KenSINgTON Community Recreation Centre Redevelopment

Community Engagement Summary Phase 2

Executive summary

**Overview**

The City of Melbourne is committed to redeveloping the Kensington Community Recreation Centre to improve its facilities for the local community. In planning for the redevelopment, Council has undertaken two phases of engagement with the community to ensure community needs and interests are reflected in the new centre. This report outlines findings from the second phase of community engagement, held from 2 September to 4 October 2019. This phase sought feedback on draft concept designs for the Kensington Community Recreation Centre. Feedback was gathered online through Participate Melbourne, through face-to-face sessions, and from specific consultation activities with children and young people.

Overall the responses showed a strong understanding of the need and support for the centre to be redeveloped. Most respondents described specific programs, building features or aspects about the character of the facility in their responses. There were also queries about how programs might be continued during construction. Strong views were expressed by respondents who may not be able to access specific activities in the proposed new facility.

**1. Background and methodology**

The City of Melbourne is committed to redeveloping the Kensington Community Recreation Centre to improve its facilities for the local community. The existing recreation centre has served the Kensington community since 1976 and needs to be replaced to help meet the diverse community's needs, while ensuring it remains affordable and accessible for all users.

Community engagement was undertaken earlier in 2019 to inform the development of the concept design for the new centre. The engagement sought to understand what people value about the centre and their thoughts on what could be provided. This information was combined with a range of other project components including:

* the physical attributes of the site,
* the land available and constraints on the site,
* knowledge of existing levels of use, recreation needs and demand for recreation facilities,
* proximity of other services in the area,
* business case models for future management and viability of the centre,
* budget available and
* best practice environmental initiatives in aquatic and recreation centre development.

All of these project details combined to inform the development of the concept plan.

**2. Two phases of community engagement**

During 2019, two phases of community engagement have gathered community input and feedback for the redevelopment.

**Phase 1 engagement**

The first phase was conducted from 29 January to 1 March 2019. It gathered information about what people value about the current Kensington Community Recreation Centre, their thoughts on what should be considered in the redevelopment, identifying the services and facilities people would like to see, and examine the needs of current and future users.

Over 420 people provided feedback. Key themes from this consultation showed the community would like:

* more recreation and fitness programs,
* a larger gym, more group fitness rooms, additional multi-purpose courts, and a café,
* more flexible spaces that can accommodate a variety of community uses,
* improvements to the pool, including more lanes and water play features for children,
* environmentally sustainable design,
* better integration with JJ Holland Park, and
* improvements to the overall building condition, including change rooms.

**Phase 2 – Feedback on Concept Design**

The second phase of community engagement was held from 2 September to 4 October 2019. The engagement sought feedback on the concept design for the Kensington Community Recreation Centre redevelopment. The engagement introduced the concept design with a “fly through” visual which could be viewed on the Participate Melbourne website. The fly through was designed to make the proposed concept design, over multiple levels, easier for people to understand. This was also available to view at the centre at an interactive display and stand set-up during the consultation period, and shown at information sessions.

The consultation approach was qualitative. Attention was given to creating opportunities for feedback in a number of ways. There were also multiple opportunities for people to meet members of the project team where they could discuss elements of the concept design in more detail and raise more specific questions and points for consideration.

People were invited to provide feedback by:

* Filling in a survey on the Participate Melbourne website;
* Attending one of two information sessions; and /or
* Speaking with members of the project team at one of three drop in sessions.

Feedback was also gathered at two community meetings with the Kensington Community Network and the Kensington Association, and a session with English as a Second Language students at the Kensington Neighbourhood House. Separate consultation with children and young people was facilitated through sessions with the Kensington Community Children’s Cooperative and the Venny and The Drum.

The invitation to participate in the community engagement was promoted by the City of Melbourne through a range of mediums. This included:

* Postcards were distributed to 6500 households and businesses in adjacent areas of Kensington. Posters were also distributed to businesses, community facilities and displayed throughout the JJ Holland Park.
* The City of Melbourne website directed people to the Participate Melbourne website.
* Emails to members, agencies and people who had registered interest in the project;
* Promotion through City of Melbourne social media channels with Facebook posts promoting the engagement reaching over 15000 people and Instagram more than 60,000 impressions.

