

Engagement outcomes report

Leichhardt Park Aquatic Centre

Master plan

Introduction

In November 2017, Inner West Council initiated the process to develop a master plan for the Leichhardt Park Aquatic Centre (LPAC). The draft master plan submitted for community feedback in 2018 involved the relocation of plant rooms which was no longer a feasible design concept. Alterations to the draft LPAC master plan were required in 2019 following a review of accessibility and making related improvements and budget considerations. Maintaining the current plant room locations required major alterations to the design and a new draft was submitted to Council in February 2020 for consideration. The altered draft master plan was placed on public exhibition in March 2020 for community comments.

Key changes to the master plan included:

> New 50m, 8 lane lap pool with movable boom;

> New 25m, 8 lane lap pool to replace current diving pool; and

> Reconfigured pathway between the water fit zone and the water play, recreation and green space zones to accommodate maintenance access to plant room pipes.

The areas of improvement identified in previous feedback that informed the reconfiguration of the design included:

> More shade and seating;

> Improved recreational spaces;

> Additional water play and lap swimming pool space;

> More child centred recreation spaces and water play; and

> Better footpaths and access.

While pool depth was not specified in the revised draft master plan for the proposed 25m pool, many respondents requested that deep water facilities be included in the design, and future analysis will be required to determine deep water usage during the architectural design stage.

In general principle the master plan has been well received. The primary areas of improvement as outlined have been addressed in the master plan. The current round of feedback has not highlighted any requirement to further improve these design elements.

## Background

The first phase of the design process was to engage with the community. The ageing asset, future needs of the community, the significant annual attendance made up of diverse user groups and program range, operational information and community engagement were key considerations for the design principles of the masterplan.

The engagement and its findings along with internal stakeholder engagement and detailed site analysis informed the future planning and design of the facility within the precinct. A draft plan was reported to Council for endorsement and placed on public exhibition. The public exhibition period allowed for a second opportunity for input by the community, this time to ensure what was requested has been delivered adequately in the draft master plan.

The draft master plan submitted for community feedback in 2018 involved the relocation of plant rooms which was no longer a feasible design concept. Maintaining the current plant room locations required major alterations to the design and a new draft was submitted to Council in February 2020 to endorse for public exhibition. The draft master plan was placed on public exhibition in March 2020 for community comments on the new design.

## Engagement Methods

### **Stage one initial community feedback – 2018**

The community engagement methods aimed to be as inclusive as possible with a variety of forums for feedback. The process included 6 informal ‘drop-in’ style interactive workshops at the Leichhardt Park Aquatic Centre (LPAC). These sessions were staggered over a variety of times and days with the aim to capture a broad spectrum of users. An online survey at ‘Your Say Inner West’ was also available during the entire engagement period.

Due to the required revisions for the master plan a second engagement period was conducted in 2020.

### **Engagement events**

Informal community engagement sessions were held at the facility. Six engagement sessions were held in the foyer of the building adjacent to the café, and one session was run concurrently in the breezeway of the gym. Two Council Officers were present and facilitated the activities, answered questions and outlined the proposed planning processes.

Community engagement sessions were run at a variety of times and on a variety of days to try and achieve a broad of a spectrum of users. The morning sessions targeted early morning swimmers, gym users and squad’s along with deep water aqua classes. The afternoon sessions targeted swim school, and gym users. The weekend sessions saw a high percentage of swim school participants, recreation pool users, gym and group exercise participants. Over the 6 engagement sessions a total of 146 paper surveys were completed. In addition, a larger proportion of people stopped to note items and issues on sticky notes and coloured dots.

The community engagement sessions were held on:

* Wednesday 24 January 2018, 6am – 8am with approximately 20-30 people in attendance.
* Friday 9 February 2018, 6am – 8am with approximately 20-30 people in attendance.
* Thursday 15 February 2018, 4pm – 6pm with approximately 20- 30 people in attendance.
* Tuesday 20 February 2018, 4pm – 6pm with approximately 20- 30 people in attendance.
* Saturday 3 February 2018, 9am – 1pm with over 100 people in attendance.
* Saturday 17 February 2018, 9am – 1pm with over 100 people in attendance.

An online survey on Your Say Inner West was launched on 22 January 2018 and ran for 5 weeks until 26 February 2018. The survey period ran over the summer school holiday break and part of term 1. There were 647 visitors to the project page, of those 451 completed the survey.

### **Stage two – revised Master Plan Public Exhibition 2020**

The revised master plan was place on public exhibition on Your Say Inner West between 16 March and 20 April. This feedback period was extended from the original closure date of 13 April 2020 upon request by community members.

During the public exhibition there were 1891visitor to the project page, 437 downloaded the master plan and 308 provided feedback.

