A picture containing grass, sky, outdoor, athletic game

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Engagement outcomes report

Henson Park Plan of Management and Master Plan

Contents

[Summary 3](#_Toc58242965)

[Background 3](#_Toc58242966)

[Engagement Methods 3](#_Toc58242967)

[Promotion 4](#_Toc58242968)

[Engagement outcomes 4](#_Toc58242969)

[Who did we hear from? 9](#_Toc58242970)

[What did they say? 12](#_Toc58242971)

# Summary

Council engaged the Inner West community for input in the preparation of a 10-year plan for Henson Park, which is to include a Plan of Management and Master Plan. Community engagement was carried out via the engagement platform Your Say Inner West (YSIW) an interactive engagement session at the Marrickville Festival and two drop-in sessions at Henson Park.

Online engagement was carried out from the 21 October 2019 to the 17 November 2019. The project page received close to 730 visits. Of those visitors, close to 190 visitors left feedback. The questions prompted visitors to express their thoughts on Henson Park in general, including what visitors currently value and dislike about Henson Park, what improvements visitors would like to see in Henson Park and what should be prioritised within the plan.

# Background

Plans of management must be prepared for all types of parks on community land. Inner West Council has established a park planning priority list, which nominates which open spaces are in greatest need of new or updated Plans of Management. Henson Park has been nominated as high priority within the Inner West Council area. Previous plans of management were prepared by the former Marrickville Council for the sportsground and park, and for the tennis centre and carpark at Henson Park. Adopted in late 2001 and early 2002, these plans are well beyond the 10 year validity period for a plan of management.

## Engagement Methods

The methods of engagement were:

* Online survey on yoursay.innerwest.nsw.gov.au
* Engagement with existing park organisations
* Written feedback form
* Interactive session at Marrickville Festival
* Two drop in session at the Henson Park

## Promotion

The engagement initiative was promoted by several means, including:

Your Say Inner West project page

* On-site signage
* Flyer to the surrounding residents
* Media release
* Social media
* E-news
* Council website
* Email to identified groups
* Interactive engagement session at the Marrickville Festival

All promotion collateral directed people to the online submission form on Your Ssay Inner West and to the two park drop-in sessions.

# Engagement outcomes

* ***Online via yoursay.innerwest.nsw.gov.au***

**Who did we hear from?**

*What did they say?*Outcomes of community engagement received through the online survey and written feedback forms have been collated within this report. Feedback to questions has been arranged so that comments which were more common are presented first.

**Online via yoursay.innerwest.nsw.gov.au**

An online survey was conducted in October and November 2019 through the ‘Your Say Inner West’ (YSIW) website, seeking feedback on a range of questions regarding Henson Park. The survey included multiple-choice and essay style questions and was open for public response for five weeks from 21st October to 17th November 2019.

The project page received 723 visits. 278 visitors participated in viewing documents and information, of whom 192 visitors contributed to the online submission form.

Quantitative responses to the multiple-choice questions are displayed in the graphs below.

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A number of essay style questions were asked, to establish community opinion of Henson Park in more detail.

Text based responses to the essay style questions have been grouped into themes, and issues which featured the most prominently have been summarised below. No written responses were made on behalf of organisations.

**What do you value about Henson Park?**

Responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive and emotive, focusing on users’ appreciation of the green space which they interact with when using Henson Park. Several users described the park as an ‘oasis’ or ’hidden gem’. Many users noted the benefit of this open space on both their physical and mental health and wellbeing. Many users expressed their enjoyment of sporting events and the spectator experience.

The root of what users valued most about Henson Park was repeatedly attributed to:

* The close proximity of a substantial pocket of nature to the built environment.
* The size and scale of open space.
* The elevated views of the sports field, and the wonderful sunrises and sunsets.
* The grassy areas, as an oasis of calm and tranquillity.
* Interaction with dogs, their owners and the community.
* Having a large, unstructured and enclosed area which is safe for dogs to use off leash, and for children to play.
* Availability of open space for use by casual and organised recreation/ exercise.
* The range of activities catered for by the park.
* Attending organised sport and other events, and the spectator experience.
* The relaxed atmosphere, character and affordability of the tennis club and restaurant.
* The heritage value of the park, including its historic feel, nostalgic value and sporting history.
* The affiliation with the Newtown Jets as their home ground.

