

Rex Smeal Park Adventure Playground



Community Engagement Report

Prepared for Publication
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Executive Summary

The Douglas Shire community were invited to provide feedback on a concept plan for a new adventure playground in Rex Smeal Park. The opportunity was promoted via media release on 6 August followed by:

- Information published on Douglas Shire Council's website.
- Two Facebook posts 6 August and 26 August 2021.
- Item in the E-Newsletter edition distributed 6 August 2021.
- Item displayed on Douglas Shire Council's video noticeboards
- Information was hand delivered to Mossman Library, all state schools and all kindergartens and childcare centres throughout the shire.
- Email was sent to event companies, community and industry groups in the shire

Council received 52 submissions. 16 supported the concept and 35 did not.

Of those who supported the concept, ten were in support of the playground in the proposed location and six supported the design, but not the location.

Of the 35 who did not support the concept, reasons given were:

- It doesn't fit with the natural environment [21]
- Impacts other users of Rex Smeal Park [18]
- There's already a playground/s in that location [15]
- There are higher priorities including other areas without a playground [10]
- Bird and/or bat droppings will be an issue [7]

When first posted on Facebook, 154 people commented, with the majority 83% giving it the thumbs up, and a further 13% posting the love emoji indicating 96% support.

An analysis was done on the Facebook comments. There were comments from 68 people. With 22 comments, it was not possible to determine with any certainty whether people supported the playground or not. Of the balance of 46 comments:

- 19 people supported the concept
- 27 were against

The desire for a water park was mentioned by 11 people, the wrong location was mentioned by 20 people, and 15 felt there were higher priorities.

Two wedding/event companies, and two Council officers did not support the location as they felt the land uses were not compatible. Reasons given included:

- The proximity of the playground may deter clients from booking the space
- Noise from children playing may negatively impact on wedding ceremonies
- There is already a shortage of event locations in the shire and some are concerned the playground will take Rex Smeal Park out of the mix.
- One submitter estimated the wedding industry was worth over \$40 million per annum to local businesses and feared this would be jeopardised by the location of the playground.

All feedback submitted directly to Council and relevant comments posted on Facebook have been collated and passed onto the project team. All comments are published in the Appendices.

Introduction

Rex Smeal Park has been identified for improvement in Douglas Shire Council's Operational Plan 2021-22, specifically to develop a design for a playground and improve vehicle and pedestrian access.

Funds have been allocated in the 2021/22 budget to complete planning, consultation and preparation of final concept plans for an adventure playground. The aim is to have a shovel ready project by 31 December 2021.

A concept plan for the playground was published 6 August 2021, with feedback requested by 27 August 2021.

This report is a public document and summarises the feedback received and includes all comments in the appendices.

Objectives of Consultation

- To engage the community to get feedback on the concept plan

Key Messages

- This is the community's opportunity to tell us what they think about playground concept.
- There are no funds budgeted for construction – Council will need to secure a grant.
- If there's community support, detailed design and costings will be prepared to achieve a shovel ready project.
- If Council is successful in attracting government funding for the project, the next step will be detailed design to take out to tender.
- Based on the above steps, it will be at least 18 months before construction could commence.

Stakeholders

All Shire residents were invited to provide feedback.

There were key groups targeted and they were:

- Kindergartens and playgroups
- State Schools
- Community Groups
- Traditional Owners
- Event Companies

Consultation Activities

Douglas Shire Council announced it was seeking feedback on the concept plan for the Rex Smeal Fig Tree Playground Concept via a media release. The media release was published in Newport 6 August. Council then rolled out the following:

- Major Projects webpage created
- Alert on Council's Website– Have your Say
- Two Facebook Posts
- Note in E-Newsletter edition 6 August 2021
- Item included on Video Noticeboards
- Playground Information Kit delivered to Mossman Library, state schools and kindergartens throughout the shire.

Website

The opportunity to provide comments was published on DSC's website on the project page which included a short summary and copy of the master plan and artist's impression.

Facebook Posts

The opportunity to provide feedback was posted on Facebook 6 August, and again 26 August.

E-Newsletter

Article published in the 6 August 2021 edition.

Douglas Libraries

Information kit delivered to Mossman Library for display and/or distribution at events for toddlers.

Email

Information sent to relevant databases such as event companies.



Results

Some people emailed in comments, others simply posted comments on Council's Facebook page. This document looks at feedback from both sources.

Submissions to Council

Council received 52 submissions. 16 supported the concept and 35 did not support the concept.

Of those who supported the concept, ten were in support of the playground in the location proposed and comments in full are shown in [Appendix One](#). Six supported the design, but not the location and comments in full are shown in [Appendix Two](#).

Of the 35 who did not support the concept, the main reasons cited were

- It doesn't fit with the natural environment [20]
- Impacts other users of Rex Smeal Park [17]
- There's already a playground/s in that location [15]
- There are higher priorities including other areas without a playground [9]
- Bird and/or bat droppings will be an issue [7]

Other reasons given by five or fewer respondents were that the tree may be damaged, it may fall, the softfall when it disintegrates will cause pollution, it will be hot in the summer and the timing is wrong with businesses struggling. Comments in full are listed in the [Appendix Five](#).

Facebook Comments

When first posted on Facebook 6 August, **154** people commented, with the majority **83%** giving it the thumbs up, and a further **13%** posting the love emoji 🍷 resulting in 96% support for the concept. A reminder post on 26 August attracted 2 likes and 4 angry emojis.

Emoji	Number	%
Like	128	83.12%
Love	20	12.99%
Sad	3	1.95%
Wow	1	0.65%
Care	1	0.65%
Angry	1	0.65%
Total	154	100%

An analysis was done on the Facebook comments posted by 68 people. With 22 comments, it was not possible to determine with any certainty whether people supported the playground or not. Of the balance of 46 comments:

- 19 people supported the concept
- 27 were against

Comments in support are shown in [Appendix Six](#) and those not in support are shown in [Appendix Seven](#).

One theme which emerged from Facebook comments was the desire for a water park. This was mentioned by 11 people.

