NAME  
ADDRESS  
Committee Member

Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholders Group

X February 2019

Ms. Michelle Carter

Active Travel Officer   
Northern Beaches Council

PO Box 82,

Manly NSW 1655

RE: Submission to the Draft Northern Beaches Walking Plan (Project No. 301 Soldiers Avenue)

Dear Ms. Carter,

As you may be aware, the Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholders Group is a not-for-profit volunteer organisation responsible for the restoration and revival of the last remaining, fully intact, Avenue of Honour in the Sydney Metropolitan Area. Soldiers Avenue of Honour along with Jacka Park also forms what is now known as the Freshwater Anzac Precinct and was declared a Community War Memorial by the NSW State Government in 2016.

For the reasons detailed below, I wish to make a formal submission (as a resident and as a Committee Member) that Council reconsider its intention to place the installation of a concrete footpath on the northern side of Soldiers Avenue, Freshwater (between Eric St and Oliver St) as a ‘medium priority’ rather than being included in the ‘Draft 2019/20 Program’.

*Background:*

* Sean Rout JP, Veteran, Executive of the Harbord RSL Sub-branch and Committee Member of the Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholder Group received an email from Nicki Adams (Executive Officer – Mayor and Councillors Office) dated 2 August 2018 rejecting a request to install of a footpath along the northern side of Soldiers Avenue.
* Council’s position at the time was set against both the heralded $3m increase for new footpaths announced on 27 July 2018 and the Centenary of Armistice Day on 11 November 2018. The footpath was scheduled to be an integral part of the lasting legacy from the Centenary of ANZAC commemoration (2014-2018), and to enable the installation of Footpath Memorial Plaques beside the heritage-listed trees of the Living Memorial.
* The Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholders Group responded to Nicki Adams in writing on 17 August 2018 requesting that Council reconsider its position on the refusal to install an 180m long concrete footpath on the northern side of Soldiers Avenue, Freshwater (between Eric St and Oliver St). The Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholders Group did not receive a formal response to this request. The points raised have been attached to the end of this submission.

*Comments on the Scoring Methodology:*

Project No. 301 Soldiers Avenue, Freshwater

*Attractions and Generators Score: 10/10*

*School Score: 8/10 | Revised Score: 10/10*

Comment: Based on the Northern Beaches Walking Plan (18 December 2018) a score of 10 should have been issued. St Johns the Baptist Catholic School is located 120m away from the proposed pathway. Harbord Kindergarten is also located 130m away. The requirement for a score of 10 is a school less than 250m away.

*Safety Score: 0/10 | Revised Score: 10/10*

Comment: Refer to Point 2 of this submission that refers to the current safety concerns on Soldiers Avenue. While Council’s score is based on the number of pedestrian-related crashes within 100m of the footpath collected by the RMS crash data, as a committee member of the Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholders Group, I believe it would be remiss of Council to ignore the anecdotal evidence of local residents. A long-term resident of Freshwater and Soldiers Avenue describes the current dirt trail as:

*“extremely dangerous with root hazards etc. forcing pedestrians to cross what has become a very dangerous road. Since all the new development in Freshwater, dodging the traffic in Soldiers is like playing Russian Roulette crossing this portion of the road, along with having to look out for the huge fast trucks tearing up and down and very heavy traffic both ways. We have a street full of young children running out between parked cars to get to the footpath after school. Once further development commences in Lawrence Street it will be horrific. The Council's reply to this would probably be that the street was quiet when inspected. IT IS NOT QUIET ALL THE TIME.”* (pers. comm., 27 January 2019).

*Hierarchy Score: 5/10 | Revised Score: 10/10*

Comment: Based on the Northern Beaches Walking Plan (18 December 2018) there no reference to how the Hierarch Score is calculated. Refer to the points raised in the submission below concerning the importance of installing this particular footpath.

