

Mr David Shoebridge MLC, The Greens

This is a typical Sydney story. Everyone can see that there is a crying community need for a new and expanded inner city school. Everyone can see that the valuable parcel of public land on the corner of Fig and Wattle Streets would be the best place for the new school. However a toxic mix of poor politics and public penny-pinching risks this public land being sold off to developers. Students, school communities and the future of inner city public education are treated as expendable while deals and counter-deals are made and broken. No wonder people are giving up on politics.

It's still not too late for this to be fixed. The Fig and Wattle Street site is still owned by the City of Sydney. The proposed redevelopment of the existing Ultimo School site has not yet gone to contract. With goodwill, the newly appointed Minister for Education can sit down with the City of Sydney and make the Fig and Wattle site work.

In this committee we heard loud and clear from the Ultimo school community that they don't want their children to spend three years in a demountable school while their school is bulldozed and redeveloped into a crowded multi-story development. They want their children to continue at Ultimo while the Fig and Wattle site is redeveloped into a first class public school that will have plenty of room to meet the needs of this and future generations of public school students. Their plan is simple, it is in the best interests of their children and it is future-proof.

All of the problems that have been posed with the Fig and Wattle site are easily remedied. The department of Education has said they don't know for sure the level of contamination and want further testing. There is no doubt that with goodwill and co-operation access can be arranged to the Fig and Wattle site to allow for further environmental testing if necessary. This can happen tomorrow if the political will is there.

On the best expert evidence available, the Fig and wattle site can be remediated to a standard that the EPA agrees would safely accommodate a school. The best evidence is that the cost of remediation would be in the order of \$9 to \$25 million and therefore well within in the range agreed for remediation between the Council and NSW Government for remediation of \$18 million.

The failure of the Department of Education and the City of Sydney to stick to a mutually acceptable sale and redevelopment option is a matter of intense frustration to the local community. The City of Sydney provided multiple different options, including partial sale and partial residential/commercial development to the Department of Education to make the Fig and Wattle site a more financially attractive option. However none of these options appears to have been seriously considered by the NSW government. This lack of imagination and lack of flexibility is frustrating to say the least.

Given the substantially greater size of the Fig and Wattle site, the uncertainty in the school enrolment projections arising from the Bays Precinct development and the benefits of accommodating children at a genuinely local public school the Fig and Wattle option must be immediately reinstated by the State government.

The new design for the Ultimo school is impressive given the very real site constraints and its extremely limited size. If it becomes the new school then it will no doubt be a positive learning environment.

However its very limited size means there is a real likelihood it will hit capacity constraints in the near future. This is not in the best interests of the school community or local residents.

Some of the systemic failures that we identified as a committee have been addressed in the recommendations in the main report. Each of those recommendations was reached by consensus and they go some way to addressing these systemic problems for the future. However none of them will assist the Ultimo school community's current needs.

For this reason I believe the government must immediately reconsider the Fig and Wattle site, and then listen to the best advice of contamination experts in promptly negotiating a final sale price from the City of Sydney. There is no doubt whatsoever that this would both rebuild trust with the local community and provide the optimal education outcome for the inner city.

Public land in the inner city has no better use than for a public school. The long suffering residents of Pyrmont and Ultimo deserve a new public school that is more than a stop-gap, they deserve a school that will last them into the future.