

Community Space:

“THE FINAL FRONTIER...”



Pam Usher | Kenmore Bridge Club | November 2017

“Houston... We Have a Problem”



Brisbane City Council’s (BCC’s) Pullenvale Ward has a space problem. This may be difficult to believe, as the Ward is the largest in Brisbane (“almost 25% of the entire geographical area of the greater Brisbane area. Covering an area totalling 318km² the Ward is a diverse and unique blend of residential, rural and bushland areas”. The BCC Local Councillor’s website lists a range of facilities, including “State of the art playgrounds and parks [...] Showgrounds and Club Houses [...] Pubs, clubs and Community hubs.”ⁱ

The problem is not *too much* space, but *too little community space*. In particular, too little space available to newer community groups—many of which are delivering critical community support.

Demand simply out-strips supply. The *Kenmore Community Centre* was a much-needed facility when it first opened 7 years ago. But, from the date of opening, this re-purposed Council depot has proven inadequate for local needs. The site encompasses 6 buildings/sheds, some of which is let out to Churches of Christ (used as a depot). The centre is proving to be progressively unsuitable for local community volunteers/ membership groups.

One community group has borne the brunt of local frustration on this issue. Kenmore Bridge Club (KBC) was the first user to seek alternate facilities. Following an extensive search, BCC proposed allocating part of the Pullenvale Reserve for use by the KBC, requiring the group to undertake extensive fund-raising and planning activity.

The lack of community space might normally be expected to be an issue for Council, or for State MPs. However, over the last three years, it is the Bridge Club that has been the recipient of aggressive community criticism—including “hate mail,”ⁱⁱ and a sustained program of adverse community comment which has been extensively reported in *The Local Bulletin*.

THE OPPORTUNITY: A WIN-WIN SOLUTION

Local political leaders can solve this problem. There are three options:

1. **Redevelop the Kenmore Community Centre as a Community Hub for Active Minds & Hands** : With anchor tenants of the Kenmore Bridge Club and Men’s Shed. *OR*
2. **Build** a community club hub in the Pullenvale reserve where current development approval has been granted for occupation no later than end 2020
3. **Build** a community club hub on an alternate site in the Kenmore area (no such site has been identified)

Doing nothing is not an option.

Leadership is required. Now.

Proposition: Community Hub for Active Minds & Hands in Brisbane's Western Suburbs

Quiet, mindful, cooperative, purposeful community activities

- **Community:** Bridge is at the heart of the centre (without KBC as the 'driver,' the project would not have existed). But this is not 'a bridge club;' it is a joint initiative, embracing community need for a centre that can be shared by a variety of groups/interests.
- **Active:** Seeking other clubs as early partners.
- **Diverse:** KBC members represent a broad spectrum of local society—self-funded retirees alongside age pensioners, students learning bridge with grandparents, and new Australians conversing with established residents.
- **Social:** Tea not party, conversation not caterwauling, intergenerational activity.
- **Life skills:** Focus, communication, cooperation, planning, strategy, thinking, understanding, peace, harmony.
- **Research-focus:** Connecting with QBI to share research with the community, and test leading-edge ideas to improve mindfulness, reduce dementia and enhance health lives....
- **Care:** Establishing a Habitat Brisbane Bushcare group (in conjunction with Moggill Creek Catchment Group) to care for the local area.

APPROACH: BRIDGING THE GAP

- **Leadership from BCC and from State and Federal Government**
- **Collaboration between local community groups:** Men's Shed, Kenmore Bridge Club, CWA, Moggill Creek Catchment Group,
- **Academic Engagement:** Possible Research opportunities?? In particular with Queensland Brain Institute/QMIR Berghoffer, as Professor Peter Visscher and Professor Naomi Wray are KBC members who are also engaged in dementia research at the UQ Queensland Brain Institute (QBI), and at QIMR Berghoffer (Queensland Medical Research Institute).ⁱⁱⁱ

A healthy mind centre in the Western Suburbs would be a popular and positive initiative. We just need to agree where. Clearly, the existing Kenmore site is ideal (located near to major population centres, great transport links, owned by BCC with State funding/support). The Pullenvale Reserve is a viable option—albeit with local, vocal objections ongoing.