**What don’t you like about Henson Park?**

Commercialisation

* The threat of commercialisation and development of the site

Event Management

* The restrictions increased sporting use could place on general free community access to the park.
* Event traffic management and parking, particularly for Centennial Street residents and tennis club visitors. Congestion, safety issues, damage to residents’ cars, and the impact on resident parking were key issues.
* The antisocial behaviours of some sports attendees leaving the park drunk and loud.
* The quantity of waste left around the park by attendees of sports matches and other events.
* The lack of prior notification for sports and other events. I can’t use the park when there is a paid event, and access is restricted well before and after the event.
* The scoreboard is hard to see, especially when it is sunny
* The poor quality speaker system and use of it during low attendance matches.
* Limited food and beverage options at games
* The grandstand and seating are too far from the field and the grandstand needs updating.
* The placement of generators, barbeques and event infrastructure near adjoining properties.
* There are no women’s sports matches, and no facilities for female players.
* The management of intrusive sports field lighting - light spills across to residents and sometimes the lights are on when there is no training.
* The lighting is not suitable for broadcasting matches.
* The lack of parking on game days.
* The lack of signage and information about ways other than driving to get to the site.
* The long-term damaging impact of allowing cars to drive and park on the grass for sports and other events.

Dog off leash area management

* Dog owners who don’t supervise their pets or pick up after them.
* The dominance of off-leash dogs makes it difficult to have a picnic, and to exercise dogs on the leash.

General facility conditions

* The facilities need to be upgraded to support sporting use, and to improve the spectator experience.
* That the facilities are visually run down and generally in poor condition.
* There is no sport to watch in summer.
* Not enough use of the playing field by local teams and the community.
* The public amenities blocks. Specifically, their appearance and condition - poor lighting levels day and night, irregular opening hours, no accessible or baby change facilities, varying opinions on state of cleanliness.
* The bitumen surfaces around the grandstand and car park are in poor condition and aren’t kid friendly.
* The derelict wire fencing around the perimeter of parts of the site.

Provision of facilities and park layout

* The lack of shelter from the sun, wind and rain.
* There is only one non-spectator seat in the park, more seats are needed.
* Not enough water fountains.
* There are not enough bins and bin locations, and there are no recycling bins.
* No bike parking areas.
* There are not enough tennis courts, especially on weekends when they are booked out.
* The separation of the tennis club and park.
* The Sydenham Road entry is unattractive and unsafe where the footpath ends.
* The expanse of hard surfaces and car parking.
* There are no gardens or areas of native vegetation, the extra grass parking is only used a few days of the year.
* There are not enough trees.
* The paths are muddy and uneven.
* The walking circuit is interrupted by the car park.

Safety

* I feel unsafe visiting the park at night.
* I can’t use the park when it’s dark in the morning or at night because there are no lights and the gates are locked.
* Dangerous driving through car park and the safety risk for pedestrians and dogs.
* The footpath from Amy Street playground to Centennial Street is very dark at night and also too narrow. Two can’t fit passing and there are many bikes/walkers/prams.
* Pedestrian and cyclist conflicts when using the sports field perimeter track
* The grassed areas need better maintenance - it is only fixed when it becomes a dust bowl.
* The grandstand is used for antisocial activities at night, left-over glass and syringes make it unsafe.

**What improvements would you like to see to Henson Park?**

Responses to this question mirrored many of the themes which had been highlighted as ‘dislikes’ in the previous question, and reinforced themes which had been ‘liked’ in the first essay question.

Community use and recreation

* Nothing that removes the feel of it being a traditional venue, and the way it brings the community together.
* More community use, less organised sport
* Extend the hours of operation of the park and its facilities. Provide lighting for evening and morning use, while minimizing spill over to nearby residents.
* Better venue facilities for additional recreation activities & festivals.
* More community festivals, markets and opportunities for socialising with dogs.
* Attract higher caliber matches
* Better communications to keep residents in the loop when events are on. Fairer policies for access to residents - don’t keep the gates locked all day
* Better cleanup after matches, ban glass during events.
* More sports variety and use throughout the year including women’s sports, junior matches, soccer and cricket.

Provision of facilities and maintenance

* Cleaner, better, well-lit toilets with baby change and accessible facilities, regular opening hours and maintenance.
* More shelter.
* Access and surface improvements with linking pathways around the park.
* Better chemical-free maintenance of grassed areas to address damage from dogs and vehicles. Limit vehicle access to grassed areas for events.
* Upgraded player amenities to cater for female players and to address drainage and plumbing issues.
* Better amenities, car parking and food and beverage options on game days.
* Grandstand upgrade, new scoreboard and public address system to improve spectator experience.
* More gates and paths for accessing the field for halftime activities.
* New aesthetically pleasing fencing around the field.
* Dog provisions - more bins, bag dispensers and water fountains in more locations. A shallow pool to cool off would be great.
* Increased storage for people using the field to assist in operations.
* More bins in more locations including recycling. Consider alternatives to landfill for dog waste.
* Facilities such as cricket nets, a hockey field and track for wheeled sports.
* A community hall or clubhouse which can be hired out.
* A café.

