



Submission on the Carrara Park play area upgrade

This submission is from the Newtown Residents' Association.

Introduction

The Newtown Residents' Association is the Incorporated Society representing the people of Newtown and its surrounding suburbs. We are an active local group of residents, working and business people, concerned with maintaining and improving our area's liveability, connectedness and sustainability and working to make our community a thriving, diverse, great place to live.

Carrara Park – a Community Play Space

Carrara Park is very important to our Association. In the 1980s and early 1990s our members were very involved in lobbying for its establishment, and in the process which led to its current design. Carrara Park was created to host casual outdoor play and recreation for a densely built up part of the city, and it is still the only play space of its kind in Newtown and the surrounding suburbs.

Carrara Park was originally designed through a series of public participatory design workshops, and then the design was implemented by Wellington City Council staff. In discussions about the current upgrade we have been assured that after this information-gathering stage there will be meetings involving local stakeholders to discuss the various proposals. We trust that there will be a co-design process to reach the final plans, and we look forward to being involved with this.

The Position of the Playground

We understand that the playground needs to be moved because of the impact of the roots of the Norfolk pine trees on the play equipment.

We advocate for moving it as little as possible because, as outlined below, the open space should stay open. In addition the current position is suitable because it is mostly sunny, with just dappled shade from nearby trees, while some other areas are damp and deeply shaded.

The Play Equipment

We understand that there are aspects of the current play equipment which do not meet current safety standards, and that the equipment needs to be replaced.

One of the benefits of the current equipment is that large groups of children can use it at the same time. In Carrara Park there are many times when a number of children are there together; it is the playground for the families in the Regent Park Apartments across the road and also used by groups from local child care centres, school holiday programmes and so on. At times there are concerts, sports, games and other events in the Park, and then attendees' children swarm over the climbing frame.

We recommend that the new playground replicates the current one in its ability to accommodate a lot of users, and in its adventurous and challenging qualities. This isn't to say that there shouldn't be additions. More swings would be welcome, and some more options for small children. We would welcome exciting new equipment to add to the mix.

The Open Space

The large area of open space is very important to the users of Carrara Park. There is no other flat grassy space anywhere in Newtown and the surrounding suburbs which is available for informal play and for community events. Other parks and reserves are sports grounds, or are on a slope, like Mercy Park or the wild and undulating Town Belt. Some sports grounds which were once open to the community, like Martin Luckie Park, are increasingly allocated to the exclusive use of sporting codes and unavailable for casual play.

We want to make sure that this area in Carrara Park is protected. The grass surface needs to be of good quality, and the drain cover that is currently a trip and serious injury hazard because it sits up higher than the rest of the area should be made safe, buried or padded. There might be some other welcome enhancements, for instance supports to erect a net for volley ball. Apart from this we don't need the open space developed further, and we will object to any proposal that encroaches on it - such as the Wellington City Council concept plan that moves the playground into this area.

The Asphalt Area

This area is extremely valuable and versatile, and allows the Park to be used for a range of activities even when the grassy area is wet and boggy. The feedback form for this engagement says that the asphalt is unsuitable for ball sports because of noise issues, but this was only true when there was a basketball hoop and a backboard – the hoop made a clanging noise as the ball dropped into it. Other sports do not cause these problems. For instance the hard surface and surrounding walls make a good contained area where a game of backyard cricket can be played with only a few participants. There has been a suggestion of installing a retractable tennis net, similar to one available in Evans Bay, and this and other creative proposals should be considered during the detailed design phase.

A Picnic Area

There are many areas under the trees which are attractive for picnics. The addition of facilities such as gas operated BBQs, tables and extra seats would be very welcome. The positioning of these should be discussed during the next phase of developing detailed designs for the Park as a whole.

Public Toilets

There is a lot of interest in the question of public toilets in the Park. We know that this is not included in this project, but want to let you know that we are planning to gather opinions from as many stakeholders as we can get hold of, and make a separate submission to Council about this topic.

In Conclusion

This project, which will determine the future of Carrara Park for many years to come, is important and exciting. We are expecting the Wellington City Council designer to work closely with Park users on a plan for the Park as a whole, a process which would mirror the way in which the Park was originally developed. We also expect the design to incorporate all the major elements without compromising the open playspace, which has always been such an essential aspect of Carrara Park.

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