

CHRIST CHURCH GRAMMAR SCHOOL — PLAYING FIELDS ZONING

Grievance

DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands) [9.25 am]: It is good to know that I am in good company. My assessor also had to put the brakes on during my first test! My grievance this morning, however, is to the Minister for Planning, not that assessor. I thank the minister for taking my grievance on an issue that I appreciate is important to both of us—ensuring accessibility to green space for our growing communities and, in particular, maintaining playing fields for girls’ participation in sport.

I will give a brief outline of the history. Eight hectares of pristine playing fields in Mt Claremont were acquired by Christ Church Grammar School in 1958 from the City of Perth. At the time of this transaction, it was represented by the school that the land would be used for playing fields. When the land was gazetted in 1985 by the City of Perth, this use and purpose was again reinforced with the land specifically reserved for parks and recreation. In recent years, the school identified the playing fields as being surplus to its needs and made an application to have them rezoned to a development zone and therefore have the reservation removed. On 25 February 2022, Town of Cambridge councillors voted unanimously to uphold the town’s local planning scheme and reject a scheme amendment request by Christ Church Grammar School to rezone the fields. The school has sought an intervention by the Minister for Planning under section 76 of the Planning and Development Act 2005 to remove the reservation so that the playing fields can be developed. It is on this note that I grieve to the minister to confirm that she will take no further action as there are no planning or community reasons for providing a section 76 exception.

The planning reasons for this grievance include the fact that in April 2021, the Western Australian Planning Commission confirmed that the reservation was appropriate as part of its formal acceptance and endorsement of the Town of Cambridge’s local planning strategy. The Town of Cambridge is also meeting its density and infill targets without the need to impinge on local reservations. It has focused increased density around key local centres and high-frequency transport corridors. At no time has it been a local or state government policy or requirement that reservations be used for densification purposes.

The community reasons are both highly local and of state significance. Locally, members of the Friends of Mt Claremont Fields, many of whom are here today, collected close to 5 000 signatures on a petition calling for the playing fields to be protected by ensuring that they remain reserved for parks and recreation, consistent with their creation, zoning and land use for the past 60 years. People from across generations collected and provided signatures, including Walter and Beth Pigeon, local residents who stood outside the Good Grocer in Claremont every day for months on end and collected signatures. The group presented this petition on 20 September 2022 to Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, MLC. I want to thank the Friends of Mt Claremont Fields for its ongoing and positive engagement in working for the fields to be protected and remain as a reservation.

Community playing fields are in short supply more broadly in metropolitan Western Australia and government reports indicate that this shortage will increase substantially with time. This is especially the case for girls’ sport, which has seen the largest participation growth of any group and, as we know, suffers from significant historic and systemic inequality in access to broadacre playing fields for sports such as football, soccer and cricket. As we continue to meet our targets for infill and development and as the population in the western suburbs continues to grow, so, too, does demand for active green space.

I will highlight growth at just one of our local clubs and use the sport of football as an example. The Swanbourne Tigers Junior Football Club, which is located in the City of Nedlands, has experienced an increase in enrolment of more than 30 per cent in just the past three years. This has put pressure on existing facilities at Allen Park, which cannot sustain this growth. Home games for the Swanbourne Tigers are now played every weekend at various fields, subject to availability. These fields include the upper park behind the Shorehouse, the Allen Park rugby fields, the John XXIII College fields, the University of Western Australia sports ground and the Scotch College playing fields.

The Swanbourne Tigers have access to only the minor fields within those facilities, so none of those locations has access to toilets, shelter, change rooms, permanent goalposts or boundary lines, which makes game preparation more difficult and the game experience for players and spectators much less engaging. All three football ovals within the Mt Claremont playing fields have permanent goalposts and boundary lines, permanent shelter and toilet and change room access.

I would like to particularly emphasise to the minister the crucial issue of access to playing fields for girls in the western suburbs. We are both mothers of daughters and know that participation in sport is essential for their mental, social and physical health. Although there are still barriers related to accessibility and inclusivity for girls’ participation, they are barriers we can help to reduce by protecting those fields.

Taking just AFL football as an example, in the female competition for ages six to 17 years in the past four years since 2018, female participation in the metropolitan north region, where the playing fields are located, increased over 90 per cent, with almost 2 300 female participants playing in the zone in 2022. Another four-year comparison for Auskick shows a 53 per cent growth in girls' participation from 300 to 458 players. There was an 80 per cent growth in juniors, from 528 to 952, and for youth there was a 138 per cent growth, from 369 to 878 girls and young women who now play. When considering the female competition for ages 18 and over, in the past four years since 2018, female participation in the Perth Football League has increased almost 300 per cent. Today, Western Australia has more female teams in the 18-plus amateur league than the equivalent league in Victoria, which is a credit to WA given that Victoria traditionally considers itself the home of Australian Rules Football.