Mind.. Matters...

‘MIND OVER’.... MATTERS

Problems—or Opportunities?

- Alzheimer’s/dementia/mental health—or active minds?
- Social isolation—or diversity and engagement?
- Research in isolation—or collaborative study?
- Daily distractions—or focus and mindfulness?
- Resignation to retirement—or purpose through lifelong learning?
- Isolated seniors—or intergenerational, shared activity?
- Counting down—or ‘slowing decline’ through physical and mental exercise?

‘Healthy Mind’: Connects with Core State and Council Policy Imperatives

- **STEM:** Mind games (such as bridge) are important building-blocks in improving science, technology, engineering, and maths outcomes.
- **Lifestyle and Community Services Issues:** Access and inclusion.^{iv}
- **Positively Ageless Seniors:** In the thick of things...
 - BCC Seniors Strategy 2012-2017: “supporting community participation and age-friendly communities” (P.13).^v
 - State Government: “Planning [...] needs to occur across all levels of government, and engage individuals and the community, to ensure appropriate housing, infrastructure and urban development” (p. 45).^{vi}
- **No one solution:** Sleep, diet, exercise, socialisation, *and* brain-training *all* matter.
- **Community cohesion** requires social connection.
- **Memory matters:** Mindfulness/brain training—active mind, healthy life.

BACKGROUND: WESTERN SUBURBS 'COMMUNITY HUBS'

The Pullenvale Ward includes a small number of 'hubs,' which are unable to meet demand for meeting space for local community groups. Locations include:

- **Showgrounds:** The Brookfield Showground and its facilities are administered by the Brookfield Recreation Reserve Trust (established 1921). The Reserve is the home of the Brookfield Show Society, the Brookfield United Cricket Club and the Brookfield Horse and Pony Club. The facility is therefore only available for uses as determined by the Trustees.
- **'The Cottage':** Opened 2008. Former Gold Creek Dam caretaker residence, now on a long-term, lease to Moggill Creek Catchment Group for use as an Environment Centre (near the MCCG Nursery).
- **Library:** Recent BCC investment in the Ward includes the popular Kenmore Library, which has limited bookable meeting space which can be accessed by community groups. The library is co-located on the site of Kenmore Shopping Village where parking is often at a premium (i.e. difficult).
- **Community centre:** The 'Kenmore Community Centre' opened in February 2010. Formerly a BCC Depot, the centre consists of 3 main buildings shared by several tenants:. There is good, frequent public transport access.
 - Churches of Christ ('not for profit'): Despite extensive redevelopment of a site at 41 Brookfield Road (which includes a \$5.5m 'function centre,' opening November 2017), CoC has a long-term-lease on these community facilities (BCC agreement extended—now currently ending mid-2023).
 - Men's Shed West (community association: "aim is to provide a safe, welcoming and creative environment in which to serve a wide range of needs for men from the district"): The Men's Shed team occupy 2 buildings/sheds, plus 1 space in the Artists construction, and shares the demountable with KBC. Due to facility constraints at the community centre, the Men's Shed team make extensive use of the Kenmore Library facilities for weekly meetings of 50-100 members.
 - Kenmore Bridge Club Inc. (not-for-profit community club, over 400 members, operating 5-1/2 days and 3 evenings of bridge each week as well as an active social program that includes providing Bridge lessons for younger/newer members). Occupies 1 building (three small rooms & WC), and shares the demountable with the Men's Shed. Due to facility constraints at the community centre, the Club holds special events in other community locations such as the Kenmore Library which attract in excess of 100 non-local players to the area.
 - **E-Waste:** 3 spaces of the "Artists construction" catering to 50 special needs workers assisted by 40 volunteers
- **Church & School Halls:** The area is also served by many Church/School halls, where meeting space is bookable (at a fee), on an out-of-hours basis, and where the lessee may need to vacate space at short notice (e.g. for funerals).
- **Pullenvale Hall:** Managed by trustees, the Hall has an increasing program of activity, with several regular users (including yoga classes) as well as taking commercial bookings (e.g. Weddings). The Hall is not located on a bus route.