- Wrong location was mentioned by 20 people, and 15 felt there were other priorities e.g. other locations without a playground – Daintree Village and Miallo extending the boardwalk from sugar wharf to marina and housing for the homeless!

Events at Rex Smeal Park

Current Usage

Council officers who book events at Rex Smeal Park provided the following information about the number of days booked for events held annually. Events include private weddings, Carnivale, Port Shorts Film Festival and Wonderland Under the Stars.

Year	No. of Events
2017	89
2018	92
2019	54
2020	21
2021 – forward bookings	67*
2022 – forward bookings	28**

*The 67 for 2021 includes 19 cancellations.

** The 28 days includes 16 days for private events and 12 for Carnivale & Wonderland Under the Stars.

Event Specific Feedback

The concept was sent to 29 wedding and event companies advising of the opportunity to provide feedback. Council officers involved with events were also invited to provide feedback on the concept.

A few do not believe the land uses are compatible and concerns raised included:

- The proximity of the playground may deter clients from booking the space
- Noise from children playing may negatively impact on wedding ceremonies held under the fig tree
- there is already a shortage of event locations in the shire and some are concerned the playground will take Rex Smeal Park out of the mix.
- One submitter estimated the wedding industry was worth over \$40 million per annum to local businesses and feared this would be jeopardised by the location of the playground.

Comments in full are listed in [Appendix Three](#).

Onsite Meeting

An onsite meeting was held with wedding and event companies to understand what, if any impacts, the playground may have others using Rex Smeal Park. Suggestions discussed on the day were:

- Create a screen and/or barrier to separate playground equipment from event space
- The enchanted garden will provide a landscaped area to screen out the amenities block, but the slide would need to be moved
- It was thought the timber platform could be used as a stage. Some thought differently.
 - 1) Staging costs around \$300, which is small in the scheme of things. Staging is being used less and less and when it is used, portable staging allows for flexibility in layout.
 - 2) The different levels mean there's insufficient space to set up a drum kit as the levels are too narrow.
 - 3) If the timber platform comes out too far, it will take up space used for tables and chairs, therefore may limit numbers.

General Improvements

At the onsite meeting, we gathered comments about the space in general and how it could be improved, unrelated to the playground.

- Remove the rubbish bins away from the fig tree
- It would be very useful to level out the area under the opposite smaller fig tree.
- It was acknowledged grass does not grow under the shade of the trees, however irrigating the surrounding grassed area would make it more attractive and increase usage.
- One of the biggest issues for prospective clients is the car parking see image below. If this could be screened off by plantings, this would enhance the area for events.



Appendix One – Submissions Support Design and Location

1. Absolutely love the design - uniquely FNQ! Kids and families will love this. Also love the proposed location, incorporating the fig tree. There are plenty of spots in Port and local surrounds for photo opportunities.
2. I think the playground looks fantastic along with the green grass and pathways. I would assume this means there would be some irrigation installed for the area if these works were to go ahead. From what I can see kids can still have access to the tree to climb which is great and I like the idea of the timber levels, provides seating and would probably be a great spot for wedding party photos. My children are not so little anymore but would still have fun playing on this, it probably lacks a bit of seating around the outside for parents and I hope the BBQ and picnic tables would be part of the upgrade as they are pretty tired but I think it looks great and would be a wonderful addition to the Douglas Shire.
3. Just emailing you to vote yes for the new Green Ant adventure playground. I think it would be a great to upgrade our playgrounds with a modern design.
4. Thanks for the opportunity to provide feedback. I am personally looking forward to seeing the project develop.
5. Hi I just wanted to say I think the park would be great. I live locally and we have 3 children and we would use the park often. I really hope it goes ahead.
6. I have just seen the new plans for council to create a new playground in Port Douglas. I think it looks amazing and I would love to see this happening. My children would be so grateful and happy to enjoy it. I know many others would too. I feel it would be a good boost for visitors also, giving them more reason to visit our area. I hope to see this happen.
7. We wanted to send our support for this new playground. As the parents of a 2-year-old, the new playground looks very exciting. Rex Smeal is her favourite playground in the Port Douglas area today. In particular, we like in the proposal that the entire playground is in a shaded area, as well as makes use of the fig tree.
8. I am seven years old, and I have used the existing playground a lot and I am looking forward to the new playground. Here is my feedback:
 - I like the big ant and the ant ball and the surrounding garden.
 - I think that the swings should be there as I have a little sister who loves them.
 - The timber deck should be there so people can sit on it and so my little brother can play dinosaurs.
 - The only thing I'm not sure about is the climbing ladder [#11], because I just don't think it is right.Please find my marked-up images attached. Can you also tell me when will it be built and why did you get the idea of the playground being a big ant?
9. Just thought I'd voice my feedback for the playground upgrade. That area between the current playground and the car park does feel run down and I think this is a good solution to make the area a bit cleaner. Kids already love playing around that tree and the area is full of kids most afternoons. Adding more equipment there means it will get used. We see many families having a picnic in Rex Smeal while kids play on the playground on weekends. It keeps the kids over that side of the park while adults can enjoy the other side. I'd love to see a water park instead but understand this is a bit more realistic. So has my full support!

10. What a wonderful concept. Can you add on a plaque in the site of the Playground an Acknowledgement to the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people please as below:

"Acknowledgement to the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these Lands and Waters. We pay Respect to their Elders; past, present and emerging."

The Green Ant is known as **Yangka** in the local *Kuku Yalanji* language. It is used by them as medicine.

Yalada,

Eastern Kuku Yalanjiwarra

The below words you may use in the concept:

- Karrkay (pronounced Gud-gay) – Child
- Kaykay-kaykay (pronounced gaygay-gaygay) - Children
- Ngamu (ngah-muh) – Mother
- Nganjan (nga-n-jun) – Father
- Nguju (pronounced ngu-juh) – Fun
- Kinkay (pronounced ghin-gay) – Play
- Bunjay (pronounced buhn-jay) – laugh,smile

Thanks again and I hope you can use the language words somewhere in the concept. It would be great to see more of our *Kuku Yalanji* Language around the Douglas Shire Region.