Design and layout

* Markers outlining the history of Henson park, to give people the chance to understand how the park has evolved with the community. Improvements in the greening of the space including more perimeter trees for shade and habitat, low planting and gardens.
* Reducing the expanse of hard surfaces and parking.
* Pedestrian safety improvements to vehicle entries and parking areas.
* Develop and enforce an event transport and parking strategy. This could include timed parking in residential streets, bike parking, a shuttle bus service from Sydenham Station and ongoing parking arrangements with neighbouring schools.
* Address the interface with car parking, off and on-leash dog areas.
* Signage, training sessions and enforcement to keep owners aware of their obligations to control and clean up after their dogs to prevent nuisance to other park users.
* Subtle multipurpose elements to encourage community use such as community gardens, nature based play for kids, fitness equipment, seating, outdoor chess and informal sports areas.
* Upgrade but not overhaul of tennis facilities and restaurant so that they are more accessible, improve external aesthetics.
* More seats in ambient locations.
* Better lighting for tennis courts, more tennis courts.
* Colour and paint to improve aesthetics and provide scope for art and interpretation.

Sustainability

* Reduce demand for resources with integration of solar panels, LED lights, rainwater harvesting and reuse, stormwater treatment.
* Improving the sustainability of buildings would be a great step forward.
* A soft fall play space rather than so much tar based surfaces so that younger kids could engage in other activities whilst games are on.

**What do you think should be the main priority of the parks plans?**

Community

* To reflect community needs, making sure that Henson Park considers and accommodates everyone who wants to use it.
* It should be family friendly, inviting and inclusive to all visitors, nature and types of casual or organised sport and recreation.
* More female inclusive sports, activities and facilities.
* Maximising community use, maintaining and building upon current assets while retaining the parks character.
* Dog friendly and supporting of casual community connection through shared interest.
* More events which aren’t exclusively sports related.

Sport and recreation

* Reconciling the different sport and recreation agendas in an inclusive way.
* Supportive of informal exercise and healthy lifestyles.

Improved facilities

* More trees, shade and shelter.
* Better toilet facilities and park furniture.
* Upgraded sports facilities for players and spectators, without compromising. the relaxed feel of the park, and affordability of attending sports matches.

Access

* Maintain green space and keeping the casual, relaxed feel.
* Improve park access and pathways.
* Weekly morning and evening use with lighting.
* Better accessibility for wheelchairs and prams.
* Retaining off leash areas.
* Retaining the tennis courts, club and restaurant.

**Do you have any other comments on Henson Park?**

* Retaining the tennis club, tennis courts, and off-leash dog areas is very important.
* Too much modernisation would erode the charm, heritage and unstructured nature of the park. There are few places where you can wander down, watch a game or go for a run and feel so connected to your local space.
* There needs to be more balance in the quality of the facilities for the local users of the venue as a park. Green open space is at a premium. Despite being a sports oval the existing use of Henson Park by all community. groups should be respected. Keep green space and facilities, don’t place too much emphasis on parking for occasional sports matches and events.
* The park is a fantastic asset to the community. The current mix of activities is great with the understanding that it needs to maintain a level of quality to attract professional sporting groups. Consider the amount of use of the oval turf before increasing sporting use as it rarely makes it to the end of season despite excellent work by the groundsman.
* We have a responsibility to maintain heritage and enhance built infrastructure with a long-term view.
* Let’s get other things happening there besides sport.
* Keep the park inclusive, don’t zone off areas for specific people.
* Maintain easy, cheap events and ensure that there are little to no barriers for people to enjoy the public space. Big events need to be better managed, with more food, bathrooms, notification and location of activities on the site to minimise the impact on residents.
* Please keep the park open, don’t close everything for upgrades.

**Face to face engagement sessions and Your Say stall at festival feedback**

Inner West Council’s held an interactive engagement session at the Marrickville Festival on 20th October 2019 a day before the Your Say Inner West project page opened. Festival goers were given the opportunity to stick post it notes on a large map of the park commenting on what works well and what might need to be brought to the attention of Inner West Council.