## Promotion

### **Stage one initial community feedback – 2018**

The community engagement events, and online survey were advertised with a letter distributed to 10,000 households around Leichhardt, Lilyfield and Rozelle. Advertisements were placed in the Inner West Courier, on the Inner West Council Website and posts on the Inner West Council Facebook page.

### **Stage two – revised Master Plan Public Exhibition 2020**

4,195 LPAC members were sent email notifications inviting them to attend community engagement sessions on 13 February 2020. Posters were placed around the centre advising patrons about the community engagement sessions.

LPAC members were notified via an email when the project opened on Your Say Inner West and were encouraged to provide feedback.

## Engagement outcomes

### **Stage two – revised Master Plan Public Exhibition 2020**

Feedback was received through the Your Say Inner West website. Respondents were asked whether they supported the revised LPAC master plan, their relationship to LPAC as well as their suburb. Respondents had an opportunity to provide comments and explain their responses.

308 responses were recorded through the Your Say Inner West website. While 135 respondents from the most recent feedback submissions advised they do not support the draft master plan, 124 advised they don’t support the draft master plan based on unresolved water depth in the proposed 25m pool.

Only 11 respondents did not support the master plan for other reasons which included objecting to the expense and the necessity of the project.

When asked which of the following best described your relationship to LPAC respondents selected:

* 53 visitors;
* 178 regular users;
* 107 members of a club using LPAC;
* 25 others.

However, in the long text response many respondents who selected ‘Regular user’ also indicated that they or their family members were members of a club using LPAC.

Although it is yet to be confirmed, the depth of the 25m pool will require more consideration including detail breakdown on additional construction and ongoing operational costs. It is expected that these will be considerable. Further options will be pursued with architects during the design stage. It should also be noted that any specific design for deep water pools, would remove the opportunity for ramp and mobility access to that pool and greatly impact on general usage and those with issues relating to accessibility.

The inclusion of the proposed 25m pool in the design will provide better accessibility outcomes for the site, as well as provide a facility for School Carnivals and wider community usage.

### **Stage one initial community feedback 2018 - Common themes**

Common themes from the engagement respondents’ feedback during 2018 has been summarised below under public domain elements:

**Pools**

Respondents regularly noted the pool was too busy during squad training and more public lanes were needed. Respondents often suggested an additional 50m pool within the facility.

The diving pool was considered important for the use of deep-water aqua aerobics. Many respondents noted that Leichhardt Park Aquatic Centre distinguished itself from other facilities by providing deep water aqua aerobics. Respondents noted the diving pool was one of the few of its kind left in Sydney and appreciated it for its historical value. There were requests for opening the 5m platform, diving to occur more often and the introduction of a Diving Club. Some respondents requested expanding the deep-water pool to allow for Water Polo and additional deep water aqua. Responders also requested a dedicated Aquatic Sports Pool with the pool the correct size and depth for competitive water polo.

Respondents regularly noted the program pool and hydrotherapy pool required better ventilation and that it was often too hot to supervise children undertaking swimming lessons. There were also requests for the hydrotherapy pool to be used for rehabilitation rather than children’s play and swimming lessons.

Ramp access into the 50m pool and a more accessible entry into the dive pool were requested. It was noted that access to the program pool could be improved by the installation of handrails.

The swim club also requested to have access to a lap time recording room close to the pool for training.

**Gym facilities**

Respondents generally felt the gym met their needs; however, it was sometimes too busy in peak periods. There was a request to use the studio rooms for stretch and weights when there were no classes. Requests from respondents generally included 24 access, access from the car park, and the provision for massage or physiotherapy.

Respondents requested additional classes throughout the day along with additional senior’s classes and deep water aqua.

Respondents were generally unhappy with the change facilities at the gym noting ongoing operational issues including broken locks on the showers, shower temperature and small cubicles. Respondents also said the change rooms needed more regular cleaning and the choice of tile made everything feel dirty.

**Crèche**

Respondents requested longer crèche hours and allowing for stays of more than 1 hour.

**Shade**

Many respondents requested more shade around the pool and additional trees to be planted in the car park. Respondents suggested cover from the car park to the facility and additional shade sails on the grassed embankment. People also requested shade over the 50m pool but expressed that they did not want the pool to be enclosed.

**Children’s play facilities**

Respondents requested additional child focused play activities and improvement of the existing water play facilities. Respondents requested improvements to the relaxation area adjacent to the mushroom pool.

Respondents requested a nice-looking playground, water slides, expanded water play, upgraded mushroom pool, children’s games and recreation facilities. Many respondents felt the children’s play and recreation within the facility was at capacity. Many respondents said that if the children’s water play was in close proximity to a café it would encourage them to spend longer at the centre and attend more frequently.

