3 March 2023

**Submission to ACT Planning System Review**

**Community Feedback Summary**

As the Member for Murrumbidgee, I have made a submission to the ACT Government’s planning system review.

I call on the review to consider in their draft district strategy the Woden Valley community’s desire to maintain the Phillip Pool site as a key community facility.

From January 19th – February 2nd, 2023, I undertook consultation with Murrumbidgee residents regarding the Phillip Pool. The survey received 127 respondents.

**Background**

The future of Phillip Pool has been of increasing concern over the last few years to Murrumbidgee residents.

The situation developed further in early 2023 when Geocon purchased the site. The current lease conditions stand, and the pool must be re-opened. Geocon have confirmed that they will continue to operate the ice rink and pool.

If, down the track, development was progressed on the site, it would be subject to lease conditions. I wanted to provide input from the community directly to the current ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project on what the community views as the type of facility they would like to see for Woden Valley. This document is a summary of the feedback I have received from the community regarding the future of Philip Pool.

**Summary of responses**

Responses from the Phillip pool survey overwhelmingly indicate the Woden Valley community’s commitment to retaining and improving Phillip pool. All of the 127 respondents strongly support the maintenance of a pool in Phillip.

*“Philip pool has been an important part of the local community facilities for the over 30 years I have lived in the Woden area.” – Phillip resident*

Throughout the survey responses residents reiterated the importance of a swimming facility as essential for both physical and mental health, especially for those who can no longer walk either at all or long distances.

*“Being able to swim recreationally has been recognised a vital physical and mental health aid for seniors who can’t walk as a means of exercise” – Weston Creek resident*

**-** **A space for community building**

Residents recognise a swimming pool as a space for community building and cohesion, which is especially important after COVID19 lockdowns where people were separated from community support for long periods of time.

*“This pool is a great asset to the community encouraging exercise and active lifestyles, learning opportunity for water safety and swimming, and fosters friendships through common interests.” – Phillip resident*

*“We critically need a 50 m pool in our local area for young families, teenagers, elderly and those of us who want to stay fit and connected with others while exercising.” – Phillip resident*

**-** **Toddler pool**

Survey responses indicate primary community priorities for the site, among which are the inclusion of a toddler pool, which 75% of respondents viewed as “very important” or “somewhat important.” Additional comments indicate that young families make great use of such facilities.

**-** **Pool length and type**

An overwhelming number of respondents expressed their desire to retain the current 50m length of the pool. Just 7 respondents, or 5% of responses indicated their wish for a 25m pool.

There lacks a community consensus on the type of pool preferred on site. Responses indicate retaining the site as an outdoor pool is generally preferred with 47% indicating this, though almost as many, around 38%, would like to see the site transformed into an indoor venue. This survey question uniquely had the highest number of “both” responses, constituting around 15%.

**-** **Swimming lessons**

Many constituents indicated that access to swimming facilities and swimming lessons was of a vital importance both culturally and for safety reasons.

*“Access to swimming amenities and learn to swim services are a vital community aspect of community safety, health and wellbeing.” – Murrumbidgee resident, 2023*

*“Access to a facility that offers swimming lessons to the wider community. This is especially important when taking into account the record number of drownings around our country over the summer of 2022/2023.” – Weston Creek resident, 2023*

**-** **Amenities**

Among community concerns provided in the comments section is access to free, adequate parking and learn to swim services provided at the pool site. As well as the inclusion of modernised shower/changing facilities and the retention of green space on site.

A common theme expressed in community responses is the incorporation of an age-friendly hydrotherapy pool, sauna and spa, and the inclusion of adequate safety measures by management for pool-users of all ages.

Access to a hydrotherapy pool was of particular importance to persons 50+ and those who stated they were recovering from injuries.

*“A heated pool where those with injuries or arthritis etc can walk and regain mobility, strength and flexibility.” – Garran resident*

*“We need indoor spaces with the climate in Canberra. Woden is changing- older community with need for hydro[therapy].” – Weston Creek resident*

**-** **Communication with residents**

Of chief concern to all respondents is the clear communication regarding the use of the site. Pool users consistently commented they feel left in the dark regarding the closure and uncertain future of the site and would like clearer messaging. I would like to request that GEOCON and where possible the ACT Government works to ensure that Murrumbidgee residents are informed of any future changes to the Phillip pool.

**Conclusion**

It’s of vital importance to the local community that there is a pool in the Woden are that is an accessible and open community facility.

The new ACT Planning System should take into account the community’s desire to retain a public pool in their local community and ensure the future of the site in the Territory Plan and Woden Valley district plan reflects this.



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3 March 2023