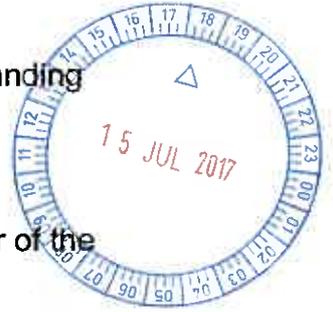


To: the Hon. Matthew Swinbourn MLC, Chair Legislative Council Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs



From: Dr Bill Leadbetter, former Legislative Councillor and presenter of the initial petition regarding Midland Oval.

Although I am no longer a member of the Council, since I tabled this petition I feel it incumbent upon me to explain why.

The issue with respect to Midland oval has been a matter of controversy in the City of Swan for some decades now. The plain fact is that there is an open green space in the middle of Midland that was originally intended as a recreation ground. For many years, it was used as such, but many clubs have moved away with the establishment of facilities elsewhere. The oval has been permitted to deteriorate through under-use and the Council seems increasingly to regard it as a liability rather than an asset.

They have chosen, as a consequence, to privatise much of the public space by selling it to developers for apartment construction. The plan that the City has approved does permit some open space, but this is a niggardly amount. It is certainly well short of the 10% minimum open space requirement of the WAPC's "Liveable Cities" document.

This has been done in the teeth of substantial opposition from local residents. An open meeting in the Town Hall, at which I was present, saw hundreds of local residents listen to speaker after speaker condemn the plan. There were very few submissions in favour. It was clear that the mood of the meeting was to oppose the privatisation plan and retain the Oval for the people of the City. Nevertheless, the Councillors voted in favour.

There are a number of arguments that can be marshalled against the desirability of this project. It ignores the heritage value of the Oval, and the original purpose for which it was set aside; it ignores the wishes of a substantial number of local residents; it impacts negatively on the open space

available for recreation in the heart of Midland; it privatises something that has been a major public asset for well over a century; it rewards the Council for neglecting the Oval and reducing it to what has been called 'demolition by neglect' – in this case, turning a major public asset into a liability simply by not maintaining it.

It remains the process itself which is of considerable concern. While the issue has boiled away for a long time (since 1976, when the Midland Cricket Club relocated to Lilac Hill), this particular proposal has been rushed. Residents' views have largely been ignored and attempts at compromise have been stymied.

The Select Committee is entitled to ask questions about the process by which this proposal was adopted and satisfy itself of the facts. It is also open to the Committee to examine the alternative proposals – the roads not taken – and enquire as to why this model was preferred.

This is not "nimbyism". The residents would be happy, I believe, for there to be appropriate and sympathetic use of the site which would retain its character of public open space (of which there is far too little in Midland) but also provide the kinds of facilities and amenities for the people of Midland that were originally envisaged when the land was passed into the Council's possession. That may well include residential apartments on the edges of the site and accessible from existing roads. But given the paucity of public open space in Midland, the residents are entitled to feel both aggrieved and let down if their elected representatives collude to deprive them of the one park in the heart of Midland set aside for public amenity.

Best wishes,

Dr Bill Leadbetter,
Former MLC, East Metropolitan Region.