

## 10.5. Community use of St Leonards Park - response to Council resolution

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<b>ENDORSED BY</b>	Gary Parsons, Director Open Space and Infrastructure
<b>ATTACHMENTS</b>	Nil
<b>CSP LINK</b>	<b>Outcome 3 – An active community with space for everyone to exercise and enjoy the outdoors</b> O2. Maximise the capacity of our existing open spaces and recreational facilities O4. Manage our open space and recreational facilities to ensure that they are well maintained and shared

### PURPOSE:

This report responds to the Council resolution of 10 February 2025 regarding the utilisation of St Leonards Park and the installation of promotional signage for Parkrun.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- St Leonards Park is listed on the NSW State Heritage Register as an item of State Significance.
- Proposed improvements within the park are to be considered in the context of the park's adopted Masterplan and Conservation Management Plan (CMP).
- Whilst most activities within St Leonards Park have remained at manageable levels, the use of the park by schools has significantly increased over the past two years. Much of this use is not formally booked.
- Staff have received complaints from park users in relation to the domination of space used by football codes when warming up prior to matches; Council staff are working to mitigate this issue through the designation of areas for this practice.
- Whilst Council is managing the physical maintenance of the park within existing resource and budget allocations, structured group activities have occasionally led to conflicts over shared spaces.
- Council first gave approval for Parkrun to operate in St Leonards Park in September 2017. The event operates on an annual approval basis and is currently averaging around 400 participants per week.
- The installation of permanent promotional signage would contravene the provisions within the CMP in relation to signage, however the promotion of the event through Council's media channels is proposed as an alternative.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**1. THAT** Council note the contents of this report in relation to the utilisation of St Leonards Park and the installation of promotional signage for Parkrun.

**2. THAT** Council note that Council's Customer and Communications team will seek to include the promotion of Parkrun through its existing media and marketing channels.

## Background

At its meeting of 10 February 2025, Council resolved:

- 1. THAT Council prepare a report analysing the extent of usage of St Leonards Park by community groups, fitness groups and other users, including but not limited to ParkRun.*
- 2. THAT the report include the impacts on the park through the increasing usage, park maintenance, other users and surrounding residents.*
- 3. THAT the report include the cost of the signage and other support proposed by the original notice of motion.*

This report responds to the above resolution.

St Leonards Park (SLP), a 15-hectare urban park originally established in the 19th century, is one of North Sydney's largest and best-loved parks, offering a welcoming environment for play, relaxation, and socialising.

The Park is listed on the State Heritage Register as an item of State Significance and has been identified *'as a rare and representative example of a largely intact Victorian era park designed in the gardenesque style with its original layout still appreciable'*.

In 2013 a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was prepared for the Park by Godden Mackay Logan Heritage Consultants. The CMP provides conservation policies and actions to guide the future conservation, management, and interpretation of the heritage significance of St Leonards Park. The policies and actions listed in the CMP were incorporated into the preparation of the Landscape Master Plan 2018 (LMP). The LMP manages the character and heritage of the park and explores various methods for presenting information. The LMP notes that *"Any signage should be low-key and visually unobtrusive"*.

The range of recreation opportunities that SLP offers, along with its popularity and the diminishing public open space within the North Sydney Local Government Area (LGA), means the park is subject to many pressures.

## Report

### Extent of Usage

Currently groups of fewer than 60 people can use these areas on a first-come, first-served basis, with no booking requirements or fees. Parts of the park can be used for private functions and special events. Permission is granted at Council's discretion, with factors including the size of the proposed function, the area remaining for public use, and the likely impact of the event on the park and adjoining neighbours. Council records indicate 12 formal 'park' bookings outside of sporting groups and schools for SLP in the 2024/25 financial year.

The park's open lawns are extremely popular for picnicking and the gathering of small groups, particularly in the warmer months, and the playground, which was completed in 2022, is extremely popular with young families.

SLP is popular with walkers and joggers, with peak periods in the morning and afternoon. Observations indicate that these numbers are constant and remain manageable. Generally, joggers stay on the paths and therefore do not greatly impact on turfed areas or landscaped areas.

Use of the park by fitness trainers is consistent, averaging in the order of three - four per day, which has decreased since COVID. Fitness trainers are required to comply with Council's [Outdoor Fitness Code of Conduct](#), which outlines guidelines to ensure that fitness trainers and others involved in these activities do not have a significant negative impact on other park users and neighbours. There is general compliance with the Guidelines and impacts are negligible.

