

INSIDE

Master Plan – Mental Health – Bay Run

MASTER PLAN –
COUNCIL
BEGINS THE
PROCESS

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT CALLAN PARK?

Friends of Callan Park Newsletter • April 2010

CALLAN PARK MASTER PLAN: BY THE END OF 2010?

Leichhardt Council has begun advertising for consultants to coordinate the drawing up the Master Plan for Callan Park.

Already more than 40 consulting firms have expressed interest in what will be the contract of the year for planning firms. Callan Park, after all, is one of Sydney's iconic sites.

The final Master Plan will lay down what is to happen in Callan Park in the next decades.

The consultants will be expected to research the site and its possibilities, and to come up with options for its future. The public will have the opportunity to respond to those alternative scenarios before Council adopts the final version. The Mayor is aiming for these options to be on public exhibition before the end of the year.

At this stage Council has budgeted to contribute \$250,000 to the cost of the master planning. It is pressing the state government to come up with half of the final costing. Given that the site is still owned by the state government – and that in other “sites of state significance”, the state government stumps up the total cost of master plans – this is clearly a reasonable (or even generous) position that Council has taken.

– Hall Greenland

PETITION...

If you want to press Verity Firth, the current Member of Parliament for Balmain, on this issue, please sign our petition.

WHAT YOU CAN DO...

You can also write or email Verity Firth MP at 112A Glebe Point Road, Glebe 2037 or balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au

MENTAL HEALTH BACK IN THE NEWS AND CALLAN PARK IS STILL ON THE AGENDA

Faced with the fact that thousands of people are in jail or homeless because they have a serious (but treatable) mental illness ... And that far too many of them will take their own lives without proper hospital treatment and community support ...

The Friends of Callan Park favour the return of a psychiatric hospital – or more precisely, the establishment of a centre of mental health excellence in Callan Park.

Such a restored mental health facility or centre would:

- **combine treatment of non-acute patients with research and training**
- **take immediate advantage of the 1990s and 1960s cottage style wards in Callan Park (they are currently vacant)**
- **enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of Callan Park (which has proven therapeutic value)**
- **pioneer new treatments**
- **be open to the community**
- **offer day facilities for people living in the community.**

Australian-of-the-Year and mental health reformer, Professor Patrick McGorry, doesn't necessarily completely agree with all of this concept, but says "I have an open mind".

Professor McGorry wrote to us recently to say: "I do not think we should have large concentrations of beds on a single site. We need smaller

havens for acute care and then community based beds for supported living. I think Callan Park could be used for a range of community-focused activities in mental health and include educational and research programs as well as well-being programs ... My main concern is for scaling up of investment in services for people with mental ill health at all stages and especially in adolescents and emerging adults."

Professor McGorry has promised to visit later this year.

Inspired by the sad revelations in the recent Insight television program into the mental health crisis and featuring Professor McGorry, the Friends have been lobbying Members of Parliament from all sides of politics about the need to restore the hospital or major mental health services to Callan Park.

We've already seen Sylvia Hale from the Greens, Kevin Humphries from the Nationals, Rob Stokes and Brad Hazzard from the Liberals (both opposition frontbenchers concerned with mental health and planning). We've also had a meeting with the cross-bench MPs from the Upper House (including the Reverends Nile and Moyes). We are now pursuing a meeting with minister assisting for mental health Barbara Perry (Labor).

The Friends haven't given up on the Rudd Labor government either. Callan Park is in the electorate of Anthony Albanese, minister for infrastructure, and on the border of the seat held by Tanya Plibersek, minister for housing and responsible for homeless people programs. As you may know, one survey found that 75% of homeless people in inner-Sydney suffer from a mental illness.

If these politicians are serious about tackling homelessness, then Callan Park offers the facilities to heal people with a mental illness who now find themselves cast out onto the streets. And if the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is serious about health reform, how can he overlook the tragic under-funding of mental health in Australia?

The planning for the future of Callan Park is about to begin. The Friends will be putting up ideas for the re-commissioning of the mental health buildings during that planning process.

There is no reason why Callan Park's future cannot encompass mental health, educational and community uses combined with glorious parkland for all.

- Roger Parkes & Hall Greenland for Friends of Callan Park

- Australian-of-the-Year Patrick McGorry agrees to visit

- Professor Vaughan Carr joins the fray for balanced mental health system (see reprint in this newsletter)

- MPs lobbied

DON'T CONDEMN PATIENTS TO PARK BENCH OR PRISON

Our dangerously inadequate system of psychiatric care in hospitals and in the community is in dire need of a thorough restructure

VAUGHAN J. CARR

WHO cares about acute psychiatric beds? Nobody apparently. That is, nobody does until they need one.

When relatives or friends become so severely mentally unwell that they can no longer take care of themselves and neither families nor community mental health teams can look after them, a hospital bed is an absolute necessity.

When someone is so deluded that the real world turns on them with hostility, when they are so disorganised or aggressive that they are a danger to themselves or others, and when they are at risk of taking their own lives, a hospital bed can be life-saving.

But acute psychiatric beds in Australia are in short supply and chances are that when such a bed is needed none will be available. Why is this? Why is it that across Australia acute psychiatric beds are constantly full so that many who require urgent admission are turned away or have to wait for unacceptably long periods when they are severely ill?

Psychiatric bed numbers in Australia have decreased by 80 per cent over the past 40 or so years, during which time the population of the country has doubled. Australia now has one of the lowest numbers of psychiatric beds per capita in the developed world, at about 60 per cent of the level recommended by experts.

Bed reductions accelerated when health planners saw new developments in community mental health care as a sign that hospitals were becoming unnecessary, since people with severe mental illness could be treated in their homes instead. Money was saved by closing beds, but the savings were not redirected sufficiently towards community services and supported housing.

