

## **8.16. North Sydney Tool Library Trial**

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**ENDORSED BY:** Rob Emerson, Director Open Space and Environmental Services

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. S Lo T Proposal [8.16.1 - 5 pages]

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement for a proposal to trial a community run "tool library" at the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Council has received a proposal from a recently formed local not for profit community group, the "Sydney Library of Things" or "SLoT", seeking to establish a community run "tool library" at the Coal Loader in part of the workshop space next to the Artist Studio. As well as reducing local resource use, and supporting the share economy, it would create a new sustainability focused community hub at the site. Based on an assessment of the proposal, several meetings and discussions with the SLoT, as well as the development of a Draft Coal Loader Workshop 2 Licence Agreement in consultation with Council's solicitor and Risk Manager, the proposal is considered to have significant merit and potential to benefit the North Sydney community.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Minor carpentry and electrical works totaling less than \$5000 are required to provide a secure storage space for a tool library, and other potential future environmental groups, in the workshop area at the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability. This will be funded through the Environment Levy. It is recommended that the space is offered free of charge to the SLoT for the trial period. This is consistent with the not for profit nature of the community group, the significant local environmental and community benefits of the proposal, as well as the value it would add in contributing to the vision and objectives of Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**1. THAT** Council issue a 12-month licence agreement to enable the Sydney Library of Things to operate a community tool library trial as detailed within the report.

**2. THAT** Council receive a follow up report on the completion of the 12-month tool library trial.

## **LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

1. Our Living Environment
- 1.2 North Sydney is sustainable and resilient

## **BACKGROUND**

Tool Libraries have started popping up around greater Sydney over the last few years, including the Inner West (<http://innerwesttoollibrary.com.au/>), Wollongong (<https://www.make-do.com.au/>) and the Blue Mountains (<https://toolo.com.au/>). Members borrow items like power drills, sewing machines, electric whipper snippers, party catering kits, inflatable jumping castles, board games etc. The libraries therefore reduce the purchase of multiple new but rarely used items throughout the local community, reducing resource use and eventual waste to landfill.

## **CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS**

Community engagement will be undertaken in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Protocol.

## **DETAIL**

Council has received a proposal from a recently formed local not for profit community group, the "Sydney Library of Things" or "SLoT", seeking to establish a community run "tool library" at the Coal Loader in part of the workshop space next to the Artist Studio. The group is made up of committee members from the lower north shore, and is led by Bridget Kennedy, the current artist in residence in Ridge St and coordinator of the Sydney Edible Garden Trail. The proposal is modeled on the operations of other Sydney tool libraries. The group has met with many of these and conducted surveys of potential local volunteers and members, which has already identified more than 40 volunteers to help run the library.

The proposed tool library would be open for four hours on a Saturday initially with the option to expand opening hours to Thursday afternoons depending on demand. The community would take out membership to borrow items from the library. These items could include power drills, sewing machines, electric whipper snippers, party catering kits, inflatable jumping castles, board games etc. They would be sourced and owned by the community group, who would be responsible for their regular maintenance to ensure they are in good and safe working order. Similarly, it would be their responsibility to

provide guidance to borrowers to ensure they know how to use borrowed items and are aware of, and can mitigate against, any associated risks.

Membership fees would be charged to fund a community librarian, development of a website, Internet hosting and service provision, business registration, tool repairs, purchase of battery tools, graphic design costs, advertising and software costs. Membership fees would range from \$21.25 for quarterly concession membership to \$110 for a full annual subscription.

### **Assessment of Proposal**

A tool library in North Sydney, where most residents live in apartments and where storage space is limited, is likely to be well patronised, especially in a location like the Coal Loader which enjoys strong foot traffic from sustainability minded visitors. As well as supporting the share economy and addressing environmental outcomes, a tool library would also create a new and vibrant community space at the site.

The tool library concept and the SLoT proposal are supported by the Open Space and Environmental Service Division and other relevant sections of Council. They are strongly aligned with the vision and objectives of Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability, in particular to "promote sustainable living concepts" and "facilitate community collaboration, leadership, learning and participation". The workshop space is currently used largely for storage, quarterly artisan markets and up to four biodiversity workshops per year. Allocating a third of the space to a tool library would not significantly impact the existing uses. The SLoT would take out its own insurance and indemnity clauses in a licence agreement developed by Council's solicitor and Risk Manager will sufficiently protect Council in the event of a claim.