Two drop in sessions were held at Henson Park, one on Wednesday evening 6th November 2019, 5.30-7pm, and the other on Saturday morning 9th November 2019, 10-11.30am.

The material consisted of two A1 panels, which displayed an overall map of the park and some images of current parts of the park or activities and features of other parks in order to prompt discussion.

Printed boards outlined key activities, both existing and proposed, as well as a map indicating the site area. Members of the public were asked to identify the facilities and areas they liked the most, and which facilities and areas they felt had room for improvement. Comments on additional items were also welcomed.

Park visitors were asked to identify facilities and areas that they liked the most, and which facilities they felt had room for improvement, through coloured stickers on the panels. Comments on areas for improvement were also welcomed. The sessions were productive with several park visitors approaching the team and engaging with the material to have their say. The comments have been themed and are presented without hierarchy.

There were no organised sports matches during the sessions as the NRL and AFL seasons are over. Generally, the consultation attendees lived locally and had walked to the reserve, many with their dogs.

The second consultation was more heavily attended. Attendees were concerned about the notification period, the impact greater sporting club involvement could bring, loss of access to the park, and issues with safety and parking.

Community feedback could be grouped into the following themes:

**Movement and parking**

* Users requested some formal paths and extended hardstand around the Woodland Street amenities to address muddy areas.
* There was a lot of concern around parking and traffic management. Centennial Street residents sought improvements to event parking and traffic management to reduce the inconvenience to residents, and to ensure pedestrian safety.
* Most users were against increasing the amount of parking, especially if it reduced the amount of green space. They noted the full capacity is used only occasionally, and suggested shuttle buses and arrangements with nearby schools would be more appropriate.
* Tennis club users were unhappy with the impact of events on their parking area. At times the parking is taken for events, or congestion on Centennial Street limits access which is problematic for visitors with mobility requirements.
* The Sydenham Road entry was noted as having poor amenity for pedestrians.
* Some users would like to see a shared circuit around the edge of the playing field for exercise.
* A staircase from the Woodland Street amenities down to the perimeter track, and more playing field entries were suggested to improve access to these areas.

Recreational use

* Users requested lighting, safety and access improvements to enable early morning and evening use.
* There was a lot of support for retaining off-leash dog areas in the park. Many users noted their preference to bring their dogs to Henson Park as the only off leash dog area in the immediate vicinity that isn’t surrounded by roads. Several users without dogs noted they visited the park specifically to enjoy watching the dogs. Some suggestions for improvement included better patrols for dog owners not doing the right thing, and buffer areas or barriers between on and off-leash areas – particularly near parking areas.

A number of users were in favour of a community fitness area

* Users expressed their enjoyment of places to sit and observe activities in the park – the tennis club, and the grassy slopes for watching sports matches and dogs. The informal nature of these spaces was valued.
* There was support for increased organised community events and activities in the park such as outdoor yoga, dog training sessions and dance classes in the tennis club hall.
* Users identified less frequented flat areas as having potential to support a greater range of activities in the park. Suggested activities include a kick wall, cricket nets, outdoor gym, basketball half stand and handball court, skate park and community garden.
* Some users were keen to see the inclusion of a track for cycling and running.

Playing fields and organised sport

* Several participants wanted to see more community use of the oval, along with a greater diversity of sports i.e. soccer, summer cricket, and the return of ‘vigoro’.
* The poor condition of player facilities, and lack of facilities for female players were flagged as priority items to address.
* Sports spectators and non-sports spectators were supportive of a new PA system. They noted the poor sound quality and volume control of the current system reduced their enjoyment of the park.
* Many respondents expressed strong opposition to synthetic playing surfaces.
* Participants who use the playing field for exercise were keen to see their access maintained.

Lighting

* Spill over and inconsistent operating hours were noted as issues with the current playing field lighting.
* Many users were keen for the park to be better lit for early morning and evening recreation. The operating hours and potential nuisance to residents were flagged as issues to be carefully addressed.
* Several users felt lighting improvements would increase their sense of safety at night, and also help to deter antisocial behaviour.

