan should designate the agreed siting of critical infrastructure – the pathway (FH), the car park, the toilets/kiosk/shelter (Council) and the adventure park (Rotary). Other elements can be added in due course. Not all these elements are known at this stage, but it should not prevent or inhibit us from starting.

Funding

We know the total cost to finish the project will be considerable, in the \$millions. We do not expect Council to provide all this money. Funding will need to be supplemented by State and Federal grants and contributions from the Berry community.

At this critical early stage however, we request that the \$100,000 provisionally approved in April for planning and detailed design be reinstated within the 2016/17 Council budget.

Maintenance

Serious consideration needs to be given to the ongoing maintenance of the Park and who will be responsible for the various aspects of upkeep of each facility. The Berry Strategic Plan considers the whole of Berry and the design of the Park needs to be considered in conjunction with this overall plan, particularly in regard to sporting facilities.

Berry Landcare and Camp Quality Park

Berry Landcare has been active in the area since 1994 in partnership with the Berry Public School and is part of Council's land care program. The plan should recognize this contribution and acknowledge that Landcare has a specific interest in Bundewallah Creek as an area for re-vegetation of the natural landscape in the riparian area which also forms part of the Berry Corridor, providing resilient vegetation connections which support the movement of wildlife between the escarpment and the sea.

Conclusion

The Berry District Park Sub-Committee looks forward to working with Council, and other stakeholders in the project, to ensure that the Park evolves into a feature that Berry and the Shoalhaven will welcome and that it becomes a favourite site to visit and use for recreation by both residents and visitors.

Discussions with Fulton Hogan have indicated that they are willing to assist with basic landscape design of the Park (earth mounds, tree trunk placement, rocks, etc.) whilst they still have the resources available locally.

For the past couple of years the Rotary Club has been actively raising funds to go towards developing the concept of a nature based adventure playground and parkland, and has also commenced discussions with the State Government in relation to obtaining grant funds for this project.

It is therefore vital that there is an agreed design 'shovel ready' as soon as possible, in order to qualify for grant funds as they become available.

THE BERRY FORUM
District Park Sub-committee
John Underwood, Chairman
6th September 2016