If the proposal is supported by Council, and the initial 12-month trial is a success, Council could consider establishing an "Environmental community group in residence" program, using an EOI process similar to the Artist in residence program. This would continue use of part of the workshop space as a community run environmental sustainability facility into the medium and longer term.

## **PROPOSAL - THE SYDNEY LIBRARY OF THINGS (SLoT)**

**We present for your consideration, a proposal to establish the Sydney Library of Things (SLoT) at The Coal Loader Centre, Wollstonecraft.** The Sydney Library of Things will add value to the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability and greater sustainability outcomes for North Sydney. We have identified the following benefits:

### **Environmental benefits**

- Less new products are purchased by consumers, resulting in ultimately less waste in landfill, less raw resource usage, less flight miles due to shipping of products to Australia.
- It would attract a larger number of people to the Coal Loader and introduce them to the other sustainable features of the Centre.
- Reusing and sharing products, rather than purchasing them new, can reduce GHG emissions by up to 99% according to a recent report from the U.N. Resource Panel.<sup>1</sup>

### **Community benefits**

- Monetary cost savings to the community as they do not need to purchase tools/things
- Less space needed in homes for storage of items
- Building of community through the share and loaning of items
- Educates the community
- Provides access to tools/things for lower socio-economic community sector
- Allows people to learn new skills without large initial financial outlay

### **Local support for the SLoT**

A small hyperlocal online survey (using typeform.com) was conducted via social media in late May, targeting people in lower north shore area with 86 responses and we found overwhelming support for the idea.

#### Results from Survey

1. How often would you use if a Library of things existed in your area?
  - a. 43% - once per month
  - b. 20% - several times per month
  - c. 15% - less than once a month
  - d. 9% - once a week
  - e. 9% - not sure
  
2. What distance would you be willing to travel?
  - a. 58% - 2-5km
  - b. 20% - 5-10km
  - c. 14% - less than 2km
  - d. 7% - more than 10km

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/re-defining-value-manufacturing-revolution>

3. What would be preferred opening times?
  - a. 60% - Saturday mornings
  - b. 16% - Saturday afternoons
  - c. 8% - Sunday afternoons
  - d. 7% - Thursday evenings
  - e. 3% - Sunday mornings
  
4. What items would you be most likely to borrow?
  - a. 86% - handyman equipment and tools
  - b. 60% - gardening equipment
  - c. 57% - homesteading equipment
  - d. 47% - party/event gear
  - e. 43% - arts and crafts tools
  
5. Annual membership with free loaning vs small fee per item?
  - a. 62% - small fee
  - b. 16% - annual fee of \$85 with small fee for popular items
  - c. 9% - annual fee of \$135
  - d. 5% - annual fee of \$115
  - e. 4% - annual fee of \$95 with small fee for popular items
  
6. Do you think it reasonable to charge late fees?
  - a. 82% - yes
  - b. 11% - not sure
  - c. 2% - no
  - d. 3% - other
  
7. Would you be interested in volunteering?
  - a. 44% - yes
  - b. 43% - maybe but not right now
  - c. 12% - no

## What is a Library of things?

A collection of extremely useful but only occasionally used objects/tools that can be loaned out to the community for a short period of time, in a similar way to a library loans out books. Objects can include tools, gardening equipment, children's party gear, toys and games, art, craft supplies, musical instruments, and recreational equipment. The first tool libraries began to appear in the USA during the second world war. One of the earliest being started by the Rotary Club of Gross Point Michigan in 1945, established with the hope that it would improve dexterity in the local youth and ease the scarcity of tools in wartime.<sup>2</sup>

## Why establish a Library of Things?

Borrowing tools saves money, saves resources, saves space in our homes and saves waste. It helps build a resilient and sustainable community and strengthens community connections. Cooperatives cultivate sharing economies and add value to social cohesion and build social capital. Research shows<sup>3</sup> that people who contribute and borrow from a tool library express a sense of belonging to their broader community. This helps create a desire to actively participate to and cultivate social cohesion. .