*Continuity Score: 0/10 | Revised Score: 10/10*

Comment: Based on the Northern Beaches Walking Plan (18 December 2018) a score of 10 should have been issued. The footpath on the northern side of Soldiers Avenue, Freshwater (between Eric St and Oliver St) completes the missing link raised in Point 3 of this submission. The footpath would connect the northern side footpath along Soldiers Avenue between Eric Street and Albert Street as well as connecting to the existing path along Oliver Street.

*Bline Score: 0/10 | Revised Score: 10/10*

Comment: Based on the Northern Beaches Walking Plan (18 December 2018) a score of 10 should have been issued. The footpath on the northern side of Soldiers Avenue, Freshwater (between Eric St and Oliver St) is located less than 250m from public transport (230m to 139 Bus Stop at Jacka Park).

*Walking Plan Priority: 6/10 | Revised Score: 10/10*

Comment: Based on the Northern Beaches Walking Plan (18 December 2018) there no reference to how the Walking Plan Score is calculated. Refer to the points raised in the submission below concerning why footpath should be considered with a higher priority.

*Total Score: 29 | Revised Total Score: 70*

Comment: A revised total score of 70 would result in the pathway being placed as the No. 1 project within the Draft 2019/20 program. If the additional 4 ‘walking plan points’, 5 ‘hierarchy points’ and 10 ‘safety points’ were not included, the total score would be 51. A total score of 51 would result in the project being placed as No. 4 within the Draft 2019/20 program.

In reconsidering Council’s position, there are a number of issues that need to be amplified. The points raised below are consistent with those highlighted by Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholders Group in a formal response to Nicki Adams on 17 August 2018.

*1. Council's long-standing commitment to install the footpath*

*1.1 Minutes from a meeting held in 1932, whereby the then Warringah Shire Council specifically approved the installation of a footpath to the northern side of Soldiers Avenue.*

*1.2 A number of requests by members of the Stakeholders Group to Council in the lead up to and during the Centenary of ANZAC (2014-2018) gave the in-principal agreement that the footpath would be installed. As a result and with the support of Federal, State and Local Government grants, the Committee invested in bronze footpath plaques to commemorate the lives of fallen local Soldiers. These plaques need this footpath to accommodate their installation.*

*1.3 During the lead up to the 2017 NSW Local Government Elections, both informal and written correspondence to Stakeholder Members from Council specifically with regards to the footpath request, detailed a assurance that the project was to continue to be a priority of the Council and that the project (along with the footpath) continues to be done as a priority and to the Soldiers Avenue of Honour masterplan proposed.*

*1.4 The removal of a large Camphor Laurel tree between Oliver St and Glen St was conveyed to the Stakeholders Group as being the removal of a ‘major obstacle’ to the footpath extension. The Stakeholders Group was also told in meetings with Council that the removal of the Camphor Laurel would reduce the cost of installing the footpath by $50,000.*

*1.5 If therefore, Council has not been committed to the installation of a footpath along the northern side of Soldiers Avenue, then the Stakeholders Group would have expected that Council had multiple opportunities to have a forthright and honest dialogue informing the Stakeholders Group that this was the case. With no attempt to provide correspondence detailing such, the Stakeholders Group believes that Council has misled the volunteer members and therefore the greater Freshwater community.*

*2. Council's claim that the footpath is not a priority or a safety issue*

*2.1 Notwithstanding the correspondence detailing that the project is a ‘priority’ for Council raised in point 1.3, the Stakeholders Group has successfully gained $129,000 of Federal and State Government funding towards Soldiers Avenue refurbishment project which includes the design and manufacture of bronze plaques that were to be installed into this footpath. This would be consistent with the installation that has already occurred between Eric St and Albert St. Furthermore, in 2015 electricity distribution company Ausgrid, spent approximately $500,000 to aerial bundle LV cables and underground HV cables along Soldiers Avenue to enhance the protection of area. This proposed footpath installation was seen to be Council’s contribution to a whole of government support for the Project.*