Appendix Two – Submissions Support Design but not Location

1. It is a nice design but not in a good place. Like most of the people who responded on a post on the original buy swap sell site, the playground should not be close to the curtain fig. It would be a shame a great shame to build up around the fig with infrastructure. It closes it off to people to use and destroys the view of the fig. If you want shade, plant some more trees over it and use shade cloth until the trees are big enough to the job. Like everyone else on that discussion, I cannot believe you would ruin Rex Smeal Park by putting this playground where the design shows it to be. Please think of the bigger picture. The park is not for kids it's for everyone. The community will be very pissed off with Council if you put it right under the fig tree. There are so few trees like this around and as I keep saying, Council should be planting more trees. If there were more, this wouldn't be such an issue but whenever council does plant trees, they plant dicky things. We are going into climate change. We already live in a hot place just plant some more trees. Why is Council never responding to this request?
2. I am not against the Green Ant Adventure Playground Concept but I believe there are more suitable sites for it. The fig tree in Rex Smeal Park is often used for funeral/memorial services as well as weddings. The noise factor of children playing is not conducive for either. I believe a more suitable site to be in the park behind the Surf Club. If the prime reason for building the playground is to attract people from surrounding districts, then surely Four Mile Beach would also be an attraction. Next to the park are public loos, eateries, the beach and a campground, plus the park at the moment is not used.
3. The idea of the children's park at Rex Smeal Park is excellent but the location totally inappropriate. The park, which is an icon for photos of the sunset, weddings etc., would be totally ruined. why would you want to hide that beautiful fig tree, which is used as the backdrop for many photo shoots, under a pile of concrete? Surely a better location could be found i.e. the sports ground, next to the surf club. You would be ruining a park that is used for all age groups down to a very small minority.
4. In following the social media and having read some submissions regarding the proposed Green Ant Playground I have the following comments to offer. Whereas the proposed design is interesting and clever I can't really see it as iconic. The adjacent fig tree is iconic and by locating the infrastructure next to an iconic tree does not necessarily convey that relevance to the infrastructure. The question regarding contamination of the playground from faeces from roosting birds and or flying foxes is a legitimate one and warrants investigation. We have seen similar issues on Macrossan Street with starlings. We need to reflect upon what is the image of Port Douglas and how we go forward in protecting and enhancing that image when planning such project. Is the image of Port Douglas, particularly in the CBD, one of a quaint tropical town with historic buildings situated in a remarkable natural setting or is the image something else? There seems to be something of a groundswell of opinion that the natural aspect of the town is the priority and that instead of placing this new infrastructure into that setting perhaps planting more specimen trees that will enhance the natural setting of the CBD is the way forward. Trees that will, in time, also become iconic if carefully selected. This also, to replace some of the old trees that had to be removed for safety reasons. Upon reflection, I believe that the new infrastructure will potentially detract from the historic character of the town and may come across as just a bit of bling to tart things up. One has also to look at the longevity of such projects and how the materials will hold up over time, what is the projected lifespan of the materials? And how long might it be before they begin to look dated.... A better location for the new playground, which is clever and interesting, may be elsewhere in the Shire. The site that comes to mind is the area near the tennis courts and CWA Hall where there is not much else of interest and nothing of historical character from which to detract. There, the new playground could become an asset and add interest and amenity value to an underutilised corner of the town.

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5. I think the play space looks wonderful though I don't agree it should be placed in Rex Smeal Park.
- There are sufficient playgrounds there now at Rex Smeal Park
 - The number of families living in the area do not justify investing in an additional playground in the area
 - The car parking is ad hoc, and doesn't accommodate people with disabilities or young families with prams if you were looking to attract more people to the area, in my opinion investing in the area could be better spent
 - Reticulating the grass so it is green, looks appealing and more serviceable all year round.
 - Pathway along the beach front linking the Tin Shed, Church and Rex Smeal park area around to Flagstaff Hill
 - Upgrading parking across Rex Smeal Park, and the adjacent park grounds.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

6. I regularly use the space at Rex Smeal Park for a variety of activities, for example reading a book under the palm trees, yoga in the mornings and sunset hangs with friends. Whenever I speak with tourists to the region, or family and friends visiting about what to do in Port Douglas, a Sunset at Rex Smeal Park is top of the list. Hence, I am very proud of our park, and have strong feelings on this subject. I agree with these two points from the proposal. 1) There has not been any significant investment in this park for some time; and there ought to be! And 2) The grass turns brown from around August and remains that way until the rains come. Watering the grass during the dry season is a simple solution and will add value to the space. However, I don't think the adventure playground is the best use of the space. In fact I have concerns about it limiting the park for future events and functions. Putting in a large playground will limit the use of Rex Smeal Park for future events such as Port Shorts, Carnivale Concerts, Weddings and Functions. The playground looks great, but there are better locations for it. For example:
- under the fig trees in ANZAC park
 - behind the Police Station and the historical museum (fairly unused space)
 - In the Reynolds Park precinct, at the Sports oval
 - at Jalunbu park behind the surf club
 - 4 Mile Beach park

In summary, it is a great addition to Port Douglas, but Rex Smeal park is not the right place for it.

7. This playground will completely destroy the natural beauty of this very peaceful, stunning park. Please put this playground near the Surf Club. Rex Smeal Park is used in many ways without intruding on its natural beauty. Horrible green plastic will completely destroy the ambience for all who go there. Keep at least Rex Smeal Park as it is when everything else in the shire that we loved is slowly being destroyed.

Appendix Three – Feedback About Events

Submission #1

I've had a good think about this playground and as much as I want to be supportive of its current location, it's going to kill the shire off another event venue to be straight up. My clients would not like to be married at 3:30pm under that fig with 50+ kids going wild on the playground 10 metres away. It is not practical to move them on or ask them to be quiet for the duration of the wedding ceremony. I will not be able to sell that event space on a site inspection. It is going to kill the event space.

Rough maths per year of loss of income -

- 100 events per year for council at \$800 = \$80,000
- Average spend for your local event industry per event all service \$30,000 per event at 100 events = \$3 million
- Every event brings in average 80 people, stay 5 days, x 100 events, spend \$1000 per day in town = \$40 Mil
- That is an economic dooms day of around \$43 million for our local economy per year for a kids' playground position!!!!

