

GEORGES RIVER COUNCIL

**Peer review:
Community consultation
on the planning proposal
for the former Oatley
Bowling Club**

20 March 2017

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

On Monday 7 November 2016, Georges River Council¹ resolved not to proceed with the former Hurstville City Council's proposal for a seven-to-nine-storey mixed residential and senior's housing development to be built on the former Oatley Bowling Club site.

Through a Council resolution, Council decided to undertake community consultation on a Planning Proposal for only half of the site to be rezoned, and to limit any development to a smaller-scale, three-to-five-storey aged care facility.

The other half of the former Bowling Club site is proposed to be converted to usable public recreation space, complimentary to the adjacent Myles Dunphy Reserve. This community space may include enhanced facilities including recreational areas, barbeque amenities, community gardens, and walking and bicycle tracks.

At a Council Meeting on 7 November 2016, it was resolved that:

- *extensive public consultation commence immediately and a report be submitted to Council in March 2017 detailing the outcomes of the public consultation (including any proposed amendments to the Planning Proposal arising from such consultation) prior to any Gateway submission to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.*
- *That an independent peer review of the community consultation results ((d) above) be undertaken.*

Georges River Council engaged Elton Consulting to deliver the above community consultation to inform decision making relating to the Planning Proposal for the former Oatley Bowling Club site at Oatley. Cred Consulting was engaged to provide the peer review. Cred Consulting is a Sydney based social planning and community engagement consultancy www.credconsulting.com.au.

1.2. Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to provide a peer review of the *Outcomes Report, Community Consultation for the former Oatley Bowling Club site (November 2017 to February 2017)*, Elton Consulting (Outcomes Report).

The peer review evaluates the process used for the community consultation (including methodology and communications) and the validity of the results and data obtained. The purpose of the Elton Outcomes Report was to gain feedback from residents of the Georges River LGA, through a range of quantitative and qualitative consultation activities.

¹ On 12 May 2016 the Minister for Local Government, Paul Toole, announced the newly formed Georges River Council, a merging of the former Hurstville and Kogarah Councils

2. Peer review

2.1. Consultation methodology and participation

Consultation program

The consultation program (shown in Table 1 below) was comprehensive including a range of opt-in and recruited participation methods. Experience indicates that participants of recruited consultation will be more broadly representative of the general local community, as they are unlikely to have particular interests. The methodology for the consultation was thorough, providing opportunities for a broad range of residents to engage in the process from across the Georges River LGA, including those with and without vested interests.

Table 1 Elton consultation program and participation

Consultation activity	Date	Participation type	Participation numbers
3 community information and feedback sessions	Mortdale and Oatley Community Centres 23 November 2016 Oatley Community Hall 26 November 2016	Opt-in (self-select)	149 across all 3 sessions
Community survey (online and at drop-ins)	23 November 2016 to 5 February 2017	Opt-in (self select)	146 surveys completed
Telephone survey	December 2016 January 2017	Recruited (random)	501 surveys 154 from Oatley (30%)

Review of consultation participation

The intent of the consultation was to engage with the Georges River LGA. Overall, participation was generally representative of the Georges River LGA with around 50% of telephone survey respondents coming from Oatley or Penshurst and 50% from other suburbs. Data on suburb participation for the community survey and drop-in sessions is not available, but it is assumed residents of Oatley or nearby suburbs would have been more broadly represented, given their higher interest in the Proposal.

2.2. Consultation communications and marketing

Promotion of the consultation opportunities included:

- Letterbox drop to 1,200 properties in the vicinity surrounding the Oatley Bowling Club Site on 18 November 2016. The letterbox drop promoted the drop-in sessions, and the community survey.
- Advertising consultation opportunities in the Leader 16 November and 23 November 2016.
- Advertising the consultation sessions on the Council' Project webpage on 8 November 2016 - <http://www.georgesriver.nsw.gov.au/Council/Major-Projects/Former-Oatley-Bowling-Club>.
- Letter to interested stakeholders.

Review of consultation promotion

- Consultation opportunities were promoted widely and appropriately.
- While the consultation report suggests that some residents did not think there was enough lead up time for the drop-in sessions, a reasonable lead up time was provided in Council's website and the leader, and the letter was deliberately dropped in the week leading up to the sessions to ensure it was foremost in community member's minds.

2.3. Peer review by consultation type

Community Information and Feedback Sessions

Participation and representation

- The Community information sessions were appropriately located close to the site. At 149 participants across the three sessions this is considered to be a reasonable number. However, earlier notification may have resulted in increased participation.
- Data is not available on how representative participants were of the Georges River LGA area, however it is assumed that participants were local, given the higher opposition to the proposal.