Overall, 146 people provided individual responses, primarily through Participate Melbourne. A number of community organisations provided verbal feedback through meetings attended by the project team. Over 30 people gave feedback through information sessions and drop in discussions. Many children and 40 young people were consulted as part of dedicated sessions during the engagement.

The project page on the Participate Melbourne website was viewed by 3047 people during the consultation period, indicating a good awareness of the project consultation.

**3. Responses to the concept design**

Overall the responses showed a strong understanding of the need and support for the centre to be redeveloped. Most respondents gave the new concept design a 3, 4 or 5 score out of a total of 5 indicating a high level of support for the design.

Many respondents then described particular programs, building features or aspects about the character of the facility. For example, describing the importance of sustainability features in the new facility. There was support for provision of a café while some suggested a different location in the centre. Access to the facility, including car parking and bus drop off areas, also attracted many comments. There were some programs or services which are not provided that were requested, including a separate warm water pool, sauna and spa. A number of responses described the importance of good indoor / outdoor design and the interface with the park.

The responses have been grouped under the following themes:

**Swimming Pools and aquatic area**

The overall redevelopment of the pool area was supported by respondents, who agreed the centre, particularly the pool facilities, need updating.

A number of lap swimmers suggested one additional lane was not enough, concerned that there was not enough space at peak times (eg. early morning) and when other programs are being run in the pool. These comments acknowledged the need for separate lanes for fast swimmers and average or slow swimmers. Some lap swimmers requested an extension of the 25 metre pool up to 50 metres.

The capacity of the 25m pool to cater for future use and a growing population was also raised by a few respondents who participate in pool programs and lap swimmers. Other points relating to the lap swimming and program use of the pool were about optimum water temperature for the different activities, and maintaining a warm temperature in the area.

Some respondents requested provision of a separate warm water pool to support physical therapy, with a few more specifically asking for a spa and sauna. A few respondents described that they liked the indoor / outdoor potential at the current pool and saw this as a family focused space. A few requested provision of an outdoor pool. A few parents of learn to swim participants described the need for adequate space for parents to watch the program.

There was support for provision of water play, with comments reflecting the number of young families in the area and the facility as a destination for the local community. A number of respondents suggested the water play component should be separate from the other pools, and a few commented that water play could feature both inside and outside.

Children described a number of things they would like including slides of different sizes, opportunities to climb and jump into the water, and to provide squirters and sinkers at the new pool. (These are described in more detail in the consultation with children section of this report).

There were also requests for a major water play park including large water slides and more significant aquatic facilities such as deeper pools for water polo, and those which could host competition. Other suggestions included hot soak and ice soak pools.

Pool users made a few comments about adequate space in wet area change rooms for showers, and suggestions for hair dryers and heated floors. Other more general change room comments included provision of child sized amenities, the need for separate facilities for school groups to change, more family change rooms and well ventilated change rooms.

One respondent requested retaining the decorative eels above the pool in the new facility.

**Gym**

A number of comments were provided about the importance of a larger gym, with well- resourced equipment, mirrors and also including space for stretching. A few respondents queried if a 24/7 access gym would be provided. There were also a few requests for an outdoor gym area, as this is currently provided. A few respondents were positive about the location overlooking the park, although some were concerned the upstairs location could make the gym warmer and limit the number of machine the space could support.

**Multi-purpose courts**

Many respondents were very supportive of the provision of three multi-purpose courts, with a few asking for more or questioning the need for three courts. Responses included the high demand for netball and basketball, with a few comments about other sports including indoor hockey, table tennis and badminton. Adjustable height rings would support younger children’s competitions. Provision of nets between courts would reduce issues with balls going into adjacent games. Storage to facilitate multi- purpose use is important. A request was made to enable screening for one court to allow a women’s only basketball program to continue to be run in a culturally appropriate way.

A number of respondents raised concern that futsal may not be provided as an activity in the multi-purpose courts. They described the important social, physical and community benefits they gained through participating in the sport and how they wanted to continue the activity. They suggested that concern about damage to the stadium from the sport could be resolved by different design solutions such as nets and durable material on the walls. A few suggested that one court should be dedicated to the activity.