Can we really afford to lose another venue in Port Douglas?

Please don't put it here, it's going to gently just kill us [event companies] more slowly in 2024.

We have Sugar Wharf and Rex Park from the Council currently, we do the rest in private location of our own back.

See map for alternative locations.

X current fig – high event impact – it's going to kill the events in the park

Y Anzac park no impact

Z minimum market impact – maybe not?



Submission #2

Concerned the location will impact on the event space. There's already a playground there. It will impact events. With no access to sugar wharf next year due to pent up demand [2020 & 2021] and 2022 weddings there will be a greater need for Rex Smeal Park. Don't think land uses are compatible. We've noticed a difference with the walking track into Little Cove. On the weekend, a dog off leash ran into the middle of a wedding ceremony. One of the guests had to restrain it. The playground location will deter clients. If it was a water park, I'd be in favour!!!!

- Yes to bins being removed;
- Yes to grading the area under the small fig tree opposite.

These two improvements will make a huge difference and make the area much more usable. Also blocking out the carpark to screen off the trees would be great.

Submission #3

Regarding the proposed playground at Rex Smeal park from both a user perspective and as someone who works with event organisers in the shire, I can't support the proposal for several reasons.

Further to recent discussions with event organisers on site, there can certainly be several improvements made to Rex Smeal park to enhance the appeal and useability for the many different events that take place there. Improved vehicle access, levelling out of useable space and repositioning of bins were suggested as desirable improvements and along with improved landscaping and better access to toilets, would be a starting point in catering to the multiple user needs.

Unfortunately, the proposed playground will offer no improvements that would benefit the 100 or so annual event bookers of the park with suggestions made by event organisers, at recent consultation, aimed at minimising disruption and inconvenience to their operations, rather than contributing to the overall appeal for hiring the space and their ability to run events.

In an area that is already popular and active, I would suggest locating a playground in an area that gets little use would be a better option, to add to the overall appeal of the town and create a new option for families. Considering the cost of the proposed playground and the contemporary design, there must be a way to incorporate innovative shade solutions, plant some new trees that could provide shade in a few short years, and create a space that adds to the variety, rather than detracts from and overcrowds an already much loved and frequently used space.

With very few spaces and venues available for events in the region the options are limited. Rather than compromising already successful event spaces, from an economic perspective, there should be a focus on making the few spaces the shire has, as desirable to event organisers and wedding planners as possible.

Submission #4

Not only should Council be very concerned about the lost venue hire revenue for its own bottom line, but the organisation should also be very concerned about the additional lost revenue to suppliers of those events and reduced visitor spend. There's also reputational damage to consider. I think an economic impact report should be prepared and submitted as part of the analysis of the project. Such a report would clearly indicate the negative economic impact clearly outweighs any uplift which may be associated with the playground, therefore making the decision very clear.

I'd like to see the playground go ahead but at an alternative location, such as ANZAC / Market Park to avoid any negative impact to the use of Rex Smeal Park as an event venue.

Another really important report to for Project Managers to consider when considering any changes to event venues is TPDD's recently released Events Strategy 2025 (page 42-82). This report was adopted as part of their KPIs in June and communicates the strategic direction for events within the region. Both this document and the Destination Tourism Plan 2025 (Page 4-41) help to communicate the importance of events as a major economic driver and one of the solutions to reducing the seasonality of our tourism industry. Rex Smeal Park will have a major role in this new direction as the region's most iconic green space and venue.

Appendix Four – Submissions Neutral

- Are there plans to provide activities for older children (like exercise equipment perhaps)?
- Could more swings be included?
- Are there provisions for children with disabilities?
- Have maintenance and cleaning been considered?
- Is sand the best option – concern about cat scat?
- Are there areas that do not have good visibility (ant head and abdomen)?

Appendix Five – Submission Not in Support

It is Not natural

8. I disapprove of the fig tree playground at Rex Smeal Park. We don't need an unnatural look to this iconic park. That fig tree is something that deserves to be left alone, admired and respected as it is ... plastic around it is really distasteful and environmentally wrong for our shire. Please do not take away the natural beauty of our Rex Smeal Park that everyone can now enjoy for exercise, picnics and special events that respect our natural environment.
9. I would like to submit my strong objection to the proposed playground under the fig tree. Tourists and residents have been and are drawn to Port Douglas for its natural beauty. This is a communal space. A beautiful iconic tree for all to share, admire, picnic under and respect. Children thrive in unrestricted areas and their imagination is stimulated. Playgrounds have their place but not where nature provides. Would you build a sand pit on Fourmile??? It is ludicrous to think a plastic playground would be a tourist destination! Talk to anyone and it is the beauty of our environment that is the draw card. Please council have some respect for our incredible environment, residents and visitors!!! Yours in bewilderment at the concept.
10. I am NOT in favour of a playground (or anything else of that nature) being built under, around or on top of that fig tree. I arrived here 40 years ago and all of my three children and countless friends and families have played under and in that tree on many occasions. They don't need giant plastic green ants to climb on as kids still have fun with each other, running, jumping and climbing in a perfectly natural environment. That tree is beautiful as it is, in its natural state. The first thing you see when you arrive at the park. Please don't turn that iconic fig into an eyesore.
11. I am writing to voice my objection to the proposed Adventure playground in Rex Smeal Park. I fail to understand why Douglas Shire council would even consider spoiling this stunningly beautiful and NATURAL asset with a (plastic and concrete) playground. Visitors, both Australian and international, frequent the park in droves and everyone (adults and children alike) love the untouched and natural beauty Rex Smeal Park offers. Most people comment about the ambience of the park because it is primarily an unspoilt natural environment for everyone to enjoy. What on earth is the point of wrecking something that is working well for everyone. The fig tree is a gorgeous natural point of difference from other places, why change it? The proposed Adventure playground, or any other similar construction, would only detract from the fig tree, and ambience of Rex Smeal Park. We certainly DON'T need an artificial construction in our park - in case you haven't noticed, our shire trades on the fact it is GREEN, and I would like it to stay this way. I don't think this proposed project in any way reflects the values of this community.
12. We certainly do not want this Disney fantasy playground. The children have a lovely playground as is with natural surrounds. This is not at all suitable for this park.
13. Objects to playground. It's not natural; not in keeping with environmental values of shire putting disgusting plastic.
14. This is a horrible idea. Port Douglas is known for its natural beauty which this council seems to have forgotten.

