

8.17. Provision of pop-up drive through COVID-19 PCR testing facility - Balls Head Reserve

AUTHOR: Rob Emerson, Director Open Space & Environmental Services

ENDORSED BY: Ken Gouldthorp, General Manager

ATTACHMENTS: Site Plan

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Council in relation to a request from NSW Health to allow a pop-up drive through COVID -19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing facility within Balls Head Reserve, Waverton.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Council has been approached by NSW Health to provide a location within the North Sydney Local Government area for a pop-up drive through COVID -19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing facility.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no predicted financial implications for providing permission for this COVID-19 testing site to establish for a short-term period on Balls Head Reserve

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. THAT** Council approves the NSW Health request to provide Balls Head Reserve as a location for a pop-up drive through COVID -19 Polymerase Chain Reaction PCR testing facility.
- 2. THAT** the term of the initial approval be for a period of three months.
- 3. THAT** the General Manager be authorised to determine any request for extension, subject to NSW Health COVID response requirements and minimising impacts.

LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

1.3 Quality urban greenspaces

1.4 Public open space and recreation facilities and services meet community needs

BACKGROUND

NSW Health have requested that the Council provide permission to allow a pop-up drive through COVID -19 PCR testing facility at Balls Head Reserve to assist with the community management of the pandemic,

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

The Waverton community will need to be advised of the Council decision regarding this matter.

DETAIL

Prior to Christmas 2021 Council was contacted by New South Wales Health requesting the Council consider locations within the North Sydney Local Government area that could be used for a pop-up drive through COVID -19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing facility. At that time, the pop-up drive through PCR testing clinics were in extremely high demand and none of these drive-through facilities were available within North Sydney.

The closest drive through PCR testing clinics to North Sydney currently are Willoughby Leisure Centre, Rose Bay, Hunters Hill, and Bondi Junction. Mosman did have a drive through COVID -19 P(PCR) testing facility on Sydney Harbour Trust Land that has recently been closed as the agreed term of approval with the Trust had expired and was not renewed.

Council staff considered the criteria required for a drive through testing clinic that included a large hardstand area to set up the marque facility and required storage of equipment and samples, an extensive road network that could accommodate potentially exceedingly long queues of cars without impacting onto major arterial roads, blocking access to private residences, businesses, and access to public toilet facilities for the clients of the testing clinics.

A small number of options were considered and a site inspection with Council staff and NSW Health staff reviewed the options of Ball Head Drive (Ball Head Reserve) and Young Street Cremorne (leading down to the small car park near the existing tricycle track and the sports fields). As a result of the site inspections the Young Street proposal was discounted due to insufficient queuing space for cars, distance to public toilet facilities and potential impacts on local residents.

After consideration NSW Health determined Balls Head Reserve was an appropriate location and advised Council staff that we would be put in contact with a private medical provider, Australian Clinicallabs that would operate the facility on behalf of NSW Health if Council approval could be attained.

On the 24th of December Council staff met onsite with a representative from Australian Clinicallabs and discussed the restrictions that would be imposed at that time if the pop-up clinic proceeded including:

- Period of consent: Two months (If the existing health crisis does not abate and the need for this temporary Covid testing site remains, the period of consent may be extended for a further one-month period at Councils absolute discretion)
- Hours of operation 8:00am – 4:00pm Monday – Sunday inclusive
- The operation of the COVID Testing Site and Balls Head Drive must comply with all relevant and applicable conditions as set out in the NSW Public Health Orders.
- Australian Clinicallabs as the operator of the COVID Testing site would need to provide Council with a Traffic Management Plan in accordance with AS1743 and TfNSW Traffic Control at Worksites, as well as a copy of the service providers public liability insurance for this activity.
- Australian Clinicallabs would be required to indemnify Council against any public liability claims that may arise as a result of using Balls Head Drive for this purpose.
- The safe and effective management of the drive through testing site and the effective mitigation of associated impacts including the provision of access to identified businesses, traffic management, crowd control, site security and waste management on Balls Head Drive will be the responsibility of Australian Clinicallabs.

It was also generally discussed that the reserve generally attracts large numbers of people to watch the New Year's Eve fireworks displays and was also a significant vantage point to watch Harbour events on Australia Day and therefore the medical provider would need to consider additional security to safeguard their equipment at these times.

Clinicallabs Australia suggested that they would consider the information the Council had provided, and they would come back to Council after they had considered the information.

On 25 January, Clinicallabs Australia contacted Council advising that they were now ready to commence operation at Balls Head Reserve and therefore seeking formal approval.

Through recent conversations between Council staff and Australian Clinicallabs staff it was questioned if at this present time there a genuine need for a further drive through PCR testing clinic with the current acceptance and reliance on Rapid Antigen Tests as it has been recently observed that many existing drive-through clinics are no longer as busy as they have been previously.

What has been explained is that whilst there is still a need for PCR testing and even though the current need for this type of testing has decreased, NSW Health are pushing forward to create additional testing clinics in the event case numbers substantially increase in the future as a result of a new variant, relaxed government restrictions or as we head into the cooler seasons.

A pop-up drive through COVID -19 PCR testing facility may have a detrimental impact on the considerable number of park users that enjoy Balls Head Reserve and in the event that these testing sites again see the numbers of people queuing for a test as has been experienced previously there will be unintended impacts on local residents. However, these impacts need to be assessed against the significant value of the health service provided through this type of facility.

The level of impact from the facility will be proportional to the demand for its use. The extended queueing area within the reserve will minimize the impact on residents unless demand increases to extreme levels, in which case the Heath response is likely to require priority.