A few respondents who currently use the facility raised questions about access to book courts in the future, particularly for smaller local community groups.

**Café**

There was interest and support for the provision of a café at the centre. Some respondents questioned the location, indicating it could be better located with access to the park as well as serving the recreation centre. The need for access to the café without leaving the aquatic area was raised. One respondent suggested placing café tables along the Altona Street edge of the facility.

**Multi-purpose rooms**

There was support for the provision of a number of multi-purpose rooms and a level of appreciation for the range of different programs (or bookings) they might support, especially group class activities such as pilates, dance, aerobics and spin. A few respondents requested ways to provide more ‘atmosphere’ in the rooms, particularly for the health and wellness activities such as yoga.

Another suggested peaceful rooms overlooking the park for yoga, pilates and personal exercising.

The size of rooms is important to support the number of participants for activities, as is the size and location of storage areas. Mirrors for technique correction were also useful. One person requested windows that could be opened in the room rather than reliance on air conditioning.

Good acoustic treatment throughout the centre was raised to support multi-purpose use.

**Programs and Services**

Many respondents asked about provision of programs in the multi-purpose courts and rooms. There was also a question about future fees for programs and the hope that they would remain affordable and for different payment options. A few respondents queried where the toy library would be relocated to. Some new program suggestions made during consultation included provision of artistic and creative activities as well as sport, and dance for different cultures and genders, aboriginal dance, Tai Chi, creative dance for kids, and African dance. A stage for performances to support this was suggested. A mini library or reading area was also suggested, along with a communal or social area for people to interact with other users at the centre. Some respondents felt that occasional childcare should be available at the centre for users with young children who want to use facilities such as the pool or gym.

One respondent suggested including some allied health services in the facility such as a physiotherapist.

**Car parking and access to the centre**

Many respondents raised concern about the capacity of car parking in the local area, particularly at peak times. Comments included that the parking is busy on weekend mornings when sport is also underway in Holland Park, swim lesson times and some popular program times. It was noted that when exams were held at the centre that parking was particularly in demand. Some respondents described commuter parking in the area, and the illegal use of private car parking by some centre visitors.

A few respondents suggested that with more courts and an upgraded facility there would be an increase in the number of people visiting the centre which would increase demand on car parking. They described congestion when people are looking for a car park.

A few respondents discussed the drop off / pick up arrangements at the centre, questioning the change of entry to Kensington Road. The comments included the need for safe access into the centre by children or young people who may be dropped off while a parent is looking for a car park, and the need for sheltered waiting areas for pick up. The preference for the drop off / pick up activity to be provided in Altona Street was described as the traffic lights into Kensington Road provides safer options for traffic to exit in either direction, although congestion at busy times was also raised. The need for design features to protect children from accessing Kensington road was also raised.

Other topics raised included the need for designated locations for school bus drop off / pick up, an adequate number of accessible car parks well linked to the entrance, and the location of the bus stop.

A number of respondents were supportive that no additional parking was proposed. There was support for provision of more bike racks, preferably in a secure or well supervised location. The provision of electric vehicle and e-bike charging stations was also suggested. Intuitive and good pedestrian links to the centre were important.

**Indoor / outdoor areas**

A number of respondents enquired if the current outdoor space would be retained, or made suggestions to increase the opportunities to either exercise outside or have water play features outside. Some of these proposed space to encourage longer family visits to the centre.

Some respondents would like additional sports facilities to be provided outside. An outdoor basketball court or half court was the most popular of these suggestions. Some highlighted they would like an outdoor grassed area for barbeques and picnics, and somewhere children can play. The current potential to open the centre walls to the outside space during good weather was raised by a few people. The outdoor area was seen as a valued community space, to be viewed and used.

**Environmental sustainable design and landscape**

There was strong support for energy efficient sustainable design and use initiatives in the centre. One respondent observed the importance of the green wall being well designed and constructed to ensure success. Another suggested investigating use of biochar as a building material. One respondent queried the waste treatment at the site.