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15. Thanks for seeking feedback on the proposed Green Ant playground concept. While I am totally in favour of new play areas for our children, I strongly believe the natural setting and existing playground is what people already love about going there, the beautiful trees and sensational view. I quite often go there with my grandchildren and would hate to see a move away from them just loving the trees, the kids quite often play in the tree or are kicking balls or running around. I really believe the proposed playground will take away from this. I also believe the playground right next to the beautiful tree takes away from the value of just the beauty of the tree itself. These trees are the attraction, I see visitors to our region here to enjoy nature, have a picnic and enjoy the sunset view. This seems to be the biggest reason to visit so I don't believe adding a playground will attract more visitors. This spot already attracts lots of visitors. My preference is that if there is funding available and the drive is to improve this space, could we spend it on putting more grass around the trees, seats under the trees would be wonderful and it would be great to move the bin there perhaps closer to the carpark. I think this would benefit many locals and tourists more who enjoy this space with the many activities already happening there, wedding photos, watching the boats come in, sunset views and picnics, Tai chi to mention a few.... Would it be possible to run a survey on this as the council has done with other initiatives, I think online surveys are a great idea, easy to complete and might help with getting feedback.
16. In following the social media and having read some submissions regarding the proposed Green Ant Playground I have the following comments to offer. Whereas the proposed design is interesting and clever I can't really see it as iconic. The adjacent fig tree is iconic and by locating the infrastructure next to an iconic tree does not necessarily convey that relevance to the infrastructure. We need to reflect upon what is the image of Port Douglas and how we go forward in protecting and enhancing that image when planning such project. Is the image of Port Douglas, particularly in the CBD, one of a quaint tropical town with historic buildings situated in a remarkable natural setting or is the image something else? There seems to be something of a groundswell of opinion that the natural aspect of the town is the priority and that instead of placing this new infrastructure into that setting perhaps planting more specimen trees that will enhance the natural setting of the CBD is the way forward. Trees that will, in time, also become iconic if carefully selected. This also, to replace some of the old trees that had to be removed for safety reasons. Upon reflection, I believe that the new infrastructure will potentially detract from the historic character of the town and may come across as just a bit of bling to tart things up. One has also to look at the longevity of such projects and how the materials will hold up over time, what is the projected lifespan of the materials? And how long might it be before they begin to look dated.... A better location for the new playground, which is clever and interesting, may be elsewhere in the Shire. The site that comes to mind is the area near the tennis courts and CWA Hall where there is not much else of interest and nothing of historical character from which to detract. There, the new playground could become an asset and add interest and amenity value to an underutilised corner of the town.
17. Please no no no. Please leave this magnificent tree to continue to grow in peace and calm in its natural settling. This area is for everyone. People want to quietly admire these trees. Kids have playgrounds, they won't appreciate the beauty & importance of this tree. They will play on any equipment so don't ruin this landscape with ugly plastic & colours. I do not want my rates going into this project. Council is asking for opinions now, which is good. If the project is approved, I consider there will be further dissent from rate payers.
18. I do not consider that this proposal complements that natural values of Rex Smeal Park. It will spoil the park and views and detract from the natural beauty of the fig that is currently used for many purposes.

19. I'd like to object to the plans the council has for the development of a new playground underneath the Fig Tree.
- It does not "blend" into the natural surroundings as suggested, at all. The plastic looking structures are quite an eyesore and would soon enough turn black with mould due to the wet weather of the tropics.
 - The Fig Tree should have pride of place on its own.
 - The existing playground is in a great position. It doesn't need to take over much more area than it has already.

Surely this would alleviate some of the cost. Can this not be redeveloped into something more "natural" and aesthetic given the amazing surroundings of the park? There are plenty of interactive playgrounds for children which incorporate logs, tree stumps, climbing frames made from wood, little wooden cubby houses, with timber that is weather proofed, the list is endless.

20. I would like to have my say on this proposed playground under the fig tree in Rex Smeal Park. Leave the natural beauty of the tree and its shade alone. There is already a playground in the park. The natural beauty of the tree should be left and definitely no man-made surface should be allowed near it. I am both a rate payer and a business owner.
21. It unfortunate that a design for a playground has been put forward that destroys the beauty of the park. There is an existing playground there so another one that is not sensitive to the environment is not appropriate. It is ugly and to someone that spends a lot of time up there it will be an eyesore. I attend Tai Chi on a Tuesday and regularly meet friends to draw and create in the park. Children should be able to experience the beauty, run, jump and play, if they want an adventure playground build it in an out of the way place where it can't disturb the peace and beauty of our park. Once built can't be undone.
22. While I am totally in favour of new play areas for our children, I strongly believe the natural setting and playground that already exists is what people already love about going there, the beautiful trees and sensational view. I also believe the playground right next to the beautiful tree takes away from the value of just the beauty of the tree itself. These trees are the attraction, I see visitors to our region here to enjoy nature, have a picnic and enjoy the sunset view. This seems to be the biggest reason to visit so I don't believe adding a playground will attract more visitors. This spot already attracts lots of visitors. I run the just start fitness group there & having a big open area to use is great for my group, families who go to play cricket & tourists having Picnics. My preference is that if there is funding available and the drive is to improve this space, could we spend it on putting more grass around the trees, seats under the trees would be wonderful and it would be great to move the bin there perhaps closer to the carpark. I think this would benefit many locals and tourists more who enjoy this space with the many activities already happening there, wedding photos, watching the boats come in, sunset views and picnics, Tai chi to mention a few.... Would it be possible to run a survey on this as the council has done with other initiatives, I think online surveys are a great idea, easy to complete and might help with getting feedback.