Adding to this, not one of the girls' schools that participates in the Independent Girls Schools Sports Association has its own venue suitable for those broadacre sports, including AFL, soccer or cricket. In order to participate, the girls' schools must negotiate for time and space on council-owned ovals or with the boys' schools to allow them to play. At age 14, girls are dropping out of sport at twice the rate of boys, and the availability of playing space is a factor in that. Given the importance of the Mt Claremont playing fields to our local community, and for girls' sport in particular, today I seek reassurance from the Minister for Planning that the zoning of Mt Claremont playing fields will remain as it currently stands—that is, reserved for parks and recreation—thereby upholding the Town of Cambridge's decision to reject the rezoning application, meaning that the playing fields will continue to be active green space for the local community.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Planning) [9.32 am]: I thank the member for Nedlands for that grievance. I also acknowledge the supporters of this grievance in the public gallery. As the member pointed out, a request was made for me to ask the Town of Cambridge to rezone the playing fields to residential. As members would expect, I get a lot of requests from all parts of the community on different fronts. As I have said on radio, I treat every proposal on its merits. In this instance, we analysed the benefit to housing, the amount of housing and the location of the proposed housing and compared that with the loss of the playing fields and other local amenity that would be lost—but particularly the playing fields. I am glad the Minister for Sport and Recreation is sitting next to me because we fully understand and acknowledge this issue. We sit here and talk about the massive demand for playing fields in the community, particularly in areas where, as the member said, more people are moving. As increased demand occurs and more people move to the area, there is an absolute explosion in the popularity of girls' and women's sport. I have two girls who are very much into sport, both football and soccer. As I traverse the suburbs every weekend to watch them play, I know the massive demand there is for training and playing. A key factor in my decision is making sure that we continue to have playing fields for the growing popularity of sport more generally, but girls' sport in particular. This situation did not exist 10 years ago. Girls were not playing AFL at the rate they are today. Now we see it absolutely everywhere, with other outdoor sports as well, such as soccer. The FIFA Women's World Cup this year will again increase the sport's popularity.

On its merits, we considered what would be the benefit to housing. We need more housing in WA; there is no doubt about that. The government continues to support more housing. We asked what would be the amount of new housing, noting that this area is very much surrounded by Bush Forever. The setbacks required to comply with fire and emergency rules would mean that the number of houses that were supported there would not be a lot, but the loss of the playing fields to the local community would be significant.

I understand what the school was trying to do, to get its playing fields closer to its campus. I understand also that it is a challenge, particularly for many schools in the member for Nedlands' area whose students must catch a bus or travel a distance to playing fields. Other schools such as Trinity College have the same problem. I understand the challenges they have, but more generally, this would be just too big a loss for that community, and that is why I made that decision. Going forward, I will probably write to the council asking what other measures exist to support those fields into the future in relation to the ownership of those fields. The next questions to be asked are: Who manages it into the future? Are there any other mechanisms to make sure that they are publicly available in the future? Questions about who is going to manage the fields into the future and what shared responsibility, potentially, will occur, are always tough. Perhaps that is something we can talk about in the future.

I have considered all the factors. I listened to the point of view of both sides and read through the documents to get across all the detail. I am very happy with the decision I made. I do not think there should be housing there; I think we should retain the playing fields. One of this government's first decisions was to retain Subiaco Oval in its form and size, because there were plans before we were elected to change the nature of Subiaco Oval. We need playing fields. The member highlighted the lighting, change rooms and accessibility at the fields. As Minister for Planning and someone who is very much interested in sport, I have discussed with the Minister for Sport and Recreation what else we can do to create more opportunities to get more playing spaces. As we all lament that kids do not get out and play, we have an obligation to create places for them to play. Girls in particular need better access to change rooms. I have had to take my kids into a lot of change rooms that are absolutely disgusting and awful. Sometimes my kids just refuse to go in there. We need to consider types of change rooms and, in particular, how they

impact on girls who want to play sport. Lighting is always an interesting issue because sometimes local residents are not keen on the lights. However, now with more targeted LEDs, we can be smarter with our lighting and provide the ability for people to train safely in the evening. Sometimes having lights still does not help people see the ball! Better lighting, change rooms and the joint management of these facilities is needed. The Minister for Sport and Recreation and I, as the Minister for Planning, want to continue having these types of playing fields available to schools and the community, supporting our younger people playing sport.