Format

- The format of the sessions was meaningful and provided participants with the opportunity to hear more about the project, talk with specialists and complete a community survey.

Analysis and findings in Outcomes Report

- The community information session findings in the Outcome Report are representative of the consultation outcomes. Key feedback such as opposition to privatisation of the land, and lack of trust with Council has been represented in the Key Insights section of the Outcomes Report.

Hard copy/online survey

Participation and representation

- The survey was live for more than two months which is more than appropriate over the December/January holiday period.
- The community survey tool did not include questions on the demographics of respondents. The intention of this was to avoid consultation fatigue.

Format/survey tool

- The survey questions are valid and provide useful information to inform the Planning Proposal around demand for senior's housing and acceptable heights.
- However, the survey tool does not directly ask a question related to the proposed rezoning. It only asks about support for senior's housing in the LGA. It is understood that this was deliberate to avoid confusion with the previous planning proposal, and to avoid the use of confusing planning language. The intention instead was to evaluate support for the concept and the heights.

Phone survey

Participation

- 501 telephone surveys were completed which is statistically valid for an LGA the size of Georges River.
- These participants were randomly selected providing representative feedback on the proposal and their decision making was well supported with background materials.
- There are some limitations to the survey results as the survey respondents do not correlate to the age range of the local area. For example, 40% of residents of the Georges River LGA are aged between 18 and 39 years but only 14% of recruited participants are in this age group. Whereas, 26% of residents of the Georges River LGA are aged 60 years and over but represent 44% of all survey respondents. A disproportionate number of older people participating in the survey may have impacted on the higher level of support for senior's housing. However, we know that it is common for a higher proportion of older residents to participate in telephone surveys.

Format/Survey tool

- The survey questions are valid and provide useful information to inform the Planning Proposal around demand for senior's housing and acceptable heights.
- However, the survey tool does not directly ask a question related to the proposed rezoning. It only asks about support for senior's housing in the LGA. It is understood that this was deliberate to avoid confusion with the previous planning proposal, and to avoid the use of confusing planning language. The intention instead was to evaluate support for the concept and the heights.

Analysis and findings in Outcomes Report

- Findings in the consultation report are generally representative of the telephone survey report. However, within the Key Insights on Page 7 it states, "*There was strong support for the current proposal from the phone survey respondents*". The data indicates some support for the proposal, however, not all the data is reflective of strong support:

- Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents felt that a three to five storey age care facility was appropriate for the site. While this indicates support by a majority of respondents, we would consider strong support to be more than 80% of respondents.
- Phone survey respondents strongly supported age care facilities as an important issue for Council (but not necessarily the proposal) and 47% stated that they may be interested in aged care accommodation at the former Oatley Bowling site – but it should be noted, 50% of survey respondents are aged over 60 years).
- While 71% felt that the proposed rezoning (51% for aged care purposes) would result in appropriate intensity for the site, when asked to explain their response, only 48% felt they were happy with the proposal, a further 33% expressed concerns. 10% of concerns related to logistical/infrastructure concerns and suitability of site for the elderly, and 22% a desire to maintain the reserve/community space/anti-development.

2.4. Conclusion

The *Outcomes Report, Community Consultation for the former Oatley Bowling Club site (November 2017 to February 2017)*, Elton Consulting, on the Planning Proposal for the former Oatley Bowling Club site (November 2016 to February 2017) is considered to be a high-quality report based on a robust methodology and wide ranging activities including:

- A range of self-select and opt-in consultation activities ensuring a representative sample of participants, not just those with a vested interest.
- Appropriately located and timed Community Information Sessions.
- Randomly recruited telephone survey, with a statistically valid sample, and a high quality and informative background document for respondents to read prior to interview.
- A well-constructed survey tool, aimed particularly at seeking support for aged care facilities, and reduced heights.
- Strong analysis and reporting of data across all consultation types.

However, the survey tool and analysis of data in the Outcomes Report have the following limitations that should be considered when progressing the project further:

- There was no direct question in the survey relating to support or otherwise for the Planning Proposal, making it difficult to assert that there was “Strong support for the Planning Proposal”. It is understood that this was deliberate to avoid confusion with the previous planning proposal, and to avoid the use of confusing planning language. The intention instead was to evaluate support for the concept and the heights.
- The age of telephone survey respondents does not correlate to the age range of the local area. A disproportionate number of older people participating in the survey may have impacted on the higher level of support for senior’s housing. However, we understand that it is common for a higher proportion of older residents to participate in telephone surveys.