23. Our key comment is that we are totally opposed to the proposed playground, as it seems to be entirely out of keeping with the nature (in the many senses of the word) of the location of Rex Smeal Park and its immediate location below and around the magnificent fig tree is, which in its natural state, truly iconic. Our main reasons for opposing the development include:
- Rex Smeal Park space is predominantly framed and contains natural materials (trees and grass). While there are small built areas (BBQ, shelter and toilets) they are adjacent to the natural space and do not impinge on the sense of a natural stage opening up to a vista of the Coral Sea and the mountains. The Park acts as a symmetrical, natural 'bookend' to the town - matched by Four Mile Beach at the other end of Macrossan.
 - In contrast to places like Cairns, visitors and locals in Port Douglas highly value the underdeveloped, natural settings of the town. It is not a large city and does not require the developments that might be expected in such a location and locating such a large and disruptive playground in such a setting would be very inconsistent with the values and expectations of visitors and locals alike.
 - Adults, who make up the largest group of people who would visit and appreciate (and spend money on weddings and events that occur in the park - to the value of the Council and community) are the key stakeholders for such a location and a plastic playground that dominates that space and the views across to the water from the arrival point would greatly diminish the natural and visual qualities of the area.
 - There is also an existing, and simple play area to the south of the park, that does not intrude on the iconic spaces in a way that the proposed playground does.
 - Also, most realistically and pragmatically, children do not greatly care about where a playground is situated and are not cognisant of the natural beauty of the area at a young age. If a playground of this type were to be constructed in the town, then the open, grassed areas near the Shire buildings on Mowbray St (which has some trees) would work as well for children, as they are not interested in the views that would be spoiled by locating the playground where it is currently proposed.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for feedback on this. We are lucky to have a town that is so blessed with natural beauty and in many respects, lucky that despite considerable development over decades, the 'fringing' and 'showcasing' magic of the town are preserved with very minimal development. Those are unique qualities and contribute to Port Douglas remaining one of the most attractive small towns in Australia and iconic around the world. We must always guard against actions that will degrade those enduring qualities.

There's already a playground there.

- I think it's a terrible idea and shows a real lack of imagination. The area is fine as it is with the current playground. I could not support this project going ahead and think it would be a bit disrespectful of Council at this stage with business and residents struggling to keep the doors open and a lack of accommodation, to go ahead with any more playgrounds, especially since it seems most playgrounds in the area seem to have recently been upgraded. For myself if I had to say what would be of better value would be a permanent stage that could host live entertainment on a regular basis, something that Port Douglas once had that was very popular. Not to mention the flow on effects to the rest of the economy that this could bring to the town. People won't book accommodation to use a playground, but they love to be entertained. Look at Byron Bay they do this better than any town I have seen. Otherwise just hang on to the money and leave rates where they are, ratepayers won't mind.

- The new playground is a silly idea. There is one there already. Let us oldies enjoy the shade under the trees. I would encourage DSC not to proceed with the Green Ant playground in Rex Smeal for the following reasons:
 - There is already a children's playground in the park.
 - Older people like to enjoy the shade of the huge fig tree where the proposed playground would be.
 - The fig tree is iconic and its roots need protection from playground construction and little feet pounding them, to say nothing of the temptation to climb the tree which will be close by.
 - This playground would be welcome in other areas of the Shire where there is no playground at all i.e. Daintree Village.
 - The quiet amenity of the park would be further disrupted by more noisy children playing there.

A suggestion - why not use this money to irrigate the park with desalinated water, so that the grass is green all year?

- I do not think that it's a good idea to put a playground where this magnificent tree is. Next people will complain of bird droppings etc and the tree be trimmed or suffer in some other way. What is wrong with the playground that is already there? There are many playgrounds already in this shire why another one? This tree is renowned for wedding photos. This is just not right.
- I think this is the wrong location for such a playground and I doubt very much that it would attract families to visit Port Douglas. A water play area similar to Muddies in Cairns would be much better. There are already two play areas close to the proposed location, why on earth waste money building another one.
- My reasons for not supporting are:
 - There are already 2 playgrounds in the vicinity of market and Rex Smeal Parks
 - Other areas of Port Douglas and, indeed, the Shire are in greater need of basic playground equipment
 - The positioning of any playground under a tree (whilst providing shade) is potentially dangerous with bird/bat droppings and the potential for a tree branch to fall
 - Rex Smeal Park is extensively used by locals and visitors to enjoy the natural surroundings Rex Smeal Park is extensively used for weddings and other social gatherings
 - A playground is, in my opinion, not the sort of "tourism infrastructure" that this Shire should be promoting to potential visitor
 - There are already investigations (with promised funding) for a kids splash park near the Surf Club. Surely this is enough infrastructure for young families in this area
- I am against the proposed playground under the fig tree. I love the fig tree as it is, and my nieces and nephews all love the pirate ship playground already there. I don't think it's necessary for another playground and think council funds could be better spent elsewhere.
- There's already a perfectly good one there.
- Just dropping a note to say that I oppose the playground under the fig tree. There is already a playground there.
- I am unclear about the need for this new development – there is an existing playground that could be upgraded if this is required. I would like to see the evidence that the existing playground is not suitable.

Impacts Other Users

- I am not in favour of any permanent structures anywhere in Rex Smeal Park. It is a glorious open space that anyone at any time can enjoy in anyway. It is a setting for meditation for one or a concert for one thousand. It is a metaphor for the lifestyle we offer as a destination - relaxing in a naturally beautiful setting. So I return to my established mantra: the sports ground is ideal for activities requiring infrastructure with or without water where noise is part of the fun and enjoyment!!
- As ratepayers, we are against this idea. If a new playground is needed at this location, then refurbish the existing one. Building additional play areas under the trees limits how this area can be used. We have seen the magical setting that is created when dinners and events have set up there, what a shame to lose that. Keep the park as it is, open space for everyone to enjoy.
- I strongly object to this children's playground concept in Rex Smeal Park. The park is sublime as is and is used by locals all year round as a beautiful picnic and walking spot, with beautiful views. Please do not spoil the ambience with this addition, which is primarily aimed at visiting children. Hutchings Park in Oriole Street would be a far better spot for children's playground facilities, as it is located in an area with many young families. Please don't spoil Rex Smeal Park. This is not the Gold Coast, and we don't want it to be. People come here for the natural beauty and unspoilt ambience.
- I would like to register my opposition to a playground being built under the big fig tree. There is little enough shade in the park, with the coconut trees providing only fleeting patches of shade. I think it would be better to leave the shady area under the tree as it is so everyone can enjoy it and extend the original children's play area with better shade cover for them.