Provision of more drink fountains throughout the centre was requested, to include taps at a child height. A charging station for electric bikes and scooters was suggested. “Real time” details of adjacent public transport could be displayed in the foyer (402 bus, South Kensington Station and Kensington station). One respondent urged that secure bike parking be considered at design phase, and that pram parking would support access by walking.

Adequate shade outside the building was raised, suggesting planting could assist with a noise barrier to Kensington Road. Protection of eucalypts adjacent to the centre was also raised.

A number of respondents described that they would like to see a good landscape interface with Holland Park. A two lane running track was suggested as an addition for the adjacent synthetic oval. Other suggestions for outside the centre included a basketball ring and climbing walls.

**Other questions and suggestions raised included:**

* There were many questions about what arrangements will be made during construction for current users of the facility.
* A few respondents described that it was important to retain the community centre character of the facility. It was “*not just a gym with a pool*”.
* Children especially highlighted many ideas related to bright colouring and patterns and pictures they would like to be incorporated into the new centre

**4. Consultation with children**

Feedback from children was facilitated by Kensington Community Children’s Cooperative (KCCC) staff. Children provided feedback with drawings, constructions and comments. A group of 5 year old children presented the feedback to the project team.

Some of the specific ideas and suggestions children raised included:

* A Jack in the Beanstalk slide
* A picture with lots of towels (folded, different and bright colours).
* An Aboriginal flag outside, something to recognise indigenous custodians of the land.
* “There needs to be solar panels on the roof, so we don’t have to use coal to make electricity”.
* Flower patterns around the building and real flowers.
* Lots of different shape windows – skinny, square and round.
* A bookshelf or a little library to read there.
* A patchwork carpet at the entrance.
* A bug café or bug hotel.

Some suggestions related to particular items:

* “The café could look outside so you can watch trees and nature. It could be convertible so you have wind in your hair. When it is sunny you can open it up and when it rains you close it. The café could connect to the pool, program rooms and entry. “
* “The pool could have squirters, sinkers and a swimming pool boat. It could have things you can take in and pack away. Something to climb and jump into the pool from. There could be a platform to stand on after you win a race, to be awarded a medal.”
* “There should be a baby pool and slide for babies. A long ladder to jump into the pool. A mummy and daddy slide, a 5 year olds slide and a baby slide. The adult one can be steep.”
* “Tiles could be green and blue, or with confetti colours.”

The children also talked about change rooms:

* A baby change room, a kids change room and grown up change room
* Toilets with buttons at the height a child can reach, and child height toilets.
* An adjustable shower in a sunny part of the change room.
* Decorative change rooms.

Children also described what it would look like, and what they would see or do there. Some of the things they described included artwork, a dinosaur, a big tooth tunnel, a swimming pool monster, a treasure map, a map of Australia on the floor, and a ladder up to another level.

**5. Consultation with young people**

A series of pop-up interviews and small group discussions at a bloc party supported engagement with young people at the Venny in Kensington in early October 2019.

Young people gave the following ideas and suggestions in response to the concept design:

* Would like access to community spaces where they could both participate in sporting activities and hang out with their friends and the community.
* Would like more trees around the centre, so they can play in natural surroundings.
* Everyone should feel welcome.
* The need for more fun lanes as well as lap lanes for swimming was important, as was a warm temperature. Places for parents and kids to sit was also important.
* Soccer, basketball and netball were the most frequently mentioned sports that young people expressed that they wanted to play. Other sports mentioned included volleyball, B-Ball, splatball, tennis and dodgeball.
* A games room was suggested as possible use of the flexible community spaces. Games that could be played include board games, PC consoles, X boxes and Ps5s.
* Other uses for the multi-purpose rooms include birthday parties.
* The need for a quiet room was also identified.
* The importance of being a space for kids, not just an adult space was described.

**6. Next steps**

The feedback from the community engagement has been analysed and reviewed by the project team. It has provided timely input to the finalisation of the schematic design for the new centre, where a number of facility elements were further assessed and edited.

There is much valuable detail embedded in the community responses which will continue to inform the design as it enters the next stage of the project which is the detailed design phase.

The project timing will be updated on the Participate Melbourne website when further information is available.