Dear Ms Walker,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on concept design for the inclusive playground proposed for the St. Ives Showground site.

Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) Health Promotion is committed to ensuring that the built environment has a net-positive impact on the health and well-being of individuals and the wider community. Overall, we commend Ku-ring-gai Council on the concept design for the St Ives Showground playground for its natural play elements, structured and unstructured play areas and features that cater for a range of ages and abilities.

Social Connectedness

Well-designed public open space is generally considered to improve physical health and emotional wellbeing and contribute to the social connections that can enhance a sense of community\(^1\). Providing multi-use open spaces will broaden the user groups and address social inclusion of residents and the community. Public spaces can provide opportunities for social interaction, social mixing and inclusion and facilitate the development of community ties\(^2\). The inclusion of a community garden can provide opportunities for a broad range of community members to undertake physical activity, socialise and aid in building a healthy and socially sustainable community\(^3\).

Recommendations:

- Consider consulting with local community groups to investigate the support for the creation of a community garden into the area near the play-space. This will broaden the user groups to adults/older adults and promote social inclusion.

- Consider provision of a community transport/shuttle bus service to encourage and facilitate community involvement and interest in the establishment and upkeep of the community garden.

Active Transport

Neighbourhoods that are ‘walkable’ and ‘cyclable’ including the provision of highly connected pathways are associated with higher levels of physical activity in the community\(^4\). Adding connections from the playground site to existing paths within the showground area can encourage people to be physically active by walking and cycling around the site.
Recommendations:

- Install additional trails that link the play-space to the showground area and existing showground trails to encourage exploration of the surrounding spaces
- Install bike parking on the perimeter of the playground to promote active travel in and around the showground area and connection to the showground trails
- Ensure sufficient way-finding signage is installed to guide pedestrians and cyclists within the area towards key sites and entrances to trail paths
- The location of the playground in St Ives Showground precludes (for most) accessibility by cycling or walking. We suggest consideration be given to providing a Council shuttle service to make the playground more accessible for carers and grandparents who may not drive or do not reside near a bus route.

Accessibility

The provision of accessible play features is important as it ensures that the space provides opportunities for children of all abilities to play, interact and enjoy the space. Additional accessible features that could encourage further inclusiveness are suggested below.

Recommendations:

- Placing one of the cubbies on the ground level to improve accessibility to those with physical disability as well as younger children
- Installing raised sand trays that allow wheelchairs to approach and interact. This will also allow carers and grandparents to engage in play with their children.
- Ensuring that drinking fountains are placed on accessible paths and are at a height that can be reached by wheelchairs and children under the age of 4

Designing for inclusion

It is not clear from the concept plan the type of seating that will be incorporated.

Recommendations:

- Provision of some seats with arms in strategic locations for the elderly and less able as the design of all seating (without arms), may not adequately meet their needs.
- Provision of seating near play areas so grandparents and carers can sit comfortably while they supervise children.
- Low seating for younger children to be able to use independently
- Include sensory play elements such as musical instruments and scented plantings in the surrounding garden area to engage children with visual or sensor impairment
Unless provided in the public amenities there appears to be no provision of baby change and breastfeeding facilities. We recommend provision of baby change and breastfeeding facilities near or within the playground area.

NSLHD Health Promotion appreciates this opportunity to provide comment and would welcome other opportunities to collaborate with Council to promote healthy environments in the Ku-ring-gai Council.

For further information about this submission, please contact Kylie Tekell on Phone 8877 5329 or Email kylie.tekell@health.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Dumbrell
Health Promotion Officer - Public Health Nutritionist

Kylie Tekell
Health Promotion Officer – Healthy Ageing Active Living
References