Health Issue for Children

- It's a health issue for children with bird poo.
- The question regarding contamination of the playground from faeces from roosting birds and or flying foxes is a legitimate one and warrants investigation. We have seen similar issues on Macrossan Street with starlings.
- Under a fig tree is not ideal for a children park, fig birds are in the trees & dropping will be everywhere, also we have lost a lot of fig trees in the past from cyclones they seem to fall more so than other kind of trees. As there is no swimming due to crocs, a splash water park would be more useful for families.

May Impact Tree's Health

- This may lead to the tree being chopped down.
- I can also envisage that the fig will be damaged over time, because of the impact of the playground on its roots and then as people complain about the possible effects on children by the bats and birds that use it as habitat.
- The fig tree is iconic and its roots need protection from playground construction and little feet pounding them, to say nothing of the temptation to climb the tree.

Other

- We feel the money for this project could be better spent on extra seating around the foreshore rather than on a new playground. Couldn't the existing children's playground be updated or refurbished? It doesn't seem honest to be asking for the public's opinions when considerable funds must have already been spent preparing the concept drawings & plans.
- Even though I am no longer a DSC resident I would like to provide feedback regarding this concept. Having been involved in the development of support services, including playgrounds, for families in the 1980s and 90s Port Douglas I understand the need for accessible and fun community spaces. This concept looks like a mis-guided adult fantasy from the desk of someone living in the city. Visitors and residents choose this part of the world as a destination based on its awe-inspiring status as a world recognised place of natural and fragile beauty. The magnificent fig tree provides enough of an attraction. We must respect and protect this precious space, Rex Smeal Park, not reduce it to a Disneyland. Please do not diminish its value as a magnificent natural attraction of Douglas Shire with this Green Ant abomination. Best Regards, Shocked and concerned.

Appendix Six – Facebook Comments in Support

- You prefer the pirate ship in the centre obstructing the view? This is beautiful but there absolutely needs to be shade over anything like a slide, sandpit etc. otherwise it won't be used 80% of the day. Also please, please for the love of god include water play like Muddies. And if you're building this, please connect to and update the pirate ship. Also please connect the sugar wharf to the marina with a boardwalk. The fact this hasn't been done yet is a complete detriment to the entire town's economy. You need to funnel people to the marina. You can't even walk in a straight-line footpath from Grant St to Choo Choo's /Hemingway's. Nobody wants to walk to the old entrance of an empty marina.
- Looks Awesome! Would be amazing!. Diwan also needs an upgrade with a mini basketball court & tennis wall like in Wonga and Port Douglas.
- If it's a good design, locals will love it as they do other attractions like the park in Mossman that has a variety of activities plus the skate run. Most new facilities attract families to visit and try out what's around. Will some of the shade be left vacant for putting chairs out and sitting around?
- If the tree remains untouched, then I LOVE IT.
- Way overdue
- Looks great but needs to be inclusive for the older children too and will most likely need some shade too
- Wow that's exactly what that area needs just beautiful
- Great, but again something for the slightly older kids as well
- The tree is amazing!!!! I honestly think this awesome playground could be elsewhere- then we will have 2 awesome spots!!!
- I have noticed in the past years after a cyclone it's always the big fig trees that seem to go over, like the one at Cooya Beach, Mossman school and in Market park Port Douglas. Also fig birds do make a lot of mess under the tree, So is this wise??? But a playground for older children as well as the young in Rex Smeal Park is a brilliant idea.
- Looks great but is restricted to just little kids! Why don't you add a tree canopy section for the bigger kids. Take a look at what Airlie Beach have, that's for all ages.
- Just about anything is better than what's there currently, as long as they leave the tree there, also take a look at Rockhampton play area obviously wouldn't need to be as large as that but it has a lot of choice for the kids as to what to play on.
- Much needed. Hope this goes ahead
- Great idea, water play area would be good too
- I love it and if Port Douglas don't want it, plenty of local schools would love it.
- Great idea!
- Love the concept just in a different location, please!
- Great concept wrong location
- Wow. I did not expect so many negative comments. The grass is not being imposed on...it's under the huge, amazing tree where the park already is they are just expanding. I'm quite surprised by these comments. I thought people would welcome a decent park for children. My kids are grown but I think as a resident for 14 years that young children would benefit from having a fun exciting place to go.. instead of going to Muddies in Cairns so the money goes to Cairns when the kids would like a drink or an ice cream or mums grabbing a coffee before they play with their children in their LOCAL park.

