



Woollahra Municipal Council
Environmental Planning Committee
3rd August 2020

Re: Planning proposal – Heritage Listing of Sydney Croquet Club

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members,

I wish to raise with you the changes that have been made to the proposed heritage listing of the Sydney Croquet Club.

The recommendation made to this Committee on the 17th February 2020 and 16th March 2020 was for the proposed listing of Sydney Croquet Club which consisted of the clubhouse, moveable heritage items and lawns.

The proposal put before you today has been extended to include the above as well as the timber shelters and mature trees surrounding the facility.

At the meeting that was attended by myself and the President Rod Richardson on the 5th March 2020, we raised the issue of trees. We were advised by Council staff that there was no intention to include the Trees within the proposal, and that we had no need for concern. But here we are today, wondering why without any consultation with the Croquet Club or its members why has this been changed, and why after all this time we have not been contacted before it was added to the proposal.

I am not against trees, in fact I am a volunteer bush regenerator and I have family members who are professionals and one thing they have taught me is to admire nature and enhance the environment that we live in today. Now we all know that Woollahra Park is no nature reserve, but it does bring and contribute to the urban wildlife that continues to live within the region, including the people that share it with them.

We are not asking that the existing fig trees be removed. Our only request is that when they come to the end of their life that something is planted that will be less destructive and costly to the lawns. My personal preference would be for an example native garden with large trees that are true to the local area. As you know there is very little Eastern Suburbs Banksia Shrub lands remaining. Having an example of a native garden in a public space will show to locals how hardy, beautiful and diverse a native garden can be for their own back yards.

The Fig trees that have been included in the proposed heritage listing are destroying the lawns, their buttress roots lifting the soil, distorting the surface of the lawns. The Council did try to rectify the problem many years ago by building an underground wall to stop the roots from growing towards the lawns. This wall has failed and the surface is so uneven on one lawn that members call every shot as “pot luck” or “don’t forget aim 3 feet to the right of the hop” (it used to be 1 foot) or “hit the ball hard to get up the hill”.

The buttress roots are appearing above the ground on the southern side line. Council staff Graham, who beautiful tends to our lawns, has commented to Mr Richardson that the uneven ground is

ruining the lawn mower, digging up part of the ground and cutting the buttress root as he mows. (FYI, I believe his lawn mower is antique, and essential equipment for the croquet lawn maintenance).

There is one Norfolk Island pine on the northern side which is a more recent planting, because of its sheer size shades the lawn making it difficult to grow grass. It also has a hard woody seed which is difficult to remove and impacts on the running and playing of the ball.

The others trees on the northern side of the lawns do create shading issues especially during winter. Very little grass will grow in the northern corners and some areas none at all no matter what the season, as there is not enough light making it to the ground. This could be better managed with regular pruning and thinning of the existing trees to allow light to come to the ground.

The last major restoration of the lawns took place 26 years ago. Now they are in urgent need of rescue. The Club Committee has applied numerous times for Grant Funding without success. The last two times when we ask how we could improve our application. The representative advised that it was perfect we just were not considered important enough to be successful. The last Grant that we applied for with the NSW Infrastructure (Liquor & Gaming) Grant was in March 2020, priority was giving to entities affected by the drought and/or fires. I don't see our Club being successful any time soon as to much has been lost elsewhere around the State and Country.

As for the timber shelters these are never used because only one person can sit in them and have a view of the lawn. The view that this one person has is limited to the space of the opening to the shelter which is 2-3 metres. They cannot see to the left or right it has to be directly in front. The shelters are too deep for viewing the game and front timbers (left and right of opening) are too high to look over. The current design is impractical and as one member has said "useless". It would be a waste of money restoring and maintaining the current structures.

Our Club has been asked by Croquet NSW to co-host the Australian Championships in March 2021. Unfortunately now that we know that there is no Grant Funding arriving it is only the Council that can help us. As fair as we can recall we have never had an opportunity like this before, and we would like to be able to add an event like this to our history.

I ask the Committee to please reconsider the recommendation to heritage list the mature trees and the shelters and remove both from the proposal put to you today.

The protection of living assets such as trees is important but in our urban environment when an opportunity to improve and regrow arises in should be taken up. Please don't lock us into something that will make it difficult for those in the next generation to improve on and develop. We are a croquet club and without a decent lawn we cannot play. We have had to give up inter club competitions as the playing surface is well just embarrassing. Our Club Champions have left as they cannot improve on their game and it's impossible to attract new members whom want to play competitively. The most important asset of a croquet club is its lawns.

Regards,
Emma Diamond
Treasurer
Sydney Croquet Club Inc.