Park staff have reported an increase in dogs in parks across the LGA. The compulsory acquisition of a significant portion of SLP for the Western Harbour Tunnel project, which was previously used by people exercising dogs, has exacerbated this situation in SLP. Reported incidents between people and dogs remain low but continue to be monitored.

SLP has also seen an increase in the number of cyclists travelling through the park between Ridge and Falcon Streets. Conflicts between cyclist and pedestrians have arisen and Council has installed signage to remind cyclists of the shared nature of the path within the park. Ideally, existing road space would be adjusted to accommodate the increasing number of bicycle commuters, which would reduce this conflict.

Active sports areas such as Bon Andrews Oval, the basketball/netball/pickleball courts, the synthetic cricket wicket, and the cricket practice nets, cater for local and regional users. Council carefully regulates use of these facilities by hirers, as rising participation in sport places ever-increasing demand on them. While the primary use of sportsgrounds or courts is to cater for organised sport, at other times (when these facilities are not booked) they may be used by the general community for informal sports, exercise, and games.

Staff have received complaints from park users in relation to the domination of space used by the football codes when warming up on the weekends prior to games at Bon Andrews and North Sydney Ovals. Park staff and North Sydney Oval staff are working with the clubs to designate areas to minimise their impacts on other park users through the designation of areas.

SLP has experienced a substantial increase in usage over the past 12–24 months by schools, particularly nearby schools such as Marist, Wenona, and North Sydney Boys High School. Additionally, the newly established school Reddam House on McLaren Street North Sydney has shown significant interest in utilising the park for its students.

Between October and November 2024, Council staff observed school usage of St Leonards Park over a month. Marist College was the most frequent user, with students engaging in various activities throughout the day. These included organised sports such as soccer, volleyball, touch football, and frisbee, as well as playground use and free time during morning tea and lunch. During school hours, between 40 and 200 students were present in the park, with estimates suggesting over 500 students (throughout the entire day) on the busiest days.

With the exception of cross-country carnivals, most of these activities were not formally booked, meaning Council is not receiving income to contribute to the required maintenance and renewal of St Leonards Park, which is borne by ratepayers.

Council records indicates that the hard surface courts are booked for activities such as basketball, netball, and pickleball on an average of 4-6 hours per day, and cricket practice nets used between 12-20 hours per week. SLP is also the venue for Council's Sunset Series, a free series of free outdoor concerts.

### Impact of Increased Use

Whilst Council manages to maintain SLP within existing resource and budget allocations, the rise in structured group activities, particularly with schools, has occasionally led to space congestion, limiting access for casual park users. Recreational users have reported conflicts over shared spaces with larger organised groups. The use by larger groups, which tend to have greater noise levels, have increased, which can impact on nearby residents and the experience of other visitors seeking a peaceful environment.

### Maintenance

Council's Public Presentation team manages the maintenance of the SLP. A team attend the site for two – three hours each morning to undertake general maintenance works. Playground maintenance is performed on a two-weekly basis. Mowing and turf management is undertaken on a weekly basis for sports field areas and every two weeks for other areas, season dependent. Garbage bins are emptied each day, and spare dog litter bags are scheduled to be replenished on a weekly basis.

### Parkrun

Parkrun is a free community event, which takes place between 7.30am to 9.30am every Saturday at St Leonards Park, in which participants can walk, jog, or run a five-kilometre circuit.

Council first gave approval for Parkrun to operate in St Leonards Park in September 2017, with the event initially averaging around 100 participants a week. Since then, participation and volunteer numbers have steadily increased and is currently averaging around 400 participants per week.

North Sydney Council issues an annual approval permit to Parkrun for the use of its hard surface pathways through SLP, without charge, which equates to a subsidy of \$300-\$500 per week.

Parkrun is popular throughout Australia, and in other local Government areas specific parkrun signage has been installed to help promote the activity through the community. Some examples of this signage is included on the next page. Such signs are estimated to cost in the order of \$5,000-\$7,000 dollars each.



The park's Landscape Management Plan has been informed by the policies and actions listed in the Conservation Management Plan, which specifically notes that "Any signage should be low-key and visually unobtrusive". The installation of permanent promotional signage would contravene these documents. Council is also be unable to fund the supply and installation of this signage within current available resources.

A preferred alternative would be to promote the local Parkrun event through Council's media channels coordinated by its Communications and Marketing team. This may include advertising in bus shelters, on community notice boards, and in social media.

### **Consultation requirements**

No formal community engagement has been undertaken to inform the recommendations of this report.

### **Financial/Resource Implications**

Adopting the recommendations of this report has no funding implications for Council.

### **Legislation**

— NSW State Heritage Act 1977