Facilities and furniture

* Users were supportive of new or upgraded amenities, noting the lack of accessible and baby change facilities, poor lighting, poor presentation and inconsistent locking times as issues with the current facilities.
* Some participants wished to have an on site coffee shop, while others were less supportive as there are local businesses in close proximity.
* Several participants with children suggested some kids spaces integrated into the park would be beneficial.
* There was a lot of support for retention of the tennis club and restaurant with some minor upgrades.
* Users were keen to see sustainable technologies and strategies incorporated in the park upgrades, particularly solar panels, LED lighting, rain + stormwater treatment and harvesting.
* There was a lot of support for more seating in ambient and shaded locations around the park, and for more water stations. Some users were keen to see barbeque and party facilities
* Dog owners requested more bins and bag dispensers in more locations for dealing with dog waste. There was also support for a dog pond.
* Users requested improved provisions for waste disposal - specifically the inclusion of recycling bins, more bins in more locations, and more sustainable methods for dealing with waste.
* Many participants requested bike racks to encourage visitors to arrive via bike.
* Notice boards and/or a Henson Park website were suggested to keep residents and visitors informed of future events so they can plan their activities to suit.

Biodiversity and green space

* There was huge support for more shade trees. Increased native planting to provide habitat and food for birds was also a priority. A number of users mentioned that they enjoyed watching the different visiting species throughout the year.
* Many residents cited the green spaces as their favourite part of the park. Loss of access to these spaces during upgrades and events was a big concern.

Sense of place

* Most users were keen for the park to remain essentially as it is, with some minor upgrades.
* Gentrification, over programming, over development and loss of public access were key concerns. Users stressed the importance of maintaining the informal character and laid back vibe of the park.
* A greater presence of the site’s history and interpretation of this was identified as something that would enhance visiting the park.
* Several participants mentioned the ‘Henson Park’ lettering as something they would like to see reinstated.

Maintenance

* Areas respondents felt were in need of maintenance include the grassy sloped areas to address dry patches, and the degraded bitumen surfaces behind the grandstand.
* The entry gates and lettering, the grandstand and the two amenities blocks were also flagged as requiring maintenance.

**Comments received from sporting organisations**

Council received no written responses from organisations during the initial engagement period.

* A meeting was held on 28th November 2019 with representatives from Inner West Council, the Newtown Jets and AFL NSW - Sydney Swans to gather their feedback. Themes raised in the meeting are summarised below.

1. NRL - Newtown Jets

* Supportive of continued arrangement to share the grounds with AFL, noting the damage to the field from AFL is far less than from soccer, partly due to the larger area required for AFL. Stakeholders discouraged use of the grounds for soccer; previous use increased maintenance requirements, and the field was unplayable by the 4th month.
* Stakeholders expressed the need to improve the playing surface, and address sinkholes. It needs to be of a certain level for professional players, otherwise the risk of injury is too high.
* Improved player amenities are needed with four changerooms, and reconfiguration of existing facilities to suit first grade matches. Facilities would also need to accommodate female players, there is a possibility of a female Jets team.
* The spectator experience needs to be improved, specifically with a new scoreboard as the current one is difficult to see, and a new public address system as the current system is virtually inaudible. Fixing grandstand seating and completing access upgrades were also noted as priorities.
* Funding is of big concern, preference to upgrade/refurbish buildings rather than replace them if more cost effective.
* Acknowledging the history of the Jets association with Henson Park was raised as something to be incorporated into future plans. Visitor 8972 was noted as significant to Jets lore.

2. AFL NSW - Sydney Swans

* AFL stakeholders also expressed the need to improve the playing surface so that it can be classified as a tier 2 level field. Facilities upgrades would need to follow for the ground to be classed as a tier 2 elite sports facility. Upgrades are proposed to visitor and player amenities, including amenities for female players, coaches boxes, a media viewing area, and grandstand upgrades.
* Options to improve the playing surface were discussed. Stakeholders explained a tier 2 surface needs to be predominantly natural turf and kept to a high standard. As such, intensifying current use of the playing surface, along with grassy park areas was discouraged to retain good levels of grass coverage.
* More durable turf systems were flagged for further investigation - these include reinforced turf with sand substrate, and hybrid turf with 10-15% synthetic fibres.
* Stakeholders noted the significant cost of making the grandstand access and BCA compliant, and requested these costs be borne by the Inner West Council.

3. Inner West Council

* The current 15,000L water tank capacity is a severe limiting factor to keeping the grounds in good condition. Inner West Council representatives explained only partially watering the field takes many hours as the current tank capacity is inadequate. New water tanks with at least 100,000L combined capacity were recommended to provide enough water supply and reduce the time to complete irrigation cycles.
* The damage to the ground and goal posts caused by rotation between NRL and AFL needs to be addressed. Inner West Council representatives noted their preference for staff training and management of goal post changeover rather than more costly engineered solutions.