Community connections and engagement:

- **Education** program connecting the Bridge Club with local Schools [none to date]
- **Fundraising:** Recent activity (May 2017) included raising money for Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA)—an independent, not-for-profit research institute based in Sydney, Australia.
- **Moggill Creek Catchment Group:** KBC 2017 sponsorship of local photography competition ‘People in their Catchment’ category
- **Men’s Shed:** Regular interaction and engagement (and not only due to shared premises!)

A disconnect exists between what the KBC could offer by way of social inclusion in the current facilities and what could be offered in extended facilities.

Positive impact:

“Kenmore Bridge Club is a safe and welcoming space where I have been able to rebuild my local network following the long illness and death of my husband. Bridge is great for me: an enjoyable means of making new friends, and a schedule of activity that gives me a structure for my week.”

Beryl, age 81, Kenmore resident.

“I get really frustrated at hearing that Bridge is a sport of the wealthy. Most men and women I meet are struggling on an age pension, or starting out on a career. Together we all find Bridge is a great way to have fun without having to spend too much.”

Anne, age 21, Brookfield resident.

“I’ve really enjoyed the chance to not only discover quite how challenging Bridge can be, but also give something back to the local community by starting to teach younger people. Seeing how they discover the strategies and skills of maths at work is fascinating and genuinely rewarding.”

Andrew, age 61, Pullenvale resident.

“It makes you think.”

Ellen, age 25, St Lucia resident.

Endnotes

ⁱ Source: <http://www.councillorkate.com.au/about/pullenvale-ward/>, 30 October 2017.

ⁱⁱ Source: <http://www.couriermail.com.au/questnews/kenmore-bridge-club-hit-with-hate-mail-over-expansion-plans/news-story/9498a90958b302878f87f33cc07a4d7f> 30 October 2017

ⁱⁱⁱ QBI stress the importance of connecting “the findings of neuroscience, psychology and education researchers. Importantly, we also want to engage those outside academia—teachers, students, policymakers and the general public” Professor Pankaj Sah, *Making and Retaining Memories: Issues of Health and Education*, ‘The Brain Series,’ QBI.UQ.edu.au/Learning. Page 4, 24 October 2017.

^{iv} BCC Access and Inclusion Plan 2012-2017: To the best of my knowledge, having discussed this with BCC, we see no evidence of BCC “establishing new community centres in Kenmore” between 2012-2017. <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/community/community-support/disability-access-inclusion/brisbane-access-inclusion-plan-2012-2017>, specifically part 4 page 68.

^v “... five priorities: 1. valuing and empowering seniors 2. improving health and wellbeing 3. promoting workforce participation, independence and mobility 4. supporting community participation and age-friendly communities 5. providing information and improving communication.” (*BCC Seniors Strategy 2012-2017*, page 13, 12 November 2017)

^{vi} “For seniors, participation may include volunteering, education and training, as well as a broad range of social, cultural and recreational activities. An age-friendly community means seniors can participate in their chosen activities in a safe environment. Planning for an age-friendly community needs to occur across all levels of government, and engage individuals and the community, to ensure appropriate housing, infrastructure and urban development” (*State Government*, page 45, 12 November 2017).

Action Plan

1. **Simple survey of community groups needs for a Centre for the next 20 years**
 - a. **Projected number of members**
 - b. **Time required for activities**
 - c. **Space requires**
 - d. **Members:**
 - **disability needs**
 - **migrant / cultural needs**
 - **transport needs**
 - e. **Facilities needed**
 - f. **Club expertise**
 - **Site management**
 - **Skills of volunteers**
2. **Design and launch a Facebook Page which repositions KBC as the Community Hub for Active Minds & Hands**
3. **Establish an electronic “Manual” for the Hubs communications, public relations and fundraising strategies.**
4. **Design a concept plan for Community Hub for Active Minds & Hands including GIS and cadastral layers of site(s)**
5. **Public meeting to present results of survey and invite further comment/ideas**
6. **Meet with Brisbane Lord Mayor and Council bureaucrats**

Meet with Federal & State members for support - political + grants