Appendix Seven – Facebook Comments Not in Support

- Not a tourist attraction; is this where our rate rise is going to? Put it in the sporting complex with a splash area for the kids. Plenty of space there. No way it is not needed already a playground already there. The park is there for all to use. I certainly don't want my rates going there. Weddings and people picnic in that beautiful location, leave it alone, so people can sit and enjoy a bit of quiet in this crazy world.
- Re rate rise - thought that was going to the swimming pool never gonna happen fund.
- How could you possibly think this is a good idea. Rex Smeal park is loved and always has been for what it is! This would be the end of our quickly disappearing natural beauty!
- Do we need a new one? Why not just upgrade the existing one?
- Yep upgrades to northern Mossman Wonga areas first.
- Why would you put this awesome, modern piece of art/playground amongst one of the most natural photographed areas of our shire? I love it, except...I think it should be wooden boundaries, not concrete. Also it will probably be covered in bird/bat crap all the time as it's under a tree. Don't destroy, natural beauty but it's a great design for somewhere in our Shire.
- Surely there must be other places in the shire that could do with a park, besides Port Douglas, instance Daintree township.
- Great point re: bird/bat crap
- Yep, next thing they will have to cut the tree down because of bat poo on the playground. it definitely detracts from the natural beauty of the tree that my kids love to climb in. not the place for a playground. there is already a playground there....one that will entertain the kids for hours on end. its free, no maintenance and environmentally friendly. putting under a fig tree is not a good idea. the mess from the tree and birds will be out of control.
- Soo many people have photos taken around the beautiful fig tree. Why put a kids playground in the view- it's bad enough having garbage bins next to it. Maybe just upgrade the old one and make it a cooling splash park.
- The fig tree is already a perfect natural playground. Please leave this natural climbing park alone. Money would be better spent on a splash park. Or possibly begin with a shade sail at already constructed play areas such as Port Pacific.
- Our two children spent hours in that tree whilst we were BBQ ing
- What about housing the homeless. It's a real problem - families living in their cars.
- There's already so many in Port Douglas. What about some where there are none yet.... Like Miallo. So many kids live out here and we have to go to Mossman for a park
- The wedding planner companies will be ecstatic with this idea! NOT
- Keep it as is. Natural and well used. / Keep it as it is.
- It is a terrible idea. It is a wonderful park the way it is.
- There are plenty of other places where this could work so much better! This is a serene area FOR all. A quiet haven to relax without the necessity of a playground such as this. No, we don't want it!
- No. Leave everything as it is. As you will ruin the good view.
- We live in tropics. A water play area is what's needed in the shire for young and a pool for not so young.
- No, just no! Always love seeing special events there... it is a magical spot, and that tree is amazing, to be enjoyed in many ways by many people.

Appendix Eight - DSSG



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26 August 2021

Chief Executive Officer
Douglas Shire Council

Attention: Gaye Scott

Via email: enquiries@douglas.qld.gov.au
gaye.scott@douglas.qld.gov.au

RE: Proposed Playground Rex Smeal Park Port Douglas

Douglas Shire Sustainability Group Inc. (DSSG) is an incorporated association active in the Douglas Shire since 2005, in support of sustainability in this region.

DSSG is a community-based environmental advocacy organisation whose objects are:

- To promote and encourage the adoption of the principals of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire;
- To the protection and conservation of the unique environment in the Douglas Shire and its surrounds, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics and World Heritage areas;
- To promote social, economic and environmental balance;
- To promote and support environmentally sustainable practices, education and great environmental awareness amongst visitors to and residents of the Douglas Shire; and
- To recognise and promote the sustainable practices of the traditional owners of the Douglas Shire.

We do not support, and make the following comments about, the proposed development at Rex Smeal Park.

Background

We agree with Council's description of Rex Smeal Park:

Rex Smeal Park is best known for its large shady fig trees, grassy green lawns (in the wet season), coconut fringed foreshore and ocean views. It is a space enjoyed by various groups ranging from community events, weddings, fitness groups, as well as it is a place where locals and visitors relax and take in the natural beauty of the Shire¹.

Council proposes to develop an 'adventure playground' under the large fig trees at Rex Smeal Park. The proposal is designed to respond to observed deficiencies with the Rex Smeal park area:

- The existing playground is in poor condition and offers limited play opportunities

¹ [Rex Smeal Park Fig Tree Playground Concept | Douglas Shire Council](#)

- *The existing playground does not visually complement the space*

There is tension between the two target markets for this development. Is it aimed at visitors or is it designed to satisfy the needs of the local residents? In our view, neither group is satisfied by this proposal.

Economic impact

The proposal is said to have “potential to be a landmark piece of tourism infrastructure to draw in more domestic travellers².” DSSG cannot see how this proposal aligns with Douglas Shire tourism positioning as Australia’s leading sustainable tropical destination. In our view, the project’s connection with the natural environment is very shallow.

We are of the view that revenue currently gained from the use of the park as a function venue will likely be lost if this development proceeds. No one wants their wedding photos to include a plastic playground.

On the issue of costs to ratepayers, Council says:

“Until concept plans are finalised the cost is unknown however Council is looking at this as a significant investment. Council has allocated funds in the 2021/22 budget to complete planning, consultation and preparation of final concept plans and technical specifications to have a shovel ready project by 31 December 2021”³.

We have several questions about cost:

- What is the total proposed spend?
- How much of this will be funded by grants?
- What if the community says it does not want this development?
- What amount of money has already been committed for the design?

Social considerations

Social media comments on the proposal indicate that majority of local residents do not support the development. Our members share these views.

1. Incorrect priority
 - Other areas need playground infrastructure more than Port Douglas e.g. Diwan, Daintree, Wonga, Miallo etc.
 - Other playgrounds in Port Douglas need maintenance and shade before we need a new playground.
 - A splash park is more desirable.
 - It is not suitable for older children and teenagers.
 - Why not just fix the existing playground?
2. Not complementary of the natural values and other uses of the area
 - Not the right location, will spoil the park and views.
 - The shade of the fig trees is valuable for other uses which will be excluded by this development.
 - The potential for increased traffic in an area which is already congested.

Environmental concerns

DSSG sees two main environmental concerns with this proposed development.

1. Materials

The structure appears to be made of plastic – do we need more plastic in our environment? In addition, as it breaks down, soft fall foam is a major pollutant.

2. Impact on fauna and flora

² Media release [Green Ant adventure playground concept released for consultation - Douglas Shire Council](#)

³ [Rex Smeal Park Fig Tree Playground Concept | Douglas Shire Council](#)

The large fig trees are iconic. There are concerns that the playground would cause damage to the trees. Birds, bats and other animals inhabit the fig trees – there is potential for them to be disturbed and displaced by this development. Birds and bats will drop excrement onto the playground equipment (and the children using it), and this will result in calls to cut back the trees. In addition, falling tree limbs will be seen as a high risk, prompting pruning or removal of the trees, in the long term.

In summary like other residents of the Shire, the majority of our members do not support this development. Those who do support the design, do not want it located at Rex Smeal Park.



Yours sincerely
Didge McDonald
President