**Seating**

There was a consensus that there was not enough seating around the pool and the seating that was provided was uncomfortable for relaxing. The awning over the seating around the pool was poorly located as it does not extend over the seating. The current bench seating is cold and uncomfortable. Chairs, spectator seating and lounging areas around the pool were requested to allow people to relax.

**Picnic facilities**

Picnic tables were requested, along with BBQs. A few people suggested the terraced site be used for spectator seating.

**Informal recreation / Grass areas**

There was a consensus that there was not enough seating around the pool and that more comfortable areas for picnicking and sunbaking were required. Respondents requested grassed ‘nooks’ and better planting where parties and gatherings could occur.

Respondents also requested the grassed area be used for a moonlight cinema and youth activities like beach volleyball and basketball. Respondents also requested a wine bar or restaurant in the evening.

**Café**

Respondents mentioned the café layout could be improved. The café currently causes people lining up and waiting for their order to wait in the main foyer of the building. There is also conflict between people picking up food orders and making their way to the pool. Respondents also requested a greater variety of healthy food options. Respondents confirmed that staff at the café was friendly. There were also requests for a second café in the existing building near the grassed area. It was proposed that this could serve the Bay Run and Leichardt Oval 2.

**Building entry**

Respondents requested covered walkways from the carpark to the facility and an awning over the entrance.

Many respondents said the entrance was crowded with many people trying to do different things. Respondents mentioned that staff at the reception are often busy serving other people and do not realise that there are other patrons behind them requiring assistance.

**Toilets / Change rooms**

Respondents were generally unhappy with the change facilities at the gym noting ongoing operational issues including broken locks on the showers, shower temperature and small cubicles. Respondents also said that the change rooms needed more regular cleaning.

Respondents were generally unhappy with recent renovations undertaken in the pool changerooms. Respondents mentioned that the floor tiles were slippery, and the colour of the tile made them feel dirty. Respondents also said that the change rooms needed more regular cleaning.

Many respondents requested for additional family change facilities and co-locating the change rooms would be useful. Currently parents and carers must leave children at the opposite end of the building to change, which often feels unsafe and unnecessary.

**Car Park**

Many respondents requested more parking, multi-storey parking and some people requested paid parking. Many respondents requested that the car park be upgraded, resurfaced and potholes fixed. There were requests for the car park to remain open during sporting events.

**Additional facilities**

Some respondents requested a wet sauna, sauna and spa. There were requests for a resort style pool, a man-made beach, swimming in Iron Cove and hiring of kayaks.

**Other requests**

Many respondents requested improved public transport and better access from Lilyfield and the Bay Run as parking at the site is an issue.

There were many requests for more thorough and frequent cleaning of facilities. There were appeals for additional cleaning and chlorinating of the pools.

People requested better access to the Bay Run, including construction of footpaths within Leichhardt Park from Le Montage, Hippo Playground and the Bay Run. Respondents also requested better facilities within the aquatic centre including a swipe card access for members at the lower part of the facility. Respondents requested swipe card access for the gym from the car park and a more efficient system throughout the whole facility.

Most people liked the character of the facility and mentioned that it is a community hub.

### **Stage two revised Master Plan Public Exhibition 2020 - Common Themes**

Common themes from the feedback received through your say inner west public exhibition of the master plan during 2020 have been summarised below under public domain elements:

**Pools**

Many respondents requested that deep water facilities be included in the design. Of these responses, many requested that a deep-water pool suitable for water polo be included in the design. Many of these respondents suggested that the proposed 50m pool and boom could meet this need by ensuring adequate depth for a specified length of the pool. This round of feedback saw a spike of submissions from water polo clubs.

Many respondents noted that Leichhardt Park Aquatic Centre distinguished itself from other facilities by providing deep water aqua aerobics, with respondents requesting a deep-water section in either of the proposed new pools to facilitate this program.

A non-aligned external user submitted a request for a high-level dive facility. However, this feedback was received after the submissions closed and is not aligned with the current usage profile of LPAC. While the dive tower was identified in previous community engagement sessions in 2017 as an area needing improvement, this was likely due to the state of disrepair of the facility at the time. Reports indicate that retaining the platform is not feasible due to structural status and the age of the asset. While several respondents requested diving facilities, diving is not an activity that has been offered at LPAC for a significant period. Removal of the dive tower to provide a multi-purpose accessible 25m pool would be an improvement that would benefit a much larger user group and generate large scale attendance from schools, children’s activities, seniors, general lap swimming, squads, lane hire and other aquatics uses.

Respondents requesting deep water facilities primarily indicated that they were members of either Water Polo, Underwater Rugby and Diving Clubs, or attendees of deep-water aqua classes.