*2.2 The current dirt trail is currently hard packed, heavily trafficked, uneven and eroded in areas including around Telstra boxes. These issues as well as the need to protect these utilities, specifically demonstrates the necessity of the footpath between Eric St and Oliver St. The Stakeholders Group recommends an on-site investigation into the high pedestrian usage and safety of this area if Council is of a contrary opinion.*

*2.3 The current trip-hazard prone trail is heavily used by school children from both St Johns the Baptist and Harbord Public School as well as parents with prams in order to access Jacka Park. In addition, war veterans and elderly relatives visit these trees (living memorials) that were planted in remembrance of their family members. The Stakeholders Group assumes a refusal of this request reflects Council’s position to forcing these people to unnecessarily cross what is effectively a highly dangerous ‘rat-run’ and having to accept the poor state of the track. The Stakeholders Group, therefore, also questions Council’s commitment to supporting the walkability and accessibility of its neighbourhoods. Please refer to the attached recent photos at the end of this letter highlighting the current and real safety risks for local residents.*

*2.4 The Stakeholders Group is of the opinion that the Freshwater community has effectively been ‘short-changed’ on the Northern Beaches Council Walking Plan and Footpath Schedule. The 17 footpath projects in Freshwater (out of 388 projects for the entire Northern Beaches), the majority have been given a ‘medium priority’ with no indication as to when these projects will be completed. During the public exhibition of the Northern Beaches Council Walking Plan Council received 45 submissions from the Curl Curl Ward of which the bulk were from local residents specifically in support of the Soldiers Avenue footpath. The Stakeholders Group is now aware that the Soldiers Avenue footpath at current will likely be delayed by a number of years.*

*3. Council’s claim that the footpath cannot be installed due to technical reasons*

*3.1 It should be noted that Councillors resolved at a Council meeting on Tuesday, the 24th February 2015 to approve the installation of a concrete footpath between Albert Street and Eric Street along Soldiers Avenue (North). This proposal also received the support of Council Officers: Boris Bolgoff (Group Manager Roads Traffic and Waste), Steve Watson (Road Asset Manager), Anver Ansareen (Road Assets Investigation Officer) and Greg Narker (Tree Management Officer). Given that this footpath had the same technical constraints with regards to heritage listed trees, assets and infrastructure as the proposed footpath between Oliver St and Eric St, the Stakeholders Group cannot reasonably understand how this most recent request has been refused. Furthermore, footpath contractors regularly negotiate obstacles such as tree roots, pipes as well as public utilities and were encountered (such as footpath between Albert Street and Eric Street) work around them.*

*3.2 Furthermore the Stakeholders struggles to comprehend how Council would not support a footpath which would require minimal excavation (approximately 100mm) that could also be undertaken manually under the supervision of an Arborist and set back in areas closest to the trees (TPZ). The exposed roots along the trail are predominantly those of trees on private property rather than the heritage listed trees. Notwithstanding this, the heritage listed Brushbox trees are known to be a hardy species and can therefore likely accept necessary root pruning where the roots are less than 50mm in diameter. In addition, the Stakeholders Group (having undertaken thousands of volunteer hours on historical research) would be agreeable to discuss the improvement towards the heritage significance as well as the educational and tourist value of the Avenue resulting from the footpath installation with any Council Officer or Heritage Advisor, if required. It should be noted that Soldiers Avenue is a point of interest in the Northern Beaches Council - Freshwater Heritage Trail.*

*The Stakeholders Group looks forward to hearing a positive outcome from Council after reconsidering its position in light of the matters raised above. The Stakeholders Group also is confident that the local community and residents of Freshwater would be extremely grateful to see the unveiling of the footpath prior to Anzac Day and on the centenary of Council’s establishment of Soldiers Avenue in 1919.*

Yours faithfully,

NAME  
ADDRESS  
Committee Member

Soldiers Avenue of Honour Stakeholders Group