This policy overlooked the fact that many patients were too ill to be treated in the community, and home-based treatments did not work for everyone, especially those who didn't have homes or whose families were unable to care for them.

The consequences of this catastrophic reduction in acute psychiatric beds have been high rates of psychiatric illness among

the homeless and the prison population. Another important consequence is that the atmosphere in many of our crowded, overworked and stressed psychiatric inpatient units resembles that in badly run menageries.

High rates of aggression and loud and demanding behaviours have become commonplace.

Among such clamour there is constant pressure to discharge patients prematurely to make room for new admissions, leading to high rates of early readmission when treatment in the community inevitably collapses.

It is almost impossible to maintain a therapeutic environment under such conditions and treat the high proportion of involuntary patients, many of whom have complex needs requiring carefully considered, expert assessment.

The atmosphere in many of our overworked and crowded psychiatric inpatient units resembles badly run menageries

Yet the units are understaffed and patients are under the care of the most junior and inexperienced doctors working with insufficient supervision.

The neglect of hospital-based care has led to substandard facilities, and even new units are often poorly designed, with insufficient provision for privacy, recreational space and therapeutic activities. This sends a message that psychiatric patients are not deserving of respect and consideration, and they act accordingly.

On the other hand, well-designed, humane hospital environments are inherently respectful of patients, who are then more likely to behave civilly as a consequence.

It is not, however, just a question of numbers, quality or distribution of acute psychiatric beds. Many hospital admissions can be averted by comprehensive, high quality community-based care and treatment, adequate levels of supported housing, assertive com-

munity case management and soundly based rehabilitation with supported employment programs. But Australia's investment in these services has been inadequate.

When such services of good quality are readily available, then hospital admission becomes much less likely.

But when hospitalisation does become necessary, these community services enable early discharge and successful return to the community, thus averting the access block caused by having nowhere to discharge patients to.

Unfortunately, since these services are insufficiently developed in Australia, the pressure builds up in the hospitals and the inevitable casualties spill into the streets and prisons.

The problem is thus twofold. There are not enough beds because we have gone too far with our bed closures. There are not enough community mental health services to help prevent admissions in the first place, or to provide ongoing community-based support, treatment and rehabilitation, without which the park bench and the prison become the alternatives to the hospital bed.

It is time for a root-and-branch reform of Australia's mental health system. The problems with the system have been well known for far too long as dozens of reports attesting to the inadequacies of mental health care have gathered dust in government archives across the country. We are past the point where piecemeal change and unco-ordinated partial reforms can deliver the change that is needed. Australia needs a comprehensive restructure of its mental healthcare system now. This must include co-ordinated expansion of hospital-based facilities and community-based services. One without the other will fail.

Vaughan J. Carr is a professor in the school of psychiatry at the University of NSW, based at St Vincent's Hospital, and chief executive of the Schizophrenia Research Institute.

www.schizophrenia-research.org.au



BAY RUN: IT'S TIME

The attempts at cost shifting by the state government seem to have no end. Lately the current local MP for Balmain, Verity Firth, is calling on Leichhardt Council to fund half the cost of upgrading the Bay Run along the Callan Park foreshore (it would involve a cost to Council of \$250,000-300,000).

Back in 2006 the state government was going to pay the whole amount – shared between NSW Health and the Department of Planning. NSW Health actually submitted the Development Application.

Now with the state election looming, the local MP is pressing the Leichhardt Council (and Jamie Parker, the Green Mayor and likely challenger to Verity Firth) for half the money. But to gain any credibility from this issue, it's necessary for the local member to convince the government to stump up the money.

The Bay Run upgrade was promised in 2006 – by the state government. 2010 is time to deliver.

CONTAMINATION: REPORT PROMISED SOON

The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (which is managing Callan Park at present) has promised to release the investigation into contamination at Callan Park as soon as the report is completed.

The basic on-site investigations were done last September. The Council called for a full investigation after earlier spot checks revealed “hot spots” on the site. The contamination has apparently been caused by the burying and burning of hospital wastes last century, the storage of fuel and the infill of foreshore areas with building and other waste materials.

COUNCIL TAKEOVER OF CALLAN PARK?

Negotiations on the state government's offer of 41 hectares of Callan Park's 61 hectares to Leichhardt Council continue. The advantage of Council taking up this offer is that it would offer one more layer of protection for Callan Park.

However, the government did not offer a draft agreement until September last year and for the past six months the negotiations have stalled on the question of money.

The state government is offering Council \$2.4 million – or what it would spend on maintenance between now and mid-2011. From that point onwards, the state government would be financially responsible for only its third of the site.

Basically the Council doesn't want the state government to be able to walk away from the rest of the site without taking responsibility for protection of the heritage buildings on site, cleaning up any contamination and bringing the infrastructure up to reasonable standard. In other words, the Council doesn't want to sign up for the proverbial “pig in the poke” as far as costs are concerned.

KEEP UP TO DATE BY VISITING OUR WEBSITE: WWW.CALLANPARK.COM



LIKE TO JOIN FRIENDS OF CALLAN PARK?

It's easy, just fill out the form below and send it and \$20 to FOCP, 17 North Ave, Leichhardt NSW 2040. We welcome new members. Cheques or postal orders should be made out to Friends of Callan Park. Or come to one of our monthly meetings

Name

Address

Email



FOCP monthly meetings: Monday, April 12, 7pm AND Monday, May 3, 7pm. All meetings at the NSW Writers' Centre within Callan Park – follow the signs from the main gates at Cecily Street. Anyone interested in Callan Park is welcome. More information: 0408 643 786.