The proposed 25m pool includes a ramp with a fixed depth which will allow for mixed use. Any increase in depth of the 25m pool would come at a cost of accessibility.

**Gym facilities**

Recent changes to the gym facilities have been completed at LPAC, which included reconfiguring studio space to provide functional training and wellness studios. These proposed changes were mentioned in the master plan however were not dependent on the adoption of the master plan.

Only a very small number of respondents provided comments relating to the gym, which included a request for increased studio space, relocation of the gym desk, reconfiguration of the gym layout, and a request for increased capacity in spin classes.

**Crèche**

Respondents did not highlight any further improvements to the crèche during this round of feedback.

**Shade**

Increased shade was identified in early feedback sessions as an area requiring improvement at LPAC. Only three respondents indicated that additional shade should be included in the design.

**Children’s play facilitates/family recreation**

Previous feedback indicated a desire for more children’s play facilities, which informed the inclusion of a water play zone in the master plan design. Only a few respondents commented on this area, with the majority indicating they were pleased with the inclusion.

The addition of family recreation and children’s play facilities has been a strong theme through both the engagement of LPAC users and from the broader recreation needs study carried out by the IWC from 2017-2018.

**Seating**

Previous feedback identified a lack of seating and that seating that was provided was uncomfortable for relaxing.

Only one respondent commented on the proposed seating in the master plan, stating that timber seating would not be suitable.

**Picnic facilities**

One respondent commented that accessible picnic tables should be specified in the design.

**Informal recreation / Grass areas**

Only a small number of respondents commented on the recreation and green space section of the master plan design. These included two requests to include a beach volleyball court as well as a request to increase the size of the grassed area to facilitate informal sports for picnicking families.

**Café**

Only a small number of respondents commented on the café, with one request for a larger café area, one request that the café be located closer to the 50m pool, and one request for increased food options.

**Building entry**

Respondents did not comment on the proposed changes to the building entry or reconfiguration of the reception area.

**Toilets / Change rooms**

Improvements to the change room facilities were identified as a requirement for LPAC. Only a small number of respondents commented on the change room proposals in the master plan, with one request for additional men’s change rooms, a request for clothing hooks to be included, and one response indicating a concern regarding the distance of the change room from the 50m pool.

**Car Park**

One respondent requested the inclusion of a multi-storey carpark in the design.

**Additional facilities**

Some respondents requested a sauna be included in the design. There was also a request for an indoor sports facility, a slide, and a saltwater pool.

**Other requests**

A small number of respondents requested improved cycleway access and secure bicycle parking at the centre, with a number of these respondents requesting bicycle parking be located inside the centre.

Improved access to the Bay Run was also requested, including an accessible path from the centre to the Bay Run and Hippo Playground.

**Other feedback**

Two information sessions were held prior to the second Public Exhibition at LPAC on:

* Thursday 27 February 2020 at 11am.
* Thursday 27 February 2020 at 6pm.

These informal sessions were used to present the revised master plan and inform attendees of the upcoming engagement period. Feedback was not collected during the sessions; however, attendees were informed that members would be notified via email when the project opened on Your Say Inner West and were encouraged to provide feedback at that time.

**Summary**

Guiding principles of the masterplan included consideration give to many underlying requirements. The recreation needs study undertaken by the Inner West Council and a review of current and future usage requirements were key drivers in developing an approach to the design.

These can be broadly summarised as:

* Improved accessibility;
* Replacement of asset;
* Meet demands of current user groups and centre programs;
* Meet future demands for community and program access;
* Create opportunities to generate new programs and healthy lifestyle opportunities;
* Family recreation and waterplay;
* All year-round access to Aquatics amenity for children and family use;
* Provide opportunities for the whole community to attend a diverse range of health, fitness, recreation and aquatics programs; and
* Provide opportunity for increased access to special populations programs and access which may include seniors, NDIS participants, children and other user groups.

Feedback for the masterplan was collected through two separate engagement process and centred around key themes as outlined above. It is noteworthy that key feedback for the final version of the masterplan focused on the resolution of the depth of the proposed 25m pool, indicating a need to resolve this item further during detailed design, planning, and site analysis. LPAC traditionally has never been used specifically for water polo games, and that this usage is largely accommodated at Dawn Fraser Baths and Ashfield Aquatic Centre. It can be further noted that deep water aqua aerobics can be readily provided in the deep end of either the 50m pool or the proposed 25m pool.

A final comment in relation to the LPAC masterplan confirms that themes previously identified in 2018 as requiring improvement were not commented on in the 2020 engagement period, suggesting that these areas requiring improvement have been adequately addressed in the current design.