## Research Undertaken

As part of the investigation into what would be involved in setting up a library and identifying any barriers to success, the three tool libraries within 2 hours of Sydney were contacted and a site visit to Make Do Library of Things in Wollongong was undertaken.

Some of the questions asked were – how many hours a week do you work on the LoFT project, what hours do you open, what are the most borrowed items, what time of insurance do you have, how many members do you need to cover basic costs, do you have issues with breakages, what would you do differently, what sort of organisation processes do you use, do you pay rent, how many members do you have, how many items do you have in your inventory, how many items do you loan per week?

From this research the following were identified:

- Approximately 150 paid memberships (@ \$85 - \$110 per year) would be needed to cover the running costs (if paying for a 'librarian' to manage the space).
- The online application 'myturn' was used by all three libraries to manage their inventory. This application is free for not-for-profit entities with less than 200 members and less than 500 items.
- The cost of tag and testing items ranged from free to \$9 per item and was performed between 1 and 2 times a year.
- The libraries opened for between 3-4 hours on a Saturday and some between 3 – 6pm on a Thursday.
- There was a preference NOT to hold petrol powered tools, or items that could become very dirty (eg. lawn mowers).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/24/library-of-things-borrowing-scheme-conquer-world>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581097b4e3df28ce37b24947/t/5f0c1d23792782130c6c4883/1594629426451/Toronto+report\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581097b4e3df28ce37b24947/t/5f0c1d23792782130c6c4883/1594629426451/Toronto+report_FINAL_web.pdf)

- All tools/things were donated and were not insured, so if they broke and were unable to be repaired, it was not a loss.
- There had been very few repair issues and members were required to ensure the items were returned in a clean condition.
- Membership varied between 110 and 200 members and loaned out between 20-40 items per week.
- Libraries had between 2-3 volunteers on each shift when the library was open.
- All of the libraries had a website, with online membership payment gateway and the online 'myturn' borrowing system.

### **How The Sydney Library of Things would operate**

- The Sydney Library of Things would run as an incorporated not-for-profit entity
- The Sydney Library of Things would have a website and also use 'myturn' to manage borrowing. We would have a Facebook presence and promote the Library through local social media networks and community e-newsletters.
- We would do a call out for donations and store these offsite whilst building our database before launching.
- Our plan is to open SLoT for a 12 month trial starting December 2020 – depending on COVID-19 developments.
- We would ensure that public liability and voluntary workers insurance is taken out.
- It is envisaged that the Library would initially open for 4 hours on a Saturday, either in the morning or afternoon, with the option to expand opening hours to Thursday late afternoon depending on demand.
- To borrow from the library would require an Annual membership of \$110 (concession \$85) with quarterly membership options. This would entitle the member to borrow any item from the Library for one week. Overdue fees may apply. (note: whilst our survey identified a preference for a small borrowing fee each time, based on our research, we believe that an annual membership fee is a more viable solution). If there is interest and demand, we would also look at ways to provide access for those in the community who lack resources and are unable to pay the concession membership fee.
- The Library will be run by volunteers sourced from the local community.
- To manage Covid-19 considerations (after researching other similar tool libraries running in the region (Toolo, Make Do and Inner West Tool Library), any items being returned will be quarantined in a separate drop off area for one week, before being handled and being made available for re-lending).
- The items that the Library will contain will depend on what tools/items are donated. Any electrical items will be tag and tested before being able to be loaned.
- The space would need to contain shelving that could securely and neatly hold a variety of small and large items (eg. metal shelving from Bunnings, or large lockable cupboards). Smaller items would be stored in large plastic stackable storage containers to allow them to be easily and neatly stored. There would also need to be room for two foldup tables and chairs, as collection, drop off points for tools.



We look forward to hearing from you regarding this proposal. Please email [thesydneylibraryofthings@gmail.com](mailto:thesydneylibraryofthings@gmail.com) should you require more information.

**The Sydney Library of Things**  
**(a people-powered solution, fighting climate change and bringing communities together)**